

Brother and Sister

THE leaf which I am about to transcribe will be found to be only, in a slight degree, the record of my own personal observation; but I do not the less feel confident in its general accuracy, inasmuch, as my informants could have had no motive for mystifying or misleading me—a postulate of great importance in estimating the credibility of the most trustworthy persons. There are one or two blanks in the narrative, which I might indeed inferentially fill up, but this I have no doubt the reader will do quite as well for him or herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Reeves were, I believe, both natives of Clifton, Bristol. Certainly the husband was the son and sole offspring of a wealthy, but somewhat feeble-minded gentleman, who had long resided there. Edward Reeves was the issue of a second marriage, and his father was again a widower at the age of sixty-three: in less than two years afterwards—having been, I suppose, wonderfully happy in his choice of previous partners—the old gentleman ventured—rash gamester!—for a third prize in the connubial lottery, and drew—a widow, one Mrs. Halliday, the handsomest, cleverest, and poorest of two sisters; her sole wealth, her brilliant eyes, her silver tongue, her Houris smile, and two fine children—boys. Alas! the brilliant eyes, the silver tongue, the Houris smile, seen by the light of common day, which in this instance, dawned upon the matrimonial horizon in something less than a fortnight after the “happy” one, proved to be mere shams—surface lacquer—elaborate deceit. A disastrous union it was soon found to be for Edward Reeves, his young, gently-nurtured wife, and their children, Jonathan and Mabel. The orange-blossoms of the bride, were cypress-wreaths to them,—funereal emblems of departing peace and competence. The old story, in such cases, quickly developed itself. The senile bridegroom lapsed into a nonentity without a serious struggle; and little Jonathan, happening one day to thrash Master Halliday, a boy about his own age (seven years), for spiteful usage to his sister, Mabel, accelerated the catastrophe. The antagonistic parties could no longer inhabit the same house; Edward Reeves and family removed to a cottage in the vicinity, and the son was thenceforth a stranger to his father’s dwelling, till he received a formal invitation to attend his funeral, and the reading of his will. “In the name of God, Amen!” rasped out the shaky voice of Randall, the attorney, —a worthy man though a lawyer. “I, Jonathan Reeves, being of sound mind, and in full possession of all my faculties, hereby give and bequeath to Maria, my beloved wife, all and sundry the estate, real and personal, of which I may die seised and possessed: to wit—” A fierce outcry, natural, if unseemly, under such circumstances, interrupted the reader. It came from the beggared son, who had leaped to his feet in wild dismay, as the lawyer’s words of doom—for such they truly were—fell upon his ear. But the utter consternation and despair of the revived man were too terrible and giant-like for articulate utterance; and, after one or two abortive efforts at speech, he sank on the floor in a fit. The usual bustle ensued—the usual remedies were applied; Edward Reeves was restored to consciousness, and conveyed home. The formal reading of the will was completed; the hearers went their several ways; and the tiny segment of the world’s great circle in which the incident occurred, revolved again pretty much in its old course,—except indeed as regarded the disinherited son and those dependent on him. To be sure, everybody said it was a scandalous will—a downright robbery of the legitimate heir; but everybody also smiled

graciously or fawningly, as the case might be, upon the fair and fortunate legatee; and everybody that could, cheerfully ate her dinners, and gaily quaffed her wines.

The property thus uxoriously disposed of, amounted to about twenty-five hundred a year, beside the personals, and was devised absolutely to the widow, with the remainder to her sons, unless she otherwise determined by will: even pretty little Mabel, of whom her grandfather was so fond and proud, was not left so much as a keepsake.

I know little concerning the legally-plundered family during the following nine or ten years, except that Edward Reeves never thoroughly recovered the shock inflicted by his father's will, and that his wife, a meek-hearted, loving woman, but, like her husband, of no great force or energy of character, participated his wearing grief and resentment, and descended step by step with him to a premature grave. They were withdrawn, I understood, somewhat suddenly, and within two or three weeks of each other, to that brighter and better land, but for whose auroral promise, this earth of ours were so drear a Golgotha, strewed with mouldering bones, and withered hopes, and breaking hearts. Neither can I relate the precise gradations of descent in the social scale passed through by the unfortunate family, till, at the period of the father and mother's decease, they occupied a poorly-furnished second-floor in Redcliffe Street, Bristol, nearly opposite the church. I fancy, however, remembering to have heard that business of some sort was attempted by Edward Reeves, with money obtained through the intervention of Mrs. Robinson, the usurping legatee's sister, and a very decent person, let me add, although, from inferiority of worldly circumstances, greatly in awe of her lucky relative. Be this correct or not, Jonathan Reeves had been apprenticed to a working jeweler, and when his parents died, was within a twelvemonth of finishing his time. Mabel, two years her brother's junior, had not then left her poor home; chained there as she was by love for her heartbroken parents, though frequently offered a comfortable asylum, by sympathizing friends, in interchange for such light service as she could render. That lingering tie had snapped, and the fair girl's hesitating step trembled at length upon the threshold of the world—she feared, yet longed to enter. I can readily believe all I have heard of Mabel Reeves' singular attractiveness as a girl, from what I saw of her when a matron. It was easy then to trace the yet lingering elastic grace, the slight, but finely-rounded outline of her charming figure; the delicately fair, pale rose tinted features, which, lit meekly up with guileless eyes of blue, and shrined with down-falling golden hair, caused the dullest-
visioned passerby to pause in instinctive admiration of the beauteous flower, fresh as it seemed, from the hand of God, and still radiant with the angel-light of Paradise. Jonathan was not uncomely; but it was difficult—so strongly marked was the contrast between the sombre, saturnine intelligence of his aspect, and the innocent candour, the almost infantine simplicity of hers—to believe they were such near relatives. Yet were they true and loving ones. Jonathan Reeves loved his sister beyond all things—even money!—and Mabel's affection for her brother was as deep and earnest as it was confiding and unselfish. They differed as widely in turn of mind and disposition as they did personally. The clouds of life passed over, and left no lasting trace upon Mabel's joyous, kindly temperament, and she was ever forgiving as a child. Jonathan, on the contrary, brooded with revengeful rancour over the wrongs of his family, and pursued with his bitterest maledictions those who had caused and profited by its downfall; evil wishes, which,

however provoked, generally, as the Arabic proverb hath it, “come like domestic fowls home to roost.”

Mabel went to live with a Mrs. Houston, of Clifton, in a kind of hybrid capacity, compounded of lady’s maid and companion. Mrs. Houston greatly disliked the rich and handsome widow Reeves (though on quite civil visiting terms with her), chiefly—so friendly gossips sneered—because she *was* rich and handsome; and dearly the patronizing lady loved to parade before their mutual acquaintance the interesting girl rendered destitute, but for Mrs. Houston’s interposition, by the infamous will—goodness knows how obtained—of her imbecile grandfather. Mabel was, however, very well treated by her somewhat ostentatious patroness, and her education was sedulously advanced. Her improvement was so marked and rapid, that her brother grew impatient, almost jealous, of the change. It seemed to be creating a gulf between them: other *indices* relating to her, augmented his chagrin and disquietude.

“These Sunday visits to your brother, Mabel,” he broke out one day, with a bitterness lately but too habitual with him, “are becoming wearisome and distasteful to you. These narrow rooms, this shabby furniture, contrast miserably with Mrs. Houston’s gilded saloons.”

“Oh! Jonathan, how can you be so cruel,—so unjust?” exclaimed poor Mabel, with suffused eyes, and trembling voice.

“I have noticed this impatience,—this growing alienation—this disgust—call it what you will—for months past,” resumed the brother, with increasing violence. “And tell me,” he added, with quick anger, and pausing in his hasty striding to and fro to seize her by the arm, and look with menacing sternness in her face,— “Tell me who was the perfumed fop I saw you with in the park on Thursday last—answer quickly and without equivocation, or the God of Heaven—”

“I, with!” stammered the pale, startled girl,— “I with! you mistake, Jonathan. There were several—”

“Yes, yes, I know; Mrs. Houston and half-a-dozen others were of the party—a gay assemblage, Mabel, which your vulgar brother dare not profane by a too close approach. But this beringleted bewhiskered *gentleman* I speak of, was with *you*; affected to be conscious of no other’s presence; walked, whispered, at your side—and you, Mabel, you smiled upon his insulting courtesies! Mabel,” continued the excited young man, after vainly waiting a few moments for a reply, “Mabel, you do not answer. Once—once!” he added, in a changed and lower tone, but fierce and deadly as the hissing of a serpent, “Once, as twilight was falling, I caught a nearer view of his face, and it flamed through me that I had seen it before; that—but no, it could not be: to suppose that of our murdered mother’s child were—”

“Oh, Jonathan!” sobbed Mabel, “you will break my heart.”

“Nay, forgive me, Mabel!” exclaimed the brother, with sudden revulsion of feeling—“forgive the blaspheming thought that for a moment wronged you. Dear child, how could I be so mad!”

“Dear Jonathan! Dear brother!” murmured the weeping girl, as her head sank upon his shoulder; but her eyes, he noticed, were steadfastly averted, as if dreading to encounter his.

“I am rash as fire, at times, dear Mabel,” said the brother, after a lengthened silence, “and utter words without sense or purpose. But we will talk of this matter calmly, wisely, as friendless orphans in this bad world should. You, sweet sister, possess in a peerless degree the dangerous gift of beauty: men such as he with whom I saw you in eager converse look upon beauty in our class of society as a toy, as—”

“*Our* class of society!” echoed Mabel, flushing scarlet; “surely we are as well born, of lineage as reputable, as any of Mrs. Houston’s friends or visitors. The difference between us is in the accident of riches only—nothing else.”

“Of riches only—nothing else!” shouted Jonathan Reeves, with a renewed paroxysm of anger mingled with scorn, and casting his sister off as he sprang impetuously to his feet. “‘Riches only,’ quoth she, as if—great God!—riches were not the be-all and the end-all of this nether world! The prime distinction between base and noble—vice and virtue—and did not sunder men as widely as earth’s from heaven! Riches *only*, forsooth! Hark ye, girl,” he added, “you are on the verge of a precipice, and by heaven—”

He spoke to deaf ears. Mabel had fainted. As soon as she was sufficiently recovered, a hack coach was called, and Jonathan escorted her to Clifton, the silence between them only broken by mutual “good night.” The next day he gave Mrs. Houston written notice that, on that day month, Mabel Reeves would return to his, her legal guardian’s home.

It was soon apparent that Mabel Reeves was extremely averse to compliance with her brother’s wishes or commands. She grew dull, melancholy, absent, and reserved in manner, and appeared to dread that, till she attained her majority,—and it wanted a whole twelvemonth of that,—she would be little better than a prisoner in his house. A day or two before the expiration of the stipulated term, the brother received a hurriedly-scrawled note from Mrs. Houston. Mabel had fled!—To London it was rumoured, but with whom (if with anybody) nobody could conjecture. She had been gone five or six hours before the discovery was made. Finally, Mrs. Houston wished to see Mr. Reeves instantly.

The brother tore the note to atoms, and sped off with frantic speed towards Clifton. Before Mrs. Houston—who was painfully agitated—could utter a word, Jonathan Reeves broke in with “Those vipers—the Hallidays, I mean—are in the habit of visiting here. James, the youngest, especially. Is that so?”

“Yes, certainly, they are, but—“

He did not wait the conclusion of the sentence, and in a minute or two he was thundering at the mansion of the dowager Mrs. Reeves. The servant who opened the door was instantly thrust aside, and, guided by the voices he heard within, Jonathan Reeves burst unannounced into the dining room. “My sister!” he gasped,—“thieves—plunderers—devils—where is my sister?”

The company, thus flatteringly addressed, were Mrs. Reeves, Mrs. Robinson, and the two Messrs. Halliday. They stared at each other, and at the questioner, their looks indicating not so much surprise or alarm, as concern and irresolution.

“We have heard something of this unhappy business,” said Mrs. Robinson; “but be assured no one here has been privy to, or aided your sister’s flight.”

“You—you answer!” shouted Reeves, addressing the gentlemen; “it is you I suspect, not your aunt!”

“My aunt’s answer is mine,” said the elder Halliday; “and I deeply grieve—”

“Perdition to your grief and you! And now, sir, *your* reply. What say you?”

Mr. James Halliday sat in the shadow of the heavy window curtains, and it was growing dusk, so that his face could not be distinctly seen; but his voice was firm enough as he replied, “I have nothing to say: it is now three or four days since I last saw Miss Reeves.”

The baffled querist glared bewilderedly for a few minutes from one to the other, and then muttered aloud, but speaking to himself, “It may be as they say. They are certainly both here, and she gone; gone—six hours since. But if she be hidden in the bowels of the earth, I’ll find her.”

He then rushed out of the house as madly as he had entered it, reached home, provided himself with money, and left per mail for London the same evening. A fortnight afterwards he returned, haggard, worn, half-crazed,—without Mabel.

Again a gap occurs in this roughly-connected narrative, extending over eighteen years and upwards; and when I again re-knit its broken thread, it is the month of March, 1812,—at which time it happened that I visited Bristol on some legal business, in which Mr. Randall, the solicitor, was concerned, and thus became a hearer and spectator of the last act in this curious domestic drama.

Jonathan Reeves, I must first state, was still a bachelor, and resided in Redcliffe Street, but nearer towards Bedminster Bridge than he formerly lodged, where he kept a small working jeweller’s shop. He was still poor; and not only so in purse, but in heart and spirit. Years of senseless repining and unavailing regrets had done their work upon him, aided, it is grievous to record, by the ravages of drink, to which fatal propensity he had

gradually addicted himself; so that, not yet forty, he was already an aged man! Mabel he had never seen nor heard of, directly, but he had every year received parcels containing presents of some value, which could only come from her, and denoting that, at all events, she was not suffering from poverty. There was no address given—no line written—but every parcel contained a lock of golden hair, and, strangely enough, the brother thought the well-remembered colour did not suffer change from age,—nay, the very last he had received was positively, he was sure, more brightly golden than that which he had hoarded up some fifteen years before! Mrs. Reeves, his grandfather's wealthy relict, still lived in London he believed; but it warmed the sickness of his cankered heart to know—in paralytic helplessness, as well as deep mental gloom, caused by the untimely passing away, within a twelvemonth of each other, of her two sons, who had both died unmarried. Charles Robinson would therefore—unless in a fit of caprice she disinherited him, and she was, people said, as vengefully capricious, as much dominated by selfish and obdurate passions, as when life was young with her—come ultimately into possession of the greatly improved and augmented property.

This is all I think I have to set down respecting the interval of eighteen years and upwards, which terminated in March, 1812. In that month the long-desired letter from his sister reached Jonathan Reeves.

It was affectionate, but reserved and brief in regard to her flight from Bristol, and subsequent existence; and it was stated that the time for a full explanation was still, in all probability, far distant. She was a widow, and alone, and yearned to find herself once more in the home of her brother. She should not be a burden to him, having enough (though barely so) for her own maintenance. She would be in Bristol on the fourth day after the receipt of the letter, which was subscribed "Mabel," only.

"You are but little altered, Mabel," said Jonathan Reeves, after the first rapturous emotions that swelled his heart on again embracing his long-lost sister had somewhat subsided; "still beautiful, though more sedately so, perhaps,—ay, and I think more hopeful too; but surely, Mabel, this hair, thinner than I once knew it, is scarcely so bright and glossy as the locks you lately sent me."

Mabel coloured a little, and replied, "You fancy so, that's all."

"It may be as you say: a widow, and recently," he added, glancing at her dress.

"Yes, dear Jonathan; I wrote you so."

"And children—none?"

"One only," replied the sad mother, with bowed head and husky voice, "and she has been taken from me."

A long silence ensued, suddenly broken by Jonathan Reeves. "Did you know, Mabel, that Mrs. Robinson—that woman's sister—has returned to Clifton within the last month, and resides in the old place?"

"I have heard so."

"Her son Charles is now the lawful heir, is he not?"

"It would appear so, unless our grandfather's widow should will it otherwise: she has the power to do so."

"That is not likely, I think. Mrs. Robinson is a kind woman enough: I have worked for her often. The old dreams are gone, Mabel, and harsh necessity has humbled my pride. She has sent to say I must not forget to call on her tomorrow, on business. You are tired— good night."

"You would have been amused, Mabel," remarked Jonathan Reeves as he sat down to tea the next evening, on his return from Clifton, "to hear how anxious Mrs. Robinson is concerning you. Over and over did she cross-examine me, to find out what she said you *must* have confided to me of past events, and yet I thought she seemed pleased when satisfied that I knew nothing. Is not this a splendid diamond?" added the jeweller, holding a large old-fashioned ring encircling a magnificent jewel to the light, upon which his grey, eager eyes were fixed all the time he had been speaking,—"clumsily set, but of the finest water, and very, very valuable, from its size and colour. It was grandfather's," he added quickly: "part of the rich spoil of which we were plundered. It should be ours, Mabel."

"Yes, perhaps so, in fairness and equity; but in law it belongs to Mrs. Reeves. Tell me," continued Mabel, in her turn speaking with quick nervousness, "did you notice anybody—any stranger—that is, anybody I know, I mean,—either—no matter, with Mrs. Robinson?"

"Let me see. Her son was at home, and there was a young woman with her, I hardly can be said to have seen,—Miss Murray, I think they called her, a sort of humble companion. Ah! You tremble and change colour. You are ill."

"No, no, a slight faintness, that's all."

The jeweller's thoughts quickly reverted to the diamond. "I think," he said, "this jewel, which, as you say, is ours in fairness and equity, must be at least worth two hundred pounds."

"To us that can matter little," replied his sister, quietly. "You had better put it away in a safe place at once. I shall take a walk," added Mabel, "as far as Mr. Randall's; he lives in Queen Square, does he not?"

“Yes, on the left-hand side from here;—name on a brass plate. At least two hundred pounds”—Mabel heard her brother mutter as she closed the door, his fascinated gaze still rivetted upon the flashing diamond. “At least that sum—and we so poor.”

Jonathan Reeves’ almost continually absorbed contemplation of the diamond, and muttered comments on its value, at length raised a feeling of alarm in Mabel’s mind, which closer observation but heightened and confirmed. The resetting had been for some time finished, but Reeves was always ready with an excuse for not parting with it. This appeared unaccountable, till Mabel discovered that he had been industriously engaged in the preparation of a paste imitation, which, in size, cutting, and, as far as possible, in lustre and colour, was a facsimile of the true jewel. Such a matter required to be promptly and decidedly dealt with, and Mabel was pondering how to proceed, when a lucky chance relieved her from all difficulty. Her brother was out, and Mrs. Robinson’s footman called for the ring. Mr. Charles Robinson was engaged out that evening, he said, and must have it. Mabel desired no better, and instantly delivered it to the messenger. Before going away, the man happened to casually remark that Mrs. Robinson had been summoned to London about a week previously, he believed, in consequence of alarming reports concerning her sister’s health; a piece of news which so flurried and agitated Mabel, and so completely drove all thoughts of the diamond out of her head, that it was not till her brother had been ransacking the shop for several minutes in search of the missing treasure, that she remembered to tell him it had been sent home. The intelligence literally dumbfounded him; he stared and trembled as if utterly overwhelmed with surprise and dismay; and when he had somewhat recovered from the shock, he went about the house moaning and lamenting as if he were demented, or had sustained some grievous irreparable loss; and all night long his sister heard him pacing up and down his chamber, as restless and perturbed as during the day.

About three o’clock all the following afternoon, Jonathan Reeves arrived at Clifton, and asked to speak with Mr. Charles Robinson; his request was complied with, and he told the young gentleman that he had called to place a foil beneath the diamond; it should have been done before it left his shop had he been at home when it was called for, and would add to its brilliancy. The young man carelessly consented, and told Reeves to go into his dressing room where he would find the ring on a toilet-table. The job did not occupy much time, for scarcely three minutes elapsed before the jeweller reappeared, bowed hurriedly to Mr. Charles Robinson, said it was all right, and hastened away. “How deuced queer the man looks!” thought Charles Robinson. “Surely he has not stolen the ring! but no—that is out of the question, I should think; I will see, however.” The ring was safe enough, and the young man blushed for his suspicions. “A droll improvement, though,” he presently muttered, “he has effected: my judgment and eyesight must be strangely at fault, or—” Charles Robinson rang his dressing room bell, and desired the servant who answered it to go instantly to an eminent lapidary, in Wine Street, Bristol, and request that he would come and speak with him, Mr. Charles Robinson, immediately. In less than an hour the lapidary arrived, and what followed thereupon we shall presently see.

It was just dark when Jonathan Reeves reached his home, and had not his sister been herself in a state of great excitement, she must have noticed that he was deathly pale—nervous almost to fainting, and fell with abject helplessness into his chair, like to a drunken man. “Mr. Randall has just left,” began Mabel, her usually meek, calm eyes, ablaze with light; “and has brought strange news,—news just arrived. Our grandfather’s widow, Mrs. Reeves, is dead,—has died intestate. Mrs. Robinson will be here tonight or tomorrow morning to communicate with her son, and accompany him back to London,—her son, the rightful heir-at-law, you know.” These last words Mabel pronounced with exultant emphasis. Her brother hardly appeared to hear her; the nervous terror that possessed him visibly increased, and a slight scuffle at the door by some passersby increased it to frenzy. “Shut—bar the door, dear Mabel,” he hoarsely ejaculated, “or I am ruined—lost! O God! that ever I was born!”

The violence of his terror startled Mabel: she hastily bolted, the door, and then demanded an explanation of his frightful words. “I have been mad during the last fortnight,” he answered; “mad with greed and drink,— I must have been so, Mabel; but no sooner was the crime effected, and I inextricably meshed in the toils, than the wretched, drunken illusion, promising success, impunity, vanished at once, and I saw that detection was inevitable—the gallows sure—and swift as sure.”

“The gallows! Oh my brother!”

A loud knock at the door interrupted them. “They are come!” gasped the criminal, with white lips. “Here, Mabel,—quick, take my purse, the accursed thing is there.”

Mabel had hardly time to conceal the purse about her person, than the frail door-fastenings were burst in, and several constables entered.

“We were expected, I see,” remarked the chief of them, glancing at the fear-stricken man. “We have a warrant,” he added, civilly addressing Mabel, “for the apprehension of your brother, on a very serious charge, but we need not unnecessarily intrude upon you. There is a coach at the door; come Mr. Reeves.”

The instant Mabel found herself alone, she drew forth and examined the purse. The true diamond was there! Alas! alas! And that this calamity should have happened now—now that—but not a moment should be lost. Mr. Randall must be seen instantly. “Perhaps,”—and the thought which glanced across her brain sent the hot blood in swift eddies through her veins,—“perhaps he may yet be saved.”

It was about half-past nine o'clock when Mr. Randall reached Clifton. Mrs. Robinson, who had not long arrived, was busy for the moment, but would see him presently if he could wait. Certainly he could. “Mr. Charles Robinson is not at home, I believe,” he blandly added; “but I daresay I shall find Miss Murray in the drawing room.” Mr. Randall briskly ascended the stairs, and as he opened the drawing room door, said, “Be sure to let me know the instant Mrs. Robinson is disengaged.” In about a quarter of an hour he was informed that that lady was expecting him in the library.

“It is a very unfortunate affair,” said Mrs. Robinson, after a few preliminary sentences. “Had I been at home there should have been no prosecution. But it must, I suppose, now go on.”

“Your son must appear either to confirm his accusation, or, by absenting himself, admit it to be false.”

“I am very sorry for it, but the prosecution shall be leniently urged. Poor Mabel Reeves too! You are aware, I know, how much I risked by taking her daughter when neither of them had hardly bread to eat. Had my sister heard of it, it is quite possible my son would have been disinherited. But that danger is now past.”

“It is true, then, that Mrs. Reeves died intestate.”

“Yes, and as the two Messieurs Halliday died without *legitimate* male or female issue, my son is, you are aware, the heir, under the original will-settlement.”

“That would be as you say. By-the-by, who has the custody of this unfortunate ring?”

“It is locked up,” was the reply, “in a drawer in my dressing room. Miss Murray shall bring it here if you wish to see it.”

“Oh dear no, not at all. I am glad to hear you are not disposed to press the case harshly, supposing there to be one at all; and I have the honour to wish you, madam, a very good evening.”

The magistrates’ office was crowded the next day by an auditory which it did not surprise anybody to find, since they were all thoroughly acquainted with the antecedents of both parties, sympathised with the prisoner rather than the prosecution. Mrs. Robinson and her son were seated near the magistrate, Miss Murray had placed herself beside her mother, and, but that Mabel looked pale and agitated, two more charming females, at their respective ages, could not, I think, be found in the city of Bristol, or the two counties in which it stands.

At eleven precisely, the accused was placed in the dock, and business commenced. Mr. C. Robinson proved what he had seen, and then the lapidary was placed in the witness-box. He had been sent for by Mr. Robinson, and found that a paste imitation, a very good one he must say, had been substituted for the original diamond, which he knew well, and had very lately seen in the prisoner’s shop.

“Is the ring here?” asked Mr. Randall.

“Yes, it is in this case,” replied Charles Robinson, handing it across the table.

“Very good. Now come, Mr. Lapidary, be modestly candid, let me entreat you. Are you positive, I ask, that you can always distinguish paste from a diamond, especially between the lights, as in this instance?”

“Sure!” rejoined the lapidary, with dignified contempt, “I could tell the difference blindfold. Look at this ring yourself, paste you perceive is—paste you perceive is—the devil!”

“Is it indeed?—well, that is something new at all events. But pray go on with your very lucid description.”

The confounded lapidary could *not* go on. His face was alternately as red as brick dust and white as chalk.

“Can this be the ring,” he at length stammered, addressing Charles Robinson, “that I saw yesterday evening?”

“No doubt of it—why do you ask?”

“Because this is unquestionably a real diamond—*the* real diamond, no doubt about it.”

“*The* real diamond!” vociferated the mayor indignantly. “What is the meaning of this accusation then? But the witness seems hardly to know whether he stands on his head or his heels.”

A white-headed gentleman in a large way of business, as a jeweller, it was whispered, stepped forward, and after looking closely at the ring, said, “This is not only a real diamond, but one of the finest I have ever seen for its size.” At this confirmation of what had at first appeared to be too good to be true, the audience broke into a loud cheer, which was again and again repeated. The accusation was formally given up, and the prisoner was immediately liberated “without the slightest stain upon his character,” the mayor emphatically assured him. I never, I must say, saw an accused person so thoroughly bewildered by a triumphant acquittal in my life. Happily he held his tongue, which was a mercy.

“Hand the ring this way, if you please, Mr. Randall,” said Charles Robinson, tartly.

“Ought I not, think you, sir, to hand it to the right owner at once?”

“Certainly—you are asked to do so.”

“In that case, I must present it to this young lady on my right.”

“To that young lady—to Miss Murray?”

“That was a mere *nom de circonstance*, and there is now no necessity for its retention. Her true name is Mabel Halliday, and she is the legitimate daughter and sole heiress of James Halliday deceased. This we shall be able to show beyond the shadow of a doubt at the proper time and place, if her right is opposed, which is not, however, likely. James Halliday and Mabel Reeves were married, by banns, in London; and the fear of disinheritance by Mrs. Reeves has hitherto prevented its acknowledgment. All this can be legally established, and I only mention these details, because I know the great majority of the people of Bristol will rejoice, that an estate, cruelly diverted from the legitimate heirs, has, by the overruling providence of God, been restored to them, in the person of their descendant, Mabel Halliday.” I do not think the auditory breathed whilst this was uttered, but at its conclusion, a perfect hurricane of cheering took place, prolonged for several minutes. It was taken up in a trice, and ran like wildfire along the streets; in fact, the enthusiasm rose to such a fever-heat that I positively apprehended some accident would befall the mother and daughter, so boisterously did the mob press round to see, congratulate, and hurrah them. As Mr. Randall anticipated, no impediment was offered to Mabel Halliday’s accession to the property of which Mrs. Reeves had died possessed according to the tenor—happily unrevoked by his implacable relict—of her great grandfather’s will. Jonathan Reeves, I have reason to know, was startled into sober and decorous conduct by the exceedingly narrow escape he had from the iron hands of the law. Should any reader fail in comprehending *how it* was he was so cleverly extricated from such deadly peril, he will be, if that can console him, in precisely the same mental condition as the discomfited lapidary who, to the day of his death, could never comprehend how the paste of the evening could possibly have become the diamond of the morning.

From *Leaves from the Diary of a Law-Clerk* by the Author of “Recollections of a Detective Police Officer,” &c. London: J.C. Brown & Co., 1857.