

The Diamond Necklace

THE reader must not expect any artistic finish or colouring in such brief transcripts as I can furnish of bygone passages in my clerkly experience. Law writers and romance writers are very distinct classes of penmen, and I am consequently quite aware that these sketches have no other claim to attention than that they are genuine excerpts,—writ large,—from a journal in which the incidents of the day were faithfully noted down at the time of their occurrence: their accuracy, therefore, does not depend upon memory, which certainly I do not find to be as virile and tenacious at seventy as it was at seventeen. No one will feel surprised that I should, in my vocation, have turned over several startling leaves in the darker chapters of our social history; and some of these, I have thought, may prove even more interesting to a numerous class of minds, when plainly and unpretendingly set forth, than if tricked out in the showy varnish and false jewels of romance and fanciful invention.

On the evening previous to the day, Mr. P—, —suppose, for convenience-sake, we call him Mr. Prince, he was one in many respects,—on the evening, then, previous to the day, Mr. Prince, a barrister, whose clerk I had been for about three years, intended setting out, for the second time, on the Western Circuit, a somewhat unusual circumstance, or rather couple of circumstances, occurred. I must premise that Mr. Prince had at the previous assize made a great hit at Salisbury, by a successful objection to an indictment framed under the 30th Geo. II., which charged a respectably-connected young man with stealing a sum of money in bank notes. Mr. Prince contended that bank notes were not “moneys, wares, goods, or merchandize,” within the meaning of the statute, an opinion in which the judge, Mr. Baron Thompson, after much argumentation, coincided, and the prisoner was acquitted and discharged. This hugely astonished the agricultural mind of Wiltshire: a lawyer who could prove a bank note, then a legal tender, not to be money, was universally admitted to be a match, and something to spare, for any bigwig on the circuit, and a full share of briefs would, it was pretty certain, thenceforth fall to Mr. Prince’s share.

And now, to return to the circumstances I was speaking of. I was waiting at chambers in the Temple on the evening in question for Mr. Prince, when who should bustle in but old Dodsley, the attorney of Chancery Lane. Many persons must still remember old Dodsley, or at all events his powdered pigtail, gold eyeglass, tasseled Hessian boots, and everlasting pepper-and-salt pants. This visit surprised me, for the spruce and consequential antique had not hitherto patronized us, we not having as yet, I supposed, a sufficient relish of age about us to suit his taste.

“Mr. Prince,” he said, “of course goes the Western Circuit? To be sure, to be sure. Is he retained in the Salisbury case of the King on the prosecution of Gilbert against Somers?”

I knew perfectly well he was not; but of course I replied that I would look, and passed my finger slowly and deliberately down the page of an entry-book. “No, he is not,” I said on reaching the foot of the leaf.

“Then here is a retainer for the defence.” Dodsley placed a one-pound note and a shilling on the table, and, as soon as I had made the usual entry, added, “I am acting in this matter for Cotes, of

Salisbury, who, as the case is of some importance, will deliver the brief, handsomely marked I believe, and with a good fee to clerk, at Winchester; good-bye!”

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the great Mr. Pendergast, solicitor of Basinghall Street, ascended the stairs, and presented himself. He had a brief in his hand, marked “Fifty Guineas.” This I saw at a glance: indeed, of all the characters on the back of a brief, the figures,—the fee,—by some magnetic attraction or influence, invariably caught my eye first.

“Mr. Prince proceeds on the Western Circuit?”

“Certainly.”

“And is not, I conclude, retained in the Crown case against Somers for larceny?”

“The deuce! well, this is odd!” I exclaimed, “Mr. Dodsley left a retainer for the defence not above ten minutes ago.”

“You don’t say so!” rejoined Mr. Pendergast, peevishly; dear me, dear me; how unfortunate! The prosecutrix is anxious above all things to secure Mr. Prince’s services, and now—dear me! This is a kind of business not at all in our line; nor indeed in that of the respectable Devizes firm who have taken the unusual course of sending the brief to London, although only relating to a simple matter of larceny;—dear me, how unfortunate! and the fee, you see, is heavy.”

“Surprisingly so, indeed! The prosecutrix must be wonderfully anxious to secure a conviction,” I replied with as much nonchalance as I could assume, confoundedly vexed as I was. It was not at all likely, for all old Dodsley had hinted, that the brief in defence of a prisoner committed for larceny would be marked at a tenth of fifty guineas: however, there was no help for it, and after emitting one or two additional “dear me’s!” away went Mr. Pendergast with brief, fifty guineas, and no doubt proportionately handsome clerk’s fee, in his pocket. I was terribly put out, much more so than Mr. Prince, when he came in and heard of what had happened, although fifty guineas were fifty guineas with him at that time. “I have seen something of the case,” he said, “in the newspapers; it has curious features. The prisoner is a young female of great personal attractions, it seems. We must console ourselves,” he added with jocose familiarity; “it is something to be the chosen champion of beauty in distress.” To which remark I perceive the word “Fudge!” in large capitals, appended in my diary. “Humbug” would have been more forcible, but that expressive word had not then been imported into the English vocabulary, or it would, I doubt not, have been used.

Mr. Prince of course travelled by post chaise with a learned brother, and I reached Winchester by coach, just as the sheriff’s trumpets proclaimed the arrival of my lords the judges in that ancient city. Our Wiltshire fame had not yet reached Winchester, and although the criminal business of the assize was heavy, very few cases were confided to Mr. Prince. Cotes arrived on the second day, with the brief in the Salisbury case, marked, I was astonished to find, “Twenty Guineas,” and the old fellow behaved, moreover, very well to me. Mr. Prince was in Court, and I had full leisure to run over the matter, and a very strange, out-of-the-way, perplexing business, as set

forth in Mr. Cotes's instructions to Counsel, it appeared to be. Divested of surplusage, of which the brief contained an abundant quantity, the affair stood about thus:—Mr. Hurdley, a wealthy person, who had resided many years at Hurdley Villa (then so called, but now, I hear, bearing another appellation, and not very distant, by-the-by, from Bowood, the Marquis of Lansdowne's country seat), had died three or four months previously, intestate, and Hurdley Villa was now inhabited by a Mrs. Gilbert, the deceased's sister-in-law, and her son, Charles Gilbert, the heir-at-law, but who yet wanted some ten months of his majority. The day before his death Mr. Hurdley dispatched James Dakin, an aged and confidential servant, to bring home one Emily Somers from Brighton, where he, Mr. Hurdley, had placed her some fourteen years previously in a first-rate school. He told the mistress of the establishment, a Mrs. Ryland, that the child, then about five years old, was the orphan daughter of a distant relative; a statement discredited as she grew up by the evidence of her features, described as presenting a beautiful and feminine but still surprisingly accurate reflex of those of Mr. Hurdley. This remarkable resemblance not only gave birth to calumnious rumours, but appeared to greatly impress Mr. Hurdley himself, at the last and only interview he ever had with the young girl since he consigned her to Mrs. Ryland's care. This was about six months before he died; and on his return home he gave Mr. Cotes directions to prepare a new will, by which he bequeathed twenty thousand pounds to Emily Somers, and divided the residue, about double that amount, amongst his nephew, Charles Gilbert, and other more distant relatives. This will was drawn out and duly executed, but was subsequently destroyed under the following circumstances:—The instant Mrs. Gilbert heard of the serious illness of her wealthy brother-in-law, she hastened with her son to Hurdley Villa, and immediately set to work, tormenting the dying gentleman into annulling his will. Wearied out at length, it seemed, by Mrs. Gilbert's importunities, he yielded the point, and the will was burnt in the presence of Cotes, the attorney, a medical gentleman of Devizes, Mrs. Gilbert, and the housekeeper, a Mrs. James. "You persist, Charlotte," said Mr. Hurdley, feebly addressing his sister-in-law, "that Emily Somers ought not to inherit under this will?" "I do indeed, my dear Robert; you may be sure she will be sufficiently provided for without the necessity of your bequeathing her such an enormous sum as twenty thousand pounds." "Are the two letters I gave you sent to the post?" asked Mr. Hurdley of the housekeeper. The woman hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Oh yes, certainly; some time since." A strange expression, something like mockery or malice, Cotes thought flickered over the pale face of the dying man as he said, addressing the attorney, "Then I authorize and require you, sir, to burn that my last and only existing testament." This was done, and everybody except the medical gentleman left the room. Mrs. Gilbert vanished instantly her wish was accomplished, following sharply upon the heels of the housekeeper.

Mr. Hurdley died on the following day. He was already speechless, though still conscious, when Dakin returned from Brighton with Emily Somers, upon whom his fast-darkening eyes rested whilst yet a ray of light remained, with an intense expression of anxiety and tenderness. The wealth, I may here state, of which Mr. Hurdley died possessed, was almost entirely personal, Hurdley Villa and grounds being, indeed, the only reality, and was lodged in British securities. It was the intention, Mr. Cotes believed, of Mrs. Gilbert and her son, the instant the latter came of age and could legally do so, to dispose of those securities, and invest the produce in land: that time was, however, not yet arrived.

Matters went on smoothly enough at Hurdley Villa for some time after Mr. Hurdley's death; Mrs. Gilbert was exceedingly civil and kind to Emily Somers;—her son, from the first, something more; and it was soon apparent that he was becoming deeply attached to the gentle and graceful girl bequeathed to his mother's and his own generous care by her deceased protector. These advances, evidently at first encouraged by Mrs. Gilbert, were by no means favourably received,—why, will presently appear,—whereupon that lady worked herself into a violent rage, both with her son's folly and the intolerable airs and presumption of Emily Somers, who had forthwith notice to quit Hurdley Villa, accompanied by an intimation that an annuity of fifty pounds a year would be settled on her. This scandalous injustice roused the spirit of the young girl, acquainted as she was with the burning of the will, and a violent altercation ensued between her and Mrs. Gilbert, in the course of which something was said or hinted that excited Mrs. Gilbert to downright frenzy, and she vowed the insolent, audacious minx should not sleep another night in the house. This scene occurred just after breakfast, and a chaise was ordered to be in readiness by two o'clock to convey Emily Somers to Devizes. About half-past twelve Mrs. Gilbert went out for an airing in the carriage, and was gone about an hour; her passion had by this time cooled down, and the servants thought, from the irresolute, half-regretful expression of her countenance, that a conciliatory word from Miss Somers would have procured her permission to remain. That word was not spoken, and Mrs. Gilbert, with a stiff bow to the young lady, who was already equipped for departure, sailed grandly away to her dressing room. In about ten minutes a terrible hurly-burly rang through the house: Mrs. Gilbert's diamond necklace and cross was declared to be missing from her jewel case, and a hurried search in all possible and impossible places was immediately commenced. Miss Somers, distracted as she said by the noise and confusion, intimated that she should walk on and meet the chaise, which could not be far distant; "and as Mrs. Gilbert," she added with bitter emphasis, "insists that every trunk in the house shall be searched, I will send for mine tomorrow." So saying she left the apartment, and, a minute afterwards, the house. The post chaise was not far off, and she had reached it, and seated herself, when a footman came running up with a request from Mrs. Gilbert that she would return immediately. Miss Somers declined doing so, and ordered the postilion to drive on. Seeing this, the footman, a powerful fellow, caught hold of the horses' heads, exclaiming, as he did so, "that it was a matter of robbery, and the young lady should return." The chaise was accordingly turned round, and the now terrified girl was in a manner forcibly taken back to Hurdley Villa. There it was proposed to search her. She vehemently protested against being subjected to such an indignity; but Mrs. Gilbert peremptorily insisting that she should, and a constable having been actually sent for, she, at length, reluctantly submitted. The search was fruitless, and Mrs. Gilbert, taking up the young lady's muff,—it was the month of January,—which was lying in a chair, tossed it contemptuously towards her, with an intimation that "she might now go!" The muff fell short, and dropped on the floor. A slight sound was heard. "Ha! what's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert. Quickly the muff was seized, felt, turned inside out, ripped, and the missing diamond necklace and cross were found carefully enveloped and concealed in the lining! Miss Somers fainted, and had only partially recovered when she found herself again in the chaise, and this time accompanied by a constable, who was conveying her to prison. The unfortunate young lady was ultimately committed for trial on the charge of stealing the jewels. Miss Somers' refusal to entertain the suit of Mr. Charles Gilbert, and the large fee marked on the brief in defence, were explained by the fact that a Lieut. Horace Wyndham, of the artillery service, then serving in Ireland, had, when at Brighton, contracted an engagement with Emily Somers, fully sanctioned, Cotes believed, by the late Mr. Hurdley. This young officer had remitted a considerable sum to

the attorney, with directions that no expense should be spared; and further, stating that he had applied for leave of absence, and should, the instant it was granted, hasten to Wiltshire.

This was the tangled web of circumstance which it was hoped the ingenuity of counsel might unravel, but *how*, Mr. Cotes, a well-meaning, plodding individual, but scarcely so bright as the north star, did not profess to understand. Mr. Prince took great interest in the matter, and he speedily came to the conclusion that it was highly desirable Miss Somers should be directly communicated with. The etiquette of the bar of course precluded Mr. Prince from himself visiting the prisoner, but I, though it was rather out of my line of service, might do so, by permission of Mr. Cotes. This was readily accorded, and the next day I and the attorney set off for Salisbury.

We had an interview with Miss Somers early on the following morning. All my clerkish bounce was thoroughly taken out of me by the appearance and demeanour of the young lady. There was a dignified serenity of grief imprinted on her fine pale countenance, a proud yet tempered scorn of the accusation and the accuser in her calm accents, so different from the half-swaggering, half-whining tone and manner I had been accustomed to in persons so situated, that my conviction of her perfect innocence was instantaneous and complete. She, however, threw no light upon the originating motive of the persecution to which she was exposed, till, after refreshing my memory by a glance at the notes Mr. Prince had written for my guidance, I asked her what it was she had said on the occasion of her quarrel with Mrs. Gilbert that had so exasperated that lady? "I merely ventured," she replied, "to hazard a hint suggested by an expression used by Mr. Hurdley in a letter to—to a gentleman I have reason to believe Mr. Cotes will see today, or tomorrow, to the effect that I might after all prove to be the rightful heiress of the wealth so covetously grasped. It was a rash and foolish remark," she added, sadly, her momentarily-crimsoned cheeks and sparkling eyes fading again to paleness and anxiety, "for which there was no tangible foundation, although Mrs. Gilbert must, it seems, have feared there might be."

This very partial lifting of the veil which concealed the secret promptings of the determined and rancorous prosecution directed against our interesting client rendered me buoyantly hopeful of the result, and so I told Cotes on leaving the prison. He, however, remained like old Chancellor Eldon, permanently "doubtful," and, moreover, stared like a conjuror, which he was not, when, after again consulting Mr. Prince's memoranda, I said he must let me have two subpoenas for service on Mrs. James and Mr. Dakin at Hurdley Villa.

"Nonsense" he exclaimed; "what will be the use of calling them?"

"I don't know; a great deal of use it may be; but at all events the subpoenas will give me an excuse for seeing them both, and that I must do as early as possible."

He made no further objection; and by eleven the next day I was at the hall door of Hurdley Villa, blandly requesting to speak with Mrs. James. I have always piqued myself upon not having the slightest odour of law or parchment about me, and I was only gratified, therefore, not surprised—ahem!—at overhearing the servant who answered the door assure Mrs. James that the person inquiring for her "was quite the gentleman." This was, moreover, only a fair return for the

compliment I had paid the damsel's blooming cheeks. I was immediately ushered into the housekeeper's room, where, as soon as the door was closed, I handed the astonished woman a strip of parchment and a shilling. She hopped back as if suddenly confronted by a serpent.

"A subpoena, Mrs. James," I said, "commanding you, in the name of Our Sovereign Lord the King, to attend and give evidence on the trial of Emily Somers."

"I give evidence!" she replied, much flurried; "I know nothing of the matter; I wash my hands of the whole business."

"That will require, my dear lady, a very profuse and judicious use of soap and water, or the damned spots will not out, as the lady says in the play."

"Oh, don't bother me about the lady in the play," she retorted angrily. "I can give no evidence, I tell you, either for or against Miss Somers. I did not accuse her of stealing the necklace!"

"That I am sure, Mrs. James, you did not. You are, I know, too just and sensible a person to do anything at once so wicked and foolish, but you *must* tell the judge how it was the two letters—ha! You begin to perceive, do you, that more is known than you imagined?"

"Letters,—what letters?" she muttered, with pale lips.

The words which had so startled her had been suggested by a surmise of Mr. Prince, and a remark which dropped from Miss Somers, implying that Lieutenant Wyndham had been expecting a promised explanation from Mr. Hurdley when the news reached him of that gentleman's death. The woman's tremor convinced me that I had struck the right trail, and I determined to follow it up boldly.

"I will tell you, Mrs. James," I replied; "but first, and for your own sake, ascertain that we are entirely alone." She looked into the passage, reclosed the door, and said with fast-increasing agitation. "Quite, quite alone; what *can* you mean?"

"This: the two letters intrusted to you by Mr. Hurdley, the day before his death, you had neglected to forward, as you ought to have done."

"I—I meant no harm," she huskily gasped; "as I live and breathe, I meant no harm!"

"I believe you; and it was *after* the will was burned that Mrs. Gilbert who followed you out of the sickroom, obtained possession of them."

She did not answer in words, and it was not necessary that she should: her scared looks did that sufficiently.

"Do you remember either of the addresses of the letters, Mrs. James," I presently continued, "or shall I refresh your memory? Was not the first syllable of one of the names Lieutenant Wyndham—"

“Ha!”

“Now don’t make a noise, there’s a good woman. To whom was the second letter addressed? Answer that question, or you will be in custody before ten minutes have passed; answer it truly, and you will not be in the slightest degree molested:—come, out with it!”

“The Reverend Mr. Ridgway, Yeovil, Somerset.”

“Very good. And do you know anything about this Mr. Ridgway, whether he was related to, or in any way connected with, the late Mr. Hurdley?”

“As I hope for mercy, I do not.”

“Very well: now pay attention to what I am about to say. Mrs. Gilbert must not be made acquainted with what has passed between us.”

“Oh no, certainly not; on no account whatever,” she quickly replied. “She strictly forbade me to mention the circumstance.”

“No doubt: as she is sure, however, to hear that I have been here, you had better admit that I have served you with a subpoena. Good day,” I added, taking her hand, which was cold as ice,— “and remember—SILENCE! or it will go ill with you.”

“Come, George,” I mentally exclaimed on emerging with exultant step from Hurdley Villa— “Come, George,”—my name is George— “you are getting along in first-rate style, my boy; and as there is nobody I wish half so well as I do you, I am heartily rejoiced at it. Old Dakin is at Devizes, it seems; well, I don’t know that it’s worth while waiting about to see him, so I’ll e’en be off back again at once.”

The news I brought which, well managed, would in all probability lead to important results, put quite a varnish upon old Cotes’s mahogany phiz; and it was needed, for Lieutenant Wyndham, who had arrived at Salisbury shortly after I had left, had kept him in a state of terrible anxiety and harassment from the first moment he entered the office. He was a fine dashing young fellow, by Cotes’s account, sudden and fiery as a rocket, and at first seriously proposed to send a bullet through young Gilbert’s head, as the only fitting answer to the atrociously absurd accusation against Miss Somers. Convinced at last that ball practice, however sharp and well directed, would avail little against a “true bill” for felony, he bounced off to procure permission to visit the imprisoned lady. This could not be for the moment granted, “and,” added Cotes, “he has been tearing in and out of the office for the last hour and a half like a furious maniac, threatening to write immediately to the Home Secretary, nay, the Prince Regent himself, I believe, and utterly smash every gaoler, sheriff, and magistrate in the county of Wilts;—oh, here he is again!”

The youthful soldier was certainly much excited and exasperated, but I found no difficulty in so far calming him that he listened with eager attention and interest to what I had to relate. “I cannot do better,” he exclaimed the instant I ceased speaking, “than start immediately for Yeovil, and

ascertain what the Reverend Mr. Ridgway knows of Em—of Miss Somers or Mr. Hurdley.” We agreed that it was highly desirable he should do so, and in less than ten minutes he was off in a post chaise from the “Antelope” for Yeovil.

The next day, Saturday, as I and Cotes were busy, about noon, drawing a fresh brief for counsel, a horseman, followed by a mounted groom, alighted in front of the attorney’s house, and presently a small clerk threw open the office door and announced—Mr. Gilbert!

The appearance of this young gentleman was somewhat prepossessing, albeit he appeared to be suffering from illness of body or mind, perhaps of both; and there was a changing flush on his brow, a quick restlessness in his eyes and a febrile tremor, as it were, in his whole aspect and manner which, read by the light of what we knew and suspected, had a deep significance.

“You are the attorney for the defence, I understand, in”—he hesitatingly began,— “in the unfortunate affair of the diamond necklace?”

“I am,” replied Mr. Cotes, “and what then?”

“Your clerk has served a subpoena upon Mrs. Gilbert’s housekeeper; what may that mean?”

“A silly question, sir, you will pardon me for saying: we lawyers are not generally in the habit of making confidants of those opposed to us.”

There was a silence for some time: Mr. Gilbert crossed his legs, tapped the toe of his boot with his riding whip, and passed his right-hand fingers several times through the thick brown locks that fell over his forehead, his irresolute, wavering glance all the while shifting from Cotes’s face to mine, and back again.

“Would it not be better,” he at length said, “that this unhappy business were accommodated? There is a means—one,” he added, flushing intensest scarlet, whereby that desirable result may be accomplished. I must be frank with you, for I cannot otherwise communicate with the—the prisoner: it is this,—if Miss Somers will accept my hand, the prosecution is at an end.”

Cotes was about to speak, but I pinched him with such sudden force that he sprang upon his feet instead, and the first attempted word broke into a shriek of pain.

“Is this proposition made with Mrs. Gilbert’s consent?” I hastily interposed.

“Yes, certainly;—yes.”

“Mrs. Gilbert consents, does she, that her son shall wed a fortuneless girl accused of the disgraceful crime of theft, her character unvindicated, her—”

“Stay, sir, a moment. I speak of course in confidence. If my proposal be accepted, I will say that I placed the necklace in the muff in jest, or as a present.”

“Do you say, Mr. Gilbert,” I exclaimed, “that it was you, *not your mother*, that placed the jewels in the lining of the muff?”

Ha! ha! That shaft, I saw, found the joint in his armour. He started fiercely to his feet. “What do you mean by that, fellow?”

“Precisely what I said, sir. Mr. Cotes,” I added, “you can have nothing more to say to this person.”

“Certainly not,” snapped out the attorney, who was limping about the room, and rubbing one particular part of his left thigh with savage energy.

The young gentleman, finding that his *conciliatory* mission had missed fire, began to bully, but that failing also, he went his way, muttering and threatening as he went. And I soon afterwards departed, after very humbly apologizing to Mr. Cotes for the extreme liberty I had taken with his still very painful leg.

On Monday, the day the Commission was opened at Salisbury, Lieutenant Wyndham brought us the Reverend Mr. Ridgway. What he had to say was this:—Mr. Hurdley had married privately, for fear of his father’s displeasure, Emily Ridgway, the reverend gentleman’s sister, at Bridgewater. The marriage was a most unhappy one: a causeless, morbid jealousy possessed the husband to such an extent that he believed, or affected to believe, that the child, a girl, baptized Emily in giving birth to whom her mother died, was not his; but this child, so Mr. Hurdley wrote to the Reverend Mr. Ridgway, died at the age of four years.

The reader is now quite as wise as the wisest in the consultation held at Mr. Cotes’s on the Tuesday morning, when it was known that the grand jury had returned a “true bill” against Emily Somers. The announcement that our case would probably be called on almost immediately, broke up the council, and away we all departed for the Court, Mr. Prince, of course, who was in costume, walking up Catherine Street with the gravity and decorum which so well becomes the law: I and the lieutenant walked faster.

“A queer fish,” said the anxious and irate artillery officer, “that master of yours: he listened to everybody, it is true, but said nothing himself, nor did anything, for that matter, except rub his nose and forehead now and then.”

“Never mind; wait till it is his cue to speak. I have no fear, unless, indeed, luck should run very contrary.”

The small, inconvenient Court was crowded to excess. Mr. Justice Rook presided, and the Earl of Pembroke, with, if I mistake not, the present Earl Radnor, then Lord Folkestone, were on the bench. Immediately a trifling case was disposed of, Emily Somers was brought in and arraigned. A murmur of sympathy and sorrow ran through the crowd at the sad spectacle, in such a position, of one so young, so fair, so gentle, so beloved,—ay, so beloved, as all could testify who witnessed the frightful emotion depicted in Lieutenant Wyndham’s countenance when the prisoner was placed in the dock: it was a speechless agony, and so violent, that I and the

Reverend Mr. Ridgway caught hold of his arms and endeavoured to force him out of the Court. He resisted desperately; a deep sob at last gave vent to the strangling emotion which convulsed him, and he became comparatively calm. The leading counsel for the prosecution, — there was a tremendous bar against us, as if that could avail! — opened the case very temperately, and the witnesses, previously at the request of Mr. Prince ordered out of Court, were called *seriatim*. The first were servants, who merely proved the finding of the necklace, as before described, and Miss Somers' anxiety to be gone before the chaise arrived; they were not cross-examined. Charlotte Gilbert was next called. At the mention of this name the crowd undulated, so to speak; a wave seemed to pass over the sea of heads, and all eyes were eagerly, the great majority angrily, bent upon the person of a lady about fifty years of age, splendidly attired in satin mourning. She was a fine woman, and ordinarily, I should have supposed, of imperious, commanding aspect and presence, but not now: she had, it was clear to me, undertaken a task beyond her strength, and every fibre in my body pulsated with anticipated triumph.

She answered, however, the few questions put to her by the prosecuting counsel distinctly, though in a low tone, and without raising her eyes. The necklace produced was hers, and she had seen it found in the prisoner's muff, *et cetera*. Mr. Prince rose amidst the profoundest silence; "Will you have the kindness, Mrs. Gilbert, to look at me?" he said. The witness raised her eyes for a moment, but utterly unable to sustain his glance, they were instantly cast down again.

"Well, never mind, we must excuse you; but listen, at all events. The letters addressed to Lieutenant Wyndham and the Reverend Mr. Ridgway, which you purloined the day before Mr. Hurdley died, — where are they?"

A faint bubbling scream, she vainly strove to entirely repress, broke from the quivering lips of the witness. "The letters!" she feebly gasped.

"Ay, the letters informing those gentlemen that Emily Somers was in truth Emily Hurdley, and the legitimate heiress to the writer's wealth."

There was no attempt to answer, and Mrs. Gilbert clutched tightly at the front of the witness-box. "Your witness is fainting," said Mr. Prince to the counsel for the prosecution; "has no one a smelling-bottle?" One was found, and the terrified woman appeared to partially revive. The cross-examination was resumed.

"When you placed the diamond necklace in the prisoner's muff, you—"

A piercing shriek interrupted Mr. Prince, and when we looked again towards the witness-box it seemed empty, — Mrs. Gilbert had fallen, utterly insensible, on the floor. She was borne out of Court, and Mr. Prince, addressing the opposite side, said in his blandest tone, "You had better, perhaps, call another witness; the lady may presently recover." This was acceded to, and the name of Charles Gilbert was bawled out once — twice — thrice. The attorney for the prosecution left the Court to seek for the unanswering Charles Gilbert. He had been gone a considerable time, and the judge was becoming impatient, when he reentered, looking very pale and agitated. "My lord," he said, "the prosecution is abandoned! Mrs. Gilbert and her son have driven off in their carriage."

The tempestuous hubbub that followed this announcement, the exclamations in a contrary sense,—maledictions on the prosecutrix, congratulations of the accused,—could not be for some time repressed. At length order was restored, a *quasi* explanation ensued between Counsel, and Mr. Justice Rook, turning towards the jury, said, “I conclude that after what we have just witnessed and heard, there can be no doubt of what your verdict will be.” An acquittal was instantly pronounced by acclamation; the triumphant shouts of the audience were renewed, and I could just distinguish through tears that almost blinded me, Emily Somers carried off in the rapturous embrace of Lieutenant Wyndham.

“You and Mr. Cotes,” said Mr. Prince, as soon as I could listen to him, “must instantly follow to Hurdley Villa; there is important work to be done yet.” There was, no doubt, but it was easily performed. Utterly panic-stricken, bargaining only for personal safety, Mrs. Gilbert and her son gave us all the information, acquired by them from the purloined explanatory letters, which was necessary to establish the legitimacy of Emily Somers,—properly Emily Hurdley; and a joyous triumphant *finale* concluded the at-one-time menacing and troubled drama I have, I fear, very imperfectly depicted.

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.