

[From the London Lady's Companion]

Miriam

A Tale of Circumstantial Evidence

It was on this very circuit, and in this very town. I was young at the bar then, one of the least known juniors, and very poor; anxious to work hard, but without either interest or connection to bring me forward. I had been the circuit four times, and, except twice, had never held a brief, and those two were given me by another man, who was summoned to his mother's deathbed. Still I did not despair; I had, indeed, two incentives to courage and perseverance. The first was a firm trust in God's mercy; and the second, my engagement to your mother. But it was hard work sometimes, lasses, and needed all my resolution to endure; but I *did* endure, and the end came. Well, it was the Lent Assizes, and Lord Cranstoun, the Lord Chief Justice, was on the criminal side. The calendar was unusually heavy, and we knew from his Lordship's charge that he came prepared "to make an example," as he called it.

The commission was opened late in the day, after which the court adjourned till the morrow. It happened that for some reason or other I remained in court a short time after everyone else had quitted it. It seemed but an accident, although doubtless it was God's doing, and ordained by him. I remember that I, gazing idly on the empty benches, when I heard rapid footsteps approaching through the deserted passage, and a moment after I was accosted by an attorney:

"I beg your pardon," he said, hurriedly, "can you tell me where to find Mr. Ashley?"

"Indeed, I cannot. Some mistake has occurred with his clerk, and when we came into town today we found that he had not procured lodgings as usual."

"So I learn. I have been to the rooms Mr. Ashley usually has, and I hear they are taken for Sergeant Keats. I wish to see him as soon as possible, and I am in the utmost perplexity."

"I am very sorry I cannot help you, Mr. Paget—Mr. Ashley had some intention of going to Malvern this evening, in which case he offered to drive me over; therefore, if you come to my rooms we may hear some tidings of him; although, perhaps, as I declined his proposal, he may not call; it is all a chance."

"How do you know me?" asked the attorney, as we walked together.

"You are an Oxford man, I think; were you not at Magdalen?"

"Yes; and you? I do not remember you."

"I was at Worcester. Do you not recollect that wine-party in Loyd's rooms at Oriel, when the chimney took fire, and the punch spoiled? I met you there."

"To be sure; how could I forget? And what have you been doing since?"

"Marvelously little."

“Is this your first circuit?”

“No, the fourth.”

“I never saw you here before; did you read with Chanty?”

“No, with Monk—why?”

“Because he had an Oxford man of your name with him a few terms since, and he married a cousin of mine. I wish I had seen you before, I should have asked you to hold this brief for me. But now—ah, here is Mr. Ashley.”

Ashley had been to my rooms, and not finding me there, had sallied forth in search of me, and now turned back with us. As soon as his eye caught the name upon the brief which Mr. Paget handed to him, he said:

“Sorry I can’t take it, sir; I am retained to prosecute.” A short conversation ensued, which resulted in the brief being handed to me.

“And now, Mr. Conway,” said the attorney, “can you give me a conference? We must get an acquittal if possible; and I know that no efforts will be spared by the prosecution to convict my client, who is, I firmly believe, as innocent of the charge as you are—when can you see me?”

“Now; this moment.” The guineas were nestling comfortably in my waistcoat pocket, and the novel excitement caused me to forget the dignity I ought to have preserved.

“Thank you; then if you will glance your eye over the case upon your brief, you will at once be in the possession of the names of the parties and the offence charged. When you have done so, I will explain the prisoner’s previous history, which it is material that you should know.”

It was a prosecution for arson—the prisoner an apprentice girl, and her master’s the premises those which had been destroyed.

“Well,” said Mr. Paget, when I had finished reading, “now you must listen to a long story. Eighteen years ago a long basket, containing an infant apparently six months old, was left at the door of a surgeon of this town. The child was handsomely dressed, and a letter enclosing a bank bill for twenty pounds, and stating that the infant’s name was Miriam Lyndon, were found beside her.

“The surgeon was a bachelor, an eccentric and strange man, although a very humane and charitable one, and in spite of all the scandal and jests of the world he kept the little stranger. But he had a housekeeper, Alice Sharpe. Yes,” he continued, seeing me turn again to my brief, “that is the woman whose house has been burned, and she was so greatly enraged at the prospect of any one sharing the influence she had obtained over her master, that after vainly trying to alter his determination, she revenged her disappointment upon the poor child, by the most cruel usage.

Ten years rolled on in this way; the surgeon gave up practice and society, secluding himself in his house and garden. There were no servants besides Alice Sharpe and poor little Miriam, who was still unreasonably hated by the former, with a boy who worked occasionally in the garden. By the exercise of constant watchfulness and cunning, Alice Sharpe managed to keep her master and his little *protégé* almost entirely apart, and she continued so to fill the child's mind with apprehension and fears of her protector, that when by any chance they did meet, her terror was so great as to mortify and disappoint the kind old man. Still he loved the child dearly, and used to watch her pretty figure running about with great delight. Sometimes, too, when Alice was absent a few hours at a meeting or at market, he would try to conciliate and attract the little creature, and thus, after a time, she learned to love him. But all this was concealed from the housekeeper. Why, has always been a mystery to me; however, it was so, and Alice Sharpe lived in ignorance of the mutual attachment, until her master was taken ill. Then for the first time, the secret was betrayed by the intense grief of Miriam and the querulous anxiety of the invalid, who craved to have the child perpetually in his sight. To this, after a short time, Alice was obliged to consent, and a little mattress was brought into the sick-room for her, while the manner and treatment of the wily, artful woman changed from its usual harshness to a caressing, oppressive kindness that was almost as offensive. But Miriam was too thankful to be allowed to remain with her protector to be fastidious, and she nursed him night and day until his death.

“He had no medical advice, Alice always ridiculing the idea of danger; but she prescribed for him herself, mixed up his medicines out of his own old stock of drugs, and administered them. Miriam observed that after taking them he was invariably worse, and that he often objected to do so; but the housekeeper always prevailed, and by dint of scolding and coaxing usually carried her point. Ten days before his death, Alice introduced into his room a cousin of hers, a lawyer's clerk, whom she told Miriam that her master had sent for; and a will was then made and signed. After this the woman became careless, and left the dying man almost wholly to the charge of little Miriam, who was alone with him when he died.

“The last act of his life was to give the child a packet, which, after his death, he bade her take to the Clergyman; it would explain who she was, he said. And Miriam positively asserts that his last words were, ‘Bless you, my own child, my darling niece!’

“The packet, however, was lost; whether the child in her exceeding misery mislaid it, or it was taken from her as she slept, there is no means of discovering. —Alice Sharpe always asserted that the whole tale was a pure invention, and that Miriam had never received any such article; she, however, remained positive, and so do I.

“Well, all was now changed. A will was produced, executed two days before the decease of the tester, bequeathing all his property to Alice Sharpe, and not one word was said about Miriam. People talked loudly, but the heiress heeded nothing; she took possession of the property, married her cousin, George Sharpe, (the man who made the will,) sent Miriam to the work-house, and opened a milliner's establishment.

“Wheels roll within wheels; Mr. Sharpe was now a large rate-payer, and once or twice overseer, and when his wife applied to the parish officers, offering to take Miriam Lyndon as an apprentice without premium, those functionaries found it convenient to forget her previous cruelty to the

child, extolled her liberality to the skies, and without consulting the poor girl, bound her instantly.

“The life she led in that house was horrible. No African slave ever worked harder or was more cruelly treated; but she never repined; she had learned endurance from infancy, and the practice was familiar. At last, however, she had another and greater trial to bear: her beauty attracted the evil eye of her wretched master, and her misery was complete. The persecution she underwent from him, and the jealousy of his wife, made existence a burden to her, and many a night she has gone to sleep with a prayer of death upon her lips.

“One night, (that named in the indictment,) Miriam was occupied in pressing some straw-bonnets, when her master entered the apartment, and after a great deal of impertinence attempted some familiarities. She resisted, and the noise of the struggle and her cries brought her mistress to the room; while the cowardly assailant, as soon as he saw his wife, slunk away, leaving the poor girl alone to bear the storm of her ungovernable rage. Blows, oaths, and every description of abuse were heaped upon Miriam, by the infuriated woman, and she left her with a dreadful vow to be revenged. Five hours after, in the dead of the night, the house was discovered to be on fire, the fire originated in Miriam’s room, from which she was absent. She was, however, soon found in a small outhouse at the top of the garden, where she was at work; as she says by the order of her mistress, but which that woman denies. She was given into custody, and is prosecuted with a remorseless zeal that would do honor to a fiend. A subscription has been raised to defend her, and by God’s help she shall be saved.”

“Have you seen her?” I asked, after listening thoughtfully to his history.

“Yes, several times; she has been in prison near four months.”

“And she persists in her innocence?”

“Yes, but there is little necessity to asseverate what to everyone who sees her must be so plain.”

“Your suspicion then lies—“

“Upon the prosecutor’s wife, Alice Sharpe. And more than this, I am inclined to suspect her of using unfair means with her late master, and of holding his property unjustly.”

“How?”

“I cannot exactly tell, but I firmly believe Miriam’s assertion that the old man gave her a packet previous to his death, and that he called her his niece; and I also believe that in some way or other Alice Sharpe has become possessed of the secret, and a deeper motive than even jealousy urges her to destroy her victim.”

“But the will—if *that* was fairly executed, she need be under no apprehension.”

“So it seems. Still my suspicions of foul play are very strong. Now let us go through the evidence. You see the principal witnesses are Alice Sharpe, Ann Jackson, the servant-girl who discovered the fire, Edward Harris, the constable who apprehended the accused, and Louisa Jones, an apprentice, who swears that she heard Miriam vow to be revenged upon her mistress.”

We pursued carefully the evidence given before the committing magistrate: that of the servants was no collusion or deception there; both spoke to facts within their own knowledge without prejudice or exaggeration. But it struck me upon a second examination that the testimony of Mrs. Sharpe and Louisa Jones were not genuine, there were several points that I did not like; and the language of both betrayed great acrimony and ill feeling.

“You can make something of that?” suggested Mr. Paget, as he saw me musing upon the matter.

“I don’t know. It’s very strange they don’t call the husband.”

“Yes, and therefore I have served him with a Crown-office subpoena, which has frightened them and put them on a wrong scent, I think.”

“Is the letter found with the prisoner when she was left at the surgeon’s door in existence?”

“I don’t know, why?”

“Nothing—a vague idea as to the indictment, that’s all. But I think if it is possible it will be as well to have it. By the by, what brothers and sisters had this old doctor? How could this girl have been his niece?”

“Nobody knows. He came here about thirty years since, but he never visited, and so far as I know never said where he came from. Alice Sharpe followed him immediately.”

“I should like to read my brief over alone, and see you upon it afterwards—tonight if you are not engaged.”

“What time will suit you?”

“Eight o’clock.”

After the attorney was gone, I pored over those sheets again and again, and the more I did so, the more satisfied I was that Miriam was innocent and that Mrs. Sharpe had some serious reason for wishing to get rid of her. But unfortunately, this was only my own conviction. I could see no way of working it out, or of bringing a jury to so desirable a conclusion, and the more satisfied I became, the more uncomfortable I was also, because, I knew that nothing that was not very plain and unmistakable, would, except by a great chance, be accepted by Lord Cranstoun.

One help I had, and next to commonsense witnesses it is the greatest that a counsel can have—a shrewd, clever practical attorney.

[CONCLUSION NEXT WEEK.]

[CONCLUDED.]

It was afternoon before the trial came on. I shall never forget my sensations, as I saw the prisoner come up to the bar. She was not simply pretty, but she was beautiful; fair, slight and delicate as a highborn lady, and graceful exceedingly. —There was a general murmur in court as she appeared, and even the old judge was softened. Oh, what I felt! knowing that under God her life was in my hands. I was very nervous; the pen I held feigned to make notes, trembled in my hand, and I shivered from head to foot as if ague-stricken.

The constable was the first witness called. His evidence was short and clear. —He stated that he was sent for at twelve o'clock at night to apprehend Miriam Lyndon, the prisoner, who was accused of having set fire to her master's house; that when he reached the place he found it burning inside, in a room which he was told was the prisoner's bedroom, and in another immediately under the chamber of her employers. That upon searching the house the prisoner was not to be found; but that after a little delay she was discovered in an out-building, at some distance from the house, pressing bonnets.

The man was turning to leave the box when it struck me that I might put a question or two with effect, and therefore desired him to stay.

“When you reached Sharpe's house,” I commenced, “what had been done to extinguish the fire? Was there any engine or people there?”

“No, sir, none; nothing had been done as I see'd, the fire was dying out of itself—a few pails of water would have put it out altogether; the straw blazed a bit fierce at first, but there was nothing for it to catch hold on, there hadn't been no body of fire.”

“You say you found the fire burning in two rooms, the prisoner's and the one under her employer's, was there much light, much glare I mean, though the windows, anything to attract attention.”

“No, sir.”

“It was a light, moonlight night, I think?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was the firelight then less visible from the moon shining on the windows, than it would otherwise have been?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How far was the outhouse where the prisoner was working at the end of the orchard, from the dwelling-house?”

“About three hundred yards, more or less.”

“In going in and out of the outhouse, as you have just told the Court the prisoner would often have occasion to do, in the course of her work, was there anything in the appearance of the house to draw her attention?”

“No, sir; I shouldn’t have known there was a fire outside of the house.”

“Did the prisoner express any surprise at seeing you?”

“No, sir, it seems there was a bonnet of my mississes altering at the shop, she thought I had come for it, for she said, ‘I’m sorry your wife’s tuscan isn’t done, Mr. Harris, but we’ve been so busy.’”

“Did she seem regular at work, as if she had been at it some time?”

“Yes, sir, there was lots of bonnets about as she had been scouring and pressing.”

“When you took her into custody, what did she say?”

“I told her nothing at first, only as she was suspected of setting fire to the house, and then she looked all amazed, dumbfounded, as it were, but after a bit she said very steadily like ‘I know nothing of it, I never had such a thought.’”

The next witness was the servant-girl.

Her testimony was clear and short. She had seen Miriam go to her bedroom at the usual time, had retired herself immediately after, and slept soundly until aroused by her mistress, who told her that Miriam had set the house on fire, and had run away. She was very much frightened, and by her mistress’s orders went to the constable. She did not see the burning rooms until her return with the man for whom she had been sent; she wished to do so but her mistress refused to let her. She knew of the quarrel that had taken place in the evening between Mrs. Sharpe and Miriam, and heard the former say that her apprentice should “rue the day she had set her cap at her master.” It was unusual to work at the bonnet-pressing and scouring at night, but once or twice before, Miriam had worked all night by her mistress’s orders. Mrs. Sharpe was a regular Turk to her; and her master worried the life of her; she led the life of a black slave between them. Never heard her swear to be revenged, or any such thing, and would not believe it. There was not much burned, only a cupboard door and shelves in one room, and an old bedstead in another; here was a lot of straw and matches under the bed; Miriam had no call with either.

The apprentice was called next. She was a bold, impudent-looking girl, dressed in a very showy style, and stared round the court in a most insolent manner. She took the oath in great flippancy, and when she turned round cast a look at Miriam which betrayed all the hatred of her heart, and its cause—she was jealous.

She swore to many conversations with the prisoner on the day previous to the fire, in each of which she had declared her resolution to be revenged upon Mrs. Sharpe, although she did not say why. Never saw Mr. Sharpe pay her attention, although she did all in her power to attract him. — Considered her a great flirt, and very artful girl. Purchased a tinder-box and six penny-worth of matches a few days before the fire. She said she wanted them for a particular purpose. Don't know where she got the money, unless it was from the young lawyer up the street, who was always after her. Would swear that on the very night before she left work, Miriam said, "You'll hear something before morning as will make you stare." Asked what she meant, but got no answer, except a vow to revenged on her mistress. This conversation took place at the garden-gate. There is an old fashioned lodge at the gate, open to the road. People can sit and rest in it; anybody there would see all the people who came down the garden walk. They could not help seeing.

Cross-examination did very little with this witness, except to show the bitter feeling with which she regarded Miriam, to elicit the fact that the young lawyer had formerly been a lover of her own but had deserted her for Miriam, and that her own character was far from stainless.

Then came Alice Sharpe the only witness from whom I had any hope; and what that hope was, was even to myself so vague and undefined an idea, that I could not shape it into any practical and tangible form. With a hesitating step and furtive glance Alice Sharpe now entered the box and certainly I never looked upon a more cunning, ruthless, determined countenance than hers.

She was evidently ill at ease, for she cast an anxious, apprehensive gaze round the court, and trembled visibly. My hopes rose as I saw this.

There was something she wished to conceal, something she feared would come out, and I knew better than she did that there is no place like a court of justice to facilitate discoveries, or unmask a lie.

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At last the examination-in-chief was concluded, and I rose as Mrs. Sharpe was hastily quitting the box. "Stop," I said, "I must have a little conversation with you now."

I cast one look at the prisoner. The misery of her face gave me new courage, and I mentally prayed for help to bring the truth to light. At first I put a few unimportant questions, and then said, "You lived with your late brother—master, I mean—twelve years or thereabouts, did you not?"

Her face became livid white, and she muttered some indistinct reply. Whether wisely done or not, I felt that I had now thrown off the mask, and must be prepared to make the most of every word, or even change of feature. "Why do you not answer me?"

Another muttered sentence.

"Speak louder," said the Judge.

“Yes,” replied the woman.

“What did you do from the time of your trial for forgery at Liverpool in 18— till your appearance at Worcester as the late Mr. Steele’s housekeeper?”

She gazed hopelessly at me.

“Answer me woman.”

“I was living at different places; I can’t exactly say where now.”

“Were you not married in the name of Sharpe?”

“Yes.”

“How long previously had you ceased to bear your name of Steele?”

A frightened glance was all her answer.

“Well, never mind; it was somewhere about the time that unpleasant business of the embezzlement in Mr. Pearson’s office occurred. You were house-keeper then, I think. After that it would of course be disagreeable to bear the same name; and you did wisely to get rid of it as soon as you could, and I suppose your cousin was of the same opinion.”

Her face worked convulsively as I went on thus coolly but she said nothing. This rather perplexed me; I had depended upon discovering something from her own incautious replies, and her wary cunning baffled me. At last I was obliged to let her down without having produced any stronger effect than that of destroying her credit with the jury.

Another witness, for whom we were not prepared, now came forward, and deposed that on the very same day of the fire Miriam went to her house and purchased a ‘bolting’ of straw, and a large bundle of matches, all of which she declared were for her mistress, but portions of which, as it turned out, had been found in the burning room. All my tact failed in shaking her testimony; it was evidently true and she proved having delivered the straw which she took up stairs by Miriam’s directions, and put under her bed in her room. She asked for what purpose it was wanted, and was told that Mrs. Sharpe was about to make some new mattresses “unbeknownst to her husband,” and therefore desired that it should be hidden out of his way. The girl, she said was crying, and upon being asked why she did so said that her mistress had been very cruel to her and that she wished herself dead, drowned, burnt, or poisoned, or anything.

This closed the case for the prosecution; and I could see that, although the jury had been dissatisfied with some of the evidence, yet this last testimony had decided them against us. Their faces wore the hard, resolute expression of men who have made up their minds to punishment. Oh, the agony of that poor girl as she saw it too!

“I would not run the risk of calling George Sharpe,” whispered Mr. Paget, “the jury are dead set against us, and the judges, too, I think; and if he does you no good, as I fear he will not, he’ll ruin the case wholly—you had better trust to yourself.”

But I dared not; one more look at that beseeching face, and the impulse to call Sharpe came so strongly upon me that I gave way to it. Very few, but as prompt as I could imagine, or utter, were the words I addressed to the jury, and then urged, I know not how, I called George Sharpe. He was a long time coming, and when at last he made his appearance, it was only by the help of a crier, and in a most pitiable state, that he could enter the box;—he looked like some one who had been suddenly stricken with death; he shook frightfully, his eyes glared, his teeth chattered, and his mind seemed wandering.

“Your name is Steele, I think—George Steele?” I said, quietly.

He stared vacantly; then said, “yes, George Steele; you’re right, sir, George Steele.”

“You are cousin, I think, of your wife, and of the late Mr. William Steele, the surgeon?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember how long it was after your trial at Liverpool that you changed your name?”

“No,” he answered helplessly.

“Had not Mr. Steele another sister besides your wife—one who displeased him by marrying?”

“Yes, Miriam’s mother.”

An exclamation from his wife, who stood in a box behind, startled him a little, but he shook his head dismally, and said, as if to himself, “It’s no good!”

“What was her name—Mrs.—Mrs.—?” and I turned over my brief as if to look for it.

“Mrs. Blackwood, she married young Will Blackwood, the squire’s son, as had been courting Martha afore Fanny left school.”

The whole thing was now plain—legible to my mind as if I had it upon my brief—but, as fact after fact rapidly followed, corroborated and explained each other, I began to fear that I should lose the connection, and not shape my questions so as bring out the truth for the jury.

“When was it that you first knew the child left at Mr. Steele’s door to be his sister Mrs. Blackwood’s child?”

“Not for a good while; but Martha knew it soon after.”

“That relationship is the reason, I suppose, why she dislikes the girl so much; her sister had captivated her sweetheart, eh? —and of course she did not like the child!”

“Yes, that reason, and another!” he answered gloomily.

“George!” exclaimed a voice which all recognized as that of his wife. He heard it, as he did before, but took no heed.

“Ay, that was the will, I suppose!”

“The will!”

“Yes, that document which was contained in the letter which Mr. Steele gave to Miriam, you know.”

“A document! —how come you to know anything about that?” he asked, as if suddenly awakening from his dreamy state to a consciousness of all that was going on around him.

“Oh, I know all about it! You drew up the first will, you remember, ten days before Mr. Steele’s death, but this deed, which altered that disposal of his property, and left it to his sister Fanny’s child, was executed the very day of his death, and was stolen from Miriam while she slept.”

I thought this probable, and acted as if it were a certainty; but the man looked surprised, and said, “He did not leave it all to her.”

“No?—I’ve been misinformed then! —how much did he leave?”

“George!” said the warning voice.

“How should I know?” answered the frightened man.

“Take the woman into custody,” exclaimed the judge, “if she disturbs the court again!”

The man was now thoroughly alarmed and perplexed.

“How much besides the house did he leave to her?” I asked, quietly, fixing my eyes steadily upon his quivering face.

“I don’t know.”

“That’s a falsehood. Remember you’re upon your oath, man, and answer me truly; how much did Mr. Steele leave his niece?”

“What’s good of bullying me? I tell you I don’t know.”

Then came a moment’s pause, and then I said suddenly—

“Who mixed up the medicines?”

The man’s face was horrible to look at, as I asked this. White it had been all along; but now it was ghastly: the eyes started and glared, white froth came out, fringed the blue vivid lips. I shuddered as I looked. There was evidently some terrible mystery, and I dreaded almost to speak, lest it should overwhelm me.

“Who mixed up the medicines?” I asked again.

A vacant stare of terror was all my answer.

“I must have an answer,” I said sternly, “or I shall ask his Lordship to commit you.”

“Oh Lord, Martha, it’s come at last!” exclaimed the wretched man: “I knew it would!” and uttering a hideous scream, he fell upon the floor of the witness-box in strong convulsions.

After this witness had been carried out, and as soon as the confusion had subsided, Mr. Ashley rose to reply upon his evidence; but it was impossible to recall the man, and endeavor to set him right with the jury, or to remove from their minds the fearful impression he had made, the counsel confined his remarks to a few common place observations, which he hurried over as quickly as possible.

Lord Cranstoun then summed up; but the jury heeded him very little: they, in common with all the court, were gazing on the prisoner, who had fainted in the box, and whose beautiful and sorrow-stricken face lay white and moveless before them. Her head was supported by one of the turnkeys, and a surgeon, who happened to be near, had entered the box to chafe her hands and bathe her face; but to those rough men in whose hands her fate reposed, this swoon appeared like death; and I knew as I looked upon their pitying faces, that not the most obdurate among them would venture to pronounce the word, which must, in the event of her recovery, doom her to die.

And I was right. Almost without turning in their box, and quickly, as if glad to release her, and do their part towards comforting her, they returned their verdict, and she was immediately acquitted, and borne out of the dock, senseless.

Alice Sharpe absconded during the confusion in court, and her husband, in the intervals of delirium, and just before his death, made a fearful confession, of which I can only give the outline—

Martha, Fanny, and William Steele were the three children of a tradesman living in Yorkshire village. The son of the Squire, attracted by the bold beauty of Martha, paid her so much attention, that she fully expected he intended to marry her, and, therefore, boasted of her conquest to all her companions; but just when she had decided in her own mind that the proposal ought to be made, Fanny returned from school.

From that time Martha lost empire over her lover's heart: and, in her treatment of the unfortunate cause of her disappointment, showed the first symptoms of that innate cruelty of heart which afterwards worked so much evil to herself and others. In a few months, worn out with her sister's unkindness and taunting words, and urged by her lover, poor Fanny Steele eloped, only leaving behind her a vague note for her brother William, whom she dearly loved.

Soon after this their father died, and Martha accepted a situation as housekeeper, to a solicitor in Liverpool. There she became acquainted with her cousin George, and in a very short period, attained so great a mastery over him as to persuade him to commit the forgery for which they were both subsequently tried and acquitted. After this she was, of course, homeless and characterless, her guilt had been too evident to admit of any doubt, and it was very well known that her life had only been saved by some flaw in the indictment; no wonder, then, she found it impossible to obtain any situation.

In this position she thought of her brother. She knew that he was most merciful and forgiving, and thought that if she could only persuade him of her innocence of the crime for which she had been tried, he might receive her again. This after a time he consented to do, on condition that she changed her name, so that she might not be recognized as the heroine of the celebrated forgery case. This proviso, however, reasonable as it was, angered her greatly, but she affected to be grateful, and after her brother broke up his comfortable house in Yorkshire and went to Worcester, she followed him in the capacity of house-keeper. Two years afterwards an anonymous letter, informing him of his sister Fanny's dangerous illness, reached the kind surgeon. Without saying anything to Martha, he went to the place to which he was directed, just in time to see his dear sister before she died, and to undertake the charge of her infant. He learned then for the first time, that her husband was dead, and that his family had refused to receive her. After the funeral, Mr. Steele entrusted the child to the care of the woman who had nursed her mother, and some weeks after he received the infant from her in his own surgery; while to baffle the suspicions of Martha, (now called Alice Sharpe,) to whom he had said nothing of Fanny's illness and death, and to whom he dared not entrust the secret, he deposited the baby, the bank note and the letter at his door.

But Martha was not long deceived. —The likeness to her sister was so strong in the child's infant features, that her suspicions were soon awakened, and her brother's tenderness to his *protégé*, although carefully concealed, speedily confirmed them. She was, however, too wary to suffer her knowledge of his secret to be discovered by the surgeon, and she revenged herself for the silence she was obliged to maintain, and her previous disappointment, by harshness to the unoffending Miriam. But after a time a new fear sprang up in her mind, and she "dreaded lest Mr. Steele, whose health had already begun to fail, should at his death bequeath all his property to the poor, forlorn little child. This fear she communicated to her cousin George, who had followed her to Worcester, and, by aid of a false reference, obtained employment in a lawyer's office; and then commenced the diabolical system of slow poisoning, which wore her brother's life away atom by atom, and finally ended by destroying it.

Previous to his death, however, she introduced George into his room as a stranger, and prevailed upon the dying man to make a will in her favor, which he willingly did, having another form ready prepared for his signature, which gave everything to his niece. This he contrived to execute

during Martha's absence, the night before his death, in the presence of stone masons who were working in the yard, and it was this which he enclosed in a letter to Miriam, explaining her parentage, and which after his death was stolen from her by Martha. Of the fire, also, the miserable man gave a full account. It had been planned and executed by Martha, partly from revenge and jealousy of her husband's admiration of Miriam, and partly that she might, by her conviction, get rid of her forever.

All this, and much more, George Steele confessed upon his death-bed; and as, but for his sudden cowardice, which had caused so great a diversion in her favor, that poor girl must have been found guilty upon the strong circumstantial evidence brought against her. I have ever looked with fear and suspicion upon any verdict sentencing to death upon testimony so liable to interpolation, misconstruction, and falsehood.

The Spirit of Democracy [Woodsfield, Ohio]

First part published February 4, 1852

Second part published February 11, 1852