

Sir William and Lady Devereaux

by Thomas Waters

I VERY early acquired a habit of transcribing in durable ink, before I retired to rest, such pencil memoranda as I had jotted down during the day of singular incidents which I had myself observed or been told of. Standing alone, these were with out apparent significance, but might thereafter prove to be invaluable links in a tangled chain of circumstance. The date, locality, the names of informants or witnesses were strictly recorded. In ninety-nine cases of a hundred I simply had my trouble for my pains; but the hundredth, as in the case I am about to relate, abundantly compensated the lost labour.

The following sensation paragraph appeared in the columns of the Morning Post, in May, 1837: “The fashionable world is in a state of excitement relative to the sudden separation of Sir William Devereux and his lady, whose marriage was solemnized at St. James’s Church less than three weeks ago. The newly wedded pair were spending the bridal month, at the baronet’s seat, Westlands, Derbyshire, when the inexplicable event took place. One, and the most constant, rumour is that the baronet has been smitten with lunacy; and this would be a probable conjecture were it not that the lady has returned to her friends. A short time will, no doubt, clear up the mystery.”

The writer in the Post miscalculated the time which the unravelment of the mystery would consume. At least a month passed after the appearance of the newspaper paragraph before the following note reached Colonel Rowan, Chief Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, into which body the Bow Street Runners had been absorbed: “Sir William Devereux presents his compliments to Colonel Rowan, and will esteem it a signal favour if he could be permitted to avail himself of the services of an intelligent and active detective officer. Sir William read an account in the papers at the time of the resolute and skillful conduct on the part of an officer named Clarke, in a case of alleged bigamy. If that person could be spared, Sir William would gladly engage and amply reward his services.”

This note was handed to me, with orders to place myself at the disposal of the baronet, should I find that the affair in which I was called to act fell within the legitimate range of a detective’s duties.

There was no room, I found, for doubt upon the point. I had frequently seen Sir William Devereux—a vigorous, handsome man, about, I judged, thirty year’s of age; and now, when I waited upon him in Belgrave Square, I found an emaciated invalid, on the high road and at full gallop to consumption. I was fortunate by my replies to his first testing questions, as he considered them, to confirm the favourable opinion he had formed from newspaper reports of my detective capabilities, and he at once gave me his entire confidence. A precious, tangled, knotty yarn it was which he spun out and expected me to unravel!

Sir William had succeeded to the baronetcy and entailed estates only about a twelvemonth previously, at the death of his father, and as a consequence of the decease, not very long before, of his elder brother. He had, however, been pretty well off for a younger son, but nothing like

sufficiently so to win the consent of Earl Verigrand to his union with the Lady Violet, youngest and loveliest of the noble lord's three lovely daughters, whose portraits have appeared in every Book of Beauty published. Mr. William Devereux's possible succession to the baronetcy and the estates was too problematical, though the elder brother was of a weakly constitution, to permit such an idea to be entertained for a moment, though the Lady Violet herself was favourably inclined, and Mr. William Devereux loved her with passionate devotion. The noble father's coolly contemptuous refusal of his beautiful daughter's hand—as I understood it to have been—drove the disappointed suitor distracted for a time; during which access of mania he must needs marry, just to show how little he cared after all—the first sharp pang over—for the passing disappointment. Lavinia Meriton—a second or third cousin of the Lady Violet's—and for some reason or other, not very clearly explained to me, at bitter feud with the Verigrand family—Lavinia Meriton was an orphan—poor, proud, very handsome, swayed by strong passions, and bitterly ambitious. She lived with an aunt—a lady of moderate means; and had a brother, two or three years older than herself, who had gone out to India at a very early age, and had risen to the grade of captain in the Honourable Company's Service some time before Lavinia Meriton became Mrs. William Devereux.

The marriage was an unhappy one. The husband and wife had no real regard for each other; and a formal separation was under discussion when, by the death of the elder brother, William Devereux became presumptive heir to the baronetcy and entailed estates. A final separation was then suddenly brought about; not by the agency of lawyers, but by the fiat of Fate. Captain Meriton returned to England upon short leave of absence; and of course visited his sister and her husband, by whom he was courteously received. He was a tall, handsome man, bronzed by Indian suns and a soldier of service—as a deep, though not disfiguring, sword scar across his forehead testified. It was, the yachting season; and Mr. Devereux who was fond of aquatics, was staying at the Royal Hotel, Ryde, Isle of Wight, with his wife. It was natural that the brother and sister should be much together—often exclusively so—considering that the terms of the proposed separation were, as before stated, under discussion. It appeared strange, to those who knew how fiercely ambitious was the wife, that the brilliant future opened up by the elder son's death did not in the least abate her anxiety to forthwith carry out the arrangement. She seldom condescended to mention the baronetcy; never directly, that he remembered, to her husband.

She was probably not so reserved upon the subject to her brother or to Mademoiselle Saint Aubin her French attendant, and, since the marriage, confidential companion and friend.

Captain Meriton and Mrs. Devereux were frequently out boating together; no other person with them. One fine but sultry afternoon the intense heat of which was forebodeful of an electric storm, the brother and sister proceeded in a light skiff upon the Southampton Water. There were several other boats in company at starting, but these returned to Cowes, as the sky became overcast and the wind rose. Not the slight skiff—managed, however, with skill by Captain Meriton. When near Calshot Castle—off which several yachts (that of Mr. Fleming, Member for South Hants, one of them) were anchored—Captain Meriton beached his boat, and with his companion went on shore; no doubt, it was supposed, to seek temporary shelter, from a sharp scud of rain which came down at the time. That passed away, they were seen to reembark—though it was blowing in violent, fitful gusts, and the skiff carried considerably too much canvas. Darkness, too, had suddenly fallen—darkness seamed; lit up by vivid flashes of lightning, by

which Captain Meriton's boat was seen to capsize when not more than four or five hundred yards from the shore. She turned completely bottom upwards; and after a few moments of painful suspense, and whilst yet Mrs. Devereux's scream of mortal agony sounded in the ears of the spectators, Captain Meriton was observed to rise, and with much effort clamber up and cling on to the boat's bottom. Mrs. Devereux sank at once. Captain Meriton was saved by the yacht boats, which had immediately hastened to the rescue; but Mrs. Devereux was not seen again, nor was the body ever found.

The storm, which lasted several hours, was a violent one, and the corpse had no doubt been whirled by the raging waves out into the English Channel, through the Needles Passage. Captain Meriton was much affected by his sister's shocking, untimely death; and well he might be, it having been caused by his own almost criminal rashness. He returned to India much earlier than he had intended.

Sixteen months after the death of his first wife, Sir William Devereux, with the full consent of Earl Verigrand, married the Lady Violet. The wedding was a splendid one, and, as the Morning Post stated, "the happy pair left immediately for the baronet's seat, Westlands, Derbyshire." There, after a decorous interval had passed, they were joined by all or nearly all the bride's family, with other distinguished friends of both sexes. A very brilliant company, no doubt; Sir William himself the gayest of the gay.

Suddenly thunder fell, and all was confusion, terror, dismay. The family and guests were assembled or assembling in the drawing room, previous to dinner, when Sir William, white as stone, his hair disheveled, his eyes ablaze, and clutching a letter, it seemed, in his right hand, staggered into the room. Meeting the alarmed gaze of his beautiful wife, he uttered a loud cry of anguish, horror, and fell prone on the floor.

The letter, which had no date or signature, contained these lines:--

SIR WILLIAM DEVEREUX, — Lavinia, Lady Devereux, was not drowned. She escaped as by miracle, and is at this moment alive and well. She does not, however, wish to intrude her unwelcome presence amongst the gay bridal party assembled at Westlands, nor expose her amiable, triumphant cousin, the Lady Violet, to public disgrace and shame. You, Sir William, may, if you will, keep the fact of Lady Devereux's existence a secret from the Lady Violet—from the world—which you and she know to be in such cases so cruelly moqueur—pitiless. But secrecy, as you will easily understand, will be costly—very costly. What of that? Tens of thousands are but as dust in the balance, weighed against the honour, the peace of the noble Verigrands—the honour, peace of mind, perhaps the life, of a young, beautiful, beloved bride. The person charged to deliver this letter will enter into negotiations upon equitable terms. Do not forget that one rash word could not be recalled—the consequence be irretrievable."

"That infamous paper, scrawled in a character unknown to me," said Sir William; "was placed in my hand by a Mademoiselle Saint Aubin, lady's maid to my first wife, as I was hastening in from the park to dress for dinner. I had no sooner glanced at it, than, turning to the woman—not in alarm, not in the least—in anger, contempt, rage, I asked if she knew the consequences to herself of attempting to obtain money by such barefaced lying, so audacious a fabrication. 'You

do not believe,' said the brazen French devil; 'ah, well! I must show you, then. Come.' She led the way, at a smart pace, out of the park to a small adjoining coppice, on the other side of which is a turnpike-road. I followed mechanically. It was getting quite dusk, I must tell you. She entered the coppice, with me close at her heels; for I fancied she meant to run off, and I was resolved that she should not. On the roadside of the coppice we came suddenly upon a light phaeton, in which was seated a lady, thickly veiled. 'Sir William is incredulous, my lady,' said the woman, in French. "It is imperative, therefore, that he should see his wife.' The person in the carriage lifted the veil and unless I was mocked by some illusion, some trick—I have read of such things—that person was Lavinia, my first wife. I was spellbound, rooted to the earth with astonishment, dismay; and before I could move a step, utter a word, the French woman had sprung into the phaeton, snatched the reins from the other, and driven off at the swiftest pace of a fleet, powerful horse. It was impossible to overtake them, and they have not been heard of since."

"Not heard of since! Strange! Inquiries after them have of course been made?"

"Yes; eager, incessant inquiries; wholly without result. It is the sword of Damocles, suspended over my head. It will kill my wife, my innocent, beautiful wife. It has killed her morally. God! God! God!" exclaimed the baronet, with groaning passion, and pacing the apartment to and fro, with feeble steps. "That I should have blighted that fair, young, joyous life! Destroyed one, to save whom I would have cheerfully accepted death for myself!"

"Do not be too ready, Sir William, to accept a sinister solution of this strange mystery. I, too, have heard of cleverly managed illusions of the kind. It was dusk, you say; and possibly a chance likeness may have suggested the trick, and—"

"No, no! Clarke," interrupted the greatly shaken baronet. "I have tried to hug that hope; vainly tried. If I stand here, I saw her: saw my former wife, in the body, with my own bodily eyes. There was--could be--no illusion, spectral or otherwise."

"I have no faith in spectres, believe me. Yet what peg of probability is there to hang a doubt of your first lady's death upon? In the alleged case of bigamy you read of in the newspapers, there was a palpable motive for the pretence of having been drowned: but in this instance, why should Mrs. Devereux wish it to be believed that she had so perished? What, in any conceivable eventuality, could she gain by it? Then, again, Captain Meriton, her brother, must have either been particeps criminis—"

"There! there again!" interrupted the baronet. "I have not told you that the man who accompanied Mrs. Devereux was not her brother,—not Captain Meriton. That gentleman arrived from India only last week. I have seen him. He has not been in England before, since he left it a mere day."

"Not Mrs. Devereux's brother! Not Captain Meriton! Her paramour, you evidently suspect—"

"I do! I do! O, she was, is a woman who would thrust aside, or overleap any obstacle that opposed the gratification of her passions, whether of love or hate. "

“Yes, but excuse me, Sir William, the very fact that you and your lady were about to be legally separated; that it was agreed she should have a splendid income as soon as you succeeded to the baronetcy,—a handsome one meanwhile,—cuts away the ground under that supposition. It has nothing whatever to support it. The lady and her supposed paramour would have everything to lose—nothing whatever to gain—by getting up a false report of Mrs. Devereaux’s death.”

“True! True! The mystery is inscrutable. Nothing can, I see, be done. Sending for you was but the futile snatching of the drowning man at a straw.”

“I do not abandon hope so easily. The conviction grows upon me, that a chance likeness discovered by the Frenchwoman must have suggested the attempt to impose upon and rob you. It failed, and the accomplices have not been seen or heard of since. Yet, why should she have first showed you the pretended Mrs. Devereux, and immediately scampered off? That certainly gives one pause.”

“The final blow is suspended only. The vile woman revels in the slow torture she inflicts.”

“She hated with a bitter hate, I understood you to say, the Lady Violet?”

“Yes; with bitter, rancorous hate. She hated me also; but I might have given some provocation. That angel none! None!”

“Well, Sir William Devereux,” said I, rising to take leave, “I am now in possession of all particulars, so far as they are known to you. I will sleep upon the matter, and tomorrow give you my candid opinion as to whether any good result may be hoped for through my exertions. One moment, Sir William. There is one important item which must be jotted down in my notes. Do you know if the French lady’s-maid, Mademoiselle Saint Aubin, has any acquaintances in London?”

“I do not know. Some of the servants may.”

“Possibly; but we must not inquire too hastily of them. They themselves may be the woman’s friendly acquaintances. Do you happen to be aware of where in France the woman was born, or where she has relatives?”

“Yes; Amiens, or the immediate neighbourhood. I am pretty sure.”

“The pretended brother was an Englishman?”

“I think so, decidedly. O yes; his speech was that of an educated English gentleman.”

I then went away; meditated quietly at home all I heard, and could come to no other conclusion than that an impudent, barefaced imposition upon Sir William Devereux’s credulity had been attempted, and failed. Failed, that is, of what I supposed could only be its real purpose—that of extorting money. It had not failed in destroying the happiness, unless proof could be obtained of

the attempted imposture, of Sir William and Lady Devereux. To obtain that proof would, I feared, be very difficult. Would my diary of remarkable incidents throw any light upon the subject? The drowning had taken place on the 8th of August 1835. I would turn to the entries (if any there were) referring to that date, or near it. By Jove! Here is a flash of light!—"Being at Mr. Nightingale's house, in the New Forest, on the 19th of September, 1835, on special business, heard of a curious circumstance. John Coombes, one of the under-gardeners, an intelligent lad, being in the forest, not very far from Calshot Castle, on the 8th of August, late in the afternoon, and when it was tempestuous dark, he himself having got under shelter of trees, out of the rain, saw a lady creeping slyly along through the forest, looking every way to see if she was followed. That, at least, was the, young man's impression. Her clothes were so heavy with wet (she had a cap but no bonnet) that they clung to her body. Coombes' curiosity being roused, he stealthily followed the lady till she came to an out-of-the-way spot, where she stopped, looked for a light spade concealed under a bush, took it up, and began digging a hole in the ground. As soon as it was large enough for her purpose, she began stripping off her clothes. The lad's modesty was, however, in no danger of being shocked, as beneath the female habiliments were a Guernsey close fitting flannel frock and flannel leggings, such as seamen wear. First burying the woman's clothing, and covering the spot over with bushes, the person next pulled out from the place where the spade had been concealed, a bundle, containing a round blue jacket, canvas trousers, and tarpaulin hat; arrayed in which, he stood confessed a sinewy young man, and a sailor. He then went off, taking the spade with him. When he had been some time gone, Coombes raked out the clothes, and took them home. They consisted of a blue silk dress, a silk shawl of a peculiar pattern, and a lace cap; the whole saturated with sea water. The Nightingale family being at the time on a visit in the north of England, no stir was made in the matter. The gardeners concluded that some lark had been forward; the clothes were sold to a traveling pedlar, the money was spent in drink; and by the merest chance the matter was mentioned in my presence. I questioned Coombes pretty sharply. He did not know, he said, even by sight, the sailor who secreted the clothes, and should not recognise him. This I suspected to be a falsehood. But, it not being likely that anything more would be elicited, I let the subject drop; and left the house shortly afterwards, on my way back to London."

Thus far my diary. Now, if I had heard or read of Mrs. Devereux having been drowned near that spot, and on the day named, the 8th of August, and the coincidence of place and date had occurred to my mind, I should certainly not have let the matter drop. It is likely, however, that I had not read of the accident, or that if I had, it had passed from my memory.

This was certainly striking a very promising trail; which, however, promised only to confirm Sir William Devereux's worst fears: that it was some diabolical device, for which no adequate motive could be assigned except utter insanity of hate for the Lady Violet—who, Mrs. Devereux might fairly conclude, would marry Sir William were she supposed to be dead.

Still it was my duty to state to Sir William Devereux what I had found by the entry in my diary to have taken place, and take his final instructions as to whether I should follow up the investigation. He was greatly agitated by this fresh proof, as it seemed to be, that his former wife was alive; but still determined to discover the whole truth, if possible, and bring the conspirators to justice, if it could be done.

It was not many hours before I was with John Coombes, and obtained an admission from him that he did know the young sailor by sight (only by sight) who buried the clothes; that he was a Portsmouth man, and might be found almost any day on Common Hard. He (Coombes) had seen him there about a fortnight after the clothes were sold—and he (Coombes) should not have known where to look for him before—in company with a swarthy, well-dressed looking man.

“Did you notice a scar on his forehead?”

No, he did not; having only glimpsed at him for a moment.

At all events, Coombes could go with me to the Common Hard. Once having found the sailor, I could question him myself.

“That’s he!—that’s he!” exclaimed Coombes; “the chap in a striped shirt, talking to the landlord of the Greyhound. They’re going away together.”

“All right; and you may go away for the present. I shall know where to find you.”

The chap in a striped shirt was a lithe young sailor, of about the medium height, strolling with its landlord (Skinner) towards the Greyhound, a low public-house on the Hard. I followed close after them, and overheard the landlord address his companion as “Charley” and “Trump.” Was Trump a real surname or a sobriquet indicative of game qualities? Desirous of ascertaining before opening my game, I harked back for a few minutes. Coombes had told me the young fellow was a waterman, and, addressing a weather-beaten tar lounging about the Hard, I said, “Pray, which is Charles Trump’s boat?”

“Charley Trump’s boat,” said the ancient mariner; “that’s one on ‘em,” pointing to a gaily painted wherry. “He’s got two now.”

“Has he, though? Then he must have got on wonderful since I first knew him.”

“I should think he have, mister. Fellows of his sort often do, though not always for a long spell. If you want Charley Trump,” added the old man, “you are pretty sure to find him at the Greyhound; he mostly lives there since he’s been in luck.”

Trump was sitting alone in a small parlour, with a pot of beer before him. First taking his moral dimensions with as much accuracy as my visional calipers were capable of, I said, with purposed suddenness, “Charles Trump, you are wanted. I am a London police officer.”

“Eh! what the devil!” cried he, starting up. “A London police officer! Well, what then?”

“You will know ‘what then’ presently. But don’t you go into fits before your time. How about Mrs. Devereux, the lady whose clothes you buried in the New Forest, not very far from Calshot, on the 8th of August last year. Ah! that licks you, my lad! I have been some time running you to earth, but you are safely bagged at last.”

“Go to the devil with your ‘bagged!’ What have I done?”

“You have committed a robbery, that is certain—possibly murder. If I were to offer an opinion, I should say the probability is that you did commit murder as well as robbery. You need not, however, confess to me that the unfortunate lady was flung alive upon the beach by the waves. Now then, leave off staring as if you had seen Mrs. Devereux’s ghost; settle for your beer and come along with me. Yes, Charley Trump, willingly or unwillingly, you must come along with me. If you are as sensible a chap as one look in that, telltale face—dingy as it is—shows you are cunning, it may not go so hard with you. Come.”

We proceeded to a house in the not-far-off vicinity, where we could talk without interruption or risk of being overheard.

“Now, then, Mr. Police Officer, what is it you want to know?” said Trump, in a sullenly savage tone; and endeavouring to rally his shaken courage.

“All you know about the lady we were speaking of.”

“Which is precious little. I wish it was less.”

“A proper wish, but entertained too late. The immediate question is, will you make a clean breast of it, on the chance—only the chance, mind—that, if by doing so you further the ends of justice, your own share in the business, if it be not a very heinous one, will be mercifully dealt with. Remember, however, that I make no promise; have, indeed, no power to do so.”

“And if I choose to keep my tongue between my teeth—how then?”

“Simply that it will be my duty to immediately take you before a magistrate, and charge you with the willful murder of Mrs. Devereux, whose clothes you unquestionably stole.”

“Willful murder of Mrs. Devereux !” stammered the sailor, trembling in every limb. That arrow, aimed at a venture, went very near, if it did not actually hit, a vital part. “Wilful murder of Mrs. Devereux! That’s all fudge. The lady is alive, and I’ve no doubt quite well, at this very moment.”

“That may be, Mr. Trump; but it will require much better proof than your bare word. Only the bringing forward of the lady alive and well would suffice. Let me clearly describe your position. It can be proved that you were, in possession of the missing lady’s clothes very shortly after she was supposed to be drowned. What money she had about her person may never be known—except, perhaps, from your own confession to the jail chaplain. Pray don’t interrupt. The possession of, or concealment of, the clothes is an ugly fact—a very ugly fact. Mrs. Devereux’s French maid will prove that about noon on the 8th of August her mistress left the Royal Hotel, Ryde, in the blue silk dress and the Indian pattern shawl—”

“What, what!” exclaimed Trump, fierce as fire; “do you mean that the Frenchwoman has turned round upon me? But no, no; it can’t be possible.”

“That’s about the size of it, Trump, whether it be possible or not. But time’s precious. Will you ‘peach,’ taking your chance, or go before a magistrate at once? I give you just ten minutes to make up your mind.”

“I suppose,” said Trump, after very brief silence; “I suppose it will be better to tell you all I know. This is it. Lieutenant Jameson was once second lieutenant on a gun-brig in which I served as cabin boy and his servant. He fell in with me on the *Hard* here last year, in the month of July. He was passing under the name of Meriton—being, he said—out of sight on account of debt. He was also after an old sweetheart of his, whose brute of a husband—a Mr. Devereux—used her shameful; kept her in constant fear of her life. The plan settled upon was to pretend she was drowned. Then they would be sure to get clear off, as no pursuit it would be attempted. I waited and waited on the shores of the Solent and Southampton Water days and days,” glibly went on Trump, his long-conned lesson surging clearly up in his memory, “and at last a lucky chance favoured the scheme. On the 8th of August Captain Meriton, as he called himself, ran his boat on shore, near Calshot Castle. Out stepped Mrs. Devereux; and as soon as she reached cover, stripped off her clothes, and dressed herself, with things brought in the boat, as a country wench, and went off in the direction of Hythe. I put on the lady’s fine things—there was a bonnet with feathers and a thick veil, but they were lost—went into the boat, which Meriton immediately shoved off and capsized; that was easy enough done, not too far from the shore. I could swim like a duck. Diving at once, I easily contrived to reach a concealing indentation of the shore, without showing more than a portion of my head above the waves. The bonnet, of course, I had cast I off. That,” concluded Trump, “is about the sum total of it, as far as I am concerned; and I don’t see that I have done anything particularly dreadful.”

“Don’t you? I do. You have learned your story well by heart. Concealing indentation of the shore! Where did you pick up such fine lingo as that? Upon *Common Hard*? There, it’s of no use trying to gammon me! Captain Meriton cooked that cock-and-bull story and crammed you with it! Where is he to be found?”

“I know no more than you; perhaps not quite so much.”

“You have papers about you. The end of a black pocketbook is sticking out of your side pocket. I must examine the contents. Must I summon assistance? It is within call!” And I placed a whistle to my lips.

“Take it,” said Trump, throwing the pocketbook savagely down upon the table. “There’s nothing there about Mrs. Devereux and Mr. Meriton.”

“We shall see. Please to move away from the door, whilst I look over the papers. You would be recaptured in three minutes, or less, did you attempt to bolt; but I like to do business in a quiet way.”

“Well,” he growled out between his teeth, as he moved up towards the fireplace, “this is devilish pretty treatment—this is—for just helping a gentleman to run away with a lady—she being willing; and the clothes given me! What will they make out to be robbery and murder next, I wonder?”

“Here is your pocket- book,” said I. “I retain only this scrap of paper.” The scrap was part of an old letter, addressed to Mrs. Devereux, Ryde, Isle of Wight; the post-mark was Bermondsey; the post-date, July 24 of the preceding year; and in a corner were the initials C. D. The “contents” part of the letter were gone; but in the inside of the mutilated cover was written, in a different hand from the address, “Lieutenant Jameson, care of Madame Saint Aubin, Rue St. Jacques, Amiens.”

“Damnation!” burst involuntarily from Trump. “I forgot—” He paused, grinding his teeth together, to keep in the self-betraying words.

“You forgot this scrap of paper was in your pocketbook! Where did you get it?”

“Found it in the lady’s purse,” was the sullen reply, after the question had been three or four times repeated, “along with her money, which I was allowed to keep.”

“Two fresh lies in a breath! But what are they amongst so many? Well, now I have the address, I don’t see that I shall for the present want you any longer. I must see you tomorrow though. We will start for France together.”

I then left. Trump must have seen me pass the window, as if I was going to Common Hard. Instead of that, I was on my way to the post-office. Exhibiting the warrant with which I was armed to the postmaster, I directed him to detain any letter addressed to “Lieutenant Jameson, care of Madame Saint Aubin, Rue St. Jacques, Amiens.” “Jameson was an Englishman,” I explained, “charged with capital felony; and the sailor who, it was believed, would write and post the letter was in the same predicament, and virtually in custody—he being closely watched by two officers of the Portsmouth police.” The postmaster, as he was in duty bound, promised compliance, and I left.

It was pretty certain that Trump would seize the first opportunity of writing to his patron and accomplice, warning him that active energies were on foot, and that, by an unlucky oversight, his address in France was known. Such a letter would, in all probability, lead to important disclosures.

I was not mistaken. The letter, which was fairly written and correctly spelled, Trump himself posted in less than half-an-hour after I left him. It ran thus: “Ware hawks, lieutenant. The infernal London police are giving chase in your wake, and that of others. Me they have taken into custody, and let go again for a while. It has set my head spinning like a top. They talk something about robbery and murder; but that is all nonsense, of course. Unfortunately, the police have got your address. I didn’t tell the unboiled lobster that, though born in England, your mother was a Frenchwoman—a Saint Aubin. I shall be staunch, depend upon it, to the last. Dumb and gritty as stone C. T.”

The same evening Charles Trump was locked up, charged with stealing from the person several articles of dress, the property of Sir William Devereux, Baronet. The next morning he was

remanded, at my instance, by the magistrate, for a fortnight; and I, without loss of time, proceeded to make inquiries at the Royal Hotel, Ryde.

There was a new landlord and landlady; but several of the servants remembered Mr. (now Sir William) Devereux, his lady, and Captain Meriton (Mrs. Devereux's brother) very well. One fact, not mentioned by Sir William when instructing me, came up:—Mrs. Devereux and her brother left Ryde, and were absent from the Wight more than a week; returning to the hotel only about four days, or five, previous to the catastrophe. After her return, Mrs. Devereux complained of indisposition—at least, her French attendant did for her—and kept close to her bedroom, waited upon only by the lady's-maid, and seen occasionally by Captain Meriton. She had no medical advice; and the day previous to the accident, Mademoiselle Saint Aubin reported her to be much better—quite recovered, in fact. Her husband, I found, was but rarely at the Ryde hotel—his time being chiefly spent at Cowes. At about noon, on the day of the accident a close fly was ordered up to the door; in which Mrs. Devereux, who was very strikingly dressed and wore a thick veil, drove off with Captain Meriton. This was about all I could hear in the house; but when leaving it, "Boots" said, in a sort of confidential "aside," that he had a few words to say about the business I was upon. "This is it, sir:—Missus, you see, don't like to have any talk about the ladies and gents that come here, which may get into the papers; so this is between ourselves. But I'm not quite sure as it was Madame Devereux that went out that day in the fly with Captain Meriton—springing into it, too, like a four-year-old, and she ill as was said. She—if it were she—must have had a curious fancy of wearing sailor's underclothes. He [Her] dress caught in the fly-step, you see, and hitched up the gown; I said nothing—of course not—not even that I thought, swift is she hurried out, that she had grown all at once two or three inches taller."

I thanked the man, slipped a half-crown into his hand, and bade him keep dark with everybody but me.

The mystery was thickening, deepening. I could not at all see my way through it. One thing certainly seemed, through all the imbroglio, to be getting perfectly clear—that Madame Devereux had not been drowned; was, as Trump asserted, alive and well at that moment. Yet, if that were so, why did the sailor tremble and turn pale when I threatened to charge him with the willful murder of the missing lady? Then, again, the words in the intercepted letter to Lieutenant Jameson: "they talk of robbery and murder; but that is all nonsense, of course." The last nine words were thickly underlined—as if to give emphatic utterance to the writer's apprehension that in that direction lay the real peril. Well, patience, perseverance might solve as great a mystery.

Before leaving Portsmouth, I called upon the governor of the prison where Trump was caged, and learned, to my great chagrin, that a letter written by the prisoner to Lieutenant Jameson, and submitted, according to the usual routine, to the governor, had been posted the previous day. It certainly, to persons unacquainted with the circumstances, would have seemed an innocent epistle enough, one even which it was the duty of the authorities to forward without delay. I read the official copy:—

"To Lieutenant Jameson, at Madame St. Aubin's, Rue de Derrière, Amiens, France

“Respected Sir,—One who served with you several years in the Alacrity gun-brig, and whom, in consideration of some small service rendered to you on the West India station, you promised to befriend if he should ever require your aid has fallen into trouble. It is endeavoured to make it appear that I and a Captain Meriton are implicated in the disappearance of a Mrs. Devereux. I am as innocent as the babe unborn; but the London police are storming heaven and earth, it seems to me, to arrest everybody that ever knew the lady, especially those who visited her at about the time she was drowned, of all of whom the officers who arrested me boasted they had that addresses—some residing abroad. I do not quite understand it, sir; but I am told that if I cannot employ a lawyer, I shall be kept in prison God knows how long before the truth comes out. Sir, it happens just now that I am very short of money, and have no dependence but upon your well-known generosity.

“If, sir, upon receipt of this you could leave Amiens, so as to be certain of being here on the first day of hearing, all would be right, as you could prove, if I remember rightly, that on the 8th of August last year I was in attendance upon you at Torbay. But this perhaps is asking too great a favour. I will only add that what is done, to be worth anything, must be done quickly.

“Your grateful servant,

“CHARLES TRUMP, “

“To whom please to direct under cover to — —, Esq., Governor of Portsmouth Jail.”

“What an infernal baulk! The clever rascal knew through the tattling folly of one of the Portsmouth officers that his first letter to Lieutenant Jameson had been intercepted; and this second one was the artful dodger’s device for warning his accomplice to “ware hawks,” through the agency, one may say, of the prison authorities themselves.

The letter was skillfully penned, the underscoring as I have given it, and Lieutenant Jameson would perfectly understand that it would be wise to make himself scarce before “the London police”—there being a treaty of extradition not long before negotiated—pounced upon him at Amiens. And that letter would reach Amiens, be delivered twenty-four hours at least before I could possibly be there. Confound it!

Regrets are always useless; and I, delayed only by the necessity of proper credentials, started for Amiens.

It was easy find Madame Saint Aubin; easier to perceive that she expected and was serenely prepared for my visit.

“Oh, yes, monsieur! My daughter Julie saw you speaking this morning to M. le Normand, the commissary of police, a cousin of ours. You wish to speak with my daughter. Nothing more reasonable. Julie, ma fille,” continued the lady, really a very intelligent, comely dame, with: enormous plaques of gold hung, à la Normand, from her ears; “Julie, ma fille, the Monsieur Anglais; Clarke, representative of Sieur Villiyam Devereux—(Devereux being a French name was decently pronounced)—wishes to see you.”

I spoke French pretty, well, understood it better.

Mademoiselle Julie Saint Aubin presented herself with the easy assurance, the perfect à plomb of all Frenchwomen that I have ever seen above the very lowest class.

After a few quickly-got-over common-place courtesies, I said—

“Mademoiselle Saint Aubin, I have come to Amiens to make inquiries concerning Madame Devereux, whose servant you were, I believe, for several years—”

“Servant!” interrupted mademoiselle, colouring and bridling. “Madame Devereaux was: my friend; but let that pass, c’est égal!”

“To make inquiries concerning Madame Devereux. I am invested with authority, you will please to understand, to make those inquiries. I also wish to see M. le Lieutenant Jameson. “

“You are unfortunate, monsieur; Madame Devereux is in her grave.”

“How, mademoiselle! Madame Devereux in her grave? Did you not, a very short time since, accompany her to Oaks Park, and show her to Sir William Devereux?”

“Quite true; you are perfectly exact. It is since that, Madame Devereux died, in this very house. Her grave is in the cemetery of St. Jacques. She died, poor lady, of a broken heart. As to M. le Lieutenant Jameson, he has, for a, time at least, left France, He is my cousin, monsieur must understand. There is—you may or may not be aware French blood in his veins. “

“I have heard so, mademoiselle ; but that does not concern me. It is very desirable to clear up all doubt concerning Madame Devereaux. I am here for that purpose. I feel confident mademoiselle, that you could, if so pleased, substitute certainty for suspense, and I really do not understand why you should not do so.”

“It would—it will be—an afflictive certainty, monsieur, to your patron, Sir William, and the Lady Violet Verigrand. Nevertheless, it is necessary that the truth should be spoken. The story told you by that poor faithful Trump is in the main correct. But he was a mere tool. Lieutenant Jameson, my cousin, is a very handsome person, a man à bonnes fortunes, you understand. He was audacious. By my means he obtained an introduction to Madame Devereux before she was married, bien entendu. There was passion on both sides—imprudence. Monsieur will understand. All this was, as I thought, known only to me, Mademoiselle Lavinia, and my cousin. He rejoined his ship. Many letters passed—deeply compromising letters, as it proved, for Mademoiselle Lavinia—which, had I known of, would, I think, have induced me to dissuade her from marrying Monsieur (now Sir William) Devereux. I do not, however, suppose that I could have dissuaded her. Her passions were fierce, exalted. She must, have had le feu Français in her veins; and she knew that the Lady Violet was attached to Mr. Devereux—the Lady Violet, whom she hated with a deadly bitterness I could give no expression to! The marriage, as you know, took place. It was an unhappy one. Madame Devereux hated her husband; her whole soul was my cousin’s. He

came to England; the intimacy was renewed—he passing for her brother, Captain Meriton. The idea of a separation between the husband and wife assumed a settled form. Madame urged it on; and the scheme would no doubt have succeeded, with my zealous help,—(I do not pretend to superfine morality, Monsieur Police Officer),—when a shocking contretemps upset it. Madame’s secret—her liaison with my cousin—was known to another person, a relative of hers: a young lady with whom she had exchanged girlish confidences. That person, whom it is unnecessary to name, made an imprudent marriage (in a different sense from that of Madame Devereux), and the husband, fallen into insolvency, demanded a very heavy price to keep silent till the deed of separation was completed.

Very well. That sum, large as it was, would have been paid, had it not come to our knowledge that he, believing—foolishly believing—that Lavinia and my cousin had been married (legally married,—not merely par amour), was resolved, after getting possession of the sum stipulated for, to acquaint Sir William, before the treaty of separation was irrevocably sealed; to entitle himself to a yet greater money-payment from the baronet—he was not then a baronet, it is true—by the disclosure of all he knew, and believed he knew. What was to be done? There was a choice of difficulties. Certainly, had it come to Sir William’s knowledge (it is as well to name him by his present title) that his wife had been the paramour—was living in actual adultery with my cousin, the lieutenant, passing himself off under the name of Meriton—he would have whistled her off without a shilling; and the English law would have justified him, we were told, in doing so. We had to do with an implacable foe. Finally, the scheme revealed to you under duress; by Trump, was resorted to. Madame supposed to be drowned, our enemy was disarmed. There were means of making terms with him, I must tell you, supposing he had no great temptation to babble. Besides, and above all, Madame gloated over this thought: That the Lady Violet would marry the supposed widower; and that she (Lavinia) would burst upon her, in the full blaze of her splendour, trample the spurious Lady Devereux into dust! That was not exactly my cousin’s game. He—(we are children of Voltaire, monsieur,—believing, more or less, only in that which we see—can be sure of; a misfortune, perhaps, but a fact nevertheless)—he (my cousin), I was saying, had another game. He believed that he might make a fine market of Sir William after he should have married the woman he adored, by offering to conceal forever from the world that the true Lady Devereaux still lived. I was the agent selected to carry out—to consummate—that design. Sir William’s skepticism, his impetuosity, baffled us. I myself, knowing something of your English laws, got frightened. I and Lady Devereaux returned to Amiens. Her health gave way; and about three weeks since she died, in this house, I have told you. Voila, monsieur, is the whole story, in its broad outline. You may spare comment.”

“It has run off your tongue, mademoiselle,” I replied, with a sneer I could not wholly repress, “very fluently. Can you give, me the name and address of the relative, or the husband of the relative (Madame Devereux’s relative), whose impertinent interference spoiled your cousin’s first game?”

“I will not give you that information; certainly not.”

“Perhaps mademoiselle will condescend to say why—with what object in view—she has favoured me so far?”

“My faith!—the object is very direct—simple. If Sir William Devereux (one of the richest of your rich English aristocrats) will purchase the secret of his wife’s existence after his marriage with the Lady Violet Verigrand, it may be his, and will be inviolably kept. To satisfy their own consciences,” added Mademoiselle Julie, with a mocking laugh, “the baronet and Lady Violet can now be really married privately; the expected infant be legitimized, and all be well. And please to understand, Monsieur le Police Officer, that we do not undertake to furnish proof—legal proof—that Madame Devereux is even now dead, except we—(Oh! Parbleu! I speak for myself as well as for my cousin Edouard)—are liberally arranged with. What I have said about her death is, of course nothing—mere gossip—bavardage, unsupported by proof.”

It could not be denied that I had to fight Sir William’s battle with antagonists very cunning of fence. But their assault, opposed to a practised hand like mine, would have been more likely to be successful if it had been less flashy. Besides, there were so many incongruities—so much three-volume-novel nonsense in the story Mademoiselle Julie had told without pausing to take breath, that I was not for one moment bamboozled. It was just as likely to be true that Madame Devereux was alive at that moment as at any time after Sir William’s marriage with the Lady Violet.

“I am, “ said I, “but a very humble intermediary in this matter; but, in reporting what has passed between us, mademoiselle, it will be necessary, if ‘a transaction’ is to be arrived at, that I should know what price is demanded for proving the death of Lady Devereaux about three weeks since?”

“O! as to that, “ said Madame Saint Aubin, speaking for the first time, “nothing unreasonable will be insisted upon by either Julie or Edouard. There must be consideration on both sides, and good faith on both sides. Let Sir William propose. If the offer be reasonable, it will be accepted—I answer for that; and also, I repeat, good faith will be kept.”

Little more was said, and I left—promising they might expect to hear from me,—in a state of deep perplexity. In what a confusing labyrinth of audacious lying, transparent absurdity with subterfuge, had I got involved! Had Mrs. Devereaux been drowned or not? Was it Mrs. Devereaux who, with the Demoiselle Saint Aubin, was seen at Oaks Park? And was Mrs. or Lady Devereaux alive or dead? I could not decide. All these were open questions.

Sir William listened to my narrative in gloomy silence. Proof that his wife died a few weeks previously—even if such proofs were forthcoming—availed nothing. The Lady Violet’s life would not be saved by that. Perhaps she was unduly sensitive. It might seem. The earl himself and her sisters would perhaps be of that opinion. Sir William would not give the Saint Aubins a guinea! “Enter into an agreement with them! Never! by G—, never!”

I thought Sir William’s intellect was giving way; and after reaching home, carefully examined my hand, to see if all my trump cards had been played. How about that cover of a letter addressed to Mrs. Devereaux, at the Royal Hotel, Ryde, marked 25th of July, Bermondsey, and having the initials “C.D.” in the corner? That stone, not a promising one certainly, was still unturned; and there might be something under it, and it would be merely the loss of a few shillings did nothing (which was most likely) come of it; so having recourse to a favourite

expedient of mine, I sent the following advertisement to the Times:—"If C. D., who, on the 24th of July last year, posted, or caused to be posted, in Bermondsey, a letter, addressed 'Mrs. Devereux, Royal Hotel, Ryde, Isle of Wight,' will communicate with Scotland-yard, he will much oblige."

The next day, the following note came to hand:—"The Reverend Christopher Doyle sent a letter to Mrs. Devereux—with whom, however, he had no acquaintance, and has never seen—on the 24th of July last year. It was posted in Bermondsey, and directed to the Royal Hotel, Ryde.—St. George's Catholic Church."

"All I have to tell you," said the Reverend Christopher Doyle, "is this. I was summoned to attend a young woman calling herself Mrs. Lorimer, who was known to be dying at—stop, I have the number of the street in my diary—'Mrs. Lorimer, believed to be dying, at No. 17, South-street, Bermondsey.' She was known to be a fallen woman, and was still (though emaciated by want and disease) remarkably beautiful. She was in want of the commonest necessaries. She told me (not in confession) that she was the natural daughter of—, and sister by blood to Mrs. Devereux, with whom she had been once on terms of intimacy. They were as like, people said, as two peas. Mrs. Devereux had, however, cast her off. Still, if anyone of character—whose word she could believe—wrote, stating that she (her own father's child) was dying for want of common necessaries, it was probable that help—too late help, it might be—would be afforded. I wrote to Mrs. Devereux. She, accompanied by a gentleman, hurried, as I was told, to London; saw Mrs. Lorimer—but too late to save her. I did not (as I told you) see Mrs. Devereux. Her blood-sister, Mrs. Lorimer, I saw a few days afterwards, in her coffin; and I myself celebrated the rites of the Church over her grave. That is all I have to communicate respecting the unfortunate woman."

I thanked the reverend gentleman, and directed my steps to No. 17, South-street, Bermondsey.

It was a large house, full of gay lodgers. The owners or renters of the place fought very shy of my questions; but, at last, by dint of both promises and threats, I managed to wring out of them that a Mrs. Lorimer, a handsome young woman, did lodge in the house at about the time mentioned; had been seized with smallpox; was visited by the Rev. Mr. Doyle, a Catholic priest; died; and had been buried by him. They (the renters) had not liked to talk much about it at the time, for fear of alarming the other lodgers and visitors. Besides, Mrs. Lorimer, pretty nearly up to the time of her seizure, always paid well, and boasted of grand friends. Sure enough, two of those friends, a lady and gentleman, did come to see her a few days before she died; the lady "the very image of Mrs. Lorimer" the woman said—"twin sisters could not be more alike." That was, before she had the smallpox, of course. The lady and gentleman went away, before the funeral took place, in a cab together. There seemed to have been a row between them.

"Would a fellow get anything now," asked the black browed, gallows-bird-looking landlord, "if he showed where the lady might be any day dropped upon?"

"Yes! twenty sovereigns, down on the nail!"

"I'm your man, Mr. Officer. She lives in a pretty little place at Camberwell. I seed her there not a week ago."

“You are the very fellow I have been looking for, a long time. You must go with me; and, first, to Belgrave Square.”

My object in going to Belgrave Square was to obtain the attendance of some one who knew Sir William Devereux’s first wife. That was easily managed; and all three left for Camberwell.

The cab stopped (by direction of the landlord of No. 17, South-street, who was seated on the box) at the gate of a neat little villa. Out we hurried, entered the front garden without ceremony, walked up, and knocked at the villa door. Before it could be opened, a lady and gentleman looked out of the parlour window, to see who knocked so loudly. The female face was a remarkably handsome one; the gentleman’s had a deep white scar across his swarthy forehead.

“Good God!” exclaimed Sir William’s servant, whom we had brought with us; “Good God! my master’s first wife—Mrs. Devereux!”

The door opened at the instant, and we were in the presence of the lady and gentleman.

“That is Mrs. Lorimer, as was dead and buried! exclaimed ‘No. 17, South Street’— “now I see her close.”

“And the lady aint my master’s first wife,” said Sir William’s servant, “now I look at her. But wonderful alike, though-wonderful!”

“What is the meaning of this insolent intrusion?” exclaimed the gentleman, with but mock effrontery of voice and manner.

“It means, Lieutenant Jameson, alias Captain Meriton, that you are my prisoner! I have a warrant for your apprehension.”

“Must matters be pushed to extremity, Mr. Clarke?” asked Lieutenant Jameson—recovering, after a lengthened pause, from the state of coma, one might almost say, into which the suddenness of the catastrophe had thrown him. “Is it too late to come to an understanding—an arrangement?”

“I cannot say that it is, or is not, too late. If you and this lady choose to volunteer any statement the truth of which is provable, I will listen and give you my opinion after hearing it. I can promise nothing more.”

“Be it so. The game is clearly up, I perceive. We can speak privately?”

“Sir William Devereux’s servant must hear what you have to say. You,” said I, addressing ‘No. 17, South-street,’ “may go and keep company with the cabman.”

The lieutenant (he had long since been dismissed the Royal Service) and Mrs. Lorimer were perfectly luminous—eminently satisfactory. There was some truth in the cooked narratives of

Trump and Mademoiselle Saint Aubin. There had been a guilty liaison between Jameson and the first wife of Sir William, before marriage; and this was the reason why the criminal wife was so eager for a legal separation. Within a few days of the hoped-for consummation of her wishes, the letter was received from the Reverend Christopher Doyle. Mrs. Lorimer, as she called herself, was known to have letters from Mrs. Devereux, more or less compromising; which it was desirable to prevent falling into the hands of strangers.

When Mrs. Devereux and her paramour arrived at South-street, Bermondsey, Mrs. Lorimer's disease had taken a favourable turn—there was no longer any danger—but Mrs. Devereux, a woman of full habit, was almost instantly stricken down by the terrible malady. So rapidly did fatal symptoms supervene, that she died within forty-eight hours. The remarkable likeness of the two blood-sisters, no doubt, suggested the expedient—which must, however, have required great ingenuity to successfully carry it out—of substituting one woman for the other.

Mrs. Lorimer lent herself—she candidly confessed—readily to the fraud, tempted by the promises made to her; and the strange device was hit upon of hiring Charles Trump to personate the deceased lady at the Ryde hotel, and get pretendedly drowned, in her name. Sir William Devereux was sure to marry the Lady Violet. By clever contrivance, aided by Mrs. Lorimer's resemblance to his first wife, he might be made to pay dearly for the conspirators' silence. The chance was, at all events, the only one left, and was worth trying for. The game was not, in my opinion, played so skillfully as it might have been. Still, had Sir William yielded—criminally yielded—as hundreds of men would have done, to the first threat, and agreed (believing he had actually seen his former wife “with his own bodily eyes”), it must have succeeded.

There was no prosecution of the guilty parties. All that Sir William Devereux required was irrefragible proof of the death, and the time of the death, of his first wife. That was obtained in over-measure; the frail woman's shame was concealed from the world, and the Morning Post was enabled to announce that the report of the separation of Sir William and Lady Devereux originated in an entire misconception. Nothing of the kind had really taken place. In a few years it was forgotten by all but a very few that such a report had ever been in circulation.

Waters, Thomas. [Pseud.] [Attrib. William Russell.] *Autobiography of a London Detective*. NY: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1864.