

had occurred. Fortunately, a farmer passed at the moment when we most needed assistance, and through his aid, principally, we managed to get the waggon righted—the baggage once more “stowed” away, and the harness properly arranged, when we resumed and completed our day’s route without further disaster.

The accident—a fatal and distressing one—to which I have alluded, as having called for the exercise of similar presence of mind, occurred in England in 1831. Captain Gordon, of the 51st Light Infantry, and his young bride, had been spending the day with my wife’s family in Essex. I was then “vegetating” in the neighborhood while writing my “Wacousta,” and composed one of the small party. The evening looked dark and lowering, and I observed that Gordon, who had ordered his phaeton and horses to the door at an early hour, so that he might reach his cottage, near Epping forest, before it became dark, looked pre-occupied and anxious, as though he dreaded some coming evil. This was the more remarkable, because he was naturally of a gay and rattling disposition. His horses, moreover, appeared to be very impatient, and this might have been one reason for his evident nervousness of manner. When all was ready, and he had taken his seat and the reins, I handed Mrs. Gordon to her place, and he drove from the house. He had previously offered to set me down at my own door, at the opposite extremity of the town, but noticing his absent and anxious mood, I thought it better not to be any clog upon his evident desire to make the best of his way home, and therefore, as he did not renew his offer, abstained from getting into the carriage. But they had not proceeded many yards when Mrs. Gordon, perceiving that I was not in the back seat, reminded her husband, who reined in his horses, and beckoned me to join them. I did so, and we passed rapidly through the town, the attention of all parties being too much attracted to the uneasiness of the horses to leave much inclination for conversation. It seemed, indeed, as though we were all under the influence of some fearful presentiment of danger, and I confess, selfish as it may appear, that I was not sorry that my seat in the carriage was so soon to be relinquished. But fate had willed it otherwise. We were within a few yards of the spot where Gordon was to put me down, when some Savoyards, who had just stopped opposite to the house, began playing on the hurdy-gurdy. The sound seemed to infuriate the horses, who dashed off at full speed, soon leaving the house at which I was to have alighted far behind. “—, assist me with the reins,” were the first and only words pronounced by Gordon. I, of course, added all my efforts to his own, but although we both pulled at the reins with all the strength imparted by a full consciousness of the impending danger, we seemed to have no more power over them than we could have had over a whirlwind. Suddenly Gordon stood up in the phaeton, relinquished the reins, and sprang sideways from the vehicle. He passed from before our eyes like a shadow, but there was no time to look round, and his wife’s gaze, as well as my own, continued to be intently fixed upon the horses. The guidance of these maddened animals was now left to myself, and it required a coolness and presence of mind to follow the windings of the narrow by-roads, without bringing the wheels of the phaeton in collision with obstacles which must inevitably have dashed it to pieces, that I did not think I possessed until put to the trial. The great danger to be apprehended was the advance of some waggon or other vehicle coming into the town. Narrow and winding as the road was, the best whip in Christendom would have found it difficult, if not impossible to pass anything moving along it in safety. Provisionally, however, we met none—overtook none—so it was so late in the day that all the country market people had been some time since returned, and thus we so far escaped. Still we dashed on at the unabated speed of the excited horses, which were thorough-bred, and as I recollected in particular a short narrow bridge in a sudden turn of the road which was guarded on each side by a slight railing, I had summoned all my address to pass it without touching the latter. To my own surprise, I cleared it, but there was neither time nor room to congratulate myself on the occasion, for there was yet, within a few hundred yards, a point of greater danger. On passing this narrow bridge, the ground gradually ascends for about three hundred yards until the top of the short ridge is gained, the descent from which is rather abrupt, and over a bridge at the bottom not much unlike that I had just crossed. I felt satisfied that if the horses once gained the brow of this acclivity, nothing short of a miracle could prevent us from being dashed to pieces, and it therefore became necessary that our great velocity of motion should, *coute qu’il coute*, be checked on the rise we were now ascending; and in order to effect this, to work the horses under the hedge, even at the risk of an upset, became a matter of paramount necessity. With some difficulty, and not without the exercise of a force of which I had not thought myself master, I continued to saw them gradually across the road and towards a piece of ground which I knew to be wet and heavy, and consequently the most likely to act as a check upon the foaming animals. In this I was successful beyond my most sanguine hopes, for scarcely had the horses felt themselves clogged by the mud in which they sank over their fetlock joints, when, as if incapable of further exertion, they suddenly came to a full stop, their tails quivering, their ears pricked forward, and the sweat pouring from them as if they had just been drenched in a river. I left the reins

in the hands of Mrs. Gordon, who, over since her husband’s evasion, had continued, yet without uttering a syllable or exhibiting any symptom of alarm which could embarrass my exertions, to lend me her feeble aid, and springing from the phaeton was in a moment at the horses’ heads, the bridles of which I firmly grasped, while, not knowing how soon they might not again be off, I entreated her to descend. This she did, but with the same coolness that had characterized her conduct throughout. Such calm courage, bordering upon apathy, I have never before or since witnessed, and in so young a woman, for she was only eighteen years of age, was especially remarkable. One or two persons now came up to our assistance, and to these I confided the horses, with directions to have them led back to my own place, while, with Mrs. Gordon on my arm, I hastened to see what had become of her husband. She had not had more time to regard him, after his disappearance from the carriage, than I had, yet we had both taken it for granted that he had reached the ground without accident, and was even then enduring extreme anxiety for her safety. We approached the spot where he had jumped out, and met several people approaching, one of whom imprudently announced that Captain Gordon had been taken up insensible, and was then dying at my lodgings. This was a severe blow to his young wife, but her great moral fortitude supported her, and she manifested little outward emotion, merely urging me to quicken our pace. On arriving at the house, I found it was but too true. Gordon was then extended on a sofa, and in a state of stupor arising from concussion of the brain, from which he never recovered. Blood was attempted to be taken from him, but it would not follow the lancet, and all human aid proving unavailing, he died within a few hours from his fall. Poor fellow! little did we think, at the moment that he had flitted from before us, that he had even then met that death which we were endeavoring to shun ourselves. He had evidently fallen backwards, and, losing his hat, must have touched the ground first with the back of his head, which was sorely bruised. He had on his boots at the time a pair of long brass spurs, and these no doubt had considerably tended to give that insecurity to his footing which led to the catastrophe. In addition to those unlucky spurs, I subsequently received from his widow an antique ring set with a beautiful Indian pebble, which he also wore on that day. This is now on the hand with which I write.

The strength which I put forth on this occasion, and which, of course, is common to every one under similar circumstances of impending danger, was a source of astonishment to myself, and shows how completely the brute force of man is qualified and kept in check by the reason which prevents its unnecessary manifestation. I had, without any effort of which I was conscious, at the time, driven in the back of the phaeton, which was strongly enough built, by the mere pressure of my knees against it as a *point d’appui*, while my arms were, from the excessive tension of the muscles, positively black, and continued sore and stiff for some days afterwards. And, during this exertion of physical strength, how was the mind engaged? A thousand recollections seemed to crowd upon my brain during these few minutes of fearful suspense. Even while my whole attention was given to the horses and the points of danger we approached, I thought of all the accidents that had taken place under similar circumstances, and felt as perfectly assured that I was going to certain destruction as that I sat in the vehicle, the difficulty of conducting which, by the way, was greatly increased from the fact of my being in the back seat, where I had no proper purchase for my feet, and was moreover too far removed from the horses, to exercise proper control over them. Once I was tempted to follow the example of Gordon, drop the reins and let myself down behind. This, as the seat was low, might have been done with great ease, and had I been alone, or with a man for my companion in danger, I should certainly have attempted it, but I could not well abandon to her fate the woman who so courageously, yet silently, lent all her feeble aid to second my efforts, and whose admirable presence of mind merited a better acknowledgement.

There was a remarkable circumstance connected with the fate of poor Gordon, who perished, as I have described, at the early age of five-and-twenty. One of his horses had been lost or stolen from pasture about ten days previously. A reward was offered for the animal, and when all expectations of his recovery had been given up, he was (would he had never been found!) restored to his master. This was only a day or two before the accident occurred which cost him his life.

As the unfortunate young officer had only been gazetted to a company by purchase the preceding week, I waited on Lord Fitzroy Somerset, explained to him the whole of the melancholy occurrence, and submitting the very peculiar condition of Mrs. Gordon, who had no other provision than what should accrue from her pension, solicited that he would obtain from Lord Hill some indulgence in her favor. Lord Fitzroy warmly interested himself in the matter, and was successful enough to obtain from Lord Hill the remission to the young and bereaved widow—who was the daughter of an Austrian Consul in the Mediterranean, and whom Gordon had married there while quartered with his regiment at Malta—of four hundred pounds of the purchase money.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.]