LISHEEN

BY REV. P. A. SHERHAN, D. D.

CHAPTER XXVII THE PORPHYRY VASE

The meditations of Ralph Outram as The meditations of Ralph Outram as be stood in his dressing-gown before his glass the morning after the dinner party were not pleasant. Moraing meditations, as a rule, are not pleasant. It is only when the blood has begun to course swiftly through the brain, and to shake off the stagnancy where unpleasant visions dwell, that fresher and more exhilarating ideas come upward. But his was not the unpleasantness of anticipations or remorse. Only vexation at having been betrayed into what he called a "tactical blunder." There are some minds to whom tactical mistakes some minds to whom tactical mistake concern than deadly sin. Outram's was one of these; and, between his teeth, as he performed the duties of his toilet, he cursed that old professor, that treacherous whiskey, those opiate eigars, those odious women, for betraying him into what might prove the most serious trouble of his life. For, all the long way home, Mabel, who had recovered wandly from her worm, was eminously way home, Mabel, who had recovered rapidly from her swoon, was ominously silent, or answered only in monosyllables; and he knew from her calm, stony face, as she entered the house, and went straight to her room, that she had seen a significance beneath the simple vesture of his story, that was known to no one but himself.

-those women," he muttered, "you cannot show them a pebble, but they want to build a mountain out of it. With their intuitions, their inspirations, with their intuitions, their inspirations, their fancies, their suspicions, one dare not even lift the corner of the veil that every man, from a sense of duty, should keep pegged down over his past life."

And then he went over in detail all that he could remember of his story and its suggestions. Suddenly a thought

that he could remember of his story and its suggestions. Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him with startling suddenness. He pulled back the sleeve of his dressing-gown and shirt, and looked long and anxiously at a mark high up on the arm, like the cicatrice of an ancient wound, except that instead of being long and narrow, it was a circular blotch, rimmed by a ridge of flesh lar blotch, rimmed by a ridge of flesh and sunk down in a pale, flabby skin in the centre. Then he pulled open his smirtfront and stared at his breast in the glass. Yes! There were a few healed wounds, here and there.

wounds, here and there.

"The marks of Paythan Triangular Knives, we shall say," he murmured. But his face wore a frown of anger and vexation. He dressed leisurely, turning over in his mind a hundred things which he might say to his wife, and debating earnestly with himself what would be the most politic course to nurse to the earnestly with himself what would be the most politic course to pursue,—to make light of the whole thing, to laugh away her anger or her fears, to simulate anger, to fall back upon his usual cold, sneering manner, and then, if the lady persevered in her unpleasant mood, to hiss defiance at her; or—to make a clean breast of all and to commence anew. Alas! no, that cannot be even thought of. It would be sheer madness. The veil must be kept pegged down. veil must be kept pegged down. nen do it. Society could not other-The veil must be kept pegged down. All men do it. Society could not otherwise cohere. These little dissumulations are the eement of good society. If all men and women were to lay bare their secrets to the world, what a cataclysm there would be! It would be just like a West Indian carthquake, when the terrified inhabitants rush out clothed in sheets and towels and counterpresses.

The Major was alone, sitting over in his arm-chair near the fire. He was now hardly able to move. His lower extremities had been turned into sto ties had been turned into stone. He was reading a letter, apparently with great interest, and not without emotion.

"Here is a letter from Bob," he said, as Outram came over and held his hands to the fire. "You remember Bob?"

"Of course. Maxwell. What news?"

"Strange enough. This is what he says."

same relative and without entailing of the production of the state of

"I said all I could," said Outram. "I exhausted my knowledge and poured it through the sieve of the fellow's mind, and then I remembered a wise old saying: 'Answer a fool according to his folly."

"How was that?" asked the Major.
"I invented a story, for rather, built up a leggend upon a few facts, as novelists do.

and poured it through his little brain, as he sipped his whiskey and water. He he sipped his whiskey and water. He swallowed it all, as easily as he swallowed his liquor. And he was so entranced that he induced me to tell the same story to the ladies in the drawing-room. I shouldn't be in the least surprised if they also believed it, and if it were over half the drawing-rooms in Dublin in a week." Dublin in a week."
"You must tell me that this evening

after dinner," said the Major. "Or perhaps Mabel will tell me all about it at lunch."

"Yes, Mabel will tell it better than I. She quite understands that it was improvised for the occasion—a little fact, a lot of faction like all romances."

"You're going to the city?" asked the

stopped him. Then after another pause to stopped him. Then after another pause the prophyry was which had been sent by an unknown hand from India with the Sanscrit letter which her husband refused to interpret. She had passed if a hundred times before without a thought, except the unconscious admiration of its perfect and polished beauty. Now she stood still and studied it. The great broad cavity shone beneath the coloured glass of the window, here crimson, here blue and yellow. She thought she would give a good deal to know its history—who made it, whence it came. Then her husband's words about the little Hindoo girl came back to her and she remembered, with a kind of vague horror, that he said she are were turned out any work of art from her hands, except with some symbol, or symbolic meaning, which sooner or later would be revealed. She argued then—this vase is a symbol—but of what? She couldn't think. But as she watched it, she thought she saw the coils of the green snake, knotted at the bottom of the vase, shiver and stir, and she shrank back in terror. It was pure imagination, of course. But she took up a heavy the vase, shiver and stir, and she shrank back in terror. It was pure imagination, of course. But she took up a heavy paper-weight that lay on the table,—a five-pound solid shell fixed in mahogany, which her father had brought home from India,—and poising it in her hand in self-defence, she looked again. Whether her imagination, strung by sleen.

She spitch numerations on the content of the conten

"Very good. Tired after last evening," we he said to the Major, "We had a long of the said to the Major, which ad a death by a professor of something—a short, dumpy, Pickwickian little fellow, eyeglass, seals, corpulence, gatiers,—no. The two saids of the Major at the Major at

"I think—I am almost sure—I queht

"I think—I am almost sure—I ought to tell you—there is a growing intimacy between Miss Moulton and your new steward, and you know it is always well to stop these things in the beginning." "Quite right. That is, if they ought to be stopped at all." "But," said the old priest, anxiously, "you do not contempte the prescribility.

him?"
"I should like to know his history,"
said the stranger. "Where he comes
from, and his antecedents?"
"Then why the devil don't you ask
himself?" said Hamberton, nettled at
the sudden possibilities that seemed to
loom up before him.
"I am a police officer." said the man.
"I thought to avoid all unpleasantness
by asking you to clear up one or two
things."

"I thought to avoid all unpleasantness by asking you to clear up one or two things."

"You're on Maxwell's track then?" said Hamberton, without apology. "In a word, he's wanted?"

"Not quite that," said the officer. "But our suspicions have been aroused in a singular manner, and we want to know something about him. If you can give me the desired information we need proceed no further and we shall spare him some pain."

Hamberton paused for a moment. Then he said:

sycophants that battened on him in his prosperity and abandoned him when he fell—fell through his own d—d benevolence. He should have poisoned these wretches at his banquet, and then stood calmly over them and watched their agonizing deaths. Hot water in their plates? No, that was weak, William, with your permission. Diluted strychnine, or cyanide of potassium, would have been better. But that 'Uncover, dogs, and lap!' is the noblest half line in all human literature. Couldn't we have it, Claire? Could Maxwell do it? There is no part for ladies in Timon, but could Maxwell do that, do you think?"

"Tis too late now, uncle," she said.
"Some other time."

Some other time."
"Yes, if there shall be another time." is library, musing. Then he suddenly

the work of bringing sinners back to m pentance. People called him "angel of the confessional," and often peated the saying of some religious wag to the effect that the good Father kept

"But our suspicions have been aroused in a singular manner, and we want to know something about him. If you can give me the desired information we need proceed no further and we shall spare him some pain."

Hamberton paused for a moment. Then he said:

"Come along here and we can talk as we proceed. What do you want to know."

"First," said the officer, "where this man comes from, his former occupation, and the reason he has adopted this mode of life."

"How refear for me, uncle," she said gaily. "I do not care so much for Max, musing. Then he suddenly is to the effect that the good Father kep to the effect that the good Father kep to the develop is a scoundrel, let him have his deserts. Let every miscreant have his halter, say I, or what else is the devil for?

But Claire, Claire, Claire," he said, coming over and stroking her hair tenderly, "take over the citadel, won't you? I cannot have you thrown away, little woman. Watch over the citadel, won't you? Woman's heart is such a traitor."

"Never fear for me, uncle," she said gaily. "I do not care so much for Max, well but that I could cut out his image if he proves unworthy." time.
"Father," said Dennison, at once

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