THE GREAT RUBY ROBBERY.

Persis Remanet was an American heiress. As she justly remarked, this is a commonplace profession for a young woman nowadays, for almost everybody of late years has been an American and an heiress. A non-Californian, indeed, would be a charming novelty in London society. But London society, so far, has had to go without one.

Persis Remanet was on her way back from the Wilcoxes' ball. She was stopping, of course, with Sir Everard and Lady Maclure at their house at Hampstead. I say "of course" advisedly, because if you or I go to see New York we have to put up at our own expense fifty dollars a day, without wine or extras, at the Windsor or the Fifth Avenue; but when the pretty American comes to London (and every girl is ex officio pretty, in Europe at least; I suppose they keep their ugly ones at home for domestic consumption) she is invariably the guest either of a dowager duchess or of a Royal Academician, like Sir Everard, of the first distinction. Yankees visit Europe, in fact, among other things, our aristocracy and nobility; and by dint of native persistence they get into places that we, I could never succeed in [illegible] unless we devoted all the energies of a long and blameless life to angling for an invitation.

Persis hadn't been to the Wilcoxes' with Lady Maclure, however. The Maclures were too really great to know such people as the Wilcoxes, who were something tremendous in [illegible] and didn't buy pictures; and Academicians, you know, don't care to cultivate any people unless they're customers. "Patrons," the Academicians themselves call them; but I prefer the simple business word myself as being a deal less patronizing. So Persis had accepted an invitation from Mrs Duncan Harrison, the wife of a well known member for the Hackness Division of Elmetshire, to take a seat in her carriage to and from the Wilcoxes. Mrs. Harrison knew the habits and manners of American heiresses too well to offer to chaperon Persis; and indeed, Persis, as a free-born American citizen, was quite as well able to take care of herself, the wide world over, as any three ordinary married Englishwomen.

Now, Mrs. Harrison had a brother, an Irish baronet, Sir Justin O'Byrne, late of the Eighth Hussars, who had been with them to the Wilcoxes, and who accompanied them home to Hampstead on the back seat of the carriage. Sir Justin was one of those charming ineffective, elusive Irishmen whom everybody likes and everybody disapproves of. He had been everywhere, and done everything—except to earn an honest livelihood. The total absence of rents during the sixties and seventies had never prevented his father, old Sir Terence O'Byrne, who sat long for Connemara in the unreformed Parliament, from sending his son Justin in state to Eton, and afterwards to a fashionable college at Oxford. "He gave me the education of a gentleman," Sir Justin was wont regretfully to observe; "but he omitted to give me also the income to keep it up with."

Nevertheless, society felt O'Byrne was the sort of man who must be kept afloat somehow; and it kept him afloat accordingly in those mysterious ways that only society understands, and that you and I, who are not society, could never get to the bottom of if we tried for a century. Sir Justin himself had essayed Parliament, too, where he sat for a while behind the great Parnell without for a moment forfeiting society's regard (even in those earlier days, when it was held as a prime article of faith [illegible] possibly call himself a Home Ruler. 'Twas only one of O'Byrne's wild Irish tricks, society said, complacently, with that singular indulgence it always extends to its special favourites, and which is, in fact, the correlative of that unsparing cruelty it shows in turn to those who happen to offend against its unwritten precepts. If Sir Justin had blown up a Czar or two in a fit of political exuberance, society would only have regarded the escapade as "one of O'Byrne's eccentricities." He had also held a commission for a while in a cavalry regiment, which he left, it was understood, owing to a difference of opinion about a lady with the colonel; and he was now a gentleman at large on London society, supposed by those who know more about everyone than one knows about himself, to be on the lookout for a nice girl with a little money.

Sir Justin had paid Persis a great deal of attention that particular evening; in point of fact, he had paid her a great deal of attention from the very first, whenever he met her; and on the way home from the dance he had kept his eyes on Persis's face to an extent that was almost embarrassing. The pretty Californian leaned back in her place in the carriage and surveyed him languidly. She was looking her level best that night, in her pink pale dress, with the famous Remanet rubies in a cascade of red light setting off that snowy neck of hers. 'Twas a neck for a painter. Sir Justin let his eyes fall regretfully more than once on the glittering rubies. He liked and admired Persis; oh! quite immensely. Your society man who has been through seven or eight London seasons could hardly be expected to go quite so far as falling in love with any woman; his habit is rather to look about him critically among all the nice girls trotted out by their mammas for his lordly inspection, and to reflect with a faint smile that this, that, or the other one might perhaps really suit him—if it were not for—and there comes in the inevitable But of all human commendation. Still, Sir Justin admitted with a sigh to himself that he liked Persis ever so much; she was so fresh and original! and she talked so cleverly! As for Persis, she would have given her eyes (like every other American girl) to be made "my lady"; and she had seen no man yet, with that auxiliary title in his gift, whom she liked half so well as this delightful, wild Irishman.

At the Maclures' door the carriage stopped. Sir Justin jumped out and gave his hand to Persis. You know the house well, of course; Sir Everard Maclure's; it's one of those large new artistic mansions, in red brick and old oak, on the top of the hill; and it stands a little way back from the road, discreetly retired, with a big wooden porch, very convenient for leave-taking. Sir Justin ran up the steps with Persis to ring the bell for her; he had too much of the irrepressible Irish blood in his veins to leave that pleasant task to his sister's footman. But he didn't ring it at once; at the risk of keeping Mrs. Harrison waiting outside for nothing, he stopped and talked a minute or so with the pretty American. "You looked charming to-night, Miss Remanet," he said, as she threw back her light opera wrap for a moment in the porch and displayed a single flash of that snowy neck with the famous rubies; "those stones become you so."

Persis looked at him and smiled. "You think so?" she said, a little tremulous, for even your American heiress after all is a woman. "Well, I'm glad you do. But it's good-bye to-night, Sir Justin, for I go next week to Paris."

Even in the gloom of the porch, just lighted by an artistic red and blue lantern in wrought iron, she could see a shade of disappointment pass quickly over his handsome face as he answered, with a little gulp, "No? you don't mean that? Oh, Miss Remanet, I'm so sorry!" Then he paused and drew back. "And yet—after all," he continued, "perhaps—" and there he checked himself.

Persis looked up at him hastily. "Yet, after all, what?" she asked, with evident interest.

The young man drew an almost inaudible sigh. "Yet after all—nothing," he answered, evasively.

"That might do for an Englishwoman," Persis put in with American frankness. "But it won't do for me. You must tell me what you mean by it." For she reflected [illegible] that the happiness of two lives might depend upon those two [illegible] thrown away merely for lack of a really [illegible] all for the sake of a moment's [illegible].

Sir Justin [illegible] work of that [illegible] was a beautiful [illegible] blood [illegible] —he would say [illegible]

"Miss Remanet," [illegible] forward and bring [illegible] hers, "Miss Remanet, Persis, shall I tell you the [illegible] Because I [illegible] you so much [illegible] have I?"

Persis [illegible] her tingling cheeks [illegible] —and [illegible]

[illegible]

"And [illegible] roses [illegible]"

Sir Justin hesitated [illegible] a perfectly natural [illegible] though only a gentleman would have ventured to make it—he [illegible] hand and just touched with the [illegible] his fingers the ruby pendants on her necklet. "This is what," he answered, simply, and with manly frankness. "Persis, you're so rich! I never dare ask you."

"Perhaps you don't know what my answer would be," Persis murmured very low, just to preserve her own dignity.

"Oh yes; I think I do," the young man replied, gazing deeply into her dark eyes. "It isn't that—if it were only that, I wouldn't so much mind it. But I think you'd take me." There was moisture in her eye. He went on more boldly: "I know you'd take me, Persis, and that's why I don't ask you. You're a great deal too rich and these make it impossible."

"Sir Justin," Persis answered, removing his hand gently, but with the moisture growing thicker, for she really liked him, "it's most unkind of you to say so; either you oughtn't to have told me at all, or else—if you did—" She stopped short. Womanly shame overcame her.

The man leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "Oh, don't say that!" he cried, from his heart. "I couldn't bear to offend you. But I couldn't bear, either, to let you go away—well—without having ever told you. In that case you might have thought I didn't care at all for you, and was only flirting with you. But, Persis, I've cared a great deal for you—a great, great deal—and had hard work many times to prevent myself from asking you. And I'll tell you the plain reason why I haven't asked you. I'm a man about town not much good, I'm afraid, for anybody or anything; and everybody says I'm on the look-out for an heiress—which happens not to be true; and if I married you, everybody'd say, 'Ah, there! I told you so!' Now, I wouldn't mind that for myself; I'm a man, and I could snap my fingers at them; but I'd mind it for you, Persis, for I'm enough in love with you to be very, very jealous, indeed, for your honour. I couldn't bear to think people should say, 'There's that pretty American girl, Persis Remanet that was, you know; she's thrown herself away upon that good-for-nothing Irishman, Justin O'Byrne, a regular fortune-hunter, who's married her for her money!' So for your sake, Persis, I'd rather leave you for some better man to marry."

"But I wouldn't," Persis cried aloud. "Oh, Sir Justin, you must believe me. You must remember——"

At that precise point, Mrs. Harrison put her head out of the carriage window and called out rather loudly:—

"Why, Justin, what's keeping you? The horses'll catch their deaths of cold; and they were clipped this morning. Come back at once, my dear boy. Besides, you know, les convenances!"

"All right, Nora," her brother answered; "I won't be a minute. We can't get them to answer this precious bell. I believe it don't ring! But I'll try again, anyhow." And half forgetting that his own words weren't strictly true, for he hadn't yet tried, he pressed the knob with a vengeance.

"Is that your room with the light burning, Miss Remanet?" he went on, in a fairly loud official voice, as the servant came to answer. "The one with the balcony, I mean? Quite Veronese, isn't it? Reminds one of Romeo and Juliet. But most convenient for a burglar, too! Such nice low rails! Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies!"

"I don't want to take care of them," Persis answered, wiping her dim eyes hastily with her lace pocket-handkerchief, "if they make you feel as you say, Sir Justin! I don't mind if they go. Let the burglar take them!"

And even as she spoke, the Maclure footman, immutable, sphinx-like, opened the door for her.

II.

Persis sat long in her own room that night before she began undressing. Her head was full of Sir Justin and these mysterious hints of his. At last, however, she took her rubies off, and her pretty silk bodice. "I don't care for them at all," she thought, with a gulp, "if they keep from me the love of the man I'd like to marry."

It was late before she fell asleep; and when she did, her rest was troubled. She dreamt a great deal; in her dreams Sir Justin, and dance music, and the rubies, and burglars were incongruously mingled. To make up for it, she slept late next morning, and Lady Maclure let her sleep on, thinking she was probably wearied out with much dancing the previous evening—as though any amount of excitement could ever weary a pretty American! About ten o'clock she woke with a start. A vague feeling oppressed her that somebody had come in during the night and stolen her rubies. She rose hastily and went to her dressing-table to look for them. The case was there all right; she opened it and looked at it. Oh, prophetic soul! the rubies were gone, and the box was empty!

Now, Persis had honestly said the night before the burglar might take her rubies if he chose, and she wouldn't mind the loss of them. But that was last night, and the rubies hadn't then as yet been taken. This morning somehow things seemed quite different. It would be rough on us all (especially on politicians) if we must always be bound by what we said yesterday. Persis was an American, and no American is insensible to the charms of precious stones; 'tis a savage taste which the European immigrants seem to have inherited oddly from their Red Indian predecessors. She rushed over to the bell and rang it with feminine violence. Lady Maclure's maid answered the summons, as usual. She was a clever, demure-looking girl, this maid of Lady Maclure's; and when Persis cried to her wildly, "Send for the police at once, and tell Sir Everard my jewels are stolen!" she answered, "Yes, miss," with such sober acquiescence that Persis, who was American, and therefore a bundle of nerves, turned round and stared at her as an incomprehensible mystery. No Mahatma could have been more unmoved. She seemed quite to expect those rubies would be stolen, and to take no more notice of the incident than if Persis had told her she wanted hot water.

Lady Maclure, indeed, greatly prided herself on this cultivated imperturbability of Bertha's; she regarded it as the fine flower of English domestic service. But Persis was American, and saw things otherwise; to her, the calm repose with which Bertha answered, "Yes miss; certainly, miss. I'll go and tell Sir Everard," seemed nothing short of exasperating.

Bertha went off with the news, closing the door quite softly; and a few minutes later Lady Maclure herself [illegible] to the Californian's room, to [illegible] her visitor in this severe domestic affliction. She found Persis sitting up in bed in her pretty French dressing jacket, [illegible] blue with revers of [illegible] colour, reading a book of verse. "Why, my dear," Lady Maclure exclaimed, "then you've found them again, I suppose? Bertha told us you'd lost your lovely rubies."

"So I have, dear Lady Maclure," Persis answered, wiping her eyes; "they're gone. They've been stolen. I forgot to lock my door when I came home last night, and the window was [illegible] somebody must have come in [illegible] or that, and taken them. But whenever I'm in trouble, I try a dose of Browning. He's splendid for [illegible] He's so consoling, you know; he seems one to anchor."

She [illegible] in bed; she wouldn't leave the [illegible], she declared, till the police arrived. After breakfast she rose and put on her dainty Parisian morning wrap—Americans have always such pretty [illegible] things for these informal receptions—and sat up in state to await the police. Sir Everard himself, much distressed that such a mishap should have happened in his house, went round in person to fetch the official. While he was gone, Lady Maclure made a thorough search of the room, but couldn't find a trace of the missing rubies.

"Are you sure you put them in the case, dear?" she asked for the honour of the household.

And Persis answered: "Quite confident, Lady Maclure; I always put them there the moment I take them off; and when I came to look for them this morning, the case was empty."

"They were very valuable, I believe?" Lady Maclure said, enquiringly.

"Six thousand pounds was the figure in your money, I guess," Persis answered, ruefully. "I don't know if you call that a lot of money in England, but we do in America."

There was a moment's pause, and then Persis spoke again:—

"Lady Maclure," she said, abruptly, "do you consider that maid of yours a Christian woman?"

Lady Maclure was startled. That was hardly the light in which she was accustomed to regard the lower classes.

"Well, I don't know about that," she said, slowly; "that's a great deal, you know, dear, to assert about anybody, especially one's maid. But I should think she was honest, quite decidedly honest."

"Well, that's the same thing, about, isn't it?" Persis answered, much relieved. "I'm glad you think that's so; for I was almost half afraid of her. She's too quiet for my taste, somehow; so silent, you know, and inscrutable."

"Oh, my dear," her hostess cried, "don't blame her for silence; that's just what I like in her. It's exactly what I chose her for. Such a nice, noiseless girl, moves about the room like a cat on tiptoe; knows her proper place, and never dreams of speaking unless she's spoken to."

"Well, you may like them that way in Europe," Persis responded, frankly; "but in America, we prefer them a little bit human."

Twenty minutes later the police officer arrived. He wasn't in uniform. The inspector, feeling at once the gravity of the case, and recognising that this was a Big Thing, in which there was glory to be won, sent a detective at once, and advised that if possible nothing should be said to the household on the subject for the present, till the detective had taken a good look round the premises. That was useless, Sir Everard feared, for the lady's-maid knew, and the lady's-maid would be sure to go down all agog with the news, to the servants' hall immediately. However, they might try; no harm in trying; and the sooner the detective got round to the house, of course, the better.

The detective accompanied him back—a keen-faced, close-shaven, irreproachable-looking man, like a vulgarized copy of Mr. John Morley. He was curt and business-like. His first question was, "Have the servants been told of this?"

Lady Maclure looked enquiringly across at Bertha. She herself had been sitting all the time with the bereaved Persis, to console her (with Browning) under this heavy affliction.

"No, my lady," Bertha answered, ever calm (invaluable servant, Bertha!), "I didn't mention it to anybody downstairs on purpose, thinking perhaps it might be decided to search the servants' boxes."

The detective pricked up his ears. He was engaged already in glancing casually round the room. He moved about it now, like a conjurer, with quiet steps and slow. "He doesn't get on one's nerves," Persis remarked, approvingly, in an undertone to her friend; then she added aloud: "What's your name, please, Mr. Officer?"

The detective was lifting a lace handkerchief on the dressing-table at the side. He turned round softly. "Gregory, madam," he answered, hardly glancing at the girl, and going on with his occupation.

"The same as the powders!" Persis interposed, with a shudder. "I used to take them when I was a child. I never could bear them."

"We're useful, as remedies," the detective replied, with a quiet smile; "but nobody likes us." And he relapsed contentedly into his work once more, searching round the apartment.

"The first thing we have to do," he said, with a calm air of superiority, standing now by the window, with one hand in his pocket, "is to satisfy ourselves whether or not there has really, at all, been a robbery. We must look through the room well, and see you haven't left the rubies lying about loose somewhere. Such things often happen. We're constantly called in to investigate a case, when it's only a matter of a lady's carelessness."

At that Persis flared up. A daughter of the great republic isn't accustomed to be doubted like a mere European woman. "I'm quite sure I took them off," she said, "and put them back in the jewel case. Of that I'm just confident. There isn't a doubt possible."

Mr. Gregory redoubled his search in all likely and unlikely places. "I should say that settles the matter," he answered, blandly. "Our experience is that whenever a lady's perfectly certain, beyond the possibility of doubt, she put a thing away safely, it's absolutely sure to turn up where she says she didn't put it."

Persis answered him never a word. Her manners had not that repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere; so, to prevent an outbreak, she took refuge in Browning.

Mr. Gregory, nothing abashed, searched the room thoroughly, up and down, without the faintest regard to Persis's feelings—he was a detective, he said, and his business was first of all to unmask crime, irrespective of circumstances. Lady Maclure stood by, meanwhile, with the imperturbable Bertha. Mr. Gregory investigated every hole and cranny, like a man who wishes to let the world see for itself he performs a disagreeable duty with unflinching thoroughness. When he had finished, he turned to Lady Maclure. "And now, if you please," he said, "we'll proceed to investigate the servants' boxes."

Lady Maclure looked at her maid. "Bertha," she said, "go downstairs and see that none of the other servants go up, meanwhile, to their bedrooms." Lady Maclure was not quite to the manner born, and had never acquired the hateful aristocratic habit of calling women servants by their surnames only.

But the detective interposed. "No, no," he said, sharply. "This young woman had better stop here with Miss Remanet—strictly under her eye—till I've searched the boxes. For if I find nothing there, it may perhaps be my disagreeable duty, by-and-by, to call in a female detective to search her."

It was Lady Maclure's turn to flare up now. "Why, this is my own maid," she said, in a chilly tone, "and I've every confidence in her."

"Very sorry for that, my lady," Mr. Gregory responded, in a most official voice; "but our experience teaches us that if there's a person in the [illegible] nobody ever dreams of suspecting, that person's the one who has committed the robbery."

"Why, you'll be suspecting myself next!" Lady Maclure cried, with some disgust.

"Your ladyship's just the last person in the world I should think of suspecting," the detective answered, with a deferential bow—which, after this previous speech, was to say the least of it equivocal.

Persis began to get annoyed. She didn't like the look of that girl Bertha herself; but still, she was there as Lady Maclure's guest, and she couldn't expose her hostess to discomfort on her account.

"The girl shall not be searched," she put in, growing hot. "I don't care a cent whether I lose the wretched stones or not. Compared to human dignity, what are they worth? Not five minutes' consideration."

"They're worth just seven years," Mr. Gregory answered, with professional definiteness. "And as to search, why, that's out of your hands now. This is a criminal case. I'm here to discharge a public duty."

"I don't in the least mind being searched," Bertha put in of herself, with an air of indifference. "You can search me if you like—when you've got a warrant for it."

The detective looked up sharply; so also did Persis. This ready acquaintance with the liberty of the subject in criminal cases impressed her unfavourably. "Ah! we'll see about that," Mr. Gregory answered, with a cold smile. "Meanwhile, Lady Maclure, I'll have a look at the boxes."

III.

The search (strictly illegal) brought out nothing. Mr. Gregory returned to Persis' bedroom, disconsolate. "You can leave the room," he said to Bertha; and Bertha glided out. "I've set another man outside to keep a constant eye on her," he added in explanation.

By this time Persis had almost made up her mind as to who was the culprit. But she said nothing overt, for Lady Maclure's sake, to the detective. As for that immovable official, he began asking questions—some of them, Persis thought, almost bordering on the personal. Where had she been last night? Was she sure she had really worn the rubies? How did she come home? Was she certain she took them off? Did the maid help her undress? Who came back with her in the carriage?

To all these questions, rapidly fired off with cross-examining acuteness, Persis answered in the direct American fashion. She was sure she had the rubies on when she came home to Hampstead, because Sir Justin O'Byrne, who came back with her in his sister's carriage, had noticed them the last thing, and had told her to take care of them.

At mention of that name the detective smiled meaningly. (A meaning smile is stock-in-trade to a detective.) "Oh, Sir Justin O'Byrne!" he repeated, with quiet self-constraint. "He came back with you in the carriage, then? And did he sit the same side with you?"

Lady Maclure grew indignant (that was Mr. Gregory's cue). "Really, sir," she said, angrily, "if you're going to suspect gentlemen in Sir Justin's position, we shall none of us be safe from you."

"The law," Mr. Gregory replied, with an air of profound deference, "is no respecter of persons."

"But it ought to be of characters," Lady Maclure cried, warmly. "What's the good of having a blameless character, I should like to know, if—if—"

"If it doesn't allow you to commit a robbery with impunity?" the detective interposed, finishing her sentence his own way. "Well, well, that's true. That's perfectly true—but Sir Justin's character, you see, can hardly be called blameless."

"He's [illegible]" [illegible] "the officer [illegible] of such a mean and despicable [illegible] you dare to suspect him of [illegible]"

"Oh, I see," the officer [illegible] one to whom [illegible] welcome [illegible] breaks suddenly through a [illegible] darkness. "Sir Justin's a friend of yours, I [illegible] Did he come into the porch with you?"

"He did," Persis answered, flushing crimson; "and if you have the insolence to bring a charge against him——"

"Calm yourself, madam," the detective replied, coolly. "I do nothing of the sort—at this stage of the proceedings. It's possible there may have been no robbery in the case at all. We must keep our minds open for the present to every possible alternative. It's a very delicate matter to hint at; but before we go any further—do you think, perhaps, Sir Justin may have carried the rubies away by mistake, entangled in his clothes?—say, for example, his coat-sleeve?"

It was a loophole of escape; but Persis didn't jump at it.

"He had never the opportunity," she answered with a flash. "And I know quite well they were there on my neck when he left me, for the last thing he said to me was, looking up at this very window: 'That balcony's awfully convenient for a burglary. Mind you take good care of the Remanet rubies.' And I remembered what he'd said when I took them off last night; and that's what makes me so sure I really had them."

"And you slept with the window open?" the detective went on, still smiling to himself. "Well, here we have all the materials, to be sure, for a first-class mystery!"

IV.

For some days more, nothing further turned up of importance about the Great Ruby Robbery. It got into the papers, of course, as everything does nowadays, and all London was talking of it. Persis found herself quite famous as the American heiress who had lost her jewels. People pointed her out in the park; people stared at her hard through their opera-glasses at the theatre. Indeed, the possession of the celebrated Remanet rubies had never made her half so conspicuous in the world as the loss of them made her. It was almost worth while losing them, Persis thought, to be so much made of as she was in society in consequence. All the world knows a young lady must be somebody when she can offer a reward of five hundred pounds for the recovery of gewgaws valued at a thousand.

Sir Justin met her in the Row one day. "Then you don't go to Paris for awhile yet—until you get them back?" he enquired very low.

And Persis answered, blushing, "No, Sir Justin; not yet; and—I'm almost glad of it."

"No, you don't mean that!" the young man cried, with perfect boyish ardour. "Well, I confess, Miss Remanet, the first thing I thought myself when I read it in the Times was just the very same. Then, after all, she won't go yet to Paris!"

Persis looked up at him from her pony with American frankness. "And I," she said, quivering, "I found anchor in Browning. For what do you think I read?

'And learn to rate a true man's heart
Far above rubies.'

The book opened at the very place; and there I found anchor!"

But when Sir Justin went round to his rooms that same evening, his servant said to him, "A gentleman was enquiring for you here this afternoon, sir. A close-shaven gentleman. Not very prepossessin'. And it seemed to me somehow, sir, as if he was trying to pump me."

Sir Justin's face was grave. He went to his bedroom at once. He knew what that man wanted; and turned straight to his wardrobe, looking hard at the dress coat he had worn on the eventful evening. Things may cling to a sleeve, don't you know—be entangled in a cuff—be got casually into a pocket! Or someone may put them there.

For the next ten days or so, Mr. Gregory was busy, constantly busy. Without doubt, he was the most active and energetic of detectives. He carried out so fully his own official principle of suspecting everybody, from Cain to Peru, that at last poor Persis got fairly dazed with his web of possibilities. Nobody was safe from his cultivated and highly trained suspicion—not Sir Everard in his studio, nor Lady Maclure in her boudoir, nor the butler in his pantry, nor Sir Justin O'Byrne in his rooms in St. James'. Mr. Gregory kept an open mind against everybody and everything. He even doubted the parrot, and had views as to the intervention of rats and terriers. Persis got rather tired at last of his perverse ingenuity, especially as she had a very shrewd idea herself who had stolen the rubies. When he suggested various doubts, however, which seemed remotely to implicate Sir Justin's honesty, the sensitive American girl "felt it so on her nerves," and refused to listen to him, though Mr. Gregory never ceased to enforce upon her, by precept and example, his own pet doctrine that the last person on earth one would be likely to suspect is always the one who turns out to have done it.

A morning or two later, Persis looked out of her window as she was dressing her hair. She dressed it herself now, though she was an American heiress, and, therefore, of course, the laziest of her kind; for she had taken an unaccountable dislike, somehow, to that quiet girl Bertha. On this particular morning, however, when Persis looked out, she saw Bertha engaged in close, and apparently very intimate, conversation with the Hampstead postman. This sight disturbed the unstable equilibrium of her equanimity not a little. Why should Bertha go to the door to the postman at all? Surely it was no part of the duty of Lady Maclure's maid to take in the letters! And why should she want to go prying into the question of who wrote to Miss Remanet? For Persis, intensely conscious herself that a note from Sir Justin lay on top of the postman's bundle—she recognized it at once, even at that distance below, by the peculiar shape of the broad rough envelope—jumped to the natural feminine conclusion that Bertha must needs be influenced by some abstruse motive of which she herself, Persis, was, to say the very least, a component element. 'Tis a human failing. We're all of us prone to see everything from a personal standpoint. Indeed, the one quality which makes a man or woman into a possible novelist, good, bad, or indifferent, is just that special power of throwing himself or herself into a great many people's personalities alternately. And this is a power possessed on an average by not one in a thousand men or not one in ten thousand women.

Persis rang the bell violently. Bertha came up all smiles: "Did you want anything, miss?" Persis could have choked her. "Yes," she answered, plainly, taking the bull by the horns; "I want to know what you were doing there, prying into other people's letters with the postman?"

Bertha looked up at her, ever bland; she answered at once, without a second's hesitation: "The postman's my young man, miss; and we hope before very long now to get married."

"Odious thing!" Persis thought. "A glib lie always ready on the tip of her tongue for every emergency."

But Bertha's heart was beating violently. Beating with love and hope and deferred anxiety.

A little later in the day Persis mentioned the incident casually to Lady Maclure—mainly in order to satisfy herself that the girl had been lying. Lady Maclure, however, gave a qualified assent:—

"I believe she's engaged to the postman," she said. "I think I've heard so, though I make it a rule you see, my dear, to know as little as I can of these people's love affairs. They're so very uninteresting. But Bertha certainly told me she wouldn't leave me to get married for an indefinite period. That was only ten days ago. She said her young man wasn't [illegible] to make a home for her."

"Perhaps," Persis suggested, grimly, "something has occurred meanwhile to better her position. Such strange things crop up. She may have come into a fortune!"

"Perhaps so," Lady Maclure replied, languidly. The subject bored her. "Though, if so, it must really have been very sudden; for I think it was the morning before you lost your jewels she told me so."

Persis thought that odd, but she made no comment.

Before dinner that evening she burst suddenly into Lady Maclure's room for a minute. Bertha was dressing her lady's hair. Friends were coming to dine—among them Sir Justin. "How do these pearls go with my complexion, Lady Maclure?" Persis asked rather anxiously; for she specially wished to look her best that evening, for one of the party.

"Oh, charming!" her hostess answered, with her society smile. "Never saw anything suit you better, Persis."

"Except my poor rubies!" Persis cried rather ruefully, for coloured gewgaws are dear to the savage and the woman. "I wish I could get them back! I wonder that man Gregory hasn't succeeded in finding them."

"Oh! my dear," Lady Maclure drawled out, "you may be sure by this time they're safe at Amsterdam. That's the only place in Europe now to look for them."

"Why to Amsterdam, my lady?" Bertha interposed suddenly, with a quick side-glance at Persis.

Lady Maclure threw her head back in surprise at so unwonted an intrusion. "What do you want to know that for, child?" she asked, somewhat curtly. "Why, to be cut, of course. All the diamond-cutters in the world are concentrated in Amsterdam; and the first thing a thief does when he steals big jewels is to send them across, and have them cut in new shapes so that they can't be identified."

"I shouldn't have thought," Bertha put in, calmly, "they'd have known who to send them to."

Lady Maclure turned to her sharply. "Why, these things," she said, with a calm air of knowledge, "are always done by experienced thieves, who know the ropes well, and are in league with receivers the whole world over. But Gregory has his eye on Amsterdam, I'm sure, and we'll soon hear something."

"Yes, my lady," Bertha answered, in her acquiescent tone, and relapsed into silence.

VI.

Four days later, about nine at night, that hard-worked man, the posty on the beat, stood loitering outside Sir Everard Maclure's house, openly defying the rules of the department, in close conference with Bertha.

"Well, any news?" Bertha asked, trembling over with excitement, for she was a very different person outside with her lover from the demure and imperturbable model maid who waited on my lady.

"Why, yes," the posty answered, with a low laugh of triumph. "A letter from Amsterdam! And I think we've fixed it!"

Bertha almost flung herself upon him. "Oh, Harry!" she cried, all eagerness, "this is too good to be true! Then in just one other month we can really get married!"

There was a minute's pause, inarticulately filled up by sounds unrepresentable through the art of the type-founder. Then Harry spoke again. "It's an awful lot of money," he said, musing. "A regular fortune! And what's more, Bertha, if it hadn't been for your cleverness we never should have got it!"

Bertha pressed his hand affectionately. Even ladies' maids are human.

"Well, if I hadn't been so much in love with you," she answered, frankly, "I don't think I could ever have had the wit to manage it. But, oh! Harry, love makes one do or try anything!"

If Persis had heard those singular words, she would have felt no doubt was any longer possible.

VII.

Next morning, at ten o'clock, a policeman came round, post haste, to Sir Everard's. He asked to see Miss Remanet. When Persis came down, [illegible] he had but a brief message from headquarters to give her: "Your jewels are found, Miss. Will you step round and identify them?"

Persis drove back with him, all trembling. Lady Maclure accompanying. At the police-station they left the [illegible], and entered the ante-room.

A little group had assembled there. The first person Persis distinctly made out was Sir Justin. A great terror seized her. Gregory had so poisoned her mind by this time with suspicion of everybody and everything [illegible] across that she was afraid of her own shadow. But next moment she saw clearly he wasn't there as prisoner, or even as witness, merely as spectator. She acknowledged him with a hasty bow, and cast her eyes round again. The next person she definitely distinguished was Bertha, as calm and cool as ever, but in the very centre of the group, occupying as it were the place of honour which naturally belongs to the prisoner on similar occasions. Persis was not surprised at that; she had known it all along; she glanced meaningly at Gregory, who stood a little behind, looking by no means triumphant. Persis found his dejection odd, but he was a proud detective, and perhaps someone else had effected the capture!

"These are your jewels, I believe," the inspector said, holding them up; and Persis admitted it.

"This is a painful case," the inspector went on. "A very painful case. We grieve to have discovered such a clue against one of our own men; but as he owns to it himself, and intends to throw himself on the mercy of the Court, it's no use talking about it. He won't attempt to defend it, indeed, with such evidence, I think he's doing what's best and wisest."

Persis stood there all dazed. "I—I don't understand," she cried, with a swimming brain. "Who on earth are you talking about?"

The inspector pointed mutely with one hand at Gregory, and then for the first time Persis saw he was guarded. She clapped her hand to her head. In a moment it all broke in upon her. When she had called in the police, the rubies had never been stolen at all. It was Gregory who stole them!

She understood it now, at once. The real facts came back to her. She had taken her necklet off at night, laid it carelessly down on the dressing-table (too full of Sir Justin), covered it accidentally with her lace pockethandkerchief, and straightway forgotten all about it. Next day she missed it, and jumped at conclusions. When Gregory came, he spied the rubies askance under the corner of the handkerchief—of course, being a woman, she had naturally looked everywhere except in the place where she laid them—and knowing it was a safe case he had quietly pocketed them before her very eyes, all unsuspected. He felt sure nobody could accuse him of a robbery which was committed before he came, and which he had himself been called in to investigate.

"The worst of it is," the inspector went on, "he had woven a very ingenious case against Sir Justin O'Byrne whom we were on the point of arresting to-day, if this young woman hadn't come in at the eleventh hour, in the very nick of time, and earned the reward by giving us the clue that led to the discovery and recovery of the jewels. They were brought over this morning by an Amsterdam detective."

Persis looked hard at Bertha. Bertha answered her look. "My young man was the postman, miss," she explained, quite simply, "and after what my lady said, I put him up to watch Mr. Gregory's delivery for a letter from Amsterdam. I'd suspected him from the very first; and when the letter came, we had him arrested at once and found out from it who were the people at Amsterdam who had the rubies."

Persis gasped with amazement. Her brain was reeling. But Gregory, in the background, put in one last word—[illegible] said with professional pride, "I told you the very last person you'd dream of suspecting was sure to be the one that actually did it."

Lady O'Byrne's rubies were very much admired at Monte Carlo last season. Mr. Gregory had found permanent employment for the next seven years at Her Majesty's quarries on the Isle of Portland. Bertha and her postman have retired to Canada with five hundred pounds to buy a farm. And everybody says Sir Justin O'Byrne has beaten the record, after all, even for Irish baronets, by making a marriage at once of money and affection.—Grant Allen in the Strand Magazine.

AMONG THE COLLEGES.

Sixty-eight Mary Smiths are students this year in Smith College, New York.

The largest university is Oxford; it has twenty-one colleges and five halls.

The junior fellowship of Dublin University will hereafter be open to men and women students on the same terms.

Harry L. Wilson, M.A., gold medallist of Queen's University in 1888, has just been appointed University scholar in [illegible] at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md., where he has been in residence since last October.

The University of Pennsylvania has succeeded in establishing what is now the third largest collection in the world of ancient cuneiform inscriptions and other fruits of Assyrian exploration. The treasures of this nature in the university's museum are surpassed by those only in the Louvre and the British Museum.

At the five Swiss universities 275 women have been matriculated and 162 who have not been examined were admitted to the lectures last term. Of all these only five studied law, the rest belonging to the medical and philosophical schools. Among the matriculated students 138 came from Russia and 19 were American.

The St John Daily Telegraph is publishing a series of articles on the condition and prospects of the University of New Brunswick. It is one of the oldest educational institutions in Canada, having been founded in 1800. During the 34 years from 1860 to 1893 inclusive it has produced 356 graduates, an average of about ten a year. The enquiry naturally arises whether such a result ought to be considered satisfactory to the people of the province.

Eton College has just celebrated, with much rejoicing, the four hundred and fifty-second anniversary of its foundation. It owes its origin to King Henry VI., who provided from his own purse the funds for the erection of the buildings, endowed the school, framed a charter for it, and, in order that it should not lack scholars, caused thirty-five of the Winchester boys to be transferred to Eton. The college buildings, which were erected in 1440, are still in a wonderful state of preservation.

Queen Victoria, it is said, can speak ten languages fluently. She is certainly mistress of the Queen's English.

The experiment of employing women instead of men in the French postal service has been tried with such good results of late that the Government has recently appointed a number of women to excellent positions of trust. The principal departments where women clerks are employed is in France, as elsewhere, the post, telegraphs, telephones, railways, the government banks, and the central administration. There are at present 5,353 women employed at provincial post-offices, 1,000 female telegraph clerks; in sixty-nine towns the telephone stations are under the management of women, affording employment for 745. The national savings banks employ 425 women.

The railways have, however, been the best friends to the women. It was the Dombes company which made the experiment with employing female clerks at the offices, or as station mistresses at the small stations, but gradually nearly all the French railway companies have followed this example. Women are used at the ticket offices, as watchers, etc.; the East Company employs 3,082 women, the North Company 2,790, the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranee 5,728, the Orleans Company 4,356, altogether some 24,000 women, in which number the thousands and thousands of female gatekeepers are not included.

In the whole of Europe it is calculated that over 600,000 women hold public appointments.

TID-BITS.

The holiday aftermath—Bills.

Following his bent—"The Crook."

Women tend elevators in Boston.

A Mexican mystery—The hot tamale.

The [illegible] sentiments are striking.

A state of affairs—The Brazilian Republic.

What the waiter waits for—The straight tip.

The iceman is in a melting mood this season.

"A sharp, nipping and an eager air"—"After the ball."

A third of England's telegraph operators are women.

Nearly 2,500 women practise medicine in this country.

Six women in England are engineers of town drainage.

The thermometer works up its record in [illegible] style—by degrees.

[illegible] is opposed to love making [illegible] session.

It is not impossible to meet with a plump refusal from a slender girl.

It is the close rather than the use of slang that robs it of its pungency.

The negro dude is not the only gentleman of colour. There is the painter.

Motto for ceramic collectors who purchase by "the marks"—"Caveat emptor."

The shooting idea resumes its fusillade again to-morrow in the Public schools.

Necessity knows no law. This forces the unfortunate into legal complications.

Dangerous—The scandal-monger who announces that he "knows a thing or two."

Animated composite photographs—People who have the reputation of being "two faced."

The charge of the light brigade occurs every month when the gas company's collectors go out.

The swiftest bird is the kestrel, or sparrow hawk. It has been known to make 100 miles an hour.

The longest wire span is a telegraph wire over the River Kistnah in India. It is over 6,000 feet.

The boy with new skates has advantages over the wrestler. He can take a fall out of himself.

From the Western governor's success in raising his voice one can almost imagine that he irrigates it.

A Kensington blacksmith says if it were not for being continually on a strike he wouldn't make any money.

About the toughest thing that can happen to a man is to go contrary to his wife's wishes and then fail.

An exchange asks, "Why do we wink?" The chief reason why we wink is because we are thirsty and out of money.

The fellow who starts out for a staving good time often has a barrel of fun before arriving at his home in a badly hung-up condition.

The light fingered individual who stole a heavy iron cash register from a West Side grocery last night is probably arranging to "keep tab" on himself this year.

To one God gave the brush, to one the pen; And theirs the blest endeavour to impart In rhyme and colour to the world of men Some of the loveliness of Nature's heart.
—F. D. Sherman in Harper's Weekly.

"I see that Peixoto is getting a balloon ready to drop dynamite upon Mello's ships," observed the horse editor.

"I should think pair [illegible] shoots would be more warlike," replied the snake editor.

Teacher—Who is the ruler of this country in which we live?

Johnnie B.—I don't know who is ruler of the country, but my pa says he's tired of having the hired girl run our house the way she does.

Spatters made a failure as a magazine illustrator.

"Yes. He had to draw some sketches of life on a Western ranch, and he wholly neglected to put patent leathers and creased trousers on the cowboys."

Priscilla—You wouldn't think the Cheesemans would parade the fact that they made their money out of vaseline.

Prunella—No, do they?

Priscilla—Yes; they have "Salve" in big letters on their front door mat.

"Confound you, sir! I've a notion to pull your nose. What do you mean by telling people that I've got a temper?"

"I take it all back, sir. When I said that I wasn't aware that you had lost it this morning."

"The first time I tried to smoke a [illegible] sick."

"You are getting even now."

"I don't see how?"

"Why, they make everybody else sick when you smoke them now."

"Yes," said Poeticus proudly. "In my first volume I set up a standard of excellence from which I shall not allow myself to depart, no matter what may be the demands of a vitiated modern taste."

And Readem innocently enquired, "What, neither way?"

The Inventor—"Ah, ha! My fortune is made! Hooray!"

His Wife—"How?"

The Inventor—"I've just perfected a duplex reversible device for automatically indicating to a woman whether her hat is on straight."

"Now, I happen to know that old Gen. Bloar never was in a battle in his life. So you see there is no excuse for calling him a dashing warrior."

"I haven't, eh? Why, if his conversation were put in print there would be almost nothing else but dashes."

Inquirer—"What are all these pages of closely-written manuscript about?"

Statistician—"Those are the records of the murders committed last year."

"Is it possible! And what are those three or four lonesome-looking lines in the middle of that long page?"

"The records of the hangings."

Chicago Alderman—"I want a pass to San Francisco and return. I'm thinking of visiting the Midwinter Fair."

Railway Official—"Any choice of routes?"

Chicago Alderman—"Yes. I want to go by way of—h'm—by way of Jacksonville, I reckon."

"I see the 'Drys' got only three votes in Simpkinsville. I thought you told me the prohibition sentiment was very strong there?"

"It is, under normal conditions; but in this campaign the saloon-keepers threatened to close their places if the town went dry."

The Bible has been printed, either wholly or in part, in 354 languages or dialects. Up to April, 1892, there have been more than 37,000,000 copies of Bibles, Testaments, and portions of Scripture printed in Great Britain and America, by various societies, while the millions printed by private publishers cannot be estimated.

"Great Scott!" shouted Mr. Larks, peering over his neighbour's fence. "What are you piling up cinders and garbage in that careful fashion for?"

"Hush!" replied his neighbour, leaning over to get hold of a rusty barrel hoop. "My wife wanted some relics from the World's Fair fire, and I haven't the time to go to Jackson Park."

Two fellow-travellers on a Western railroad were exchanging reminiscences.

"What was the proudest day of your life?" asked one.

"The day I was married. When I stood up to claim my bride I felt as if all the world were beneath me."

"A very natural feeling."

"Particularly in my case. We were married in a balloon."

Southern Town Boomer—Cayn't sell any more town lots to the Boston folks?

"No."

"Ner we cayn't fin' er hot spring anywhere about?"

"No; the' hain't any spring, hot 'r col', in fo' miles."

"Well (with a sigh) we mout's well offer a purse of $75,000 for the Corbett-Mitchell fight."

"Is the editor-in-chief in?" asked a stranger as he sauntered into the city reporters' room at 8 o'clock in the morning.

"No, sir," replied the janitor, kindly, "he does not come down so early. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Perhaps so. Are you connected with the poetical department of the paper?"

"I am, sir."

"Oh, what do you do?"

"I empty the waste baskets, sir."

Louisiana Sheriff—I wanter git a warrant fer ole Si Plunkett, fer drunkenness; he's practisin' with his rifle on the nigger camp meetin', an' he's hit four already.

Louisiana Justice—Whar'bouts be Si?

Louisiana Sheriff—He be shootin' from his smoke house winder.

Louisiana Justice—Sho, officah! That's nigh onto 600 yahds f'um the nigger camp-meetin'. Old Si kaint be very drunk if he kin hit a nigger at 600 yahds. Yo' must be mo' keerful 'bout askin' this co't fo' warrants, sah!

"That's what I call a good dinner," remarked Bobby Clamwhooper, as he leaned back in his chair with an air of repletion after the Christmas dinner was over.

"Bobby," said his mother, "I'm heartily ashamed of you."

The minister, who was dining with the family, laughed heartily. "Bobby appreciates the good things of life," he said, "like all the rest of us."

"Don't you think it was a good dinner?" Bobby asked the minister.

"Yes, indeed. I enjoyed it very much."

"Ma said she thought you would, cause [illegible] suppose you got very much at home."