

reason to regard with respect the dream which had brought me thither.

Right under the 1748 of the parchment, stood on the vellum cover 1747. Then followed the usual blank, and then came an entry corresponding word for word with the other entry of my great grandfather and mother's marriage.

Meantime, I followed out my investigation, and gradually stripped the parchment off the vellum to within a couple of inches of the bottom of the cover.

Next to the entry of the now hardly hypothetical marriage of my ancestors, stood the summing up of the marriages of 1747, with the signature of the rector. I paused, and, turning back, counted them.

As the entry of the marriage was, on the forged leaf, shifted up close to the forged 1748, and as the summing and signature had to be omitted, because they belonged to the end of 1747, a blank would have been left, and the writing below would have shone through and attracted attention, revealing the forgery of the whole.

With my many speculations as to why the mechanism of the forgery had assumed this shape, I need not trouble my reader. Suffice it to say that on more than one supposition, I can account for it satisfactorily to myself.

I left the parchment still attached to the cover at the bottom, and laying a sheet of paper between the formerly adhering surfaces, lest they should again adhere, closed and replaced the volume.

When I came out, the sky was clear and the stars were shining. The storm had blown over. Much rain had fallen. But when the wind ceased or the rain, I had no recollection: the storm had vanished altogether from my consciousness.

The next thing was to see the rector of Umberden. He lived in his other parish, and thither I rode the following day to call upon him.

I told him that I came to him as I might, were I a Catholic, to a father-confessor. This startled him a little.

"Don't tell me anything I ought not to keep secret," he said; and it gave me confidence in him at once.

"I will not," I returned. "The secret is purely my own. Whatever crime there is in it, was past punishment long before I was born; and it was committed against, not by my family. But it is rather a long story, and I hope I shall not be tedious."

I told him everything, from my earliest memory, which bore on the discovery I had at length made. He soon shewed signs of interest; and when I had ended the tale with the facts of the preceding night, he silently rose and walked about the room.

"And what do you mean to do, Mr. Cumbermede?" "Nothing," I answered, "so long as Sir Giles is alive. He was kind to me when I was a boy."

He came up behind me where I was seated, and laid his hand gently on my head; then, without a word, resumed his walk.

"And if you survive him, what then?"

"Then I must be guided partly by circumstances," I said.

"I want you to go with me to the church, and see the book, that, in case of anything happening to it, you may be a witness concerning its previous contents."

"I am too old to be the only witness," he said. "You ought to have several of your own age."

"I want as few to know the secret as may be," I answered.

"You should have your lawyer one of them."

"He would never leave me alone about it," I replied; "and positively I shall take no measures at present. Some day I hope to punish him for deserting me as he did."

For I had told him how Mr. Coningham had behaved.

"Revenge, Mr. Cumbermede?" "Not a serious one. All the punishment I hope to give him is but to show him the case, and leave him to feel as he may about it."

"There can't be much harm in that."

He reflected for a few moments, and then said:

"I will tell you what will be best. We shall go and see the book together. I will make an extract of both entries, and give a description of the state of the volume, with an account of how the second entry—or more properly the first—came to be discovered. This I shall sign in the presence of two witnesses, who need know nothing of the contents of the paper. Of that you shall yourself take charge."

We went together to the church. The old man, after making a good many objections, was at length satisfied, and made notes for his paper. He started the question whether it would not be better to secure that volume at least under lock and key.

Before the end of the week, he had his document ready. He signed it in my presence, and in that of two of his parishioners, who as witnesses appended their names and abodes. I have it now in my possession.

That same week, Sir Giles Brotherton died. (To be continued.)

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