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VOL. 9.-NO. 22.

SACKVILLE, N. B., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1878.

WHOLE NO. 438.

LITERATURE.

(From Rose-Belford Magazine.)

THE HAUNTED HOTEL.

Wilkie Collins's New Story.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was only the 20th of September when Agnes and the children reached Paris. Mrs. Norbury and her brother Francis had then already started on their journey to Italy—at least three weeks before the date at which the new hotel was to open for the reception of travellers.

The person answerable for this premature departure was Francis Westwick.

Like his younger brother Henry, he had increased his pecuniary resources by his own enterprise and ingenuity; with this difference, that his speculations were connected with the arts. He had made money in the first instance by a weekly newspaper, and he had then invested his profits in a London theatre.

This latter enterprise, admirably conducted, had been rewarded by the public with steady and liberal encouragement. Pondering over a new form of theatrical attraction, the coming winter season, Francis had determined to revive the languid public taste for the "ballet" by means of an entertainment of his own invention, combining dramatic interest with dancing.

He was now, accordingly, in search of the best dancer (possessed of the indispensable attractions) who was to be found in the theatres of the Continent. Hearing from his foreign correspondents of two women who had made successful first appearances, one at Milan and one at Florence, he had arranged to visit those cities, and to judge of the merits of the dancers for himself before he joined the bride and bridegroom.

His widowed sister, and her friends at Florence, whom she was anxious to see, readily accompanied him. The Montbarris remained at Paris until it was time to present themselves at the family meeting in Venice. Henry found them still in the French capital when he arrived from London on his way to the opening of the hotel.

Against Lady Montbarris's advice he took the opportunity of renewing his addresses to Agnes. He could hardly have chosen a more unpropitious time for pleading his suit, as she was then in the very midst of her grief for the death of her husband.

She shared willingly in the ever-varying oscillations of amusement offered to strangers by the ingenuity of the liveliest people in the world—but nothing roused her: she remained persistently dull and weary through it all. In this frame of mind and body she was the other gentleman to receive Henry's ill-timed addresses with favor or even with patience.

She plainly and positively refused to listen to him. "Why do you remind me of what I have suffered?" she asked petulantly. "Don't you see it has left its mark on me for life?"

"I thought I knew something of women by this time," Henry said, appealing privately to Lady Montbarris for consolation; "but Agnes completely puzzles me. It is years since Montbarris's death; and she remains as devoted to his memory as if he had died faithful to her—she still feels the loss of him as none of us feel it!"

"She is the truest woman that ever breathed the breath of life," Lady Montbarris answered. "Remember that, and you will understand her. Can such a woman as Agnes give her love or refuse it according to circumstances? Because the man was unworthy of her was she less the man of her choice? The truest and best friend to him (little as she deserved it) in his lifetime, she naturally remains the truest and best friend to his memory now. If you really love her, wait; and trust to your two best friends—time and me. There is my advice; let your own experience decide whether it is not the best advice I can offer. Resume your journey to Venice to-morrow; and when you take your leave of Agnes speak to her as cordially as if nothing had happened."

Henry wisely followed the advice. Agnes made the leave-taking friendly and pleasant on her side. When he stopped at the door for a last look at her she hurriedly turned her head so that her face was hidden from him. Was that a good sign? Lady Montbarris, accompanying Henry down the stairs said: "Yes, decidedly. Write when you get to Venice. We shall wait here to receive the letters from Arthur and his wife, and we shall time our departure for Italy accordingly."

A week passed, and no letter came from Henry. Some days later a telegram was received from him. It was despatched from Milan instead of from Venice, and it brought this strange message: "I have left the hotel. Will return on the arrival of Arthur and his wife. Adieu, meanwhile, Albergio Reale, Milan."

Preferring Venice before all other cities of Europe, and having arranged to remain there until the family meeting took place, what unexpected event had led Henry to alter his plans? and why did he state the bare fact, without adding a

word of explanation? Let the narrative follow him and find the answer of those questions at Venice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Palace Hotel, appealing for encouragement mainly to English and American travellers, celebrated the opening of its doors, as a matter of course, by the giving of grand banquet and the delivery of a long succession of speeches.

Delayed on his journey, Henry Westwick only reached Venice in time to join the guests over their coffee and their cigars. Observing the splendor of their reception rooms and taking note especially of the artful mixture of comfort and luxury in the bedchambers, he began to share the old nurse's views of the future and to contemplate seriously the coming dividend of ten per cent.

The hotel was beginning well at all events. So much interest in the enterprise had been aroused at home and abroad by profuse advertising that the whole accommodation of the building had been secured by travellers of all nations for the opening night. Henry only obtained one of the small rooms on the upper floor by a lucky accident—the absence of the gentleman who had written to engage it. He was quite satisfied on his way back, when another accident altered his prospects for the night and moved him into another and a better room.

Ascending on his way to the higher regions as far as the first floor of the hotel, Henry's attention was attracted by an angry voice protesting in a strong English accent, against one of the greatest hardships that can be inflicted on a citizen of the United States—the hardship of sending him to bed without gas in his room.

The American are not only the most hospitable people to be found on the face of the earth—they are (under certain conditions) the most patient and good-tempered people as well. But they are human; and the limit of American endurance is found in the obsolete institution of a bedroom candle. The American traveller, in the present case, declined to believe that his bedroom was in a completely finished state without a gas-burner. The manager pointed to the fine antique decorations (renewed and regilt) on the walls and ceiling, and explained that the emanations of burning gas light would certainly spoil them in the course of a few months.

To this the traveller replied that, if possible, but that he did not understand decorations. A bedroom with gas in it was what he was used to, was what he wanted, and what he was determined to have. The complaint manager volunteered to ask some other gentleman, housed on the inferior upper story (which was lit throughout with gas), to change rooms. Hearing this, and being quite willing to change a small bed-chamber for a large one, Henry went on to the other gentleman. The excellent American shook hands with him on the spot. "You are a cultured person, sir," he said, "and you will no doubt understand the decorations."

Henry looked at the number of rooms on the door as he opened it. The number was Fourteen.

Tired and sleepy he naturally anticipated a good night's rest. In the thoroughly healthy state of his nervous system, he slept as well in a bed abroad as in a bed at home. He never slept at a hotel. Without the slightest assignable reason, however, his just expectations were disappointed. The luxurious bed, the well-ventilated room, the delicious tranquillity of Venice by night, all were in favor of his sleeping on the door as he opened it.

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could honestly answer, "I know no more than you do."

When night came he gave his comfortable and beautiful bedroom another trial. The result of the second experiment was a repetition of the result of the first. Again he felt the all-pervading sense of depression and discomfort. Again he passed a sleepless night. And once more when he awoke at his breakfast this appetite completely failed him!

This personal experience of the new hotel was too extraordinary to be passed over in silence. Henry mentioned it to his friends in the public room, in the hearing of the manager. The manager, naturally zealous in defense of the hotel, was a little hurt at the implied reflection cast on Number Fourteen. He invited the travellers present to judge for themselves whether Mr. Westwick's bedroom was to blame for his Westwick's sleepless nights; and he especially appealed to a gray-headed gentleman, a guest at the breakfast-table of an English traveller, to take the lead in the investigation. "This is Dr. Bruno, first physician at Venice," he exclaimed. "I appeal to him to say if there are any unhealthy influences in Mr. Westwick's room."

Introduced to Number Fourteen the doctor looked round him with a certain appearance of interest which was noticed by every one present. "The last time I was in this room," he said, "was on a melancholy occasion. It was before the palace was changed into an hotel. I was in professional attendance on an English nobleman who died here." One of the persons present inquired the name of the nobleman. Dr. Bruno answered (without the slightest suspicion that he was speaking before a brother of the dead man), "Lord Montbarris."

Henry quietly left the room, without saying a word to anybody. He was not, in any sense of the term, a superstitious man. But he felt, nevertheless, an insuperable reluctance to remaining in the hotel. He decided on leaving Venice. To ask for another room would be, as he could plainly see, an offense in the eyes of the manager. To remove to another hotel would be to openly abandon an establishment in the success of which he had a pecuniary interest. Leaving a note to Arthur Barville, on his arrival in Venice, in which he mentioned that he had gone to look at the Italian lakes, and that a line addressed to his hotel at Milan would bring him back again, he took the afternoon train to Padua, and dined with his usual appetite, and slept as well as ever that night.

The next day, a gentleman and his wife, returning to England by way of Venice, arrived at the hotel occupied by Number Fourteen. Still mindful of the slat that had been cast on one of his best bed-chambers, the manager took occasion to ask the travellers the next morning how they liked their room. They left him to judge for himself how well they were satisfied by remaining in the hotel. His ghost walks in torpid until he can tell it! The living persons related to him the persons who feel he is near them—the persons who may yet see him in the time to come. Don't, pray don't say anything about it. I would not stay tonight here myself—not for anything that could be offered me."

Mrs. Norbury at once set her servant's mind at ease on this last point.

"I don't think about it as you do," she said gravely. "But I should like to speak to my brother of what has happened. We will go back to Milan."

Some hours necessarily elapsed before the maid left the hotel, by the first train in the forenoon.

I that interval Mrs. Norbury's maid found an opportunity of confidentially informing the valet of what had passed between her mistress and herself. The valet had other duties to perform, and he related the circumstances in his turn. In due course of time the narrative, passing from mouth to mouth, reached the ears of the manager. He instantly saw that the credit of the hotel was in danger unless something was done to relieve the character of the room numbered Fourteen. English travellers, well acquainted with the pedigree of their native country, informed him that Henry Westwick and Mrs. Norbury were by no means only members of the Montbarris family. Curiosity might bring more of them to the hotel after hearing what had happened. The manager's ingenuity easily hit on the obvious means of removing all the room's water enlaid on blue and white china plates, screw-down to the doors. He ordered a new plate to be prepared, bearing the number, "13 A," and kept the room empty, after its usual use for the time being had gone away, until the plate was ready. He then remembered the room; placing the removed Number Fourteen on the door of his own room (on the second floor) which, not being numbered at all, had not previously been numbered at all. By this device Number Fourteen disappeared at once and forever from the books of the hotel as the number of a bedroom to let.

Having warned the servants to beware of promising any evidence on the subject of the changed number, under penalty of being dismissed, the manager composed his mind with the reflection that he had done his duty to his employers.

A letter recently produced in a breach of promise suit as evidence contained the following sentences: "Dearest love—I swallowed the postage stamp on your letter, because I knew your lips touched it."

"Now," he thought to himself, with an excusable sense of triumph, "let the whole family come here if they like. The hotel is a match for them."

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Love-Tormented Elder.

The Nether Lochnaber correspondent of the *Inverness Courier*, in his latest contribution, says: The root of the male fern (*Pteris aquilina*) was at one time put to a curious use in the Highlands. Gathered at a certain season, and under a particular phase of the moon, the root, thoroughly dried and grated down into a fine aromatic powder, was the most potent ingredient in the *leann-talach*—a tincture of the root—love-philtres of the old herbalists, who professed, by means of their essences and decoctions, to deal successfully not only with bodily, but mental ailments.

Properly prepared and cunningly administered, these love-philtres thought to be of very extraordinary efficacy and power. One herbalist, an old woman who, within the memory of people still living, practised her art in Lochnaber. She lived on Foder Wullin, and was visited by people from all parts of the country, who bore testimony to her skill in relieving their real or fancied ailments. The most important and lucrative branch of her practice was the preparation of "love drinks," so skilfully decocted that they never known to fail in sooner or later bringing about the desired result. So powerful, indeed, were the love potions prepared by this dame, that great caution was necessary in their administration, great care particularly that they were administered to the right person.

On one occasion a servant girl, falling in love with her master's son, and afraid that her affection might not be reciprocated either so speedily or as warmly as was desirable, applied to the cauldron Lussagrain, or old wife herbalist, to help her in the matter. A love-philtre of more than ordinary potency was at once prepared, but by some mismanagement it happened that the girl, instead of drinking it, should be drunk by the young man at bedtime, was very innocently drunk in a moment of thirst by the father instead, and the consequences may be imagined. Next morning the son for whom the potion was intended, though he of course knew nothing of it, went about his business as usual; but his father, a respectable man, well past middle age, and an elder of his church, was surprised to find his heart so strangely pit-a-pat all round. The old man was making a fool of himself and couldn't help it; and his wife and family were sadly scandalized, as was no wonder, with his conduct. The girl was as vexed and ashamed of her own share in the business, while the young man was wondering what it could mean. What had happened, rushed off in desperation to the herb-wife to tell her of this unlooked for and extraordinary case of ardent love by misadventure. The old woman was happily equal to the occasion. A second decoction was immediately prepared, and his wife having been let into the secret, the love-tormented husband was to take the decoction in restoring matters to the status quo ante philtre. The old woman was prepared, and his wife having been let into the secret, the love-tormented husband was to take the decoction in restoring matters to the status quo ante philtre.

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