

THE MORTLAKE PEERAGE.

(From Chambers's Journal.)

CHAPTER II.

My next step, after seeing Miss Onslow, was to proceed to Sandgate, and call at the addresses given me of the doctor and lodging-house keeper. The latter I could not find; she had left the town, and no one knew where she was now living. The doctor, I discovered, had given up practising, and had taken up his residence at Folkestone; so I had to hark back to that town, where eventually I found him. Dr. Scudamore proved to be a very gentlemanly old man, in no way disposed to be reticent. He remembered the whole affair. He thought the young lady was good-looking, but not very strong-minded. And somehow he imagined she was not happy, and tried to gain her confidence, but could not. Both mother and child were strong and healthy; in the whole of his practice he never saw a finer infant. He knew nothing of what became of them after they left Sandgate, and could give me no information about Mrs. Pocock, the lodging-house keeper. He, however, voluntarily stated that he did not believe that the lady he attended was dead. He gave as his reason that, as he was crossing from Calais to Dover not many months since, he saw a lady whom he believed to be his former patient. She was attended by a gentleman, who seemed to be her husband, and had a large retinue of servants. He bowed to her, and she returned his salutation. I did not attach much importance to this, because a bow from so courtly an old gentleman as Mr. Scudamore, I argued, even if given in mistake, would be almost sure to elicit a response. But Mr. Scudamore would not listen to such an idea; he was confident that the lady was the same person he had attended at Sandgate—only that she had grown more womanly and even more beautiful.

All this was very tantalising. I could not entirely credit Mr. Scudamore's story; nor did I feel perfectly satisfied with Lord Mortlake's assertion that his wife was dead. I did not for one moment imagine that he had treated his wife unkindly, or that she had been subjected to any foul-play on his part. On the contrary, I had a strong conviction that he had been deceived, and that he was in reality as much in the dark with regard to her existence and whereabouts, as I was; nevertheless, the conviction that Lady Mortlake was still alive had become so rooted in my mind that I was not inclined to give credence to anything to the contrary. It may be asked, why did I not go to Lord Mortlake and seek a solution of the mystery from him? At least he could give me his grounds for asserting that his wife was dead. That is all perfectly true; but it was not practicable. I did not know where he was to be found. Lord Mortlake had not been in England for years. He had been travelling in all parts of the world; and according to common report, had become a misanthrope, or been seized with a mania for trapping and hunting. At any rate, as far as his friends knew, he was living somewhere in the backwoods of America; and no one had any idea when he was likely to return.

One morning some time after this, I received a message from Miss Onslow, who was seriously ill, requesting that I would call upon her. Accordingly, I went, and found the lady in her sick-room. I was shocked and surprised to see how much she was altered since I had last seen her. Always thin, she had now shrunk into a mere skeleton. She beckoned me to approach her, and whispered: 'I want to speak to you alone—before my sister comes; there is no time to be lost. I am dying!'

'You can leave the room,' I said to the woman in attendance. 'I want to have some conversation with Miss Onslow of a private nature.'

'The doctor said she was not to be left,' answered the attendant sullenly.

'I will ring if there is any necessity,' I replied.

The woman glared at me; she did not answer, but left the room without a word.

As soon as the door was closed, Miss Onslow put her long thin hand out of the bed, and thrust into my hands a packet of old letters. 'Put them into your pocket,' she whispered. 'Don't let her see them; she is a spy.'

'What are they?' I asked.

'Letters—their letters—the ones we suppressed.'

'Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope's?' I asked.

'Yes,' was the reply.

'Then you were the cause of their separation?'

She gazed at me piteously, and then answered, 'Yes.'

'God will judge you for that wicked act!' I exclaimed.

'Those who separate husband and wife will have much to answer for.'

'The wild yearning look in her eyes came back, and she said: 'The thought of how we treated that poor girl has been like a canker in my heart. I wish I had my time over again.'

'A vain wish, my poor woman,' I said, softened by her anguish, 'and one that will not serve you.'

At this moment the door opened, and another tall woman, the very counterpart of Miss Onslow, only stouter and better looking entered the room, and stalked across towards the sick woman, who faintly ejaculated: 'My sister.'

'What is all this, Ann—and who is this gentleman?' asked the new-comer sternly.

The sick woman essayed to answer—raised her head a little from the pillow, and then suddenly fell back. She was dead. She had been suffering, as I afterwards learned, from heart-disease, and the shock of her sister's sudden entrance had killed her.

I went home in a very sad mood. The scene I had just

witnessed was so deeply impressed on my mind, that I could not get rid of it—it haunted me; while I was almost unmanned by the thought that a soul had passed into eternity in such a state. In the hope that the perusal of the letters given me by the dead woman might distract my attention from these morbid ideas, I sat down and read them. There were more than twenty, some of so touching and pathetic a character, that I was moved to tears as I read them. Mr. Stanhope's were full of love and tenderness, urging his wife to disclose their marriage to her father, or to let him do so; vowing eternal fidelity, and complaining that she did not answer his letters. His wife's at first expressed the most unbounded love; but they gradually changed. It was evident to me that the Misses Onslow were trying to poison her mind, and persuade her that she was deserted. When the idea first dawned upon the young wife, her agony of mind as expressed in her letters was intense; but she evidently would not believe it and urged him to come and take her away. Poverty, she said, she could bear; but the thought that he had ceased to love her, was maddening. Some of her letters were very incoherent, full of passionate love, alternating with vows of hatred and revenge; and I came to the conclusion that the writer at these times was hardly accountable for what she wrote. The mystery to me was, how human beings could have read these letters and acted such an inhuman part.

From one of Mr. Stanhope's later letters, it was evident to me that he had procured an interview with one of the Misses Onslow, and had tried to discover the whereabouts of his wife. The letter was obviously written while he was in a state of great mental excitement. He said that though he still loved her, he was stung to the quick by her silence and neglect; stated his intention to accept an appointment in India, and gave an address in Calcutta where she could write to him.

The first thing I did after I had read these was to apply to Lord Mortlake's bankers for his address. They stated that they had not heard from him for some time; but they gave the address of a bank in New York through which he received his remittances. I wrote to the manager, inclosing a letter to my friend. Time went on, and I got no answer; but the letter was not returned.

Shortly after the death of Miss Onslow, I received a note from Dr. Scudamore. He said that, understanding that I was anxious to discover the whereabouts of Mrs. Pocock—the person with whom Mrs. Stanhope lodged while she was at Sandgate—he had made inquiries, and had discovered that, having lost her first husband, she had been married again to a man of the name of Minter, at Ramsgate, a small shipowner. At the same time he inclosed her address. This was another link in the chain; and I started off to pick it up.

I found the woman very uncommunicative. All I could get out of her was, that the child of the lady I spoke of died a few months after it was born, and was buried at Ashford. She admitted that she had the charge of the child till its death; and she produced a certificate of its burial. I was about taking a copy of this, when I discovered that it was a certificate of the baptism of the child, and not its burial. I took no notice till I copied it, then I said: 'Thank you. Now I'll see the certificate of its burial.'

She looked at me blankly; then she snatched up the paper and examined it. With a muttered execration, either on me or herself, I could not make out which, she produced the other paper, and gave it me. Just as I had finished making a copy of this, a handsome boy of about fourteen or fifteen entered the room. He was about to withdraw, when I stopped him and asked his name. 'George Pocock,' he answered.

'This is your son, then, I suppose?'

'Of course he is!' she replied. 'What makes you ask?'

'Because he is the very picture of what Mr. Stanhope was when he was young. The likeness is perfectly astounding.'

'I can't help nothing about who he's like,' she said sullenly. 'He's my boy.—Ain't ye, George?'

'Yes, mother,' he replied meekly.

I folded up the copies of the certificates carefully and put them into my pocket-book. The woman all this while was motioning to her boy and looking daggers at him. I was watching her all the time. At this moment, a voice in the passage called out: 'Dinner ready, Polly?' and a bluff, hearty-looking man entered the room.—'Savvy, sir,' he said on seeing me, and he doffed his hat.

'This is your wife's son?' I said interrogatively.

There was a broad grin on his face as he answered: 'So she says; but blame me if I know whose he is! He ain't a bit like the missus, is he? And he ain't no more like old Pocock than she's like the Queen. 'Tain't her, sir; don't you believe it.'

'What rubbish you do talk, Robert!' his wife cried; and then turning to me, she said: 'You musn't mind what he says. He's jealous of the boy.'

(To be Continued.)

ECONOMISING GAS.—The progress of the electric light is leading to the discovery of new means of economising gas, either by reducing the consumption or by increasing the brilliancy of the light. The London Times of 23rd ult. announces that a small company with a capital of £50,000. has been formed to deal with Sir James Douglass's high-power gas burner patents, and to introduce the burners into general use. It is stated that by putting one of the new cones on a Sugg burner it increases its illuminating power by 40 per cent. on the consumption of gas. Out of the competition between gas and electricity now setting in will arise the light of the future, a cheaper and better article than until recently it was deemed possible to produce.

THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON.

Last year, according to Col. Henderson's report, 26,170 new houses, covering a length of eighty-six miles, were built in the metropolitan police area, London, which now contains 4,788,657 persons—the largest number probably ever packed within fifteen miles of a centre. Out of this enormous multitude twenty-three children and one hundred and fifty-four adults entirely lost. Their disappearance is one of the mysteries of London, upon which but little light is thrown by the fact that fifty-four bodies of persons found dead and unknown were buried before identification. There were three times as many people killed in the streets of London in 1881 as it cost to storm Arabi's position at Tel-el-Kebir, and ten times as many wounded, the figures being—killed 252, wounded 3,400. There were 800 fires, 274 suicides, 11 murders and only three convictions, 470 burglaries and only 91 convictions; 27,228 persons were apprehended as drunk and disorderly—a decrease of more than 8 per cent. since 1881, although there has been an increase of population of over 80,000. The temperance movement seems to be telling at last, even in London—the proportion of apprehensions per 1,000 of population for the last four years being: 1878, 7,809; 1879, 7,345; 1880, 6,345; 1881, 5,698.

TWO HUNDRED MILES OF OYSTERS.—The joy caused in gastronomic and epicurean circles by Mr. Olsen's paper on 'The North Sea Fisheries,' and the great oyster discoveries there, will be shared by the whole oyster-eating world. Two hundred miles of oyster-beds, thirty to seventy miles wide, that is to say, 10,000,000 acres of splendid oysters within easy distance of the British coast, is a discovery to which all those of Stanley and Livingstone sink into insignificance. One curious feature about it is that the oysters lie at a depth of twenty-one fathoms, thus disposing summarily of the prevalent idea that oysters can only be raised successfully in shallow water. The man who invents a new dish, according to some, the man who plants a tree, according to the Mohammedans, deserves well of mankind; but what is the reward of a man who discovers 10,000,000 acres of oysters? And yet all this is tinged with the melancholy doubt whether oysters will be cheaper in consequence.

SELF-ACTING FIRE-ALARM.—A Manchester, England, inventor has exhibited a self-acting fire-alarm and fire-extinguisher of his devising. He utilizes the effect of the change of temperature upon the mercury. The float as it ascends moves a lever, the raising of which has the effect of turning on a stream of water, and, as an alarm, fires a revolving gun and rings a bell. The stream of water continues until the fire is extinguished, when from the fall of the temperature the mercury descends, the lever is depressed, and the tap in the water-pipe is again closed. The depression of the lever at the same time stops the ringing of the bell, whilst the gun would continue to fire until all the cartridges were expended. This apparatus is affected by slight as well as by a marked change in the temperature.

EUROPE v. AMERICA.—Emil Deckert, a German essayist, has been considering the prediction that North America will commercially overwhelm Europe, and his conclusion is that Europe will always hold its own, through advantages in the way of geographical situation, soil, and climate. 'The foreign commerce of Europe,' he says, 'is twice as large as that of all the rest of the world together. In all manner of productions it likewise predominates. In the matter of coal and iron the European countries produce annually almost four times as much as those of North America, Europe still possesses three times as many cattle as the United States, and four times as many sheep; the fields of Europe still produce three times as much grain, and four times as much wheat as those of North America, while on that side of the ocean the industrial establishments have two and a half times as much power in steam engines as those of America.'

SPIRITUAL BANKING.—In his address to the Bankers' Club, of Chicago, Ill., recently, Mr. J. O. Rutter, Vice-President of the club, recalled how, many years ago, a character named Seth Paine opened an office in the city, and called it the Bank of Chicago. In addition to his duties as banker, Seth added those of editor and preacher. He published a newspaper called the *Christian Banker*. Seth was a Spiritualist, and the direction of the business of the bank was in, if I may so put it, the hands of the spirits. Seth managed in some way to get a quantity of the bills of the Bank of Chicago into the pockets of the people, and when any of them were presented at his counter for coin these supernatural agencies would indicate through the medium of a number of long-haired and not over good looking women whether it would be the proper thing to redeem or not. It was more frequent not. After being once or twice mobbed the bank was closed.

EXTENSION OF THE GRAND TRUNK CATTLE YARDS.

An idea may be formed of the importance of the live stock trade in this city, and its constantly increasing volume, by the large extensions which have recently been made by Messrs. Acer & Kennedy in the above yards. A new division of four yards, with every convenience for both cattle and sheep, has just been completed, with sufficient capacity for accommodating a whole train load of cattle. This division is watered from a tank in the centre, and each of the four yards is provided with everything necessary for the proper care of live stock after being taken off the cars. This latest addition to what were previously by far the largest cattle yards in the Dominion, now gives them total capacity for accommodating comfortably 4,000 cattle, 4,000 sheep, and 1,000 hogs.—*Gazette*.