

not one of which I look at during my holiday.

Often, on autumnal evenings, pacing up and down by the moat, enjoying the social weed, in a kind of half silence that is pleasanter than talk, we drop out a word or two about that forgotten Leger.

"It was much better to win the race by your own pluck and industry than by the swiftness of Jezebel's heels, wasn't it, Hugh?" I said.

"Well, I don't know, old fellow," he answered in his careless way. "I lost five years of paradise, and had to work like a galley slave among our friends in the Antipodes. But I suppose it makes a better moral."

THE END.

[REGISTERED in accordance with the Copyright Act of 1868.]

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

TALES OF THE LINKS OF LOVE.

BY ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE.

LILLYMERE.

CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

"I brought away the parcel as given me, but respected Anna's mild charity too well to desecrate her clothes in disguising the skeleton. I looked at the articles a few times, and could have loved them. They remain in the wrappings she gave them in, lying atop of the other feminine raiment; and that is spread atop of the bones."

"All in one packing case? Or is it a trunk?"

"It is a large deal box; five feet and a half, by about twenty inches wide and deep."

"How soon could you fetch that box?"

"In half an hour, with light spring waggon and good horse."

"Say? If I get a customer, what will you sell for, just as the thing is now fixed?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"And bring it right away? Is the packing case, or whatever you call it, secured by a lock? Sure there's no smell? What other female attire is it? Rags? Hospital clothing?"

"A lady's ball dress, and various odds of things, opera cloak, damaged less or more, a crinoline skirt, a veil, a scarf, and opera gaiters. One of our fellows got them from his landlady, now in the States. They had been left at her house. Forget her name. There's a name inside the gaiters."

"Opera gaiters did you say? What are they?"

"Fancy dress boots worn by ladies; pretty things they have been. The skeleton wore them that time I frightened Tush, and the time your nigger was at my rooms, Brand, or Hildebrand, whatever you call him. He was scared, you bet."

"He, he, he! that was good; that was a caution."

"Yes, to see the young nigger was a caution, you bet."

"The money, Dickey; how much money?"

"As I told you, two hundred dollars."

"One hundred, you mean?"

"You know my position, Tom, and may screw me to anything absurd and cruel. But if I get two hundred I go right away to Sacramento, Cal., where my sister is. Write a cheque for two hundred."

"I write no cheque in this matter. Get the waggon; bring the packing case to the private garden door, in the lane rear of the bank. I'll give a hundred dollars on account of the customer; and present you with a hundred from myself, besides defraying expenses. Take these for present use, three two's and a four, making ten. Don't hire a man, drive yourself. The key, give that, please; I take the key in token of contract. He, he, he!"

"There it is, Tom, now I'm off. Will be at your place in an hour, at most. Bring my own luggage to the G. T. R. depot same time. Don't owe anything at Lot Four, so may clear at once."

"Don't owe anything, Dicky? Wonder to hear that. Perhaps they wouldn't let you?"

"Right; they wouldn't let me; and I didn't try to. Inkle's bank would be a poor concern if somebody didn't get deeper in debt to money-lenders than D. Rickaby."

Within the time promised, D. Rickaby returned with the packing case. The purchaser handed him money, repeating several times with emphasis:

"On behalf of a customer, one hundred."

Then:

"Take this second hundred as a gift from myself, dear Mr. Rickaby. Happy at having the privilege; just borrowed that and the customer's payment from mother, for I've none, so to speak, of my own. May prosperity attend you, Dicky!"

A thought of something forgotten flashed on the Inkle mind; he continued:

"Say, come inside the garden; let's try the key before you go."

He tried the key, opened the box, and in the dark groped among the contents.

"The bones are loose, lying in pieces, Rickaby. You said the skeleton was wired and fixed. Help carry to my private cellar, a lumber room I have underneath the bank, and let's examine with a light."

Under a light the contents of the case were looked at one by one, the student explaining that the wiring had been at first imperfect, and was undone to be reconstructed.

"Give back half the money, Dicky, this isn't fair."

"Quite fair, Tom. You'll find a coil of new wire and springs in the box; the work is easily done; be nice amusement for you at night. Good bye."

"Come back, Rickaby, this is a swindle. Return me half the money."

"Not a cent, Tom. Good bye."

"I'll have you arrested."

But the other quickly disappeared through the garden wicket, closing it after him.

Left alone young Inkle laughed in the usual manner, satisfied he had not the worst of the bargain. But the odour was unmistakably bad.

"If I take the concern up-stairs smelling so, it may be felt in the bank, or by the servants doing my rooms. I'll leave it here for the present. Quick lime and charcoal both in store, fortunately, for garden purposes. Scatter some on the floor and box lid; they'll chemically absorb bad odours. Also leave the Anna Liffey clothes, spread out to the deodorizing influences. And burn the rest in the stove upstairs, when examined under the gold ore detector lens."

While scanning the opera cloak and other articles, finding inside the gaiter boots, by aid of the powerful gold ore detector, the name "Agnes Schoolar," a policeman reported to Chief Grynd that he had been watching Inkle's garden-door in the lane.

"Heard high words between young Tom and Rickaby. Guess Dick had sold some of this Rama gold ore which town and country have run insane on all at once. Guess they'd fallen out about the price. Dick had a Steelyard's Mills light waggon in the lane. They had carried in something heavy afore I came up. Must have been heavy or bulky, else they needn't have had a waggon."

"It is well to note everybody's proceedings, Alleroo; at that time of night especially. But the Inkle being dealers in ores, the incident suggests nothing. What words passed?"

"Only heard Tom cry 'Rickaby, this is a swindle; return half the money.' To which the other replied, 'Not a cent, Tom; good bye.' Then Inkle called 'I'll have you arrested.' I asked Rickaby as he came into the lane, what was the matter; and he said 'Only Tom Inkle as usual not content with his side of a bargain. Brought him some bank valuables in the waggon; we traded, and now he wants to be off the fair thing. Not likely I'm to stand that.' So he drove away. I had nothing to detain him on, but thought it best to report."

"Quite right, Alleroo. Keep a quiet eye on Inkle's garden door in these times of gold rush. If the diggers be getting nuggets and auriferous quartz at Rama, as reported, we'll soon have thieves, perhaps murderers, coming with it at night to sell in a hurry."

And, while the plain clothes constable and chief held this dialogue, Tom, in his private chambers on upper floor of the bank buildings, continued his monologue:

"If this rush to Rama holds on, and gold be found in plenty, I'm bound to have a large share any way. Shall get this skeleton rigged in my wardrobe closet. Any one opening the room door will also open the closet, by connecting wires and springs, and bring the skeleton into view, hideous and grinning. And there I'm like to keep, at least, one private horde of gold."

"Have done Rickaby nicely! Would have given two thousand dollars for the bones rather than not get them. A skeleton watching the treasure!"

"Guarding the gold for me! How delectable the sound of that precious word! Met a man in the backwoods once with teeth of gold, or golden links holding together his teeth. Never envied a human being but him. How rich, luscious, delicious in the mouth the constant flavour."

"I dote on, gloat on, love, adore the alluring treasure. Oh, the rapture that one in his youth like me, should arrive at the crowning climax in human ascendancy—possession of treasure!"

"I'm almost as hilarious over gold as father. And I've youth on my side to enjoy the luxury of possession through a long life time yet, which he has not."

"So young, and so rich already; and so vastly wealthy as I may be! What hordes to be accumulated, and voluptuous indulgences revelled in! Not a desire, or passion in nature but may be indulged, in broadest luxurious rapture!"

"Sin? What is sin to me? Ethnological science, progress of the age will soon and forever extinguish religion."

"If subjugation of dull old age to opinions of the young be sin in eyes of the old, what of it? The young have got charge of the world now, and are best entitled to judge."

"If the science of a monkey ancestry become false by the time I'm old, and religion be again deemed true, I'll repent, he! he! he! Time enough then. I'm not old yet."

"What superlative natural combination is mine! Mother's luxurious tastes, ambition, enjoyment of power. Father's eager avarice, energy, sagacity, eagle-eyed perception of methods and means. Hard to convince me of descent from ring-tailed apes; but small doubt I'm a relation of the Inkle who sold Yarico to the Barbadian merchant. 'Twould be nice though to believe the monkey lineage; and be sure scripture is false—gives such freedom to a young fellow with gold in hand, and vastly more to be got at. Got at with his mind emancipated from old superstition."

"Splendid idea! If that girl, Anna Liffey, have the secret of knowing where to find rocks of golden ore, and I marry her—my father having already secured the auriferous territory as his and mine, the fortune is princely. It must excel every family revenue hitherto known."

"Will she accept me? Though a girl of science she is said to be also religious."

"Guess I've something in hand sufficient to disgust Miss Liffey with medical students. They say she and Ocean Horn are affianced; the beggarly brat medically educated on charity of Ramasine and his mother. I'll tell her of Rickaby's deception in obtaining her garments to clothe a skeleton. To attire for sport the bones of a young female they possibly murdered. An Ocean Horn may her. Will I dare say this?"

"Failing in that direction, what then? Get her to the bank of Inkle by the garden gate at a late hour on pretence of conferring with father about sale of nuggets. Stain her name. Drive Ocean Horn mad, or get him arrested for something. Must get rid of him, and have Anna Liffey. All of us descended from monkey's, cutest male prevailing, he! he! he!"

During this monologue Inkle junior handled the female attire piece by piece several times; the opera gaiter boots attracting most attention, because of the name read by aid of the lens.

"Agnes Schoolar," he cogitated; "who may she have been? I'll lay those beside the deodorizing charcoal and chloride of lime to be kept a while, and burn the rest; they smell of death. Yet not all, now I think of it. The scarf and cloak and veil smell least; may want them here with the clothes of Anna."

He bundled the dress, shawl, and crinoline into the stove; crumpled old newspapers beside them and looked for a match. It had been disused since winter; the iron funnel and brick flue left unswep. A thing unusual elsewhere on the Inkle premises, for bank and household moved ever as clockwork in order. But the apartments of the young gentleman none interfered with. He forgot the flues, and forgot that his gross of telegraph matches lay in the disused stove.

So he crushed all in, and finding a fusee lighted the paper; closed the stove door; opened the valve for draught in the flue, and the slide to admit air.

It was done. The matches exploded. The soot caught fire in the piping and brick chimney. In consternation, lest of alarm, Tom closed the valve, a right thing; but opened the stove, drawing out the crinoline, a wrong thing. He trod it under foot in the charcoal brought there to deodorize.

Flame and smoke issued from door of the stove. The charcoal caught from the smouldering crinoline, and its wires remained witnesses to whom they might concern. The charcoal glowing fired the floor.

Half suffocated Inkle raised a window for air, and saw a crowd gathering, the fire brigade coming at a gallop with the reeled-up hose on wheels.

The policeman on the beat when seeing first sparks of fire, hastened to the nearest signal box, Forty-Three. Opened it with the key he carried; pulled down the hook and let go.

Instantly the electric mechanism was in action giving the number of the box, within the office of the Town Hall.

Instantly the operator on duty there touched a spring sending the electric pulsations to the different fire divisions, and to the High Church tower, where the bell sounded; as also in the Church tower at St. Elyard's Mills, two miles off.

"One, two, three, four; one, two, three." Those numbers reading as forty-three—Inkle's bank.

In thirty seconds only from the policeman's pull and let go, the vehicles were horsed and reels on the street coming at a gallop. Attached to high pressure hydrants supplied from Rama River Reservoir, the hose, directed by men of skill, extinguished the fire in a few minutes. Small damage done.

Firemen and constables rushing up-stairs carried Tom out. He soon recovered. Constable Alleroo remained in the room after extinction of the fire, and seeing wires of crinoline with tinder attaching, snatched up other articles of feminine dress and took them away.

"Charcoal and chloride of lime," he said to Chief Grynd; "female clothing in a bachelor's room, crushed into a stove to be burned, then withdrawn; this has a meaning."

"Has a connection, you think, with Dicky Rickaby's visit two hours previously?"

"It may turn out so, by watching."

Two days later young Inkle sent the fire brigade a hundred dollars in acknowledgment of promptitude. Then by influence on his mother, she on his father, another hundred were given by Inkle's bank as an institution; and the two items publicly announced in newspapers.

Tom also presented two hundred dollars to the police on express terms that no public report should tell of his generosity. Which gift may have been intended to induce the return of small articles taken away in the confusion. If so it failed to take effect. Policemen of the plain clothes order have a remarkable instinct, the world over, for holding to trifles if associated with mystery. Alleroo repeated his remarks:

"A lady's veil and fancy gaiters found in a bachelor's chambers when on fire, at top of the banking house where no female is supposed to have ever been, except his mother on rare occasions, and Betty scrubbing and doing up, isn't all O. K., to say the least of it."

"They were none of the maid's things," replied the Chief; "I might have thought them his sister's had the young fellow not volunteered a statement. I'd have liked his statement the better if unaccompanied with two hundred dollars. That money we retain intact, sealed up, with the veil, scarf and lady's gaiter boots."

"Do you make out any name, or mark?"

"There had been a name, which some chemical agent has partly obliterated. The microscope may bring it up. Meanwhile mum's the word. To every man in the force, it is mum. Understand?"

Alleroo did not reply in words, but nodded. Mr. Grynd reading in the nodes: 'Understand,' 'mum.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

ARRESTED FOR MURDER OF ANNA LIFFEY.

"If gold ore underlie the soil we cultivate," said Deacon Pearly to his wife, "it is safer there than above ground. Let it lie where thieves cannot break through and steal."

"Yet, William, it might be useful. See how they as have money get their daughters married—Inkle, for instance—and think on our unmarried girls, Willy."

"Our eldest is married, Nancy; and if wealth and position of a son-in-law be an object, where is such another as Samson Steelyard? And if that other wealth be an object, where are moral character and worth excelling his? If, from amidst the hundreds and hundreds of hand-loom weavers who came from Lancashire and settled in Conway County, as the Scotch in Lanark, one Inkle has arisen eminent for greed of gold, and unscrupulous as to means of getting it, aren't all the rest, with small exception, a contented, moral, patiently working people? Steelyard one of them. All covering the face of a goodly land with milk, and butter, and cheese, and wheat. Aiming at rearing families in the ways of honest industry, moral worth and piety?"

"We have four unmarried daughters, William, and two sons; this farm cannot give all the girls a dowry."

"Nancy, they have your comeliness and womanly ways; no small dowry, as I have found, and knew I should find when first I looked on you. When, years ago, I looked from the loom to behold you milking a cow, Nancy, I was much surer that a treasure lay under the muslin cap than I'm sure of gold lying under the ridges of our farm this day. We'll continue to work on as we've heretofore done, and let the land retain the secrets its Maker and ours committed to it, if it have any."

"Anna Liffey, of the school over which you are a trustee, William, is sought by young men of rich families from far and near, since she found the gold on Redwald bottom. And see how Inkle, of Conway, snapt at that land the moment he heard of nuggets found on it; and now he's selling quarter acre claims for sums I dare hardly believe."

"They who buy the lots may be deceived. As yet they are only digging pits, sluice runs, and quarrying stones. As for Anna Liffey, her life's in danger; all sorts of adventurers flock after her. She's resigned the school."

"Other farmers are prospecting for gold, William; why not us as well?"

"Only a few, Nancy. The greater part of our worthy and sensible neighbours are, like as the beautiful crop of wheat now growing, standing upright with heads to heaven. The wheat is our gold. If the other gold be in the rocks under the land, time will tell."

"Time will not tell if you don't look and 'prospect' like other people, Willy."

"Who is that coming riding so fast? Young Tom Inkle, I do think. He is putting in his horse. Nancy, give him no encouragement with the girls. I don't like him."

"But if every one is to be discouraged you don't like, William, what are the girls to do? Tom Inkle is goodly in looks, son of the richest man in the country, and careful of business."

"I don't like him, Nancy."