

JUST IN TIME.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT, AUTHOR OF "JACOB'S WIFE," "UNDER FALSE PRETENCES," &c.

CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile, the boy, maddened, as it seemed, by the sentence, had lost control over himself, and was struggling fiercely with the policeman.

He struck out wildly right and left. It took two strong men to bring him into subjection, and to hold him while the Magistrate addressed a few sharp words to him.

But Dr. Airle turned for the first time to the pew-like enclosure where Mr. Lockhart had been sitting.

"What have they done?" "Done?" said the doctor, coolly. "Why, sent the thief to prison for a couple of months.

"You said you said you could get him off—I can't let him go to prison, when I—when I—"

"When you took the half crown yourself," said the doctor cheerfully. "It is a very odd thing that you should have done it, Gerald; you are not generally a want of money.

"But he boy—the boy who has gone to prison—" "A young jail-bird," replied his precursor, "who has probably been in prison a dozen times before, and he so again.

"You ought to thank me for saving you," he said, at last, "instead of crying like a schoolboy or a baby."

"I did not want any one else to bear the punishment," gawped the lad. "Possibly not, but you did not want either to go to prison, to have your name in the newspapers as a thief, to hear Lord Morven's opinion of your conduct.

"I don't care whether you are sorry or glad," said Glenberrie excitedly. "I say that you have ruined the boy—ruined him, I say—and you know who he was, too. You knew his name and you were glad of it. Lord Morven shall hear

of your interference, sir. You will suffer for it—suffer for it—yet."

"He spoke thus far, with frequent breaks and repetitions in his sentences, which showed the depth and extent of his agitation; then, without listening to the doctor's apologetic phrases, he groped his way with outstretched hands, blind eyes, and shaking hands, to the outer door.

"It's a wonder he got down those steps safe," remarked the inspector. "Poor old gentleman! You'd better follow him, Mackie," he added to one of his subordinates.

"He had to submit to be asked two or three questions, to which he answered with his customary unctuous blandness. Then he also left the police court, and betook himself to his own hotel in George Square, where he was at once ushered into a private room.

"What have they done?" "Done?" said the doctor, coolly. "Why, sent the thief to prison for a couple of months. Do you suppose they could do less?"

"You said you said you could get him off—I can't let him go to prison, when I—when I—"

"When you took the half crown yourself," said the doctor cheerfully. "It is a very odd thing that you should have done it, Gerald; you are not generally a want of money.

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The ponderous words, the elaborate peroration were not lost upon the timid listener. Gerald was impressed, staggered, over awed. Surely Dr. Airle must know best! And it was a great relief to think that his dishonest act need never be known by the brother of whom he was mortally afraid.

"You need not fear," he said smoothly, "that you have done any injury to the lad. I will ascertain the date of his release, and will take pains to put him into a good situation or provide for his welfare in some way."

"Has he no friends? no father nor mother?" asked the boy. "I think not."

"Then," Gerald hazarded the remark rather falteringly, "it may be, after all, a good thing for him?"

"Exactly so. That is the sensible view to take of it. Now give me your word, my dear boy, that you will say nothing more about the matter."

And Gerald promised, humbly enough, to hold his tongue.

Dr. Airle took him back to the Towers in a day or two. He had brought his pupil to Glasgow for a little change and recreations, as well as to see some of the boy's relations resident in that town, and he was secretly a good deal disturbed in mind by the result of his visit.

It was true that Gerald had already more than once betrayed that odd moral weakness, that curious want of distinguishing power between good and evil, which sometimes makes its appearance in members of families that have been virtuously brought up, but he had never hitherto done anything likely to him within danger of the law.

Stephen Airle hungered and thirsted for power over the minds of the men and women with whom he came in contact. He liked to influence their thoughts, and control their motives. He had the same curiosity about their mental processes their secret griefs, joys, and ambitions, as he had with regard to the sciences of which he was a devoted student.

Just as he would willingly torture a living dog or cat in order to demonstrate some scientific truth, so he would lay bare the wounded spirit and probe the shrieking heart of man, or woman who came within his power.

He had no more rancour against the human being than against the dumb animals that he tortured; but the suffering of either was nothing to him compared with his increase a knowledge of quivering nerves and rent heart strings. Knowledge, in his opinion, was power; and power was the only good thing in life which he desired.

error of the prison fortunately; I think I can devise a way."

He devised a way with some success. On the day when Anthony Lockhart was to be set free, Dr. Airle presented himself at the prison with a very long face.

He had found out that a relation of the boy's—a relation on the mother's side—was dying, and wished to see her young cousin immediately. He made such strong representations about this cousin that the Governor, who knew him slightly, authorized the release of the boy—a mighty concession—full fifteen minutes before the rightful hour.

But fifteen minutes were enough for Dr. Airle's piece of work. He was just in time. He got the boy into a cab with him, endured, smilingly, the few bitter sentences with which Anthony assailed him, and then sat him down at the railway station, and offered to pay his fare to any part of the United Kingdom. The boy laughed in his face.

"Do you think I would take a penny from you?" he said. "What will you do, then?" asked the doctor, considering him gravely. "I'll go to London."

"Without a penny?" "Yes." The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Why will you take nothing from me?" he asked.

"Because," said Anthony Lockhart, with a fierce light in his dark eyes, "I owe you too much already. I always pay my debts."

Then he turned away and plunged into the by-ways of the city.

Stephen Airle looked after him with a smile. "The young cock crows loud," he said to himself. "Ah, well! I am not sorry to be rid of him. He is a young ruffian and scamp, I am sure of it. Go to London, will he? Not he! He'll go"—and the doctor pressed his white fingertips together with an air of saucy enjoyment—"he'll go to the devil. And I trust," added Doctor Airle, smiling more sweetly than ever, "I trust that he will be quiet about it."

It was at that moment that old Mr. Lockhart received the news of his grandson's departure with Doctor Airle. The chaplain, who saw the old man, observed that his face changed oddly as he heard where the boy had gone. But he made no remark. He bowed and took his leave. Only when he reached the outer gate did his strength forsake him. He tottered, recovered himself, stumbled again—and fell.

This time there was no doubt as to the gravity of the attack. Mr. Lockhart was carried back to Glenberrie a dying man.

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