

A DETECTIVE VICAR.

By MISS M. E. BRADDOCK.

CHAPTER V.
"RELAY THIS MESSAGE," Mr. Leworthy went back to Kibble & Mr. Umpleby and asked if Mr. Umpleby was the vicar. No, Mr. Umpleby had been a year ago, to return to the boom of his family in Tolington Park.

Reply for the eager vicar, Tolington Park was an adjoining suburb, where those who were citizens of Grandchester who did not like the labor of daily railroad journeys contented themselves with a semi-urban retirement in villas of their own building, amidst shrubberies of their own planting, overlooking the town and most formal of public parks. It had long been a great to the female Umpleby that, where other men-hunters of wealth and standing had gotten mansions or Italian palaces set in richly wooded landscapes, "miles from the smoke of the city, they had only the stony surroundings of a thickly-populated suburb, and were in no wise better off than their next-door neighbors."

A cab with a horse of his own choosing drove Mr. Leworthy to the street limits of Tolington Park in less than half an hour. He found the Umpleby mansion, which was called Mount Lebanon, although the ground on which it stood was as flat as a pancake, and there was not a cedar within a mile. It was a substantial square house, with bay windows, a broad flight of steps, grandiose iron railings, painted dark blue and mounted with gilded plinths, and an all-pervading glare of plate glass windows.

The hall was tessellated, the drawing room was brilliant in color, and painfully new. Here Mr. Leworthy waited for the master of the house, who was a young lady, and began with the man's half a foregone, and he was not a paragon in any family. "I never liked him," mused Mr. Umpleby. "He was the worst of the lot, and he was a very much attached to my gentleman! Rather hard lines for her if she is fond of him, poor child!"

At last Mr. Umpleby appeared, plethoric, ruminant, pompous. "Happy to have the honor of making your acquaintance, vicar," he said. "I have long known you by report. 'Every one in Grandchester does,' answers Leworthy, pleasantly. 'I have been too often in hot water not to be pretty well known.'"

"Impossible to please everybody," murmured Mr. Umpleby. "Precisely, and the man who tries it ends by pleasing no one. I have taken my own course, and though I've made a good many enemies, thank God I've made twice as many friends. Now, Mr. Umpleby, I must ask you to receive me with all good nature, and to believe that I mean well by you and yours, although I have come on a most unpleasant business."

The merchant looked uneasy. Another great firm gone wrong, perhaps a question of a big debt. "Is it a business matter?" he faltered. "No, it is a family matter."

"Oh!" he said, with an air of relief, as if this were of minor importance. "You are going to marry your daughter to-morrow?"

"I am." "To your clerk, Mr. Foy?"

"Yes, sir. It is not the first time that a merchant's daughter has married her father's clerk, I believe, though it is out of the common course of things."

"I am here to beg you to postpone the marriage."

"On what grounds?"

"Before I tell you that, you must give me your promise to communicate nothing I tell you to Mr. Foy."

Mr. Umpleby hesitated. "Mind, it is vital to you, as a father, to know what I have to tell."

Mr. Umpleby gave the required promise. The vicar told his story, beginning with the scene at the railway station, ending with the story he had just narrated.

"Where was that Foy had a sister?"

"I never heard him speak of one."

"Curious that, in your future son-in-law, Mr. Umpleby sat and stared into space like a man bewildered. He wiped his large, bald forehead with the largest and most expensive tissue in his pocket."

"This is a most frightful suspicion," he said, "a young woman poisoned for you seem to think this young woman was poisoned. It is an awful position. Every arrangement has been made for the wedding, as you may suppose—guests invited—some of the best people in Grandchester. My wife and daughter have the highest opinion of young Foy. I may say they are infatuated about him. His conduct in business has been irreproachable. There must be some mistake—some ridiculous misunderstanding."

"I got Foy's address at your own office, and at that address I heard of a sister, of whose existence you are absolutely unaware. Do you think that speaks well for your intended son-in-law?"

"He may have had some powerful reason for concealing her existence. She may be weak in her intellect. She may have gone wrong. As for your idea of slow poisoning, that is too absurd."

"And you mean this young man to marry your daughter to-morrow morning?"

"What am I to do? I never cared about the match. I have been persuaded into giving my consent. My girl has a right to look higher. But to stop the marriage now would be simply prudent. Investigate the case as I have put it before you. If I am deceived—if Foy is not the man who took that dying girl to the railway station—if Foy's sister or a woman who passed as his sister, is not lying dead at Milldale, I will make a humble apology to you and Mr. Foy for my baseless suspicions. You must take your own course. I want to save your daughter from sorrow and disgrace. Remember you have been warned. If Foy is the man I take him to be, the police will be digging his heels to-morrow morning when he goes into the church to marry your daughter. Good-afternoon. I have given you plain facts and I have no time to spare for discussion."

Mr. Umpleby would fain have detained him, but the vicar was in a hurry. He drove back to Grandchester and to the headquarters of the police, to whom he repeated his story. They had been at work all day, and had done very little. They had discovered a porter at the station who remembered the arrival of a gentleman, and a stick lady in a plain dress. They had seen the woman who took charge of the ladies' waiting room, second class—always more friendly than the first class—and from her they had heard again of a sick lady in a plain dress, accompanied by a very attentive gentleman, but she could give no account of the personal appearance of either.

The lady's face was hidden by a veil, and there had been so many people rubbing in and out just as the last that there had been no time for her to observe these two, who came in late. This much she knew, that the lady seemed in a kind of faint or stupor, and the gentleman had to carry her in his arms.

Once furnished with a clear professional intelligence was quite equal to taking it up. This woman at Parminster must be taken to Milldale to identify the body," said the chief official in the detective line, "and we must watch this fellow Foy, so that he may not give us any slip."

"He is to be married to-morrow morning," said the vicar. "To have Grandchester to-morrow would be tantamount to a confession of his guilt. It would be throwing up the cards altogether."

"The symptoms you describe sound like arsenical poisoning," said the officer, and then he and his colleagues whispered together for a minute or so.

"I don't think there's anything more I can do to-night," said the vicar.

No, sir. You may leave everything in our hands."

Precisely. But remember, if you don't want this young woman to be married to a respectable young woman at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning you'll have to look sharp."

The vicar went back to the boom of his family at Freshmead, thinking that he had done a pretty good day's work.

Before ten o'clock that night two facts had been discovered in the biography of Mr. Foy—First, that exactly three years before he had been married at a registrar's office to Jane Dawson, spinster, daughter of John Dawson, master mariner; and secondly, that he or a man exactly answering to his description, had bought small quantities of tartar emetic and small portions of laudanum at diverse times within the last few months, and at several chemist's shops in the obscure streets of the great busy town.

These two discoveries the police communicated to Mr. Umpleby late on the vigil of his daughter's wedding.

The evidence of the marriage was indisputable. Much as Mr. Umpleby was inclined to discredit the charge brought

against his intended son-in-law, he could not disbelieve the legal proof of the marriage before the registrar; and convicted of having concealed a prior marriage, Mr. Foy's character appeared in a new and doubtful light.

"I'll put off the wedding," cried Umpleby, who had spent the evening marching about his house and garden in a state of suppressed agitation. "I won't have my daughter married to a liar and a trickster. There must be something wrong—no smoke without fire."

He sat down directly the detective had left him and wrote with his own hand to those Grandchester magnates who had been bidden to the wedding.

"Let these letters be delivered by hand before eight o'clock to-morrow morning," he said to the respectable man-of-all-work, who had been waiting daintily in a pantry at the back of the hall; "and let this letter be taken to Mr. Foy at the Crown Hotel."

Foy was to stop at a hotel in Grandchester on the eve of his wedding, in order to be on the ground early.

Mr. Umpleby felt a happier man after he had done this deed. He went up to bed more at ease with himself. But he did not awaken his slumbering wife to tell her the unpleasant news. There would be a scene in the morning, of course, with all these women—bystanders, faintly veiled, and in which he, the husband and father, would get the worst of it.

Mr. Umpleby's lavender moire-antique, her brand-new Honiton shawl, were lying in state upon the sofa. Would any woman give a husband for upsetting the festival at which these splendors were to be worn? Would she have been so foolish as to go about the breakfast, about every one of the wedding arrangements, and now, to behold, she had been left for nothing!

"I never liked him," mused Mr. Umpleby. "I was the worst of the lot, and he was a very much attached to my gentleman! Rather hard lines for her if she is fond of him, poor child!"

The father was up before ten, too agitated to eat his breakfast. He carried his cup of tea to the study at the back of the dining room, and paced that snug apartment, waiting for Mr. Foy. Upstairs there was wild excitement among the feminine party of the household, rushings and hurrys from room to room—spectral figures in long, white night and flowing hair, crimson slippers, looking and crying. Here on the ground floor there was an awful quietude. A critical trial—the crowded court, every creature in it believing him, George Canfield, the murderer of a helpless girl. He saw the chain of circumstantial evidence lengthening out link by link, and he could have no power to sunder those links. His lips were sealed.

He saw involuntarily there broke from his lips a cry of anguish:

"He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and a shew before his shearer, and he knows not so he openeth not his mouth."

He had spent a feverish night, given half to wakefulness, half to dreaming. He had risen and dressed himself as soon as his weight, and now he was sitting at his desk, writing a message, some word of hope. It was only two days from the time of his wedding, and he had left him, yet it seemed ages.

He was not that the cheery voice he heard so well, the full vibration of tones that came from powerful lungs, the clear utterance of a man accustomed to address multitudes. Yes, it was Leworthy's voice. He sat with his hands clutched the edge of his pillow, profoundly agitated, while the deepening twilight turned to night, and the heavy cell of the prison slowly blacked.

The vicar rushed into the cell and grasped his hand and laid his lips to his forehead in loving benediction.

"Good-bye, my dear boy! You will not have long to stay in this wretched hole. The man who brought that poor creature to the station is now being taken to the prison. He will be a post-mortem to-day, the inquest will be held on Monday morning on Wednesday next, and the evidence then produced will prove his guilt and your innocence."

"Thank God!" ejaculated George Canfield, and that said he fell on his knees before the prison bed and poured out the rapture of his soul in prayer and thanksgiving.

When he had finished his prayer he sat down quietly beside his friend to work, and he had not long to wait before he was completely he had succeeded.

"Up to last night the evidence against my friend was only speculative," he said, "but now he has been identified with the photograph at Parminster; but last night the police conducted him to a focus. One having got a clue, they worked marvellously well. They got hold of your sister's present containing a few words will do. Thus I am anxious about my sister—please let me know how she is this morning. Answer me! The reply can come here. Why do you hesitate?"

"Because your request implies suspicion. I shall send no such telegram. Why should you drag my poor suffering sister into this day's business? I have told you the truth, at least for to-day."

"No, Mr. Foy. I want to have positive proof that your account of this young woman is a true one. I want to know that she is alive and in safe hands, and I have settled that question I shall have to ask you another."

The benefic spots had intensified on the young man's cheeks, leaving the rest of his face livid. He wiped his aching lips with his handkerchief.

"What question?"

"I shall have to ask you about your wife, and when and how you became a widower. What have you done with the young woman, Jane Dawson, whom you must have met long ago at the registry office in St. Swinburn Street? Was she an imbecile, too? Were you compelled to conceal her existence?"

"There is some mistake," said Foy, recovering his resolute tone, but not his natural color. "I have never married in my life."

"I have been shown a copy of the registry of your marriages on the marriage of a man calling himself George Foy, clerk of Grandchester. The name is not a common one. Come, Mr. Foy, we needn't prolong this argument. I never liked the notion of your marrying my daughter, though I submitted to it to please my womanhood; but last night I made up my mind you should not marry her, and now, she is dead, and there's the door. I wish you a very good morning!"

"And now, my friend, there's the door!"

"Not so strange as your own conduct!"

George Foy took up his hat from the table and left the room without a word. He was meditating what he should do with himself the next hour. He was speculating whether he should have one hour free in which to extricate himself from a desperate predicament—whether he was not so hemmed round and beset with danger as to make all movement on his part full of peril. He walked slowly out of the house, down the broad flight of steps, and just outside the iron gate of the garden a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"I arrest you on suspicion of murder," said a voice, and George Foy knew that his case was run.

CHAPTER VI.
BROUGHT TO A POSTER.

The day had seemed long to the prisoner in Milldale jail, although he was cheered by the society of his next-door neighbor, the time authorities allowed in her son's gloomy apartment. It was a sight to see

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the brave-hearted old lady sitting opposite her son knitting a cover-pleat of soft blue-land wool, and preoccupied about the comfortable and as much at her ease as if she were in her pretty drawing room at South Kensington. Not by so much as a quiver of her lip would she allow herself to betray her anxiety. Her face, which had been so pale and so contracted to smile, and kept up a cheerful flow of small talk about the past and future of the school, and the school choir.

But even with this consoling company the dark winter day had seemed long to George Canfield. He was feverishly expectant of news from Grandchester, and he was sure to come to find that his friend, his lawyer, and the police had all failed in their efforts to discover the whereabouts of the girl. And if the worst came to pass, if the dreary winter night, when imagination, excited by strange circumstances and strange surroundings, conjured up the horrors of a criminal trial—the crowded court, every creature in it believing him, George Canfield, the murderer of a helpless girl. He saw the chain of circumstantial evidence lengthening out link by link, and he could have no power to sunder those links. His lips were sealed.

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Legal Notices.

NOTICE.

All unsettled accounts due the undersigned, please settle before the 1st October next, will be used for without any further notice.

Negus N. B. August 14th 1888.

Caution & Notice

I hereby caution any and all persons against giving employment to my son, James Wall, a minor, without first making arrangements with me in reference thereto, as I shall hold them responsible for any loss he may incur. And I further give notice that I will not be responsible for any debts contracted by the said James Wall.

CHATHAM July 28th 1888

CIRCULAR.