



BY McDONNELL BODKIN

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Concluded.)

"MEANWHILE?" insinuated the solicitor.

"Meanwhile you will do what is necessary to defend the action."

"That is very simple, my lord. We have merely to rely on your lordship's possession. It is for the young lady to prove her case."

"Which she is hardly likely to do," said his lordship. "Good-day."

But his lordship was not by any means as unconcerned as he led his solicitor to believe. He had no doubt indeed of Abdallah's efficiency. He had no fear that Sybil would proceed with her action. But he was vexed that Abdallah's action had been anticipated by the writ. It would have been more satisfactory, far more satisfactory, if the girl had died before the action had begun. This thought worried him as he whirled home in his motor, and it worried him now as he paced slowly up and down his sitting-room waiting for lunch.

He was unreasonably angry with Abdallah that he had not done his work more promptly. The Indian, he knew, had to follow the girl and the man to Rome. Once in Rome there was no excuse for this delay. Every day his lordship had been expecting a wire with a single word to tell him the work was done. Abdallah was now nearly a week in Rome, and there was still no news.

"Curse him," growled Sternholt. "Curse him for a sloven!"

Life is made up of coincidences. Even as the words were spoken the door opened softly and Abdallah walked into the room. There was no outward change in the man. He was as softly moving, and as impassive as ever. The perfect servant came back to his duties.

Lord Sternholt stared at his sudden entry as if he had seen a devil. But before Abdallah could set the luncheon tray he carried on the table, his lordship found his voice.

"When did you arrive?"

"Half an hour ago, sahib."

"Why don't you wire? Put those things down anywhere, and lock the door. Why didn't you wire?"

"Because I had nothing to tell, sahib."

"Nothing to tell! Do you mean to say you have failed, that you have dared to come back and tell me you have failed!"

"I have failed."

Lord Sternholt glared at him. "You have failed, go on, tell me."

Then the Indian quietly told his story. How he had found Hugh Limner in Rome, how he had tracked him to the hotel, and how, at last, beaten and baffled, he had fled from the hotel at his command.

Lord Sternholt, leaning far back in his chair, his hands tight gripped on his arms, heard him through with ominous patience.

"So the fellow kicked you out like the cur you are," he said, savagely, "and you licked his foot."

"It was fate," said the Indian; "there is no escape from fate."

"You cursed coward! Why didn't you strangle him there and then when the fool released you?" He jumped from his chair and began pacing the room again rapidly, as was his custom when excited.

After two or three efforts he gulped down his wrath and steadied his voice.

"Well, well, you should not have left Rome, Abdallah, until your work was

done. It is now more urgent than ever you must return at once to-night."

The Indian shook his head.

"What cursed folly is this? I tell you, man, you must!"

"It is useless, sahib, the man is not to be slain by me, nor the girl. It is fate."

"Why, you superstitious fool and coward," cried Lord Sternholt, leaping from his seat and facing him, his eyes blazing and the veins on his forehead swelling and darkening. "Do you mean to say you refuse to go?"

The Indian nodded without speaking.

Thereupon the black passion in Lord Sternholt's heart broke loose. Without a word of warning he struck Abdallah a savage blow on the cheek. The signet ring on his little finger gashed the flesh and the blood trickled from the wound, staining the Indian's white robe with streaks and blotches of red.

But he made no motion to avenge or save himself. Recovering from the fierce impetus of the blow he stood stock still, staring with a strange light in his eyes at Lord Sternholt, who heaped curses on him in a very frenzy of rage. For a moment it seemed as if he would strike again, but he wrestled with his rage and mastered it.

"Begone," he whispered, hoarsely, "you ungrateful, cowardly dog, before I murder you! There is a better way to deal with you. You shall hang, you shall hang."

Then without a word, Abdallah turned from him and left the room.

Next morning all London was startled by the news that Lord Sternholt had been found strangled in his bed. A scarf of fine silk, purple, green and orange, like a brilliant snake, was tightened round his throat. There was no sign of a struggle; no motive could be assigned. The jewels and loose money undisturbed on his dressing-table precluded the notion of robbery. For no one but Abdallah knew that his lordship kept a large sum in gold in a private drawer.

The faithful Abdallah was much affected by the death of his master, whom he had served so long, but he gave his evidence impassively at the inquest, and when the jury found a verdict of suicide during a fit of temporary insanity, the news of the ejectment action, which had already been noised about London, suggested an all-sufficient motive.

There was much sympathy for Abdallah at the inquest, and he had many offers of service elsewhere. He preferred, however, to return to his own country, and when about a year later the news came from a remote Indian station of a thug shot dead by an Irish major, whom he attempted to strangle, no one, of course, dreamt of connecting the incident with Lord Sternholt's sedate serving man, Abdallah.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Wedding Gift.

"BUT why are you going?" Sybil repeated.

She had asked the same question a few moments before, and he had answered her, but it would seem the answer was not quite satisfactory.

Six months after Lord Sternholt's suicide, Hugh had come to say good-bye to Sybil, who had been peaceably established as the owner of Sternholt Towers. Now, though the two had been more than an hour alone together

in the picture gallery the good-bye was not yet over.

Never, he thought, had she looked so beautiful, dressed in a soft grey dress with a belt of scarlet ribbon, and a little ruffle of grey and scarlet at her neck. On her breast gleamed the diamond star of the Sternholts and two great opals—her favourite stone—trembled at her ears and changed and glimmered like dewdrops in the sunlight. The bright gold of her hair, the warm loveliness of her face, were set off by the frail, neutral tint of her dress and the lustre of the jewels.

The dark crimson couch on which she sat faced the famous Velasquez, which now hung conspicuous, challenging sunshine. Leaning against the wall, uncovered, but not yet hung, was the wonderful Turner, a vision of rural loveliness, stolen from nature, preserved and perpetuated by the genius of the painter.

SYBIL was calm and smiling. Hugh painfully disturbed. Her twice repeated question seemed to trouble him. He fidgeted with his watch, chain and seal, before he answered, slowly choosing his words carefully as a public speaker answers an inconvenient heckler.

"Why must I go? Well, Sybil, because I must. I have already stagnated too long in London. There are scores of great picture galleries I have never seen. I have had news from an agent of two wonderful finds. One of them, I fancy, is a genuine Fra Angelico, which I must try and smuggle out of Italy. In a year or so I hope to be back again in London. It is pleasant to leave you happy behind me. You like your new life?"

"Wonderfully well, wealth gives me power and freedom. This place is lovely. I seem to have known it from a child; to have seen it in my dreams. There is a stream down there at the back of the trees with a sudden bend and a nook carpeted with wild flowers that I knew when I first saw it as well as I knew the little river in Connemara, where we used to fish together in the dear old days. It is very pleasant, Hugh, to be rich and powerful; to enjoy oneself and help others to enjoyment. And for this I have you to thank. Oh, I am very, very happy here, but—" she added in a lower voice, "I am sometimes a little lonely."

"You have your mother."

"Mother is not happy here. My father was right. I suppose some instinct of love taught him. She does not like the role of a great lady. She wants to get back to Connemara."

"I can understand that. I would like myself to visit the old place again."

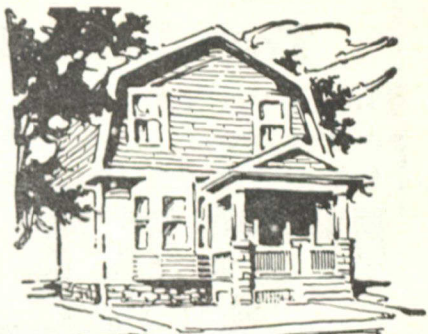
"Could we not visit it together?"

She asked the question quite innocently. But her eyelids drooped before the light that kindled in his eyes, and she asked hastily, "Why did you bring me that picture?"

"Because I always meant it for you. Because you alone can appreciate it as it deserves. Because I hope it will sometimes remind you pleasantly of me."

"You said once, I remember, that you would only give it to me as a wedding present. I'm not married, nor engaged to be married."

"Well, I am only anticipating a little. The beautiful heiress of Sternholt Towers will have many suitors. I shall not be here to give the picture when you have made your choice."



A BEAUTIFUL HOME

is now possible at one-third less cost than ever before.

SOVEREIGN...
Readi-cut

Not Portable... HOMES

mark a new era in house-building—a new economy for home-builders—because we have eliminated every cost that adds no value. We buy our raw materials in enormous quantities, cheaply, we cut it without waste, and ship it to you in shape to erect without much or costly labor.

Sovereign homes, when erected, are comfortable, cosy and beautiful. They are designed by clever architects and nothing but the best of materials enters into them. They are NOT portable houses.

Our booklet No. F describes and illustrates 100 beautiful homes and tells more about the Sovereign system. Write for it.

SOVEREIGN CONSTRUCTION CO., LIMITED

1317 C.P.R. Bldg., Toronto

G.H. MUMM & CO.

By ROYAL WARRANT



TO HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V.

CHAMPAGNE

College re-opens after the Easter vacation on Monday, April 20th.

Alma (Ladies) College

A few new students can be received for selected studies. Spring or Commencement term is especially interesting.

Robert I. Warner, M.A., D.D.,
St. Thomas, - - - Ont.

Luxfer Prisms

throw natural light into dark rooms, thus adding to the beauty of interiors and materially reducing the cost of artificial illumination. For stores, public buildings, dwellings, etc. Let us figure with you on the installation you require.

The Luxfer Prism Company Limited

100 King St. W., Toronto, Ont.