

## AGONY POINT.

BY TOM BROWN.

He sat in the elegant gilded saloon  
Where the élite of beauty and fashion were  
found;  
But no more care he than the man in the moon  
For the charms and the grace which encom-  
passed him round.

All around him bright faces their happiness  
showed  
When music arose with its rapturous strain;  
But no sign of pleasure on his features glowed,  
In fact they seemed rather expressive of pain.

And one sang a song which enchanted all ears,  
But sad thoughts in him were inspired by the  
strain,  
For his eyes seemed as if they were bursting  
with tears  
To lighten the anguish that burned his brain.

His lips were compressed, his glances were  
strange,  
His hand he oft nervously pressed to his side;  
But no matter now often his features may  
change,  
They told always of agony struggling with  
pride.

His friends saw his trouble, and one, making  
bold,  
Demanded the cause of his evident grief:  
"Alas!" said the sufferer, "I've got a bad cold  
And I find I've forgotten my handkerchief."

## TWO SCENES IN A LIFE.

BY ASTLEY H. BALDWIN.

## CHAPTER I.

## SCENE I.

Two young men were sitting in one of a suite  
of very handsomely-furnished apartments in  
Jermyn street.

It was the commencement of the London  
"season;" that is to say, the month of April,  
and about half-past seven o'clock in the evening.  
The companions, having just finished a  
luxurious meal, were lazily sipping their after-  
dinner wine.

Take a glance at them. The first—Philip  
Ritson—was a handsome, but austere-looking  
man, of about eight-and-twenty, with exceed-  
ingly brilliant black eyes and a deep olive com-  
plexion. The expression of his features was  
melancholy, and, together with his somewhat  
weird beauty, reminded one irresistibly at times  
of a fallen angel.

The second young man—Henry (or, as his  
friends called him, Harry) Annesley—was of an  
entirely different style. He was about twenty-  
five, tall and well-knit, and had the blue-grey  
eyes, curling brown hair, and white teeth of a  
thorough Saxon. Both young men possessed  
ample and independent incomes.

The dining-parlor in which they sat (the  
chambers were young Annesley's) was well, but  
not meretriciously furnished. All its appoint-  
ments were in excellent taste. There were none  
of those showy, but indecent French prints  
which disfigure the walls of so many young  
men's chambers. There was not a solitary  
popular dancer, a prize-fighter, nor even a  
Derby winner. In their place were a few water-  
color landscapes; two portraits—the one by Sir  
Joshua Reynolds, the other by Greuze; a  
country-scene by Gainsborough, and one or  
two of Sir Edwin Landseer's gems of animal  
life. A stand or two of Capeheaths and Camellia-  
japonicas occupied the windows; and dispersed  
about the room were a few white marble statu-  
ettes, including models of Hiram Power's  
"Greek Slave," a Wyatt, a Gibson, and a Ben-  
venuto Cellini.

There was a small fire in the grate, for the  
season was chilly, and Ritson sat with his boots  
on the marble chimney-piece, moodily looking  
into the embers, and puffing at a choice Ha-  
vanna. Annesley, on the other hand, was not  
smoking, but abstractedly twisting his watch-  
chain, and regarding his friend at intervals  
with a somewhat puzzled expression on his  
comely, good-humored face.

"What! all in the downs, old man?" he said  
at length. "Fill your glass. Here you are;  
white wine and red: Amontillado sherry, white  
Hermitage, Château Lafitte, Clos Vougeot, Bra  
Mouton, all of the best brands! Come; what  
are you moping about?"

"My wife!" said the other, abruptly.  
"Your wife! Good gracious!" and the sunny-  
natured Harry Annesley relapsed into thought-  
ful silence. He was too delicate and well-bred  
to push the matter further.

"Ha!" exclaimed Ritson, with a harsh laugh.  
"So you didn't know I was married, old boy?  
Few people do. I have hugged my chains in  
secret. Old story of the Spartan boy and fox,  
you know?" Then he took from his pocket one  
of a beautiful little brace of pistols, which he  
always carried with him.

Harry Annesley moved uneasily in his chair.  
"I wish you would give up that fashion of car-  
rying fire-arms, Phil," he said; "it is so  
thoroughly un-English."

"May be so," said Ritson; "but I'm half a  
Neapolitan, you know. I passed half my life in  
Naples: my mother was a Neapolitan; and, he

added, defiantly, "I married a Neapolitan girl."

Annesley looked up, involuntarily.

"Yes," continued Ritson; "and Rita was as  
beautiful as the night in a robe of stars. You  
know Byron's lines, 'She walks in beauty, like  
the night,' &c. Those lines exactly describe  
Rita."

"Is she dead?" asked Annesley, breathlessly.

"Dead! No. Would she were!"

"My dear fellow!" remonstrated Harry An-  
nesley.

"Ah! it's very well to say that," returned  
Ritson, gloomily. "But you don't know what  
it is to have a beautiful wife made love to by a  
parcel of fellows: I couldn't stand it; and so—  
so, she left me."

"You don't mean to say?" interrupted An-  
nesley.

"That there was anything positively wrong?"  
said Ritson, sharply. "No; I don't mean to  
say that. My perpetual jealousy wore her out,  
and she left me—alone, I believe. Yes; I think  
Rita is stainless."

"Ah!"

"Incompatibility of temper," I suppose the  
judge of a Divorce Court would term our ground  
of separation," continued Philip Ritson, with a  
bitter sneer. "I have nothing to say against  
my wife's morality. I don't allow her a penny,  
for the very simple reason that I don't know  
where she is. From the day she left me, in  
Florence, nearly two years ago, I have never  
heard a syllable of her."

"Advertise," said Annesley, briefly.

"To what purpose? She would not return,  
even if I wished it; and I don't. I can't live  
with a woman who courts admiration from  
every man who approaches her—who is a born  
coquette, as most Southern women are. I should  
end by murdering her! No! Better as it is!"

Annesley, who immediately came to the con-  
clusion that his friend's mind was diseased from  
causeless jealousy—that he was a monomaniac  
on this point, in fact—thought it best to drop  
the subject. He said, soothingly, "Well, my  
dear Phil, we'll hope that 'all will be well that  
ends well,' and that I shall yet live to see you  
a happy Benedict, not to say a paterfamilias."

Ritson shook his head, and tapped his foot  
impatiently on the thick-piled Turkey carpet,  
but said nothing.

"So, now," continued Annesley, smilingly, "as  
it's night, or nearly so, let us stroll down the  
central avenue of Covent Garden, buy a bouquet,  
and then on to the Opera House, to assist at the  
début of the new singer: that was our programme,  
you know. Come, stir your stumps, and light  
another cigar."

Ritson's face brightened momentarily. If he  
had a passion besides that for his absent wife,  
it was for music. So he rose with some alacrity,  
lighted another cigar, and drank off the remains  
of his glass of Clos Vougeot. Then this strange  
man examined his little pair of pistols.

"By Jove!" thought Harry Annesley, "I really  
must coax him out of that nonsense, or one of  
these days he will be doing some one a mis-  
chief, in one of his sombre fits. Upon my  
word, he looks at times like Mephistopheles, or  
Cagliostro, or the Stranger, or some of those  
mysterious worthies." Then he said aloud,  
"My dear Phil, do be persuaded to lay aside  
those nasty little barkers."

"So far from being nasty, they are exquisite-  
ly beautiful," said Ritson, coolly.

They certainly were so; for, though small,  
they were of choice workmanship, and splen-  
didly ornamented and mounted.

"With a bullet scarcely larger than a pea,"  
continued Ritson, "I could kill a man at seventy  
paces." He smiled sardonically.

"Good heavens! my dear fellow, don't look  
like that!" exclaimed Annesley. "One would  
fancy that you were going to fight a duel, rat-  
her than to witness the début of a beautiful and  
accomplished actress."

"How do you know that she is beautiful and  
accomplished?"

"Oh, pooh! all opera-singers—that is, lady  
opera-singers—are supposed to be beautiful and  
accomplished. Besides, have we not heard of  
this Mademoiselle Ritornelli, up-hill and down-  
dale, for the last month? Haven't we been  
inundated with extracts from continental news-  
papers, chronicling her triumphant successes  
before half the crowned heads of Europe?—*vide*  
posters."

Ritson quietly returned his pistols to a small  
belt concealed beneath his waistcoat: "I am  
ready," he said, with a smile—actually a smile.

"But Phil, really now," remonstrated An-  
nesley, "if one of those little pistol should go  
off, accidentally? Fellows don't go to the  
Opera, nowadays, in this melodramatic, brigand-  
ish fashion."

Ritson quickly resealed himself: "Very  
good," he said, coolly; "as you please; if you  
don't choose to accompany me, I can go alone."

"I'd better humor him," thought Annesley;  
"it's a mania, certainly, and not a pleasant one;  
but I daresay no harm will come of it. No one  
will know of it, if only those little brutes of  
poppers don't go off of their own accord, as ar-  
ticles of that sort have an unpleasant habit of  
doing." So he took his friend's arm, and said,  
"Well, come along, old boy: I'm glad at least  
you have uncocked those abominations; so I  
suppose I must indulge your whim, and refrain  
from handing you over to the police when we  
reach Bow street."

The young men strolled out, arm-in-arm, and  
crossing the Hay-market, and St. Martin's Lane,  
turned into the central avenue of Covent Gar-  
den Market.

Every one knows what that delicious lounge  
is in the London season. The most beautiful of  
floral productions delight the eye; the most

delicious perfumes, from both fruits and flowers,  
assail the senses. Groups of superb bouquets,  
of camellias, azaleas, myosotis, violets, orange-  
flowers and geraniums, tastefully arranged in  
colored glasses, give to the arcade the appear-  
ance of one vast conservatory. Rhododendrons,  
azaleas, and flowering shrubs at the western  
entrance to the avenue, form a floral screen-  
work to the treasures within. There we have  
colossal pines, leviathan grapes, and Broddig-  
nagian peaches; there are a few strawberries,  
in small "cornichons" marked at fabulous  
prices. Tamarinds and bananas from the West  
Indies lie side-by-side with the shaddock and  
the guava. Shelled peas, almost worth their  
weight in gold, are flanked by baskets of snowy  
sea-kale and pink-tipped asparagus: punnets  
of early potatoes nestle close to foamy-headed  
cauliflowers; and small bundles of French beans  
(containing each some fifteen pods, and marked  
"Only 4s. the bundle,") combine to make up a  
show of luxury, to obtain which the four quar-  
ters of the globe have paid tribute, and to con-  
stitute the attractions of a promenade in which  
Lucullus himself might have taken delight.

Ritson and young Annesley stopped at Solo-  
mon's to purchase a superb bouquet (Harry  
remarking that it was the duty of the *jeunesse*  
*dorée* of England to encourage a foreigner and a  
*débutante*), and proceeding to the Covent Garden  
Opera House, took their seats in their stalls—  
both young men being regular subscribers.

The beautiful horse-shoe-shaped theatre was  
already crowded to repletion with as much of  
the rank, fashion, beauty, and wealth of the  
metropolis as could by any possibility be  
crammed into it. Silks rustled, velvets and  
satins shimmered, diamonds glittered, and fea-  
thers waved. The atmosphere was almost op-  
pressive with the scent of the costly bouquets  
and the still more powerful perfumes used by  
the fair owners of them. There were collected  
all the celebrities of the bar, the senate, the  
army and navy, the leaders of fashion. The  
millionaire *parvenu* was side-by-side with the  
noble of a hundred descents. The very essence  
of the intellectual, territorial, and monied  
powers of the mightiest capital in the world  
was collected within the walls of that splendid  
temple of the lyric drama. An eager, yet sub-  
dued buzz of anticipation pervaded the house.  
To the *habitués* of the Opera, who have to wit-  
ness the same rôles, filled by the same singers,  
season after season, the *début* of an artiste with  
a great continental reputation, but as yet un-  
heard in this country, is always pregnant with  
interest.

The opera was "Lucrezia Borgia," the part  
of the haughty, but meretricious Grand Duchess  
of Ferrara being, of course, played by the  
*débutante*. It is needless to describe the  
phases of this operatic rôle. Scenes similar  
have been so often described in print that they  
become stale by repetition. Mademoiselle Rit-  
ornelli met with the usual indulgent reception ac-  
corded to a prima donna; but as her genius  
made itself felt by the house, the enthusiasm  
rose with each succeeding scene until, when the  
guilty Duchess (after discovering her latest lover  
to be no other than her own son) sinks beneath  
the weight of her remorse, it culminated in a  
storm of applause, a shower of bouquets, and  
the customary calls and recalls before the cur-  
tain. It was like one of the ovations always  
awarded to the incomparable Grisi.

Before the actress, laden with her floral tro-  
phies, had made her final courtesy to the  
audience, Harry Annesley turned to his com-  
panion. "A splendid performance!" he re-  
marked.

But he was astonished at the deadly pallor  
which had overspread the features of his friend,  
who with one hand clutched convulsively the  
arm of his stall, and with the other crushed the  
bouquet he had brought for the new singer,  
until its costly petals showered, bruised and  
broken to the ground.

"Are you ill, Phillip?" inquired young An-  
nesley.

"Let us go!" said Ritson, in a hoarse voice.  
"Let us go round to the stage-door. Come!"  
And he rose.

"To the stage-door!" exclaimed Harry. "What  
for? Besides, I want to see the ballet."

But Ritson had already almost reached the  
last of the row of stalls; and Annesley, with some  
curiosity, a little vexation, and still more anxiety,  
mechanically followed him.

There was a small crowd, collected round the  
stage-door, to see the new opera-singer depart.  
Her carriage was already in waiting.

Presently a slight stir was heard, and Made-  
moiselle Ritornelli, escorted by the manager,  
made her appearance. Annesley felt his friend  
tremble violently. The steps of the carriage  
were rapidly let down by the footman, and the  
prima donna's foot was actually on them, when  
there was a flash, and exclamation, and the sud-  
den report of a pistol; and the actress sank back,  
fainting, in the arms of the manager.

"Seize him! seize the murderer!" cried the  
excited crowd. And a dozen gentlemen rushed  
forward to secure Ritson, for it was he who had  
fired one of his little pistols. But he slipped  
from the grasp of his would-be custodians, and  
fell forward heavily on the pavement.

All this while Harry Annesley stood like one  
paralysed, and in speechless horror.

A surgeon in the crowd was meanwhile  
anxiously examining the insensible opera-singer.  
"She is not dead," he said: "only in a swoon;  
her arm is broken—nothing more."

A faint cheer arose at this as the actress was  
lifted into her carriage, accompanied by the sur-  
geon, who had spoken, and driven rapidly away.  
Then the crowd rapidly turned their attention  
to the unfortunate Phillip Ritson, the would-be

assassin; and he was raised from the pavement.

There was no need to give him into custody  
now. The sudden exit from a heated theatre  
into the chill night air, acting on an excited and  
diseased brain, had produced apoplexy.

Phillip Ritson was dead.

## SCENE II.

The affair was a nine days' wonder, of course;  
especially when it was known that the new  
prima donna was not in reality Mademoiselle  
Ritornelli, but Mrs. Ritson, and that her own  
husband had attempted her assassination.

Then Mrs. Ritson retired from the stage (she  
had already realised a fair income by her efforts  
on the Continent); and the recollection of the  
tragedy died out of the minds of the ever-chang-  
ing public, to give way to some newer sensa-  
tion.

Four or five months had elapsed, and it was  
the close of an unusually sultry August. All  
London was, of course, to use a conventional  
phrase, "out of town;" and amongst others,  
Henry Annesley. He was on a fishing excur-  
sion in the midland counties, the banks of the  
lovely little river Dove being his temporary  
resting-place.

The weather, as remarked, was unusually  
sultry; too much so, in fact, for either grayling  
or trout to rise well; but Annesley was in-  
defatigable at his sport, and was out early and  
late. His friend's sudden death had been a  
shock to him; but youth is buoyant, and speedily  
shakes off melancholy impressions. Besides,  
Phillip Ritson and Henry Annesley had not been  
dear friends. Their regard was not of that sort  
which lasts a lifetime, and which, once lost,  
cannot be replaced. It was rather the mutual  
liking of young men thrown together, by the  
force of circumstances, in the daily whirlpool of  
London life.

It was a magnificent afternoon. There was  
not a ripple on the little river, not a cloud in  
the blue sky, not a rustle of grass or fern. The  
Dove trickled its way gently through the boul-  
ders which here and there oppose its course, and  
which form so prominent and picturesque a  
feature in the scenery of this river. To fish,  
with such a bright sun glaring on the water,  
was simply impossible. So Annesley lay quietly,  
at his full length, in the shadow of some huge  
boulders, half hidden in fern and grass, and oc-  
cupied himself with the perusal of a small  
volume of Victor Hugo's he chanced to have in  
his pocket.

At this point of the river it had collected itself  
into two or three calm, still, dark-looking pools,  
as it frequently does, on its onward progress.  
The boulders which intercepted the river's  
course formed a sort of natural dam or weir,  
through which small rivulets trickled down,  
and, falling with a pleasant, murmurous gurgle,  
again joined the main stream.

It was as peaceful and picturesque a spot as  
is to be found in the whole of Derbyshire; and  
Annesley, who had all the elements of a true  
poet in his nature, thoroughly enjoyed the con-  
templation of it. The book he was reading was  
not, it is true, calculated to induce a placid state  
of mind. It was the famous work, "Les Tra-  
vailleurs de la Mer," by the greatest of French  
romance writers; and the part of it to which  
Annesley had come was the horrible chapter  
describing Gilliat's struggle with the sea-  
monster, the "Medusa" of naturalists; and his  
discovery of the skeleton of Clavin, a victim to  
the same horrible vampire. Annesley shud-  
dered as he read; and at last, throwing aside  
the volume, looked impatiently at the sky.  
"Not a cloud," he muttered; "but a good two  
hours before the trout will begin to rise.  
Heigho!" Then he arose, and looked round  
him.

At a distance of a little less than a quarter of a  
mile he observed two ladies following the course  
of the river, and advancing in his direction.  
They had been sketching, but, apparently, find-  
ing the work too arduous under so hot a sun,  
had taken up their camp-stools, and were sun-  
bathing along the river-bank. There is nothing  
especially remarkable in the fact of lady-  
tourists sketching on the banks of so beautiful  
a river. But yet young Harry Annesley—he  
knew not why—watched their progress in his  
direction with more than common interest. As  
they approached sufficiently close for him to  
discriminate between them, he perceived the  
younger, but taller of the two, was habited in  
widow's weeds, whilst her companion—much  
older, and of a short, squat, matronly figure—  
appeared to be a sort of duenna; possibly an  
elderly aunt, or other female relative. The  
good lady probably had a *penchant* for botany,  
for she was rather excitedly pointing out to her  
companion an aquatic plant, which the younger  
was vainly endeavoring to reach with the carved  
handle of her parasol.

Harry Annesley advanced, of course, as any  
gentleman would on such an occasion. "Can I  
be of any service to you, ladies?" he inquired,  
politely raising his hat as he spoke. The  
younger lady looked up at the sound of his low,  
melodious voice, and regarded him flushed and  
handsome face with evident interest. The elder  
lady was profuse in her thanks.

Annesley's pulse throbbed, and his heart beat  
quicker; for in that momentary glance of the  
lady in the widow's garb he had at once re-  
cognised the fascinating *ci-devant* opera-singer,  
Mademoiselle Ritornelli, otherwise Mrs. Ritson.  
Too seldom had she been out of the young  
man's thoughts since the night of the eventful  
tragedy at the stage-door of Covent Garden  
Theatre.