

starring tour in the principal theatres of the provinces, which was attended with the most gratifying success. Crowded audiences assembled to witness his impersonations, and his benefits in the Theatres Royal, Birmingham and Dublin, attracted the largest audiences ever assembled in those vast temples of the drama.

In Dublin Mr. King was seized with a lingering and dangerous illness, and for some months was incapacitated from pursuing his profession. When at length he recovered, and reappeared on the stage of the Theatre Royal, he was welcomed by an enormous audience. The *deuts* of the Irish capital crowded the boxes, and the pit and galleries were densely crammed.

He then fulfilled a series of starring engagements in England, Ireland, and Scotland, at the end of which he accepted an offer of a three years' engagement from Mr. F. B. Chatterton, and appeared at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in October, 1868. He made his reappearance in the metropolis in the character of Cardinal Richelieu, and achieved a remarkable success. This impersonation was succeeded by "Hamlet," "Othello," "Macbeth," "William Tell," and other of his chief roles. His finished and artistic embodiments stamped him as the greatest Shakespearian actor of the day. The *Times*, in a criticism on his performances at Drury Lane, says: "Now in the zenith of his matured powers, Mr. King stands alone in his portrayal of Shakespearian tragedy. He is earnest and impassioned, tender and pathetic, declamatory and conversational, as suits the spirit of the character he represents, and in all the varying moods and feelings that actuate him he is true to nature. Apparently impulsive and unstudied, only rare discriminatory powers and exceptional intelligence could have enabled him to present such a perfect and harmonious embodiment." The *Saturday Review*, referring to Mr. King's performances, said: "At last the national theatre can boast of an exponent worthy of the high-class characters of Shakespear. Mr. King has all the attributes of a first-class tragedian. No such actor has appeared on the boards of old Drury since Macready bade farewell to the stage in the same character (Macbeth)."

This is high praise, and coming from such authorities it sets the seal upon the reputation of this great artist. The praise is in every respect deserved. Mr. King has rare physical gifts—a deep, resonant baritone, which can be made to thunder like a clarion or murmur like a reed; an imposing presence; wonderful mobility of features; vivacity of temper, and exuberance of health. These qualities he has supplemented by deep study of his profession and the most intelligent reading of his parts. He has told us that it takes thirty years for a tragedian to qualify himself for excellence. This remark has given us the measure of his thoroughness and perfection, especially when we contrast it with the example of so many young fellows who, with little or no training, rush into the representation of the highest tragic roles. Socially, Mr. King is the type of the English gentleman, genial, affable, and brimful of most entertaining anecdotes. As he is still in the prime of life and the full maturity of his great powers, he only requires the assistance of an adequate travelling company to visit the whole American continent and Australia, with large pecuniary profit and the wide extension of his fame.

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TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

A NEW NOVEL.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

CHAPTER LXI.

"EITHER I'LL BE THY SLAVE OR THY DESTROYER."

Very grave was Mr. Bain's aspect as he rode back to Monkhampton—the suppressed smile, a smile of lurking triumph, had vanished from his lips, and there was a look of settled purpose which augured ill for that person whom the steward deemed his enemy. He did not draw rein at his house in the High-street, but rode further into the town, and stopped at another house of the same present, but a house with more pretension to grandeur than Mr. Bain's substantial and homely dwelling. This house stood a little way back from the street, and had a narrow shrubbery in front of it, guarded by iron railings, and wide gates right and left, and a semi-circular gravel sweep for the accommodation of carriages. The dignity of this good old house, as an ancestral mansion, was somewhat compromised by a side-door, which had been made on the left of the dining-room windows, a door adorned with a very large brass plate, and at night made conspicuous by a red lamp which burned above it. This was the abode of that well-to-do citizen, Mr. Stimpson, the family practitioner.

It was not long after two o'clock, the hour at which Mr. Stimpson regaled himself with a comfortable and substantial luncheon, washed down by a glass or so, perchance half a bottle, of his own particular dry sherry. Mr. Stimpson was a family man as well as a family doctor, but he had married late in life, and his habits had been formed without reference to Mrs. Stimpson or the little Stimpsons. So while the wife and children had their noisy, boisterous meal in the dining-room, the doctor took his chop and his pint of sherry comfortably in his snugger, where he could not be pestered by rude boys demanding potatoes, or shrill girls swamping the doubtfully-clean table-cloth with small beer.

Mr. Bain was lucky enough to find Mr. Stimpson still lingering over his cosy little luncheon, trifling with a biscuit, and digging choice morsels out of the cavernous depths of a Stilton cheese, one of those choice Stiltons with which grateful patients occasionally rewarded Mr. Stimpson's labours.

"Sit down, Bain," he said, with friendly familiarity, "and help yourself to a glass of that sherry. No sugar there, sir; no brandy; no suppressed gout or heartburn in that wine. Nothing wrong at home, I hope. You're looking pale. Miss Bain keeps up pretty well under her heavy responsibilities—admirable young lady, a pattern to all Monkhampton."

"Yes, my daughters are very well. They are good girls." "Excellent girls, sir; first-rate girls—girls such as you don't often meet with now-a-days," said the doctor, bursting with enthusiasm, and with the air of knowing a good deal

more about the Miss Bains than their father himself was aware of.

"My family are well enough, I am happy to say," said Mr. Bain, after he had drunk a glass of the doctor's favourite sherry, an acrid fluid which seemed nearly related to some of the doctor's tonics. "I did not come to speak about them."

"Not about yourself, I hope," exclaimed the doctor, running his eye over Mr. Bain with professional scrutiny, not unseager to detect the tokens of some chronic disease which would make Shadrack as profitable a patient as his wife had been.

"Upon a much more serious subject than any ailment of mine."

"Good heavens, Mr. Bain, you alarm me!"

"I shall give you better cause for alarm, perhaps, before I have done," said Mr. Bain, gravely. "You know what my position was with Sir Aubrey Perriam?"

"One of entire confidence, I am aware."

"Yes, and of more than confidence, of affection. I served him, and I honoured him, as I have never served or honoured any other man. I was proud to think of him as my master—from my boyhood I had made it the study of my life to watch his interests. After his paralytic seizure I became, as you know, his right hand. His helplessness drew us nearer together. I felt as if I were attending the decline of a beloved father."

"Highly creditable to your heart and head," said the doctor warmly, wondering what was the drift of these remarks, which seemed to lead nowhere in particular.

"You may remember that when you advised my taking my poor wife to Cannes, on the second occasion, I somewhat shrank from doing so, though it is not my habit to recoil from the performance of a duty, be it ever so onerous. The fact was, that I did not like to leave my old friend and employer in his broken-down condition. It may have been a foreboding, perhaps even a warning intended to deter me, but I certainly felt a profound disinclination to leave him, even for a few weeks. Judge, then, of my horror when I returned and heard he was dead."

"A sad blow, doubtless," exclaimed Mr. Stimpson, wondering more and more at the drift of this lamentation.

"I heard that he was dead—suddenly, unexpectedly snatched away. Before I returned he had been huddled into his grave."

"Don't say huddled into his grave," protested Mr. Stimpson; "the funeral, though strictly private, was performed in excellent style. I attended it myself, remember. There was absolutely nothing wanting."

"Yes, there was one thing—an inquest upon the dead man."

"An inquest?—quite uncalled for, my dear Bain. Granted Sir Aubrey's death came upon us somewhat unexpectedly at last, still it was not to be ranked among sudden deaths. He was a confirmed invalid, and in a condition in which he might go off at any moment without astonishing any medical man acquainted with his constitution. The heart had been feeble for a long time. I have very little doubt that the heart was the immediate cause of death."

"Don't you think a *post mortem* examination would have been better than speculation or theory upon such a question as that?"

"A *post mortem* examination could not have brought Sir Aubrey back to life, and it would have given extreme pain to Lady Perriam."

"I perceive. You considered the living rather than the dead."

"I could do nothing for the dead, but I could spare useless and needless pain to the living," answered Mr. Stimpson, with offended dignity. He did not like to have his conduct questioned by Mr. Bain.

"And you never tried to understand the cause of Sir Aubrey's death. You took it for granted that he died from heart disease?"

"I did not say heart disease," said Mr. Stimpson, looking uncomfortable, "I only said that he had a weak heart. There was no organic disease."

"How long had he been dead when you saw him?"

"Some hours. I was not sent for till morning, and he died shortly after midnight. I found Lady Perriam in a fearful state of distress; the shock had been almost fatal to her. If I had not thought more of the living than the dead at that time she would have been in a brain fever, very likely, before the day was out."

"You gave your attention, therefore, to the living patient, and did not trouble yourself about the dead?"

"There was nothing for me to do."

"You made no examination of the body?"

"To what end? I would not disturb the repose of the dead. Mrs. Carter had performed the necessary offices. Sir Aubrey's limbs had been composed in their last rest for some hours when I saw him."

"Oh, Mrs. Carter laid him out, did she? Where was his faithful old valet, Chapelain? Why did not he assist in that last sad office?"

"He was confined to his bed by an attack of gout—a victim, I very much fear, to intemperance. He left Perriam Place before the funeral, a thoroughly broken man, to go back to France, most liberally rewarded, though Sir Aubrey's will had not yet been read. Lady Perriam rewarded his fidelity from her own purse."

"Sir Aubrey was much changed, I suppose? You did not glance at his face, perhaps?"

"Yes, I looked at the face. The room was somewhat dark, but I did perceive a change, a more marked change than death usually makes."

"Did that give rise to no suspicion in your mind?"

"Good heavens, no! What suspicion could arise from it?"

"That Sir Aubrey had not come by his death fairly."

"Mr. Bain, are you mad?"

"I hope not, but I have brooded upon the subject of my employer's sudden, and, to my mind, mysterious death, until it has assumed an awful shape in my mind. Why were you not sooner summoned to that death-bed—why were hours suffered to elapse—why was the corpse laid out before they took the trouble to send for you?"

"I attribute anything unusual in the circumstances to Lady Perriam's prostrate state at the time," said the doctor.

"Well, perhaps I am wrong. Pray do not for a moment imagine that I suspect Lady Perriam. Not for the world would I harbour such a thought. She is doubtless as innocent as she is beautiful. Never did I hear Sir Aubrey utter a complaint against her. Never did I hear her repine at her lot. The person I suspect is Mrs. Carter—that smooth, silent time-server."

"A singularly reserved person, I admit. But I cannot see what motive she could have for harming Sir Aubrey."

"She may have believed that his will had provided for her. In some moment of childishness he may have made her some promise which kindled avarice and inspired wonder."

Mr. Stimpson brushed up his few grey hairs with an agitated movement of his hands till they literally stood on end. Very pale, very fearful looked Mr. Stimpson as he clutched the decanter and poured out another glass of the dry sherry wherewith to fortify himself against the horror of Shadrack Bain's suggestion.

"I don't believe it," he exclaimed. "Why do you come here to alarm me with such a cock-and-bull story, simply because I respected the feelings of a refined and delicate lady, and took some trouble to save her the torture of a coroner's inquest? What is your motive in coming here with such insinuations, Mr. Bain?"

"Simply to put you on your guard. I thought from the first that there was something wrong about Sir Aubrey's death. Circumstances that have occurred of late have gone very far to confirm this opinion. I thought it my duty to warn you. In the event of any revelation some discredit might fall upon you—you might be accused of want of care. Take my advice, Mr. Stimpson, and not a word of this to any one till you hear more from me, or from some one else. Good day to you. I've some particular business to transact down street, and can't stop any longer."

"Mr. Bain—my dear Bain—for goodness sake be more explicit," cried the doctor piteously; but Shadrack Bain had left the room before his appeal was finished, leaving the family practitioner in a state of collapse.

"I think I've laid the train neatly there," the lawyer said to himself as he walked away from the surgeon's in the direction of the bank. "If Lady Perriam changes her mind, and comes into my way of thinking, it will be easy enough to withdraw all I have said. If not, it is the beginning of the machine that shall destroy her."

He went to the bank, paid in two or three checks which he had carried in his pocket for a week or two, and then asked if he could see Mr. Standen.

"Mr. Standen is not in Monkhampton. Would Mr. Philpotts do?" argued the clerk.

"No. I wanted to see Mr. Standen himself particularly. Will he be back in a day or two, do you think?"

"I've no idea, but I'll ask Mr. Philpotts if you like. I dare say he knows," said the clerk civilly, anxious to oblige so good a customer, one who in some measure represented the Perriam estate.

"Do, there's a good fellow, and if you can find out where he has gone to I shall be doubly obliged."

The clerk vanished into an inner room, and speedily reappeared, smiling.

"Mr. Philpotts had a letter this morning, sir. Mr. Standen is not expected back just yet. He's at Antwerp."

"At Antwerp?"

"Yes, sir; on a tour, I suppose. His letter was from Antwerp. He might be leaving directly to go up the Rhine, but he wrote from the Hotel Peter Paul, Antwerp."

"Thank you—that'll do. I'll write to him by this afternoon's post. I wanted to consult him about a little piece of land contiguous to the Dean House property. Good morning." Shadrack Bain went back to his own house. He knew all that Monkhampton could help him to discover.

"At Antwerp," he thought; "at Antwerp. The chances are that those two—Lady Perriam and Edmund Standen—are acting in concert, and that she has gone after him. Where else can she have gone? She boldly avows her affection for him in her letter to me. She has gone to join him at Antwerp, to be married to him most likely if I don't prevent it. But it'll be strange if I can't put a stop to that marriage. I wonder how often the steamers go to Antwerp? Stay, the quicker way will be to go from Dover to Ostend, and then on by rail. Yes, that shall be my route, and I must get to Dover in time for to-night's mail."

The agent was a man prompt in action. He went to his office, gave verbal instructions and a page or so of written memoranda to his clerks, told them he had to go to Belgium on business for a few days, or possibly more than a few days, gave instructions as to the forwarding of letters and telegrams, packed his portmanteau, announced his departure to his astonished children, ate a mutton chop, though with the smallest inclination for that sustenance, and was at the station in time for the 3.45 train, which reached London at a quarter to eight, time enough for him to catch the mail for Dover.

At midnight he was standing on the deck of the fast little steamer, speeding over moonlit waves in the balmy August air, and meditating upon the course that lay before him.

He followed Sylvia Perriam with a settled purpose. If he failed to win her for his wife he meant to denounce her. That which had been only a dark suspicion in his mind was now almost certainty.

It was his firm belief that Sir Aubrey Perriam had come to an untimely end at his wife's hands.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE SWEETS OF RE-UNION.

Sylvia and her belongings landed at Antwerp early in the morning after they left St. Katherine's Wharf. Celine, the French maid, was quite in her element amidst all the bustle and confusion of the quay, since many of those jabbering tongues which made a Babel around the travellers jabbered in French, while poor Mrs. Tringfold gazed about her in helpless amazement, as much alarmed as if she had found herself amidst a tribe of North American Indians, or the dark aborigines of Central Africa.

"I never could abide foreigners," she muttered to herself, since there was none other to whom she could confide her emotions, "and to live among them must be awful, not knowing what one's eating or drinking, or if the natives mayn't be laying a plan to murder one. I'm sure they all look like it."

Lady Perriam made short work of the ordeal with the Custom House officials, who glanced with an indulgent eye at the portmanteaux of so liberal a lady, and then had her child and nurse and maid put into a hackney coach and whisked off to the Hotel St. Antoine. She did not think it advisable to put up at the hotel where Mr. Standen was staying.

She chose her rooms, a bed-room for Tringfold and the child, opening out of hers; a saloon with three windows, gorgeous with crimson velvet and a looking-glass; altogether a