

THE CONVICT'S RETURN.

"Will you ask whether Mr. Graham will see a stranger?" The clerk spoken to nodded, arose and went into an inner office.

The stranger remained leaning against the desk, his hand trifling with the little door that shut outsiders from the sanctum within.

He was a tall, fair man of thirty, with close-cropped hair and beard.

"Mr. Graham will see you, sir," said the clerk, returning and opening the little railed door. "In there—the office to the right."

The stranger passed into the room indicated, and closed the door behind him; then standing with his back against it, he fumbled with his hat in the same odd manner in which he had handled it in the outer office, and instead of speaking, looked at the gentleman behind the desk with eyes that had a measureless appeal in them.

The other did not rise from his chair, nor hold out his hand, nor even speak for some moments; each looked at the other, that was all.

But it was the elder who broke the spell at last.

"So," he said, "it is you, James?"

"Yes, it is I," said the other, "haven't you a word for me, William?"

"I have a good many words that you might not like to hear," said William Graham. "I really can't say I am glad to see you."

"I don't expect anyone to be glad," said the other. "I know I've disgraced the family, but I've been punished for it. Fifteen years, William—think of that!—fifteen years of prison life, and prison fare, and prison friends! I'd have given my soul to undo what I did, even before it was found out; and I never meant to keep the money."

"We know the story," said the merchant. "You were in a position of confidence; you betrayed it. It's the old affair. I've had it happen in my own office."

"I can't feel any sentimental pity for a fellow like you. What brings you here, James?"

Shifting his hat from hand to hand, looking from under his eyebrows in an abject fashion, pitiable to contemplate when one saw in what a gentlemanly mould he had been cast, James Graham answered—

"I was twenty when I went to prison. I'm five-and-thirty now. The outside world has been a blank to me for all these years. I want work. I want you to give it to me—any honest work, William. I'm a good bookkeeper, but I'll be a porter—anything."

"Oh, no; not anything here," said the elder. "You are no brother of mine; I cast you off when you became a felon. For the sake of the poor woman who called you 'son,' I'll give you some money—enough to live on for a week or two; I will never give you more—don't expect it. I will have you sent away if you come here again."

The prison taint was so strong upon the other man that his pride was not aroused yet.

He fumbled with his hat, ground himself against the door, looked abjectly from under his eyebrows again, and asked—

"How is sister Jessie?"

"Well," said the merchant

"Can you tell me where she lives?" asked his brother.

"No," said the merchant; "Jessie is married, and has tried to forget the terrible grief you gave her. You are the last person a respectable brother-in-law would care to see."

"I'll ask you one more question," said James, in a faltering voice; "Ada Musgrove—what has become of her? Is she living? Is she married?"

"I have no information for you," said the merchant, harshly. "Here are ten pounds. If you are careful, you will get work before it is gone. Take it and go, and don't come back again."

He flung the money down upon the table, but there was a spark of manhood in his brother's breast even yet.

He could not take a gift so proffered.

Suddenly the abject look upon his face changed to one of wrath and hate.

Glaring at his brother, he threw the note that lay before him in his face.

"Curse you, keep your money!" he said. "I don't want it. I don't want anything from you or anyone. I came for help, it is true; for help to be an honest man."

"I've been among the outcast of the world so long that I've lost all kinship with you decent folk; but I thought a brother might hold out a hand to draw me back. You refused it. Money! Why, look at these hands, these shoulders—look at me! I can earn money somehow. And, by Heaven! if this is all your respectability and Christianity amounts to, I don't care if I see no more of it. There are plenty to welcome me, and you have driven me to them. Remember that, son of my mother! You!"

He thrust his hat upon his head, and dashed out of the room.

One dark night, a few weeks later, James Graham, in full fellowship with a gang of burglars, was receiving instructions from a companion how to enter and conceal himself in a house marked for robbery.

The lesson was given in front of the doomed house itself, and after his companion had left him Graham muttered—

"Yes, I belong to the fraternity now. I am here to rob this house. My brother—I wonder what my poor mother would say if she could see me now? If she knew—"

He stopped himself, and in a moment more had mounted to the window indicated by his comrade, and, finding that it opened easily, had clambered in.

Guiding himself by his lantern's light, he looked for a place of concealment.

It soon presented itself.

A long wardrobe, with a door at either end.

In this, behind a very curtain of suspended garments, he hid himself.

He heard, after a while, a baby cry, and, in a minute more, a step, and a ray of light glanced through the keyhole at one end of the wardrobe.

"Ada," cried a lady's voice, "come here! Baby is wide awake."

Then another rustle, another step, and there were two women very near him; so near that he could almost hear them breathe.

"I'm so glad you came to-day, Ada," said the other, "when

I was all alone. Charles was called away so unexpectedly this morning. I declare the thought of that accident makes me ill, and I am nervous all alone in the house at night, dear; besides, being always glad to see you, I am so thankful to have you to-night."

"I am never nervous, Jessie," said the other. "I'm as good as a man about the house, mamma says. I've hunted imaginary burglars with a poker many a night. Mamma is always imagining burglars, dear soul."

"Don't speak of them," said the matron, who was evidently quieting her child as only a mother can. "This house would be more of a temptation to them to-night than it has ever been before since we lived here. There are ten thousand pounds in that safe, Ada. Charlie hadn't time to deposit it. They telegraphed that Mr. Bird might be dying."

As she made this confession, the man concealed so near her listened with his very heart in his ears.

But it was not to the statement so well calculated to rejoice a burglar's heart.

That was forgotten.

He heard only the voices and the names these two women called each other by.

Ada.

That had been the name of the girl he loved.

Jessie.

That was his sister's name.

After all, what was it to him?

Like his brother, the latter had cast him off, of course, and no doubt Ada only remembered him with horror.

Still, how like the voices were.

Could it be?

He knelt down with his eye to the keyhole, but he could only see part of a woman's figure swaying to and fro, as she rocked her infant on her bosom.

"Dear little fellow!" said the voice of the other woman.

"How sweet babies are."

She came forward now and knelt down, and he saw her profile.

It was Ada Musgrove—older, for he had left her a girl of sixteen, and found her a woman of thirty, but handsomer than ever.

"You love children so, that I wonder you don't marry," said the matron; and now James Graham knew that it was his sister who spoke.

"I know William wants you to have him. He always has loved you. And, Ada, he can give you all that makes life happy."

James Graham's cheeks flushed in the darkness.

He hated the world more than ever now.

He hated his kinsfolk—this cruel brother and sister of his most of all.

"He cannot give me the one thing necessary for wedded happiness—love for him," said Ada. "No, Jessie; I have never said this to you before, but I must say it now. I loved poor James too well ever to love any other man while I know he lives."

"Ah, Ada," cried Jessie, stooping over her, "it is a comfort to me to know you still remember my poor brother. I thought I was the only living being who still loved him."

And then James Graham, listening on the other side of the door, heard these two women weeping together, and for him.

"Yes, Ada," said his sister, "and though poor James is so sadly disgraced, still when he returns I will be glad to see him, and this shall be his home if he will, and my good husband will help him to win back the place among good men that he lost so long ago. When he is free again, I trust he will come straight to us. He will be free very soon, Ada."

The man who had stolen into that house to rob it, could bear no more; his heart was softened.

He crept away, and finding his way to the window by which he had entered, he departed as he had come, vowing to lead an honest life.

With these thoughts in his mind, he stood on the ground, and remembered, with a pang, who would arrive soon, and what their errand would be. He felt in his bosom for his pistol.

He would not use it until the last.

But he must stand between these women and all harm.

He knew well enough the unforgiving ferocity of those with whom he had to deal, and he muttered a little prayer for aid as he heard soft footsteps approaching.

"He is opening his eyes," said a voice.

James Graham heard it, and wondered what had happened, and why he could not turn himself, and who spoke.

Then came a remembrance of a quarrel, a conflict, and the report of a pistol.

He knew all now.

His fellow burglars had shot him, and left him for dead.

But where was he now?

"Ada, dear," said the voice again. "I think he is opening his eyes."

Then they did open, and James Graham saw two women bending over him.

"James," said one, "do you know sister Jessie?"

The other only burst into tears.

"Yes; I know you both," said he faintly. "How did I come here? I am so full of wonder. How did you know me?"

"We found you wounded—dead, we thought, at our gate," said Jessie. "It was Ada knew you first."

"Dear Jessie!" he said, "dear Ada!"

"We don't know how it happened," she said. "When you are better you must tell us. Only we have you back, and you shall never go away again; never."

He knew he never should.

He knew that in a little while he should neither see their faces nor hear their voices, but he was very happy.

"They have been terrible years," he said, "terrible years! All that while I have never heard from you, but I have you now. Come closer; I can't see you very well. There's a mist before my eyes. I want Jessie to kiss me."

The sister flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him over and over again.

Then he turned to Ada Musgrove.

"If I were going to live, I should not ask it," he said, "but you used to kiss me long ago, Ada. Will you kiss me now, my dear, just once more?"

She took him in her arms.

"God is very merciful," he said, "more merciful than man. Perhaps we shall meet again, darling."

These were the last words he ever uttered.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

Mrs. Scott Siddons tells of herself the following remarkable circumstance:

"One winter night, a friend of Tom's (her husband—an officer in his regiment—came up to our house to spend the night with us. During the evening, the conversation turned upon dramatic subjects, when Tom's friend began to dispute with him about the reading of some lines in 'Macbeth,' which he had heard rendered a few nights before, as he claimed, without sense or meaning. To defend his interpretation of the lines, he went to the library, and, taking down a copy of Shakespeare, began to read the play. He was a fine natural reader, and, in his earnestness to convince Tom, read with considerable effect."

"I shall never forget that scene," said Mrs. Siddons, with great animation. "I was sitting at the table sewing. Tom was in a chair before the grate, his back to me, and his friend sat facing us. He read the play from the beginning, connecting the parts omitted with some remarks tending to show the unity of his interpretation of the character of *Lady Macbeth*. When he approached the climax of the 'Sleep-Walking Scene' he rose and with great animation declaimed the lines. The effect upon me was like a nervous shock. A cold tremor seized upon me. Although I had never before felt so strong, my body trembled with agitation. I feared, if I remained longer, that the feeling of ecstasy would overpower me, and I should burst into tears. My nervous sensibility had undoubtedly been made more keen by a severe sickness from which I had hardly recovered, and afraid that my agitation would be noticed, I stole to my chamber, where, standing in the middle of the room, my brain on fire with the long pent-up desire to represent to others the power I felt stirring my soul, my mind exalted by the conception I had of the woe which drove *Lady Macbeth* forth from her bed at midnight, I began to feel I myself was *Lady Macbeth*. I was seized, almost agonized, with an inexpressible dread—a kind of nightmare horror—and felt that I could only exercise the terrible spirit which had seized upon me by retiring to the library and driving it forth in their presence. I dreaded to stay longer alone, yet was fascinated by my ideal, and with the almost insane desire to appear to my husband as *Lady Macbeth*, I quickly bound up my face with a handkerchief, threw about my body a white wrapper, and taking my wax candle, started for the door. In the mirror, as I passed, I caught the first sight of my face—pallid with fear, and drawn into an expression of woe unutterable. My eyes, made large by recent sickness, seemed fixed with a strong stare that so frightened me that I dropped my candlestick from my hand, and was alone in the dark. I ran out into the hall down the stairs, and paused at the library door only for a moment."

"Remember," said Mrs. Siddons, "I had never before studied 'Macbeth,' and knew nothing of the lines. I only felt I was *Lady Macbeth*. So inspired was I by the conception caught during the reading of the scene that I felt myself able to render it in pantomime."

"Swinging back the door," she continued, "I glided into the room and stood for a moment so absorbed by my conception that I forgot to act. I must have looked like a grave-risen person with my white wrapper, my chin tied up with a handkerchief, and my wide-open eyes staring out of my pallid face. Tom's friend, who sat facing the door, sprang to his feet in great consternation, and wheeled his chair in front of him. My husband, seeing his excitement, turned, and catching a glimpse of my face, exclaimed, 'Oh! my God! she has gone mad!'"

"This broke the charm," said Mrs. Siddons, "and the nervous strain had been so great that Tom had barely time to save me from falling on the floor as I fell fainting in a chair. Do you wonder now that I always feel a kind of dread when I attempt to render the 'Sleep-Walking Scene?'" said Mrs. Siddons, with a laugh.

"But did this incident determine you to appear at once on the stage?" asked I.

"I began immediately after I recovered my health to study 'Macbeth,'" she answered, "and soon after determined to appear on the stage."

A ROYAL LIBRETTIST.

M. Legouvé, who has just been lecturing in Paris on Scribe, reveals that Louis Philippe wrote *libretti* for operas:—In 1850 Scribe had composed an opera on Shakespeare's "Tempest." The English desired that it should be played in their country, and the author went over to London to bring it out. Immediately on his arrival he paid a visit to his Majesty Louis Philippe. Scribe had never been a Republican, and had been too well received at the Tuilleries not to make a pilgrimage to Claremont. Louis Philippe, according to the account of those who knew him, was one of the most agreeable talkers of his day. He gracefully turned the conversation on the "Tempest," and all at once said, in a tone half laughing and half serious, "Do you know, Monsieur Scribe, that I have the honour to be a colleague of yours?" "You, sire?" "Yes, indeed. You came to London about an opera; well, I also, in my younger days, wrote one, and I assure you it was not bad." "I believe it, sire. You have accomplished more difficult things than that." "More difficult for you, perhaps, but not for me. I took for subject the Cavaliers and Roundheads." "A fine theme," replied the author of the "Huguenots." "Well, shall I read it to you? I have lately come across my manuscript by accident. I am curious to know your opinion of it." "I am at your orders, sire." And the King, with his excellent delivery, commenced the first act. Scribe listened at first respectfully, silently, with all the attention he would have paid to a speech from the throne, but gradually, as the piece advanced, his nature of dramatic author getting the mastery, he absolutely forgot the sovereign, and saw only the plan of an opera, and, stopping the reader at a defective passage, exclaimed, "Oh, that is impossible!" "How impossible?" replied the monarch, somewhat piqued. "Why? Because, first of all, it is improbable, and what is worse, uninteresting." "Not interesting—not interesting! My dear Monsieur Scribe. Excuse me." But that was enough—Scribe was excited, the parts were inverted, and the author was now the master. "Do you know what is necessary there, sire? A love scene—politics are very good in a council of ministers, but in an opera the tender passion is required." "Well, we will introduce some love," said Louis Philippe, laughing. And both set to work proposing, debating, until the clock reminded the author that he was expected in London. "Already?" said the King to him. "Oh, wait an instant. I shall not let