# THE LAST SCENE OF THE PLAY.

## CHAPTER I.

The village stood half-way up the slope. Behind it rose the mountains, before it the brown and leafless vineyard, crossed and recrossed by low gray walls, stretched downward to the blue waters of Lake Leman. The mountains were still white above the line of frequented pathway; but lower down the snow had melted as though the shivering slopes had warmed and comforted themselves against the homes of men. The sun was hot enough for June, and though in the shade the cold air and the biting wind betrayed their March parentage, there were many signs that spring was on its way. The few trees huddled round the village, as though they feared the waste beyond, were budding. Far up behind the village, at the edge of the fir-trees that clothed the topmost part of the mountain, stood a long, low shed; its whiteness could be seen for miles away. Close beside it was a ruined wooden chalet. Midway between the firs and the village and far from all other dwellings stood the highest inhabited house in the immediate vicinity. It was only one storey high; it had a window at the back looking up at the firs, and a door and several windows on the other side looking down towards the village and the lake. Before the upper windows stretched a wooden balcony, from which hung great bunches of maize corn. The door was shut, the windows closed, the green shutters were fastened inside so that no gust disturbed them; there was no smoke from the chimney; the house seemed simply a part of the landscape and the stillness.

But in the ruined chalet higher up some one was moving. Between the wide chinks a man's eyes looked down at the lonely house, and anxiously towards the village. After a time the man came cautiously out from his shelter, and, crouching close to the low grey wall, began to descend. He drew near the house with a sigh of relief, keeping in a line with it as soon as its height formed a screen between him and the village. He stole to the front door with noiseless step, and, lifting the latch, entered. There was a dim passage, bare and whitewashed, flagged with rough grey stones. At the farther end was a wooden staircase; he looked towards it and listened, then examined the fastenings of the street door; they consisted of a lock and bolt; he drew the bolt, and turning the key in the lock, took it out. He opened a door on the left, and entered a dirty, comfortless kitchen; he noticed quickly that the windows were fastened inside the closed shutters. An old woman rose as if from sleep. He gave her the key.

"Some visitors might come for us," he said. "Do not let them in; we have letters to write and wish to be quiet. I have locked the door and taken out the key, so that people may think the house is empty." She looked at him suspiciously. "It is only for to-day," he added. "To-morrow it will be different."

"I will not say that Monsieur the painter is gone and you have come," she answered. "Nor let in anyone if I can help it."

He nodded, and left her looking at the key. She sat down to consider. The painter who had stayed since January painting the snow-covered mountains had been gone a fortnight. The day before he left he had talked with a stranger who had looked over his canvas while he sat painting near Vevey. A foolish waste of time she thought, for work and talk were never trusty partners; if one was good for aught the other went for little. But the painter had told the stranger how he had lived for two months in her house, pointing it out on the mountain side, and that the next day he was going to Italy. He went, and that same night the strangers came; they told her they wanted to be alone and quiet; and she was to forget if she could that she had changed her tenant. Well, they were curious people, were the English, always liking to keep to themselves. These were easy to do for, staying up in their rooms almost in silence. She would have forgotten that they were there but for the serving of meals. She doubted if any knew that they had come, for the painter had walked away in the early morning with all he possessed on his back, and the same evening those two had walked in with all they possessed in their hands, and neither had passed through the village. That was lucky; Louis Strubb would not come asking for his money. The painter was known to be poor, but the Englishman, who was able to travel with his wife, might be supposed to pay well, and Louis Strubb was not one to wait patiently if he could help it. To-morrow at the market there might be questions asked. But that was in the future. To-day there was nothing to trouble about till it was time to prepare the strangers' supper. No need either to think of that yet, nor to burn the wood in waste. Ah! that was comfortable, a chair and a high stool on which to put her legs. Her head fell on her chest, her withered eyes were closed, and all things were forgotten as she sat and dozed beside the cold, black stove.

## CHAPTER II.

The man went slowly up the stairs, which turned abruptly towards the front of the house. Between the door and the last stair there was a landing that went along the width of the house; and on to it opened all the rooms of the top storey. He opened the door that faced the stairs, and he entered what the old woman beneath called the salon. It had a second door, leading to an inner room; he went towards it gently and looked in. On one of the two low beds within a woman was lying. She started and in a voice that was full of dread asked, 'Is it all safe?' He nodded. With a sigh of relief she sank back.

'It is very cold,' he said; 'you had better lie still—do you hear?' for she had collapsed in some strange way. 'I will call you presently; I want to be alone for a little while.' She made a sign of assent, then turned her face away till it was hidden in the pillow. He shut the bedroom door behind him and went back to the salon. Through the green bars of the closed shutters he could see the village below, the lake with the sunshine sparkling on it, the Savoy mountains on the other side, with the little towns and villages set low down along the shore. If he were only across that bit of blue water he might yet escape unnoticed. He turned away and looked round the comfortless room. Its was bare, and, like the rest of the house inside and out, whitewashed. There was a round table, a gaunt sofa, two or three chairs; a wide, open fireplace, with a few logs piled up ready for lighting on its stone cheeks. That was all, save that between the windows stood a high, well-made escritoire. It had a flap that let down in front to form a desk; beneath the flap there were three drawers, and behind it several smaller ones. He let down the flap and prepared to write. It was a little difficult to see; there was almost a recess between the windows, and the shadow kept off the light.

The man began his letter almost desperately, feeling that he was writing it against time and in the teeth of many things. The light changed and fell upon his face. It was thin and weary, but it had none of the sadness or the fear of the woman's. He was singularly handsome, tall and well-made; perhaps he should be described as dark. There was something in his eyes—a light, a spark almost—that gave him at times an uncanny, a shifty, at other times a kindly, humorous look. There was an expression on the face that seemed to say, for some reason almost beyond his control, he could not be counted on in any way. He was capable of doing great deeds and generous ones if they were suggested to him and came easy, without in the least seeing their greatness or generosity, or of committing almost any crime, any meanness, if they, too, came in his way or were convenient, never realizing or caring about the enormity or the meanness. Good and evil had been settled and defined by others, but he was not able to care which was which. In a certain sense he was moral blind, as some are color blind. He did that which came in his way; the goodness or the badness did not concern him. People might applaud one deed and be shocked at another; to him, in a way, they were the same. The one real guide he acknowledged was his own convenience. Of very strong feeling he was almost destitute; of a queer analytical one he was constantly possessed. He was distinctly a man who attracted women; it was impossible to help thinking that many had probably loved him. But men were more cautious; in all his life only one man had been his true and fast friend. He was writing to him now:

'Dear Jack,—To-day I got a paper at Vevey, and see that they have tracked us to Lausanne. They will probably not be long in scenting the rest of the trail. To-night we—or I, at any rate—make an effort to get elswhere. Meanwhile do not be nervous. I shall not be taken alive. I hope that meddling fool, her brother, will be content when he finds that I have escaped him, as I shall do, dead or alive, and that he will not give you any trouble. But I know nothing of legal matters, and, as you see, mean to keep clear of them. Yours, old fellow,

H. W.'

He went to the window again and carefully scrutinised the landscape; then to the back of the house and looked up at the ruined chalet and the dark firs. He shook his head and returned to the salon.

'I suppose it is always so; every place seems safe till one gets to it, and then every other seems safer. I must try Charlotte soon.'

He went to the escritoire, and, opening the deepest drawer inside the flap, he drew out a small pair of Derringers. They were loaded. With grim satisfaction he examined and replaced them. For a moment he hesitated, then went to the door of the inner room. The woman started to her feet trembling.

'Yes; is it anything?'

'Well, no,' he answered in a leisurely voice, in which there was no alarm, though a suggestion of doubtfulness. 'But I think it would be as well to have a talk. We have been pretty silent lately.' She came slowly into the salon, a tall, slight woman with a pale face, and eyes that were full of fear and sorrow. Her mouth was curved and beautifully formed, her hair was dark and gathered into a knot behind. She looked like a loving, tender woman, though there was an air of strength and determination about her that made her seem reserved and cold. With a shudder she turned away and stood leaning against the escritoire waiting for her husband to speak. He scanned her face in an odd, reflective manner.

'It is odd that you should feel it so much more than I,' he said.

'Do you not feel it?' she asked, clasping her hands. She had a deep, sweet voice, to which it was impossible to help listening, so keenly did one realize the living woman behind it.

'I suppose so; but men take things calmly. Besides, when a deed is done no amount of feeling will undo it.'

'Herford,' she cried, yet her tone was so low that the keenest ears beyond the room could not have caught a sound, 'is it true? It has come on me so suddenly I cannot take it in. I feel as if you cannot have lived these two years since we have been married—these three since she died—you could not have lived so calmly through them if it were true.' He looked at her while he spoke:

'It is true,' he answered, 'I gave her enough poison to kill half a dozen of women. If any doctor but Jack had been called in, there would have been but one thing for him to do——' She writhed in agony at every word he said, shrinking involuntarily farther away from him. He saw it, but it produced no visible effect upon him, except that the odd, interested look on his face grew more intense, as though he were making an experiment and watching its effect.

'How could you live? The horror and remorse; why did they not kill you? They are killing me now. In every sound there is a threat, a reproach, and everywhere a dead woman's face. I can see her even at this moment as plainly as though she were between us, her closed eyes, and still lips, and folded hands. Oh, God——' but her words had no effect on him.

'It is very odd,' he repeated, 'but it seems as if it had cost you these last few days since you have known as much as it has cost me all these years since it was done.'

'Has it cost you nothing?'

'I think it has,' he said. 'It has not left me many minutes' peace. But men do not take their pain in the consentrated manner of women.' There was a ring of truthfulness in his voice that was some sort of relief to her.

'Why has it been so suddenly discovered now, and why—why did you do it?' she faltered, speaking of the thing directly for the first time.

'I bore it as long as I could, but she made life such that it came to be impossible for us both to live in the same world. It was after I heard you had come back, and gradually I got possessed of the idea that she or I must die. She fell ill, and the devil suggested how it could be managed. I made Jack come and see her. It was necessary to have in a doctor to make things right, and I thought it would never occur to him to suspect. But it did. He discovered it the moment he saw her, but she was then past saving. He would have had me hanged if I had not prevailed on him at last to hold his tongue. They'll make him pay for that now, I fear,' he added uneasily. 'He agreed to be silent for the sake of bygones and for my mother's sake. He made me take an oath never to see you again, but it was not in human nature to keep it. I had married the other only in a fit of jealousy; it was not possible to miss the chance when it came, and I found you cared for me still.' But the last words only made her draw back a little farther.

'Did she love you?' she asked at last, almost in a whisper. He was silent for a moment; he seemed to call up some past scene in his mind before he answered—

'Yes,' he said slowly; 'I wish she hadn't; then I might get rid of the memory of her eyes following me around that room, and looking up gratefully when I gave her the dose that killed her.'

She could see it all as clearly as if the woman lay dying now before them. But her voice was quite calm. She wrenched her thoughts from the dead woman to the living man.

'Why did no one suspect before?'

'It was no one's business to do so. There was a chattering servant, but I gave her £10 when she went away, and perhaps she understood that she was to hold her tongue. It would never have come out if Tom Carr had not returned. He went poking about and got hold of a chemist's assistant and of Jack, though Jack said nothing; but that only made matters worse. Then it occurred to the meddling fool to have the body exhumed. He managed it somehow. I heard it from Jack. He had never spoken to me since the hour we parted by her coffin, but he gave me the hint and we fled. It was lucky we had arranged to go to Italy that very day. No one suspected it was flight, and we got a good start.'

'Are you certain they can prove it?'

He smiled grimly. 'As clearly as if I had given her the dose in public. One would have thought the grave was a good hiding-place, but it has been a bad one.'

'If they should find you?' she whispered.

'If they should take me there would be—the hangman's rope,' he said quietly. She raised her hand quickly to her lips to stop a cry. Even then he watched her cruelly.

'It would not hurt much; it would soon be over. There may be something to come.' He said the last words as if he were doubtful, yet politely curious, concerning eternity. She remembered an account of an execution she had once read; something had forced her to read it, and for days after it had haunted her. The prisoner was taken from his cell, a ghastly procession formed—the death-bell tolling, the parson in his surplice reading the burial service over the living man—into a stone yard it went, and the hangman was there, he stood beside the man—O, God! She could see and hear it all. Was it coming true—true of Harford?

'Would there be no escape?' she asked, in an agonised voice. 'Surely it would be better to die first—anything rather than that.' A gleam of triumph came into his eyes.

'Yes,' he said, almost with a smile, and opened the drawer behind the flap. She turned slowly and looked in, then raised her eyes inquiringly to his. In some strange way he seemed to know how it would all be. He took up one of the derringers and put it to his head; 'it will be time enough when they are three steps from the door,' he said. A little sense of relief went through her. He had, at anyrate, courage for that. For one short moment her eyes reflected the triumph of his.

'One is enough to kill.'

'One is enough,' he answered.

'The other will do for me.'

He looked at her silently; he knew well enough that she meant it. 'For you?'

'Yes, for me,' she said firmly.

'I don't think you would take life easily without me,' he said slowly.

Her lips gave out but one word—'No.'

He considered for a moment. 'I don't see why we should not go on together if we are forced to use them. I believe,' and there was an odd sound in his voice, 'every atom of me would know it if your lips touched another man's, though I were dust being swept before a march wind like that that howled round us last night.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## American Power of Assimilation.

A. A. Leitch, in an article in the St. Louis (Mo.) Labor Record, says that the cheap labor class in the United States must be having a great deal of fun over the miseries of employers who once thought they were well rid of it. When American labor struck for higher pay for unskilled work, a number of employers sent abroad for foreigners, and succeeded so well that for more than forty years nearly all the heavy manual labor in the country was done by Irishmen. But Pat is as quick-witted as a Yankee; he lost no time in becoming an American himself and demanding the highest market pay and getting it. Then the Germans were tried. They seemed slow-witted enough to suit the most unscrupulous of employers, but German wits got there in course of time and got there to stay. Welshmen, Englishmen, Norwegians and Swedes followed in great numbers, but they, too, quickly learned that one man is as good as another in this country, and they stuck up for their rights and got them. A few years ago thousands of Hungarians were brought over at very cheap rates to drive the striking workmen out of some of the Pennsylvania collieries; they looked like animals and lived about as cheaply as so many beasts, but even animals have quick eyes, and when the fiery Hun discovered how much there was in America that money could buy, he also went on strike for higher pay, and it took a great many soldiers and policemen to repress him. Last of all came the Italian, fifty sons of sunny Italy could be domiciled in a single small house, then they could be fed at ten cents per head per day, they didn't understand our language and seemed unable to learn it, and each gang was under a native boss who saw lots of money for himself in keeping them down. Now, however, the Italian is on strike in many places, Who is to replace him is a question which now is driving the employers of cheap labor almost crazy. The darkey won't answer. The Chinaman has been tried, with the result that he is the highest paid laborer in the United States to-day, and, to do him justice, he earns his money. The Indians won't work for wages, and the monkey can't be taught to handle a shovel or trundle a wheelbarrow.

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Any man found betting on Pickpocket should be arrested.—New York Press.

# State Employment Agencies.

## HOW THEY ARE WORKING IN OHIO.

*To the Officers and Members of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council:*

GENTLEMEN,—Your special committee, in concert with a like number from District Assembly 125, Knights of Labor, to whom was referred the consideration of the question of the establishment and advantages of state free public employment offices, beg leave to present a progress report.

At its first meeting the joint committee elected R. Glockling chairman and W. H Parr secretary. The secretary was authorized to prepare and issue a circular, and address copies of same to the commissioners and superintendents of labor bureaus in the several states of the United States where such bureaus are in existence, asking for such information on the subject as they may be in possession of.

Up to date many replies have been received, and the information of a general character gleaned is of much advantage and value. When the correspondence is considered complete a detailed report will be laid before your body. It may be stated, however, that only in the State of Ohio are such offices at present in existence, and they are conceded to have more than met the most sanguine expectations of their advocates, both in the State Legislature and on the part of the general public. For the time being, your committee content themselves with submitting for your information in relation to the Ohio scheme a lucid letter in relation thereto, published in a New York periodical, from the pen of Daniel Ryan.

Respectfully submitted.

R. GLOCKLING, Chairman. W. H. PARR, Secretary.

This letter is as follows:

### OHIO'S NEW EXPERIMENT.

"The General Assembly of Ohio, on the 28th day of April last, passed a law for the establishment of free employment bureaus in the five principal cities of the State, viz., Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Columbus and Dayton. The law provides for the appointment of a superintendent by the Commissioner of Labor Statistics and for such clerical assistance as may be necessary. The primary object of these bureaus is to secure employment for the unemployed and to assist employers in securing such help as they may apply for and such other free and reliable information as relates to such applications. An additional duty is also imposed, and that is to collect statistical facts and figures relating to the industrial interests of the respective cities bearing upon employers and employees. Provision is made also for weekly reports to the Commissioner of Labor Statistics, and a consolidated report by him of the returns of all the agencies, which is to be sent by him to each of the five employment offices weekly. The compensation of the superintendent and clerk is to be paid by the city council of the municipality in which the employment agency is established. Superintendents are forbidden, under penalty, charging or receiving compensation from any applicant to their respective offices.

This law is essentially an 'Ohio idea,' it being the first of its kind passed in this country, and, with the possible exception of the Intelligence Office in France, there is nothing with which it can be compared. It has for its mission as proper and legitimate an object of State legislation as can well be thought of—that is, the reduction of unemployed labor to a minimum. Legislation of this character is usually received by the average citizen with distrust and doubt. It strikes him as a direct interference of the State with private affairs and as being beyond the legitimate province of legislation. Public opinion in Ohio has not passed such a judgment on this law. It has been generally received with approbation in the cities where it has been put into effect. This is due to two reasons: First, that the law is not a piece of political legislation; it passed both branches of the Legislature with practical unanimity, receiving with equal strength the support of both political parties. It was as clear and clean a piece of non-partisan legislation as ever passed our General Assembly. The second reason is that the law has been economically enforced and has proved successful in its operation. I need not give the record of the various agencies to demonstrate this fact. The following tables give the applications for situations and help and the positions secured from the establishment of each office to August 14. Owing to complications arising in the appointment of a superintendent at Columbus, no office has been established at that point at this writing.

CLEVELAND—July 1st to August 14th.

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| Situations wanted | 652 |
| Help wanted | 1,031 |
| Positions secured | 357 |