A WHITECHAPEL MYSTERY.

B. E. M. ...

(Continued.)

It was true as Clarence had told his father, that he had had brain fever, and had been in danger of losing his life also that he was among foreigners who could not identify him.

We fear it was not the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as is said in court the fact being that, just five days after his rescue by Bess, brain fever had attacked him. His scalp wounds were healing well and his other hurts, when another row in the court, and too near for a sick man, who most needed quiet, had suddenly disturbed him with disastrous effect. In spite of care and skill, the worst results were feared; but his good constitution and the devotion of his nurses had helped to turn the tide in his favor. Dr Forster determined to have him removed much earlier than had at first been intended. A neat and roomy cottage, in one of the healthiest parts of low-lying Bermondsey, was chosen, and Bess and Nell installed, not much against their will, as nurses. Here he and a brother physician attended, with, at the end of a fortnight, the happiest results.

Meanwhile, as hinted, a greater than a physical change was taking place in the inner structure of our hero. If, as physiologists tell us, the drastic work of a fever is to purge and clear the physical system of long accumulated impurities, so the mental and spiritual nature of a man can be seven times purified by an experience that will clarify his better self by suffering as painful as salutary. It was so with our hero, and happened in this wise.

It must be remembered that more than a month had elapsed before the good doctor and his friends had any confirmation of their suspicions concerning their patient's social position. That was, of course, when the police, tired of their ill success, consented to allow Sir James to flood the newspapers with advertisements. Thus they knew, of course, that the quondam printer from the States could be no other than the missing son of ——, baronet. What was worse for poor Bess—not even so distantly related. The brave girl, of course, knew thus, for the first time, how immeasurably removed, even in cousinship, was her hero from her now, and what a hopeless chasm lay socially between them. She knew he was a gentleman, but no more. It may be surmised that the good doctor had many an uncomfortable qualm of conscience when reviewing his own part in the drama. He waited impatiently for his patient's recovery, for permission to announce to his father and friends his safety and whereabouts. This Clarence, when the time came, refused to grant. His spirit did not leap at the prospect of freedom, like a bird from its narrow cage. On the contrary, he seemed like an opiate dreamer who dreaded and hated most intensely to be awakened to the dreary realities of every-day life. The utmost he would consent to was to send the note, by careful messenger, that his father received. And then he would relapse into moody silence. When cautiously questioned, once or twice, about his former life and surroundings, his answers were short and taciturn, and Dr Robertson (Forster's medical friend) had especially forbidden any further recurrence to the subject, and advised to lead his mind into entirely new channels.

During the ravings of his recent delirium, amongst the disjointed fragments uttered were curious sentences that excited the patient most violently. They were unintelligible to the woman whom only once or twice he mentioned as the poor flower girl; and again—shocking to relate—d——d the girl, and wished that cursed Frenchman might get her. Poor Bess! Not even love in his "midsummer madness," more like hate, she felt; and then comforted herself hugely with some nineteenth century superstition about "dreams being contrary to truth."

These fragments that shook the patient to the centre were from a "play" and a "book." "It's a socialistic lie!" he would shout, "a canting, radical calumny. The English peasant is happy and contented, has good wages—good! Look at the beer he can drink—look! 'Crushed under the wheel!' *Who* is? Ha! ha! a pitiful tale. Can they not work and get money? 'Song of the Shirt'—cant—all cant! We pay them well for their work! Family starved. Am I responsible? Take 'em!—away!—take 'em away! How could *I* help it? It's a lie—the play is a lie! We crush no one! We have a right to wealth—it is our privilege. No! no! no! Not brothers—no brothers of mine. Not the same race—the canaille—born to their sordid work! Down with them! down! And he would struggle with imaginary foes, whom he would hate and loathe and glare at and shrink from; and when soothed, he would murmur, "Yes, they nearly killed me—the scum! And the flower girl, where was she? I thought I saw her and heard her scream! Yes, it was the Frenchman; he settled us both at last. Never mind; the girl escaped. Poor thing! poor thing!"

Another time he would be conversing seemingly with ladies and politicians, with lawyers and judges. And all at once he would see phantoms of woe and want, and the others would smile at his fears, like the ghosts at Banquo's feast. Anon he would be calm, and mutter peacefully, then start up with frightful mien, and expostulate with his imaginary company, and almost scream, "Yes, I have been in Golgotha. I have seen humanity hanging on a cross. Do none of you know what sights the sun and stars look down upon in this city? Do you not know that close to your doors a great multitude—flesh of your flesh—live lives that are one long agony? Hush your laughter and listen! the pitiful cry of the little ones—the hoarse curses of men, sodden in misery—the chaffering of an army of women selling themselves for bread. With what have you stopped your ears that you do not hear these doleful sounds? For me I can hear nothing else—nothing else!" he moaned. "I am doomed to hear nothing else. Oh the pity of it—the horror of it!" And he lay back exhausted, the tears streaming down his cheeks and his whole frame shaken with a passion of sobs.

Dr Robertson entered with a stranger during the last few sentences of one of these deliriums. The doctor looked sad and concerned, and having some hypnotising power, soothed him and left him in a peaceful sleep. The stranger was eager in his questions regarding his patient, and told Dr Forster that the lines that seemed to have burned themselves into the poor man's brain were from Bellamy's famous book. They had been quoted with such effect by the hero of the play that the whole house was visibly affected. But such sympathy, such antagonism, such class hatred had been aroused by "Under the Wheel," that, on the third night the Lord Chamberlain had ordered its withdrawal under the most powerful pressure from society influence but that some friends, with himself had succeeded in publishing the play. This was the new drama Clarence had witnessed on the eve of his (almost) taking off; and hence its effect on his disordered brain. When stronger and saner—for change of theme—the doctor would welcome the visits of a home missionary—a good man—one of many unrecognized benefactors who cope, without glory or reward, or more than scant recognition, with the heathen in our midst, a more sordid and unpoetical field than his brother on "Afric's golden strand," and dealing with a much more stubborn and savage race. Yet these poor men, while they do yeoman's service to the Church, are just the ordinary rank and file recruited from the common militia ranks of the militant establishment. They are not picked from college or seminary, but are sent out with scant training to fight the foe, which the generals should fear most, but constantly make the tactical error of despising.

One of these, a good living, well intentioned man, but of somewhat narrow social and religious views, used to visit poor Clarence, and whilst interesting, also somewhat amused him. Hearing that the seeing a "wicked play" had something to do with Clarence's trouble, he brought next time a twelve page tract for him to read, where the "super" supposed to have written the same, points out the roads to heaven and hell behind the scenes in the usual orthodox and inconsequential manner. When asked concerning it, Clarence startled the poor missionary with the Scriptural query, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and gave him a play book to read entitled "Under the Wheel," asking him to make a sermon from it. Poor Mr. Jackson could not make the patient out, but took much interest in him, and quite as much in his nurses, Bessie and her sister Nellie, the latter of whom was quite an attractive blonde. The women listened more attentively than the men, and did not ask such puzzling questions. But other men—the doctor's friends—came occasionally, and it was mainly due to their influence and conversation, the books they left and read, and the debates that followed, that Clarence underwent the change, so complete and radical, he may almost have been, in theological parlance, "born again." He arose from that sick couch like the winged insect, the emblem of immortality, which leaves behind all that is base, sordid and earthly. When entirely convalescent, he was glad to take short walks and drives with his two doctors. He was entirely indebted to them for the whole of his means of subsistence, refusing with the most wilful stubbornness to visit his former friends or make himself known to his father's family. One interview he had with his grief-stricken father, which was a painful and memorable one, and that finally separated them.

When Clarence first thought of getting up from a sick bed, his friends had to find him, as a preliminary step, some clothes. When this was hinted to him, and a fashionable tailor mentioned, he, with decision and a dangerous approach to violent excitement, insisted on being provided with just such a shabby suit as his friend Forster or the missionary or any of the working tribe around him were usually arrayed in. And so a visit to a ready-made store was made, and with a rough guess at his size, a strong-looking, common business suit was purchased. With his newly awakened avidity for learning, he nevertheless avoided newspapers; but when his father's advertisement was shown him in almost every class of paper, begging his return to him, his heart softened, and he promised Dr. Forster to go and see him.

Accordingly, one morning, after breakfast, he presented himself in the Upper Berkeley street mansion. Putting aside the astonished flunkey, who, as he never tired of telling the ladies and gentlemen below stairs, "was so *nonplushed*, that he stood *agashed*, as the workingman that looked so like young master rushed past him that he couldn't stop him," Clarence entered his parent's chamber quietly and closed the door. The old gentleman, who was listlessly expecting his valet to help him finish dressing, did not immediately look up; but the more than monotonous silence caused him to send an enquiring glance around just as the deeply agitated young man laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. Then burst the broken cry from two strong men of "Father!" and "My own boy! my long lost son!" and they were in each other's arms.

Before the first excess of joy was over, the valet innocently entered, to be promptly dismissed, bursting with curiosity and chagrin, surprise and resentment, to add his contribution to the sensation in the servants' hall as to master's strange conduct, and the strange likeness of the stranger to their long lost young master. That a young gentleman who had always been the pink of fashion could possibly exist under the vulgar disguise of a poor-looking clerk or working mechanic, "without a bit o' chain, nor ring, nor nothin'," as Jeames described—and in a shoddy suit as I wouldn't be seen a givin' away to the grocer's boy—was a wild and visionary theory not to be entertained for a moment. So Clarence's aim to be recognized as little as possible was likely, from his bold manœuvre, to be successful. It is true the Baronet, when he had got his second wind, as the sports say, could not avoid letting his son know how painfully the anomaly in question struck him and Clarence smiled sadly when questioned somewhat sharply about masquerading in so derogatory a costume. But there were more and worse surprises for this good old country gentleman's Conservatism in store before the sad interview was over.

When that somewhat old fashioned but thoroughly lovable old gentleman Colonel Newcome, returned to England, with the usual wealth of rupees and liver derangement, to spend—as he fondly thought—his last days in peace and tranquil enjoyment, with his dear boy Clive, we all sympathised with the poor old man's disappointment, without being able to condemn young Clive, who suffered also, who could no more help growing up different in temperament, disposition and nature to the father he loved, than a yew can avoid growing up different to his sturdy friend the oak. Clarence saw, with a sigh, the inevitable gulf between himself and his loving parent widening and ever widening. What a wise provision is it of our Mother Nature that father should be so unlike son, and brother differ so much from brother! Without it, what "family pacts" there would be! how Clanishness would rule and reign.

Something like a sense of the inevitableness of a divided destiny inspired our hero with courage and patience enough to explain to his perplexed parent how to him "old things had passed away"—never to return—and "all things had become new"—never to be relinquished.

The father listened, at first, in a dazed, stupified way, scarcely listening, and not replying; but if the son took this silence for consent, as he expounded his new views and explained his new position, with logical clearness and force, with the eloquent fervor of deep conviction, he was woefully mistaken. The sullen stream was but silently gathering force behind the barrier that would divert its current till its swollen and angry flood burst in one tempestuous torrent, sweeping the obstacle before it in a fierce, fighting whirl of waters. The language the son had used, the ideas presented were, truth to say, not altogether new. He had heard distorted, ultra conservative perversions of the same fundamental facts before in his parliamentary career, but firmly and honestly believed they were nothing but the envious ebullitions of rascally Radicals—the hissings of the venomous reptiles and their foolish victims, who raise their impious heads against all that is sacred and great and imperial in the annals of their country—the great Conservative party, the bulwark of their country's glory.

Now, when he thought he understood the drift of the boy's talk, to have these same views presented to him as those of his only son's, a son whose destiny he had been carefully preparing all these years, as the pride and hope of his country, as the trained and polished knight, strong and valiant, to deal the death blow to this democratic demon; and, more than all, to have these same obnoxious views pressed on him for his own adoption cut him to the quick.

He poured forth a torrent of invective on his recreant son, in language and volume such as the consistent aristocrat had never used before in his whole career, and which the recording angel, if one drop of pity live in his veins, must blot out as he writes.

Clarence's heart bled for his aged parent, and he forgave his abuse as soon as uttered, but his purpose was firm and unshaken, as solid as the rock against which the tempest so vainly spent itself. Seeing the boy's impassive resistance, the father awkwardly—for he was not used to pleading—tried to soften the boy's purpose by kindness. He offered to retire from his seat at once in the son's favor; to deed all his wealth to him now, just reserving a pittance for his last few days; to use all the influence and power at his command for his immediate advancement; to do all that a fond father and a true friend could, if he would only relent and turn from this wretched and dreadful project. Seeing all this was of no avail, he implored him to remember his sainted mother, to consider what he knew was her dearest wish, to see him honorably successful in a brilliant career, either at the bar, as a judge on the bench, or in parliament, pleading powerfully for the right. He implored Clarence not to distress her gentle spirit, as he must, by disregarding his poor old father's last request, but to fulfil the dearest wishes of both, and crown the effort of his life, by his dutiful acquiescence.

Poor Clarence! How could he resist this appeal? This turning of the roads comes to us all, sooner or later—this imperious demand of the angel of fate, whose voice rings out clear and incisive as a trumpet. "Make your choice now. You are at the crossing of the ways." Is it love or duty—inclination, pleasure—all that youth and hope desire—or the stern purposes of life—without compromise or compensation? Choose ye this day whom ye will serve. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Alas for our hero, and all in his predicament. On which side was God, and which Mammon? Was it not his duty to fulfil his parents' wishes? Could he not use his immense advantages for the good of his fellows—his immense wealth, his position and prestige? Could he not, at the same time, fulfil his father's most ardent desire and shower benefits on all his new friends, alleviate, at least, the fringe of the misery he saw, put his good doctors in remunerative berths, lift poor Bess and her sister and friends from their abject poverty to refinement and luxury even—marry them to the doctor or missionary? Ay!—and here he pulled up sharp, conscious for the first time of a strange feeling that he was not quite satisfied that his nurse should be monopolised by any other man—not even the well-deserved doctor.

What could he do then? Marry her himself? As Harry Smith, unskilled laborer that might be all right, but as Sir H. Clarkson, Bart., M.P., how would the world regard it—the clubs, the London drawing rooms, the Hon. Dowager H. B.—Lady C. D. and her lovely daughters—one of whom had so much impressed him at her first season?

As the glamor of the world he had left began again to color his thoughts Clarence wavered and hesitated and almost sank into the arms of the enchantress that were slowly encircling him. If the adage is true that "the woman who deliberates is lost (and it need not be in every case), it is not so with men. When suddenly and sorely tempted, reason often comes to his aid to vanquish passion; he takes time for consideration and rallies his latent forces, like Greatheart, and gives Apolyon the quietus that for the time ends the strife. When Clarence knew for certain that his soul was in the hands of the tempter the strife was ended. Being conscious on which side his duty lay, his resolve was unalterably fixed, and he determined to follow such noble examples as Krapotkin and Tolstoi, and, (in a lesser degree), Hyndman and Morris, Bradlaugh and Huntingdon, men who gave up patrimony and power, the comforts and solace of wealth, with the joy and refinement of art, to throw in their lot with the workers, to live their sordid life, to sympathise with their sorrows, and be a coworker, a comrade, a brother to the struggling millions.

Let him that knows aught of the seventh heaven that belongs to the young patrician—beloved, admired, courted, flattered, rich, absurdly rich, with youth and health, and the world open for his gratification—and the deepest hell of abject poverty—begging for an honest crust, kicked, cuffed, despised, loathed, shunned, hated, for all the misery he has to suffer, and the unlovely results in his own distorted and emaciated person—let him who knows aught of the contrast, despise the sacrifice made by our hero, made deliberately with his eyes wide open to the dread consequence. Let him who gives away a suit of clothes he is tired of, and puts in the charity sermon plate the price of a box of cigars—let him ask if he knows what self-sacrifice means? Let her—but to speak or write calmly of the nameless horror and degradation of the women "under the wheel," and the wasted opportunity for good of those in the upper air, is impossible—"that way madness lies." Where Balzac and Hugo have written in vain, and Hood and Dickens spent their strength for nought, what could my weak voice avail? But we must return to our narrative, and follow poor Clarence, as he leaves his father's mansion, never to return, with a heart as heavy as any bereaved parent. "For this my son was lost and is found again, but is lost now in a double death, more hopelessly removed than if lying in his sepulchre." So the broken-hearted aristocrat thought and felt, as he saw his son depart, with a parent's curse on the head he was willing to bless and anoint with the oil of renewed and seven fold prosperity.

Clarence walked, with downcast eyes and heavy heart, he knew not whither, nor cared as on that eventful night that changed his fate. This was near noon. As he left the wealthy portion of the great city where his father's mansion lay, he turned north-west, passing miles of palatial dwellings, crowded with comfort and luxury, he reached the squalid portion of Paddington, near Lisson Grove, as this wretched, utterly verdureless region is termed. Here, on the stroke of twelve, a big factory vomited forth its human machine tenders, all rushing in every direction for the matitudinal meal. He asked himself, as he noticed their pale, cadaverous faces, their tawdy frayed finery and shiftless, limping walk, if these were the happy, contented, well-fed people of the greatest Christian country on earth—the free-born Britons, the peaceful citizens of a glorious empire, their bulwark, pride and strength? He thought of all the glowing perorations that had won him such rapturous applause in the University Debating Club, when characturing such elements as the glorious material that shall build this great empire to higher heights yet in Imperial Federation of use and grandeur. And, as the Scripture says, "he mocked within himself," and wondered how many more self-satisfied, blind fools there were in either University fondly hugging the same delusion.

Here he came upon a knot of navvies at their noontide meal. Hungry as he was, he wondered when his palate would be educated to the point of enjoying such a meal, eaten under such conditions; the dirty newspaper, the jackknife, used for every purpose, the inevitable grime that mixed with every mouthful, washed down with that exhilerating beverage cold tea or coffee—in some cases beer, from the nearest "pub."

Where does the great temperance question come in here? The commonest malt decoction is cheaper here than manufactured tea or coffee or most temperance drinks. He had learned that all this class of laborers brought their wretched condition on themselves by their drunkenness and improvidence. "If it were so, it were a grievous fault, and grievously hath Labor answered it." But he failed to detect any difference between those who drunk tea and those who drunk beer. The improvidence would consist in paying for the dearer beverage. He thought bitterly on the extent of their crime, and wondered if in their case he would have been tempted to hide the dismal surroundings behind an atmosphere of cheap alcohol. And as to the punishment of improvidence, why he and his class had not suffered, when the price of *their* beverages were taken into account.

How many workingmen's meals, he thought, could be purchased with the price of one bottle of decent wine he and his friends had often cracked together, though temperance lecturers and tract writers and preachers had never pointed out to his class these obvious truths. Could it be true that not only the statute laws and their administration were differently treated for rich and poor, in the principle that the more excuse or necessity there was for stealing or getting drunk the more heinous therefore was the crime of doing either, but that also there should be a different plane of ethics for rich and poor? Even the æsthete Clarence could not well moralise on an empty stomach, and a sympathetic chord in his grosser nature had been struck on seeing the working beast feed. His Whitechapel friends had insisted on his having a few shillings in his pocket when he started out; so that, compared with the submerged tenth, the really poor he was as an armed knight among naked savages. He was learning the value of money now by its scarcity. He knew he could get a dinner anywhere for five shillings, a decent dinner of two courses that he could enjoy, but, with the waiter's fee that would about empty his pockets—to be refilled when or how? So he searched for something cheaper. "An ordinary, from 1 to 3, half a crown." He could well afford that, he thought for the moment, but prudence—a hard lesson—said "No—lower still," as Montague Tigg says, in Nicholas Nickleby. Then it comes down to the ridiculous sum of eighteen pence. This, in the region of shabby genteel Hammersmith, where he found he had wandered to, was the offer in more than one clean-looking eating house; but still he must economize. He was getting quite elated with his newly acquired virtue, as he spied, in a dingier thoroughfare of Upper Chelsea, a bill of fare in a coffee-house, setting out the facts that a large plate of meat was 6d., a small do 4d., vegetables 1d., bread ½d. a slice, tea 1½d. a cup, coffee 1d. (pastry 2d. extra). All the daily and weekly papers. Cleanliness and prompt attention guaranteed. Thinking he had struck the lowest rung of the social ladder, he went in.

We have no wish to underrate the good done by the coffee tavern and coffee palace association in providing antidotes to the too seductive saloons of our great cities, but the old fashioned London chop house, or coffee shop, as it is more familiarly termed, has, without noise or advertisement, without praise or recognition from the men and women of light and leading, who take the masses by the hand, as nurses do children, and fairly drag them into the right path. The society philanthropists who insist on their benevolent ventures paying good dividends to the shareholders, have had scant recognition, for the private enterprise of the coffee-shop, which depends mainly for success on good quality and good management, and the reason is that a customer, taking a coffee house meal, has the option of sending out for *beer*, if he prefers that beverage with his meal. And although there is never a case recorded of this being abused, or more than half a pint of malt served to each customer with a meal, still this drop of poison in the cup is sufficient to shut the institution out of recognition among the class reforming fraternity. But Clarence did not avail himself of this (to a Briton) dearly-prized privilege—he contented himself with two cent. coffee. He had a hatred for alcohol, ascribing what might have been his death, in a great measure, to his drinking too much wine on that fatal night—and (mark the confession, teetotalers!) he thought then that its evil influence could scarcely be exaggerated. He enjoyed his large plate (6d.); and on the waitress burdening him with some coppers out of a shilling he tendered them back. She explained they "were not allowed to take anything," but eventually, with a blush, consented. Clarence was not now half so much in love with his new virtue, feeling that "strict economy" somehow meant meanness. Why hadn't he given the girl 6d. at least? She would have been more civil and grateful than the waiters he was used to, were for a shilling. But no, he couldn't afford it, he must learn to be "near" if he wished to "get on." And this is one of the most hateful consequences of poverty, which the rich moralist insists we must practise, and wherein we cannot charge them with much inconsistency, for it is a virtue they invariably practise themselves.

Clarence next found himself wandering Chelsea way, admiring the relics of the genuine, well-built houses of Queen Anne's times, and equally not admiring the bran new vagaries of the plutocratic exploiters, whose tony mansions were supposed to illustrate that style of architecture. The old bridge and the river, the magnificent park beyond the new embankment, and the few remaining relics brought to his mind the great painter who had made that region classic ground for the artist, and the grim philosopher opposite the wroughtiron gates of whose house he stood.

He mused awhile on the eyeless windows of the house, so emblematic of the long-departed light that had once shone through them, making it a Mecca for so many literary pilgrims; and he thought how characteristic, in the cold, gray February twilight, with the barge on the river and the almost Scotch mist in the street, how emblematic it all was of the stern spirit of the departed prophet.

(*To be continued.*)

It is far better to let all the world know at once that we mean to have all industries organized for the benefit and under the control of the workers. The class now in possession must soon be at their wits ends as the economical development proceeds, to counteract our rapidly growing influence. Every step they take must help on our cause; for the evolution of society is inevitable and is on our side. The duty of us Social Democrats at the present moment, therefore, is clear—to bring recruits to our own ranks, so that we may increase our organized strength and show a compact and solid front to the general enemy.—*A. P. Hazell.*