

Her bosom was bursting with the rage that was stifling her. She looked round for her Montruel, and not seeing him immediately, she called his name in a hoarse voice.

Montruel sprang from his hiding place.

"Oh!" murmured Agnes to herself, "I have no dagger! merrise," screamed she, with the foam on her lips, "it was thee, who drew me into this infamous snare."

"Me!" interrupted Amaury.

"Silence!" cried madame Agnes, trembling with fury; "Thou art a traitor and a coward!"

She placed her two hands upon his shoulders, and shook him with the strength of a man.

Then reaching the last spasms of her delirium, she struck him in the face so violently, that the blood spurted from his eyes and nostrils. In another moment her strength had vanished, and she fell, half dead, upon the muddy street of la Calandre, and even before the threshold of the tavern of St. Landry.

Half an hour afterwards, you might have met with Amaury Montruel and madame Agnes, in the avenue of young elms, which led to the palace of the Louvre. They had stopped just at the same place where the handsome page Albret had told his love to Eve, on the morn of this eventful day.

But Agnes had now repaired the disorder of her toilet, and nothing seemed to remain of all that high fever, and of all that furious madness which had so lately overcome her. The bands of her jet hair were arranged with their customary elegance, and her cheeks wore no traces of her recent distress.

To be continued.

"OLD MURDER."

I.

THERE goes Old Murder," said Mr. Miller, the manager of the Old County Bank, as he stood at his window, with his nose resting on the top of the wire blind.

"Old Murder" was the nickname given to Doctor Thatcher by the inhabitants of Crossford. It was a sarcastic nickname, but used in all good nature; for the old doctor, though somewhat penurious and brusque, was a worthy man who had done his duty and combated death with success and profit for forty years.

Crossford is a pleasant compact town, and as the doctor drove up the High-street every one saw him. The butcher, among his sheep, pinked with white slashes, took off his hat as he jointed a loin of mutton on his enormous sacrificial crimsoned block. The bookbinder standing at his press, torturing a volume in his vice, saw him through his window, and, with some scraps of gold leaf in his hair, opened his glass door to watch him. They saw him over the little buttery door at the post-office, and the young men at the draper's discussed him as they unrolled carpets and uncoiled ribbons.

Dr. Thatcher was bound on a visit to his old friend the rector, at Woodcot, a suburb of Crossford; wrapped up in a coarse, threadbare, brown great-coat, with a comforter hiding all but his nose, he drove on in his rickety pony-chaise, his old blind white mare never exceeding her usual pace for any possible provocation. He drove, brooding as he went, over old times; old men can only look back, the future has little pleasure for them. With his thick rough grey eye-brows, furrowed frosty face, and big grey whiskers, Dr. Thatcher looked the very type of elderly sagacity.

It was a bright November morning, and the sunshine, like the presence of one we love, shed hope, joy, and comfort on the meanest and humblest object.

The doctor was in high spirits, and ripe for gossip. As he rang at the door, a portly, comfortable butler presented himself, and called a page-boy to hold the doctor's horse.

"How are you, Roberts?" said the doctor, with gruff kindness. "How's the gout? Take less ale; that's my prescription."

The rector's study was a delightful den, walled with sound old books and hung with exquisite water-colour sketches by Cox, Copley Fielding,

Turner, and Prout—rainy moors, sunny cliffs bathed in pure blue air, enchanted mountains, magic sunsets, and crumbling gable-ended Norman houses. There were rare hothouse flowers on the table, a Venetian glass, and rare photographs, old editions of the Elizabethan poets, ivory elephants, little palanquins, and Japanese fans. It was the den of a man of refinement, travel, sense, and taste. The windows looked out on a broad sweep of soft green lawn, and a fine cedar-tree spread out its vast dark ledges of boughs in eternal benediction. A bright lively fire rose in a waving pyramid from the grate, that shone as bright as a Life Guardsman's breastplate. The doctor, growling at the delay, was turning over some photographs of Cornwall, the granite cliffs reproduced with every crack, cleft, and splinter, when there came a cheery tap at the window. It was the rector, cheerful as ever, and rejoicing to see his old friend. As the doctor opened the glass door that led out to the lawn, the rector stepped in and shook him by the hands.

"We want you to see George; his throat's bad, doctor," said the rector.

"Very well, then—here I am. Mind, no gratis advice; down in the bill. I earned my experience hard, and I don't mean to part with it gratis."

"No one asked you, doctor," said the rector, who knew his old friend's manner. He rang the bell, and the frightened page-boy entered.

"Page-boy!" growled the doctor. "In my time they were called only boys. Get a silver spoon."

The boy went and returned in a moment with a spoon.

"Now open your mouth. I'm not going to cut your tongue off. Open it wider, sir."

The doctor held back the boy's tongue with the bowl of the spoon and looked in.

"Bah!" he said. "Mere inflammation. I'll send you a gargle, boy. If it gets worse, why, I can snip off the end of the uvula. There, that'll do, page-boy. When I was young, Buller," said the doctor, as the door closed, and he threw himself back roughly in a sloping arm-chair, "I made this my golden rule—always, if possible, to get my fee when the patient was still in pain. It made the fee larger, and it was paid quicker. I never pretended to refuse fees, and then took them. I only wish I could get my Jack into better ways about these things. Delicacy is thrown away on people; every one is for himself."

The rector laugh, poked the fire, and rubbed his hands. He enjoyed the doctor in his dry, splenetic moods.

"I've come to ask you to dine with the Prices and one or two more, to-night at seven: plain mutton and a bit of fish, hare soup, and a pudding—no fuss. I don't ask you for show, or to wipe off a debt; but because I like you. Rubber afterwards. Your old flame, my sister, will be there, and Letty, of course, or Jack won't hear of it."

"How is your adopted son, doctor?"

"How is he? What, Harkness? Why, strong as a lion, of course; riding, shooting, singing better than any other young man in Surrey. This morning the dear boy insisted on driving tandem—only fancy driving tandem to see patients! Ha, ha! But these are harmless follies. Oh, he'll ferment clear as your dry sherry. How's Mary?"

"Pretty well, thank you. Gone out with the children. Excuse me, doctor, as a great admirer of old jewellery, asking you to let me see that key-ring of yours again off your finger. I always admire it so much—it is really worthy of Cellini."

The doctor was propitiated; his old grey eyes brightened under his white eyebrows. "Only take it off for very old friends. That is the key of my case-book, which my poor dear wife gave me on our wedding-day, forty years ago next spring."

It was a curious ring, of old Italian workmanship. It had originally been the key of the jewel-chest of some nobleman of the house of Medici, for it bore the arms, the three pills of that dangerous family.

"I should leave you that key when I go under the grass, Buller, but I've promised it to that dear boy, for he'll have all my business, and there's nothing like secrecy with a case-book. Buller, you must walk more—you're getting too stout. How's that eye of yours, by-the-by?" He put the ring on again as he spoke, and rubbed it affectionately with his coat cuff.

"The conjunctiva is still inflamed, and the iris wants expanding."

The doctor darted a crafty look from under his thick eyebrows, then began to hum Paddy Carey—"tum tiddie ti-ti.—But what do you know about irises?"

"Will you come into the conservatory, doctor, and see my Neptunias—you are in no hurry?"

"How do you know? I'm just off to see my sister. Jack is attending her; but she writes me to come and see her too, without his knowing it, for fear he might be offended. Am I ever idle?"

"She'll leave all her money to Jack, I suppose?" said the rector.

"Every penny; but he won't get it for a dozen years, I hope. Do you know, Buller, I am planning something to keep the boy quiet and prudent; for he is rather inclined to be wild. I tell him he shan't marry Letty till he has made two hundred a year by half fees. He'll do it, I'll be bound, in the first year. I pretend to be inexorable. I examine his accounts. I pay no debts. I keep him hard at it—and what is the result? A better boy doesn't breathe in all Surrey. He won't drink spirits—he won't touch cards; yet all the time I'm negotiating for a small estate to give him when he marries; but it kills me parting with hard-earned money."

By this time the doctor and the rector had reached the conservatory, a cheerful room, gay with flowers, with vines trellised over the sloping glass roof, and Chinese caricatures over the fireplace.

"More waste money," grumbled the teaty man with the soft heart under the bear's skin; "you'll be having a pinery next."

"Well, and you doctors are paid to cure us, and half the money you get is for putting us to a lingering and expensive death—tut! Ah, it's six of one to half a dozen of the other. I brought you here, doctor, to say something disagreeable, but true—will you bear it?"

"Will I bear it? What did I say when Sir Astley told me once I must have my leg off, after that accident, riding?—'You'll find a saw,' I said, pointing, 'in that third left-hand drawer.' You're a good old friend; come, say away."

The old doctor's manner was, nevertheless, somewhat restless, and a little belied the energy and resolution implied in his words. He twisted his key-ring round anxiously.

The rector's eyes were clear, cold, and fixed; his mouth closed, as if he felt some inward pain. He was silent for a moment, then he spoke.

"My dear old friend," he said, "it seems cruel to tell you the truth when you are so happy in your ignorance; but I must use the lancet and wound to heal—you know what profession uses that motto. I feel, from what Roberts tells me, and other people who know Crossford well, that the adopted son you love so much and trust so entirely, deceives you. He is not going on respectably; he drinks, he gambles, he likes low company, he is going bad; take my word for it; he is better away from Crossford for a time; he is going bad, I am sure he is. He is idle, he is quarrelsome, he runs into debt, he is going fast down hill; he has been too much indulged —"

As a skilful surgeon stays his knife to see if the patient is bearing up or sinking, so the rector stopped to watch his old friend, who had sunk on a chair; at first pale, tremulous, and faint, then angry, restless.

"No no," he said; "I cannot and will not believe it. It is lies—lies! What, my boy Jack? No, he is full of spirit; he is fond of humour; they call that been quarrelsome and liking low society. Gamble? He won't play even a rubber with me. Idle? Why, he is a slave at business. He is by this time fourteen miles