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POETRY.

GOOD NIGHT.

Downward sinks the setting sun,
Soft the evening shadows fall;
Light is flying,
Day is dying,
Darkness stealeth over all.
Good night!

Autumn garners in her stores—
Poison of the fading year;
Leaves are dying,
Winds are sighing—
Whispering of the winter near.
Good night!

Youth is vanished, manhood wanes,
Age its forward shadow throws:
Day is dying,
Years are flying,
Life runs onward to its close.
Good night!

—London Inquirer

LIFE.

Life hath its sunshine; but the ray
Which flashes on its stormy wave
Is but the beacon of decay,
A meteor gleaming o'er the grave;
And though its dawning hour is bright
With fancy's gayest coloring,
Yet o'er its cloud-encumbered night
Dark ruin flaps his raven wing.

—J. G Brooks.

Recollections of a Policeman.

BY THOMAS WATERS.

THE GAMBLER.

A little more than a year after the period when adverse circumstances—chiefly the result of my own reckless follies—compelled me to enter the ranks of the metropolitan police, as the sole means left me of procuring food and raiment, the attention of one of the principal chiefs of the force was attracted towards me by the ingenuity and boldness which I was supposed to have manifested in hitting upon and unraveling a clue which ultimately led to the detection and punishment of the perpetrators of artistically-concontrived fraud upon an eminent tradesman of the west end of London. The chief sent for me; and after a somewhat lengthened conversation, not only expressed approbation of my conduct in the particular matter under discussion, but hinted that he might shortly need my services in other affairs requiring intelligence and resolution.

"I think I have met you before," he remarked with a meaning smile on dismissing me, "when you occupied a different position from your present one? Do not alarm yourself: I have no wish to pry unnecessarily into other men's secrets. Waters is a name common enough in *all* ranks of society, and I may, you know"—here the cold smile deepened in ironical expression—"be mistaken. At all events, the testimony of the gentleman whose recommendation obtained your admission to the force—I have looked into the matter since I heard of your behavior in the late business—is a sufficient guarantee that nothing more serious than imprudence and folly can be laid to your charge. I have neither right nor inclination to inquire further. Tomorrow, in all probability, I shall send for you."

I came to the conclusion, as I walked homewards, that the chief's intimation of having previously met me in another sphere of life was a random and unfounded one, as I had seldom visited London in prosperous days, and still more rarely mingled in its society. My wife, whoever, to whom I of course related the substance of the conversation, reminded me that he had once been at Doncaster during the races; and suggested that he might possibly have seen and noticed me there. This was a sufficiently probable explanation of the hint; but whether the correct one or not, I cannot decide, as he never afterwards alluded to the subject, and I had not the slightest wish to renew it.

Three days elapsed before I received the expected summons. On waiting on him, I was agreeably startled to find that I was to be at once employed on a mission which the most sagacious and experienced of detective officers would have felt honored to undertake.

"Here is a written description of the persons of this gang of blacklegs, swindlers, and forgers," concluded the commissioner, summing up his instructions. "It will be your object to discove their private haunts, and secure legal evidence of their netarious practices. We have been hitherto baffled, principally, I think, through the too hasty zeal of the officers employed: you must especially avoid that error. They are practised scoundrels; and it will require considerable patience, as well as acumen, to unkennel and bring them to justice. One of their more recent victims is young Mr. Merton, son, by a former marriage, of the Dowager Lady Everton.* Her ladyship has applied to us for assistance in extricating him from the toils in which he is meshed. You will call on her at five o'clock this afternoon—in plain clothes of course—and obtain whatever information on the subject she may be able to afford. Remember to communicate *directly* with me; and any assistance you may require shall be promptly rendered." With these and a few other minor directions, needless to recapitulate, I was dismissed to a task which difficult and possibly perilous as it might prove, I hailed as a delightful relief from the wearing monotony and dull routine of ordinary duty.

I hastened home; and after dressing with great care—the best part of my wardrobe had been fortunately saved by Emily from the wreck of my fortunes—I proceeded to Lady Everton's mansion. I was immediately marshalled to the drawing-room, where I found her ladyship and her daughter—a beautiful, fairy-looking girl—awaiting my my arrival. Lady Everton appeared greatly surprised at my appearance, differing, as I daresay it altogether did, from her abstract idea of a policeman, however attired or disguised; and it was not till she had perused the note of which I was the bearer, that her haughty and incredulous stare became mitigated to a glance of lofty condescendent civility.

"Be seated, Mr. Waters," said her ladyship, waving me to a chair. "This note informs me that you have been selected for the duty of endeavoring to extricate my son from the perilous entanglements in which he has unhappily involved himself."

I was about to reply—for I was silly enough to feel somewhat nettled at the noble lady's haughtiness of manner—that I was engaged in the public service of extirpating a gang of swindlers with whom her son had involved himself, and was there to procure from her ladyship any information she might be possessed of likely to forward so desirable a result: but fortunately the remembrance of my actual position, spite of my gentleman's attire, flashed vividly upon my mind; and instead of permitting my glib tongue to wag irreverently in the presence of a right honorable, I bowed with deferential acquiescence.

Her ladyship proceeded, and I in substance obtained the following information:

Mr. Charles Merton, during the few months which had elapsed since the attainment of his majority, had very literally "fallen amongst thieves." A passion for gambling seemed to have taken entire possession of his being; and almost every day, as well as night, of his haggard and feverish life was passed at play. A run of ill-luck, according to his own belief—but in very truth a run of downright robbery—had set in against him, and he had not only dissipated all the ready money which he had inherited, and the large sums which the foolish indulgence of his lady-mother had supplied him with, but had involved himself in bonds, bills, and other obligations to a frightful amount. The principal agent in effecting this ruin was one Sandford—a man of fashionable and dashing exterior, and the presiding spirit of the knot of desperadoes whom I was commissoned to hunt out. Strange to say, Mr. Merton had the blindest reliance upon this man's honor; and even now—tricked, despoiled as he had been by him and his gang—relied upon his counsel and assistance for escape from the desperate position in which he was involved. The Everton estates had passed, in default of male issue, to a relative of the late lord; so that ruin, absolute and irremediable, stared both the wretched dupe and his relatives in the face. Lady Everton's jointure was not a very large one, and her son had been permitted to squander sums which should have been devoted to the discharge of claims which were now pressed harshly against her.

I listened with the deepest interest to Lady Everton's narrative. Repeatedly during the course of it, as she incidentally alluded to the manners and appearance of Sandford, who had been introduced by Mr Merton to his mother and sister, a suspicion, which the police papers had awakened, that the gentleman in question was an old acquaintance of my own, and one, moreover, whose favors I was extremely anxious to return in kind, flashed with increased conviction across my mind. This surmise I of course kept to myself; and after cautioning the ladies to keep our proceedings a profound secret from Mr. Merton, I took my leave, amply provided with the resources requisite for carrying into effect the scheme which I had resolved upon. I also arranged that, instead of waiting personally on her ladyship, which might excite observation and suspicion, I should report progress by letter through the post.

"If it *should* be he!" thought I, as I emerged into the street. The bare suspicion had sent the blood through my veins with furious violence. "If this Sandford be, as I suspect, that villain Cardon, success will indeed be triumph—victory! Lady Everton need not in that case seek to animate my zeal by promises of money recompense. A blighted existence, a young and gentle wife cast down by his means from opulence to sordid penury, would stimulate the dullest craven that ever crawled the earth to energy and action. Pray Heaven my suspicion prove correct; and then, oh mine enemy, look well to yourself, for the avenger is at your heels!"

Sandford, I had been instructed, was usually present at the Italian Opera during the ballet: the box he generally occupied was designated in the memoranda of the police: and as I saw by the bills that a very successful piece was to be performed that evening, I determined on being present.

I entered the house a few minutes past ten o'clock, just after the commencement of the ballet, and looked eagerly round. The box in which I was instructed to seek my man was empty. The momentary disappointment was soon repaid. Five minutes had not elapsed when Cardon, looking more insolently-triumphant than ever, entered arm-in-arm with a pale aristocratic-looking young man, whom I had no difficulty, from his striking resemblance to a portrait in Lady Everton's drawing room, in deciding to be Mr. Merton.—My course of action was at once determined on. Pausing only to master the emotion which the sight of the glittering reptile in whose poisonous folds I had been involved and crushed inspired, I passed to the opposite side of the house, and boldly entered the box. Cardon's back was towards me, and I tapped him lightly on the shoulder. He turned quickly round; and if a basilisk had confronted him, he could scarcely have exhibited greater terror and surprise. My aspect, nevertheless, was studiously bland and conciliating, and my out-stretched hand seemed to invite a renewal of our old friendship.

"Waters!" he at last stammered, feebly accepting my proffered grasp—"who would have thought of meeting you here?"

"Not you, certainly, since you stare at an old friend as if he were some frightful goblin about to swallow you. Really"——

"Hush! Let us speak together in the lobby. An old friend," he added in answer to Mr. Merton's surprised stare. "We will return in an instant."

"Why, what is all this, Waters?" said Cardon, recovering his wonted *sang froid* the instant we were alone. "I understood you had retired from amongst us; were in fact—what shall I say?"

"Ruined—done up! Nobody should know that better than you."

"My good fellow, you do not imagine—"

"I imagine nothing, my dear Cardon. I was very thoroughly done—done *brown*, as it is written in the vulgar tongue. But fortunately my kind old uncle——"

"Passgrove is dead!" interrupted my old acquaintance, eagerly jumping to a conclusion, "and you are his heir! I congratulate you my dear fellow. This is indeed a charming 'reverse of circumstances.'"

"Yes; but mind I have given up the old game. No more dice-devilry for me. I have promised Emily never even to touch a card again."

The cold, hard eye of the incarnate fiend—he was little else—gleamed mockingly as these "good intentions" of a practised gamester fell upon his ear; but he only replied, "Very good; quite right, my dear boy. But come, let me introduce you to Mr. Merton, a highly connected personage I assure you.—By the bye, Waters," he added, in a caressing, confidential tone, "my name, for family and other reasons, which I will hereafter explain to you, is for the present, Sandford."

"Sandford!"

"Yes; do not forget. But *allons*, or the ballet will be over."

I was introduced to Mr Merton as an old and esteemed friend, whom he—Sandford—had not seen for many months. At the conclusion of the ballet Sandford proposed that we should adjourn to the European Coffee-house, nearly opposite. This was agreed to, and out we sallied. At the top of the staircase, we jostled against the commissioner, who, like us, was leaving the house. He bowed slightly to Mr. Merton's apology, and his eye wandered briefly and coldly over our persons; but not the faintest sign of interest or recognition escaped him. I thought it possible he did not know me in my changed apparel; but looking back after descending a few steps, I was quickly undeceived.—A sharp, swift glance, expsessive both of encouragement and surprise, shot out from under his penthouse brows, and as swiftly vanished. He did not know how little I needed spurring to the goal we had both in view!

We discussed two or three bottles of wine with much gaiety and relish. Sandford especially was in exuberant sprits; brimming over with brilliant anecdote and sparkling badinage. He saw in me a fresh rich prey, and his eager spirit revelled by anticipation in the victory which he nothing doubted to obtain over my "excellent intentions and wife-pledged virtue." About half past twelve o'clock he proposed to adjourn.—This was eagerly assented to by Mr. Merton, who had for some time exhibited unmistakeable symptoms of impatience and unrest.

"You will accompany us, Waters?" said Sandford, as we rose to depart. "There is, I suppose, no vow registered in the matrimonial archieves against *looking on* at a game played by others?"

"Oh no; but don't ask me to play."

"Certainly not;" and a devilish sneer curled his lip. "Your virtue shall suffer no temptation be assured."

We soon arrived before the door of a quiet, respectable looking house in one of the streets leading out of the Strand; a low, peculiar knock given by Sandford, was promptly answered; then a password, which I did not catch, was whispered by him thro' the key-hole, and we passed in.

We proceeded up stairs to the first floor, the shutters of which were carefully closed, so that no intimation of what was going on could possibly reach the street. The apartment was brilliantly lighted: a roulette table and dice and cards were in full activity: wine and liquors of all varieties were profusely paraded. There were about half-a-dozen persons present, I soon discovered, besides the gang, and that comprised eleven or twelve well-dressed desperadoes, whose sinister aspects induced a momentary qualm lest one or more of the pleasant party might suspect or recognise my vocation. This, however, I reflected, was scarcely possible. My beat, during the short period I had been in the force was far distant from the usual haunts of such gentry, and I was otherwise unknown in London. Still, questioning glances were eagerly directed towards my introducer; and one big burly fellow, a foreigner—the rascals were the scum of various countries—was very unpleasantly inquisitorial. "*Vien reponds!*" I heard Sandford say in answer to his iterated queries; and he added something in a whisper which brought a sardonic smile to the fellow's lips, and induced a total change in his demeanor towards myself. This was reassuring; for though provided with pistols, I should, I felt, have little chance with such utterly reckless ruffians as those by whom I was surrounded. Play was proposed; and tho' at first stoutly refusing, I feigned to be gradually overcome by irresistible temptation, and sat down to blind hazard with my foreign friend for moderate stakes. I was graciously allowed to win, and in the end found myself richer in devil's money by about ten pounds. Mr. Merton was soon absorbed in the chances of the dice, and lost large sums, for which, when the money he had brought with him was exhausted, he gave written acknowledgements. The cheating practiced upon him was really audacious; and any one but a tyro must have detected it. He, however, appeared not to entertain the slightest suspicion of the "fair play" of his opponents, guiding himself entirely by the advice of his friend and counsellor, Sandford, who did not himself play. The amiable assemblage broke up about six in the morning, each person retiring singly by the back way, receiving, as he departed, a new password for the next evening.

A few hours afterwards, I waited on the commissioner to report the state of affairs. He was delighted with the fortunate *debut* I had made, but still strictly enjoined patience and caution. It would have been easy, as I was in possession of the password, to have surprised the confederacy in the act of gaming that evening; but this would only have accomplished a part of the object aimed at. Several of the fraternity—Sandford amongst the number—were suspected of uttering forged foreign bank-notes, and it was essential to watch narrowly for legal evidence to insure their conviction. It was also desirable to restore if possible, the property and securities of which Mr. Merton had been pillaged.

Nothing of especial importance occurred for seven or eight days. Gaming went on as usual every evening, and Mr. Merton became of course more and more involved: even his sister's jewels—which he had surreptitiously obtained, to such a depth of degredation will this frightful vice plunge men otherwise honorable—had been staked and lost; and he was, by the advice of Sandford, about to conclude a heavy mortgage on his estate, in order not only to clear off his enormous 'debts of honor,' but to acquire fresh means of 'winning back'—that *ignus-fatuus* of all gamblers—his tremendeus losses!

A new preliminary 'dodge' was, I observed, now brought into action. Mr. Merton esteemed himself a knowing hand at *ecarte*; it was introduced; and he was permitted to win every game he played, much to the apparent annoyance and discomfiture of the losers. As this was precisely the snare into which I had myself fallen, I of course the more readily detected it, and felt quite satisfied that a *grand coup* was meditated. In the meantime I had not been idle. Sandford was *confidentially* informed that I was only waiting in London to receive between four and five thousand pounds—part of Uncle Passgrove's legacy—and then intended to immediately hasten back to canny Yorkshire. To have seen the villain's eyes as I incidentally, as it were, announced my errand and intention! They fairly flashed with infernal glee! Ah, Sandford, Sandford! you were, with all your cunning, but a sand-blind idiot to believe the man you had wronged and ruined could so easily forget the debt he owed you!

The crisis came swiftly on. Mr. Merton's mortgage money was to be paid on the morrow; and on that day, too, I announced the fabulous thousands receivable by me were to be handed over. Mr. Merton, elated by his repeated triumphs at his ecarte, and prompted by his friend Sandford, resolved, instead of cancelling the bonds and obligations held by the conspirators, to redeem his losses by staking on that game his ready money against those liabilities. This was at first demurred to with much apparent earnestness by the winners; but Mr. Merton, warmly seconded by Sandford, insisting upon the concession, as he deemed it, it was finally agreed that ecarte should be the game by which he might hope to regain the fortune and the peace of mind he had so rashly squandered; the last time, should he be successful—and was he not sure of success?—he assured Sandford, that he would handle cards or dice. He should have heard the mocking merriment with which the gang heard Sandford repeat the resolution to amend his ways—*when* he had recovered his wealth!

The day so eagerly longed for by Merton and the confederates—by the spoilers and their prey—arrived; and I awaited with feverish anxiety the coming on of night.—Only the chief conspirators—eight in number—were to be present; and no stranger except myself—a privilege I owed to the moonshine legacy I had just received—was to be admitted to this crowning triumph of successful fraud. One only hint I had ventured to give Mr. Merton, and that under a promise, on his honor as a gentleman, of inviolable secrecy. It was this: "Be sure, before commencing play to-morrow night, that the bonds and obligations you have signed, the jewls you have lost, with a sum in notes or gold to make up an equal amount to that which you mean to risk, is actually deposited on the table." He promised to insist on this condition. It involved much more than he dreamt of.

My arrangements were at length thoroughly complete; and a few minutes past twelve o'clock the whispered password admitted me into the house. An angry altercation was going on. Mr. Merton was insisting, as I had advised, upon the exhibition of a sum equal to that which he brought with him—for, confident of winning, he was determined to recover his losses to the last farthing; and although his bonds, bills, obligations, his sister's jewels, and a large amount in gold and genuine notes, were produced, there was still a heavy sum deficient. "Ah, by the bye," exclaimed Sandford as I entered, "Waters can lend you the sum for an hour or two—for a *consideration*." He added in a whisper, "It will soon be returned."

"No, thank you," I answered coldly. "I never part with my money till I have lost it."

A malignant scowl passed over the scoundrel's features; but he made no reply. Ultimately it was decided that one of the fraternity should be despatched in search of the required amount. He was gone about half an hour, and returned with a bundle of notes. They were, as I hoped and expected forgeries on foreign banks. Mr. Merton looked at and counted them, and play commenced.

As it went on, so vividly did the scene recall the evening that had sealed my own ruin, that I grew dizzy with excitement, and drained tumbler after tumbler of water to allay the fevered throbbing of my veins.—The gamblers were fortunately too much absorbed to heed my agitation. Merton lost continuously—without pause or intermission. The stakes were doubled—trebled—quadrupled! His brain was on fire; and he played, or rather lost, with the recklessness of a madman.

"Hark! what's that?" suddenly exclaimed Sandford, from whose satanic features the mask he had so long worn before Merton had been gradually slipping. "Did you not hear a noise below?"

My ear had caught the sound; and I could better interpret it than he. It ceased.

"Touch the signal-bell, Adolphe," added Sandford.

Not only the play, but the very breathing of the villians, was suspended as they listened for the reply.

It came. The answering tinkle sounded

*The names mentioned in this narrative are, for obvious reasons, fictitious.

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