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VOL. 9.—NO. 11.

SACKVILLE, N. B., THURSDAY, JULY 18, 1878.

WHOLE NO. 427.

LITERATURE. THE HAUNTED HOTEL.

Wilkie Collins's New Story.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER VII.—PART SECOND.

Some days later the insurance offices (two in number) received the formal announcement of Lord Montbarry's death from her ladyship's London solicitors. The sum insured in each office was £5,000, on which one year's premium only had been paid. In the face of such a pecuniary emergency as this the directors thought it desirable to consider their position. The medical advisers of the two offices, who had recommended the insurance of Lord Montbarry's life, were called into council over their own reports. The result excited some interest among persons connected with business of life insurance. Without absolutely declining to pay the money, the directors (acting in concert) decided on sending a commission of inquiry to Venice, "for the purpose of obtaining further information."

"Mr. Troy received the earliest intelligence of what was going on. He wrote at once to communicate the news to Agnes; adding what he considered to be a valuable hint in these words: "You are intimately acquainted, I know, with Lady Barville, the late Lord Montbarry's eldest sister. The solicitors employed by her husband are also the solicitors to one of the two insurance offices. There may possibly be something in the report of the commission of inquiry touching on Ferrar's disappearance. Ordinary persons would not be permitted, of course, to see such a document. But a sister of the late lord is so near a relative as to be an exception to general rules. If Sir Theodore Barville puts it on that footing, the lawyers, even if they do not allow his wife to look at the report, will at least answer any discreet questions she may ask referring to it."

The reply was received by return of post. Agnes declined to avail herself of Mr. Troy's proposal. "My interference, innocent as it was," she wrote, "has already been productive of such deplorable results that I cannot and dare not stir any further in the case of Ferrar. If I had not consented to let that unfortunate man refer to me by name, the late Lord Montbarry would never have engaged him, and his wife would have been spared the misery and suspense from which she is suffering now. I would not communicate with a report to which you allude if it were placed in my hands—I have heard more than enough already of that hideous life in the palace of Venice. If Mrs. Ferrar chooses to address herself to Lady Barville (with your assistance), that is of course quite another thing. But even in this case, I must make a positive condition that my name shall not be mentioned. Forgive me, dear Mr. Troy, I am very unhappy, and very unreasonably—but I am only a woman, and you must not expect too much from me."

Foiled in this direction, the lawyer next advised making the attempt to discover the present address of Lady Montbarry's English maid. This excellent suggestion had one drawback: it could only be carried out by spending money—and there was no money to spend. Mrs. Ferrar shrank from the bare idea of making any use of the thousand pound note. It had been deposited in the safe keeping of a bank. If it were even mentioned in her hearing she shuddered and referred to it with melodramatic fervor, as "my husband's blood-money!"

So, under stress of circumstances, the attempt to solve the mystery of Ferrar's disappearance was suspended for a while. It was the last month of the year 1860. The commission of inquiry was already at work; having begun its investigations in December. On the 10th, the time for which the late Lord Montbarry had hired the Venetian palace expired. News by telegram reached the insurance offices that Lady Montbarry had been advised by her lawyers to leave for London with a little delay as possible. Baron River, it was believed, would accompany her to England, but would not remain in that country, unless his services were absolutely required by her advisers. The Baron, "well known as an enthusiastic student of chemistry," had heard of certain recent discoveries in connection with that science, in the United States, and was anxious to investigate them personally.

These items of news, collected by Mr. Troy, were duly communicated to Mrs. Ferrar, whose anxiety about her husband made her a frequent, and too frequent, visitor at the lawyer's office. She attempted to relate what she had heard to her good friend and protector. Agnes steadily refused to listen, and positively forbade any further conversation relating to Lord Montbarry's wife, now that Lord Montbarry was no more. "You have Mr. Troy to advise you," she said; "and you are welcome to what little money I can spare, if money is wanted. All I ask in return is that you will not distress me. I am trying to separate myself from remembrances—her voice fathered; she passed to control herself—from remembrances," she resumed, "which are sadder than ever since I have

heard of Lord Montbarry's death. Help me by your silence to recover my spirits, if you can. Let me hear nothing more, until I can rejoice with you that your husband is found." Time advanced to the 13th of the month; and more information of the interesting sort reached Mr. Troy. The labor of the insurance commission had come to an end. The report had been received from Venice on that day.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the 14th the directors and their legal advisers met for the reading of the report, with closed doors. These were the terms in which the commissioners related the results of their inquiry: "Private and confidential."

"We have the honor to inform our directors that we arrived in Venice on December 6, 1860. On the same day we proceeded to the palace inhabited by Lord Montbarry at the time of his last illness and death. We were received with all possible courtesy by Lady Montbarry's brother, Baron River. My sister was her husband's only attendant throughout his illness, the Baron said. "She is overwhelmed by grief and fatigue, or she would have been here to receive you personally. What are your wishes, gentlemen, and what can I do for you in her ladyship's place?"

"In accordance with our instructions, we answered that the death and burial of Lord Montbarry made it desirable to obtain more complete information relating to his illness, and to the circumstances which had attended it, than could be conveyed in writing. We explained that the law provided for the lapse of a certain interval of time before the payment of the sum assured, and we expressed our wish to conduct our inquiry with the most respectful consideration for her ladyship's feelings, and for the convenience of any other members of the family inhabiting the house.

"To this the Baron replied: 'I am the only member of the family living here, and I and the palace are entirely at your disposal.' From first to last we found this gentleman perfectly straightforward, and most liberally offering to do anything that we wished to do. "With the exception of her ladyship's room, we went over the whole of the palace the same day. It is an immense place, only partially furnished. The first floor and part of the second were the portions of the palace that had been inhabited by Lord Montbarry and the members of the household. We saw the bedchamber at one extremity of the palace, in which his lordship died, and the small room communicating with it, which he used as a study. Next to this was a large apartment or hall, the doors of which he habitually kept locked, his object being (as we were informed) to pursue his studies uninterrupted in perfect solitude. On the other side of the large hall were the bedchamber occupied by her ladyship and the dressing-room in which the maid slept previous to her departure for England. Beyond these were the dining and reception rooms, opening into an anti-chamber which gave access to the grand staircase of the palace.

"The only inhabited rooms on the second floor were the sitting-room and bedroom occupied by Baron River. The sitting-room at some distance from it, which had been the bedroom of the courier Ferrar. "On the rooms on the third floor and on the basement were completely unfurnished and in a condition of great neglect. We inquired if there was anything to be seen below the basement, and we were at once informed that there were vaults beneath, which we were at perfect liberty to visit.

"We went down so as to leave no part of the palace unexplored. The vaults were, as we were informed, used as dungeons in old times—some centuries since. Air and light were only partially admitted to these dismal places by two long shafts of winding construction, which communicated with the back-yard of the palace, and the openings of which, high above the ground, were protected by iron gratings. The stone stairs leading down into the vaults could be closed at will by a heavy trapdoor in the back hall, which we found open. The Baron himself led the way down the stairs. We remarked that it might be awkward if that trapdoor fell down and closed the opening behind us. The Baron smiled at the idea. "Don't be alarmed, gentlemen," he said, "the door is safe. I had an interest in seeing to it myself, when we first inhabited the palace. My favorite study is the study of experimental chemistry, and my workshop, since we have been in Venice, is down here."

"These last words explained a serious smell in the vaults, which we noticed the moment we entered them. We can only describe the smell by saying that it was of a two-fold sort—faintly aromatic, as it were, in its first effect, but with some after-odor very sickening in our nostrils. The Baron's furnace and retorts, and other things, were all there to speak for themselves, to wit: a large number of chemical apparatuses, and explosions—and she banished me to these lower regions so that my experiments may neither be smelt or heard." He held out his

hands, on which we had noticed that he wore gloves in the house. "Accidents will happen sometimes," he said, "no matter how careful a man may be. I burnt my hands severely in trying a new combination the other day, and they are only recovering now."

"We mention these otherwise unimportant incidents in order to show that our exploration of the palace was not impeded by any attempt at concealment. We were even admitted to her ladyship's own room—a subsequent occasion when she went out to take the air. Our interest recommended us to examine his lordship's residence, because the extreme privacy of his life at Venice and the remarkable departure of the only two servants in the house, might have some suspicious connection with the nature of his death. But we found nothing to justify suspicion from first to last.

"As to his lordship's retired way of life, we have conversed on the subject with the Consul and banker, the only two strangers who held any communication with him. He called once at the bank to obtain money on his letter of credit, and excused himself from accepting an invitation to visit the banker at his residence, on the ground of delicate health. His lordship wrote to the same effect on sending his card to the Consul, to excuse himself from personally returning that gentleman's visit to the palace. We have seen the letter, and we beg to offer the following copy of it: 'Many years past I have been in India have injured my constitution. I have ceased to go into society; the one occupation of my life now is the study of Oriental literature. The air of Italy is better for me than the air of England, or I should never have left home. Pray accept the apologies of a student and an invalid. The active part of my life is at an end.' The self-seclusion of his lordship seems to us to be explained in these few lines. We have not, however, on that account spared our inquiries in other directions. But nothing to excite a suspicion of anything wrong has come to our knowledge.

"As to the departure of the lady's maid, we have seen the woman's receipt for her wages, in which it is expressly stated that she left Lady Montbarry's service because she did not like the Continent, and wished to get back to her own country. This is not an uncommon result of taking English servants to foreign parts, and Lady Montbarry has informed us that she abstained from engaging another maid, in consequence of the extreme dislike which his lordship expressed to having strangers in the house, in the state of his health at that time.

"The disappearance of the courier Ferrar is, in itself, unquestionably a suspicious circumstance. Neither her ladyship nor the Baron can explain it; and no investigation that we could make has thrown the least light on this event, or has justified us in associating it, directly or indirectly, with the object of our inquiry. We have even gone the length of examining the portmanteau Ferrar left behind him. It contains nothing but clothes and linen—no money or even a scrap of paper in the pockets of the clothes. The portmanteau remains in charge of the police of Venice.

"We have also found opportunities of speaking privately to the woman who attends to the rooms occupied by her ladyship and the Baron. She was recommended to fill the situation by the keeper of the restaurant who supplied the meals for the family throughout the period of their residence at the palace. Her character is most favorably spoken of. Unfortunately, her limited intelligence makes her of no value as a witness. We were patient and careful while questioning her, and we found her perfectly willing to answer us; but we could elicit nothing which was worth including in the present report.

"On the second day of our inquiry we had the honor of an interview with Lady Montbarry. Her ladyship looked wretchedly worn and ill, and seemed quite at a loss to understand what we wanted with her. Baron River, who introduced us, explained the nature of our errand in Venice. He took pains to assure her that it was a purely formal duty on which we were engaged. Having satisfied her ladyship on this point, he left the room.

"The questions which we put to Lady Montbarry related mainly, of course, to his lordship's illness. The answers, given with great reserve, of manner, but without the slightest appearance of reserve, in the report. "Lord Montbarry had been out of order for some time past—nervous and irritable. He first complained of having taken cold on November 13th last; he passed a wakeful and feverish night, and remained in bed the next day. Her ladyship wished him to send for medical advice. He refused to do this, saying he could quite easily be his own doctor on a trifling cold. Some hot lemonade was made at his request with a view to producing perspiration. Lady Montbarry's maid having left her at that time, the courier Ferrar (then the only servant in the house) went out to buy the lemons. Her ladyship made the drink with her own hands. It was successful in producing perspiration—and Lord Montbarry passed some hours of sleep afterwards. Later in the day, having need of Ferrar's services, Lady Montbarry

rang for him. The bell was not answered. Ferrar, who had been in the main, in and out of the palace, in vain. From that time forth not a trace of Ferrar could be discovered. This event happened on the 14th of November.

"On the night of the 14th, the feverish symptoms accompanying his lordship's cold returned. They were partly attributable to the annoyance alarum caused by Ferrar's mysterious disappearance. It had been quite impossible to conceal the circumstances, as his lordship repeatedly stated, as the courier, insisting that the man should relieve Lady Montbarry and the Baron by taking their places at his bedside during the night.

"On the 15th, (the day on which the old woman first came to do the housework) his lordship complained of sore throat, and of a feeling of oppression on the chest. On this day, and again on the 16th, her ladyship and the Baron entreated him to send for a doctor. He still refused. 'I don't want strange faces around me; my cold will run its course in spite of the doctor,' that was his reply. On the 17th he was so much worse that it was decided to send for a doctor whether he liked it or not. He was called by the name of the doctor, and he came. He looked at the address. It was directed to a lady in London. The name I can perfectly recall: it was an Italian name—Mrs. Ferrar. He said that night my lord nearly died of apoplexy. I got him through it for the time; and his eyes showed that he understood me when I told him the next morning that I had posted the letter. This was his last effort of consciousness. When I saw him again he was sunk in apathy. He lingered in a state of insensibility, supported by stimulants, until the 25th, and died (conscious to the last) on the evening of the 26th.

"As to the cause of his death, it seems (if I may be excused for saying so) simply absurd to ask the question. Bronchitis, terminating in pneumonia—there is no more doubt than this, and this only, was the malady of which he expired. Two or three weeks ago, Dr. Torelli's own note of the case is added here to a duplicate of my certificate, in order (as I am informed) to satisfy some English offices in which his lordship's life was insured. The English offices must have been founded by that celebrated saint and doubt mentioned in the New Testament, whose name was Thomas! "Reverting for a moment to our inquiries addressed to Lady Montbarry, we have to report that she can give us no information on the subject of the letter which the doctor posted at Lord Montbarry's request. When his lordship wrote it? what it contained? why he kept it a secret from her? we were unable to ascertain. Also? and why he should write at all to the wife of his courier?—these are questions to which we find it simply impossible to obtain any replies. It seems even useless to inquire into the matter as open to suspicion. Suspicion implies conjecture of some kind—and the letter under my lord's pillow baffles all conjecture. Application to Mrs. Ferrar may perhaps clear up the mystery. It is the only person in London who can easily be discovered at the Italian Courier's Office, Golden square.

"Having arrived at the close of the present report, we have now to draw your attention to the conclusion which is justified by the results of our investigation. "The plain question before our directors and ourselves appears to be this: Has the inquiry revealed any extraordinary circumstances which render the death of Lord Montbarry open to suspicion? The inquiry has revealed extraordinary circumstances, beyond all doubt—such as the disappearance of Ferrar, the remarkable absence of the customary establishment of servants in the house, and the mysterious letter which his lordship asked the doctor to post. But where is the proof that any one of these circumstances is associated—suspiciously and directly associated—with the only event which concerns us, the event of Lord Montbarry's death? In the absence of any such proof, and in the face of the evidence of two eminent physicians, it is impossible to dispute the statement on the certificate that his lordship died a natural death. We are bound, therefore, to report that there are no grounds for refusing the payment of the sum for which the late Lord Montbarry's life was assured.

"We shall send these lines to you by the post of to-morrow, December 10th, leaving time to receive your further instructions (if any) in reply to our telegram of this evening announcing the conclusion of the inquiry."

TO BE CONTINUED.

NO MORE SUFFERING AND SORROW.—After all, these Virginia City miners have big, generous hearts. The other evening one of them, who was finishing up a week's spree in 'Frisco, stepped out of the palace after dinner, and ran against a haggard-looking, shabby-gentled woman who was weeping upon a corner. "What is the matter, marm?" said the miner, respectfully. She told him a sad story—poverty, sickness, a large family of children, nothing to do, nothing to wear. "Is that the best frock you've got?" said the rough fellow, gently. She said it was. He felt in his pocket. He contained just one twenty, which he had intended to devote to wine and wickedness that evening. "Stop here, a moment, marm," and he dodged around the corner and into a dry goods store. In a few minutes he returned, and pressing a small bundle into the poor woman's hand disappeared with the air of a man who had done a kind action graciously. The starving female eagerly unfolded the package. It contained a pair of embroidered silk stockings. —San Francisco News Letter.

time had come. I am informed that there are serious reasons for my stating what passed between us on this occasion, in detail, and without reserve. I comply with the request. "Lord Montbarry received the intelligence of his approaching death with becoming composure, but with a certain degree of resignation. He put my ear to his mouth. He whispered faintly, 'Are you sure?' It was no time to deceive him; I said, 'Positively sure.' He waited a little, gasping for breath, and then he whispered again, 'Feel under my pillow.' I found under his pillow a letter, sealed and stamped, ready for the post. His next words were just audible, and no more—"Post it yourself." I answered, of course, that I would do so, and I did post the letter with my own hand. I looked at the address. It was directed to a lady in London. The name I can perfectly recall: it was an Italian name—Mrs. Ferrar. He said that night my lord nearly died of apoplexy. I got him through it for the time; and his eyes showed that he understood me when I told him the next morning that I had posted the letter. This was his last effort of consciousness. When I saw him again he was sunk in apathy. He lingered in a state of insensibility, supported by stimulants, until the 25th, and died (conscious to the last) on the evening of the 26th.

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