ERCILDOUNE

A NOVEL

BY

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"A Red Star and a Waning Moon
Rede me this true rune;
A Gray Sun and a bastard loon
Ding doun Ercildoune."

ERCILDOUNE

CHAPTER I

THE GLACIER CAMP

MIDNIGHT on the Chogo Lungma La. Moonlight. The steady sweep of the icy blizzards of the north cuts through canvas and eiderdown and fur. Roland Rex, peering out for a moment from his tiny tent upon the stupendous beauty of the snows, almost wonders that the stars can stand before the blast. Yet, dimly and afar, a speck of life stirs on those illimitable wastes. How minute is a man in such solitudes! Yet how much man means to man! No avalanche, not the very upheaval of the deep-rooted mountains could have held his attention so close as did that dot upon the wilderness of snow.

So far it was, so heavy the weight of the wind, so steep and slippery the slopes, that dawn had broken ere the speck resolved itself into a man. Tall and rugged, his black hair woven into a web over his eyes to protect them from the Pain of the Snows, as the natives call the fearful fulminating snow-blindness of the giant peaks, his feet wrapped round and round with strips of leather and cloth, he approached the little camp.

Patient and imperturbably are these men who face the majesty of the great mountains: experience has taught them that it is useless to be angry with a snowstorm. A blizzard may persist for a week; to conquer it one must be ready to persist for many weeks. So, quiet and at ease, just as if he had not made his two-and-twenty marches in six days, the messenger fumbled in his clothes and produced the mail.

Two years and more since Roland had been lost in the waste; within a month of Skardu he had arrived, and sent forward a swift runner with a letter to the Tehsildar, the local official, and a budget for his friends at home. The wind had failed just after dawn, and the sun shone strongly on the glacier. Every particle of bedding was hung out to dry; the coolies were right merry; it would be easy to cook food today.

Roland had thawed his penultimate tin of sausages, and boiled up his chocolate. Seated on one of the leather-bound baskets which contained his few effects he was now enjoying the warmth, and his pipe, and the rapture of news from home. For though he could expect no letters, the thoughtful Tehsildar had sent him up a newspaper. Mr. Justice Billington had hay-fever; Lord Wittle had obtained his decree nisi; Consols had fallen a point; Sir Julius Boot had left town for his country seat; three pigs had been killed in Staffordshire, and a land-agent in Galway; coal would probably soon be dearer; Tariff Reform meant lower income-tax and work for all; Peter Briggs, alias "Peter the Pounder," had got three years; Buncombe's Bottlettes Cured Constipation; Should Women Wear Braces? and all the weariness of the daily drivel.

But the haunting unreality of the rubbish for a Londoner gives place to a vivid brilliance and charm for one who is far off. Clearly the stuff that dreams are made of; therefore—strange paradox!—convincing. Lord Wittle became for the moment as real as Mr. Pickwick. Roland Rex was happy.

Nor was his satisfaction confined to the news of the world. After the starved brain has got every stupid phrase by heart, it turns, still eager, to the report of the Monthly Medal Competition at Little Piddlingborough, and the P. and O. sailings for next month. Even the dull personal column with its hairpin imbecilities and its bogus assignations gives a certain thrill. All is so deliciously fantastic; in the dreary maze of glaciers, in the grim silence of the rocks, in the splendour of the vast, sheathing as they did the iron of reality in the soul of the explorer, the fatuous piffle of the penny-a-liner is like a fairy story told for the first time to a child. Rather a shock to the child when it learns that its Cinderella is not true, but merely a lesson in humility and punctuality; so to the man should he find in his fairy newspaper a paragraph which directly concerns him. Roland Rex found two.

The first, in the memoriam column, read as follows:

"In memory of Lord Marcus Masters, who died—[a date two years earlier]—never forgotten by his affectionate wife. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' "

He drew in his breath.

"Poor Marcus!" he exclaimed. And then—Roland Rex looked himself over. His hair and beard had been innocent alike of brush and scissors for three years; his skin was darker than that of his coolies; he would have been taken for a savage in any country of the world.

And he laughed. "If the Marquis dies to-morrow, I suppose I could hardly take my seat like this!"

Next his eye fell on the personal column. This time he started in genuine surprise.

The paragraph read:

"SS. 887. Austria to John. Come home. F."

Ronald translated thoughtfully. "Austria to John"? Now what the devil can he mean by that? I ought to know. But I suppose three years of wilderness dulls the intelligence. "Come home!" And the old boy has put that message in the paper 887 times!

Go home I will.

He called his headman, Salama. Laconic as ever. "Bas! Safar ho-gaya. Panch roz-ka dhal-bat bana'o; Askolemen jeldi jaebne." (Enough. The journey is over Take five days' provisions. We will go quickly to Askole.)

Right enough, in an hour's time, the whole caravan was hurrying down the slopes, tentless and on most meagre rations, if haply they might do fifteen days' march in four. At Askole he paid off the men; and with his gaunt old headman for sole companion, made headlong down the Bralduh valley to Skardu.

CHAPTER II

THE RIVER OF MUD

ROLAND REX had chosen the certain passage down the valley in preference to the dubious short cut over the Skoro La. Moreover, he wanted news pretty badly, and local rumour had it that a Sahib was now ascending the Bralduh on a sporting trip.

So down they slogged over the rough track.

About noon on the second day they met the servants of the sportsman in question preparing his lunch; learning from these that he was probably an hour behind, they pushed on, and found him sitting on the banks of that strange river of mud which flows into the Bralduh. Sluggish and even is its course; in normal weather of the consistency of very thick tar, it moves down inch by inch, until at last it oozes over into the pale amber froth of the grey Bralduh, and is lost.

Roland Rex had worn his English clothes threadbare long since; he wore the inevitable turban, that best of headgear against both heat and cold, and the rest of his costume was the handiwork of a Yarkand tailor. Small wonder if the natives failed to mark him as a Sahib, and salute; smaller that the Sahib sitting by the river equally mistook him. He called authoritatively to the travelers as they approached. Amused at the jest, Roland made his best salaam.

"Are there any Sahibs shooting or travelling in this nala?" he asked.

Roland said that he had heard of one or two.

"Is Rex Sahib in this district?"

Roland was startled, and showed it; but the spirit of mischief moved him to deny it. What should this stranger want with him?

"You are lying, son of a pig!" said the Englishman cooly, noticing the momentary confusion. It is easy to frighten the truth from an Asiatic by this simple plan. But Roland was really confused, and the stranger accordingly emboldened.

"You are his dak-runners!" he exclaimed. "Where have you left the Sahib?"

Roland's headman, Salama Tantra, took up the tale. An expert liar for over forty years, he was equal to the situation. Seeing that his master for some reason desired to deny his identity, the grey old hunter began a long tale of woe, beginning nowhere in particular, and ending up, after a series of magnificent falsehoods, with the statement that the Sahib had sent them on with letters, he himself having turned

back up over the Hispar pass with the intention of visiting Hunza and returning by Gilgit. The stranger was apparently convinced.

"I am going to join him," he said. "My own dak-runners shall take the mail, and you shall return with me and take me to him. I am glad I have met you." And with truly royal generosity, he fished out some rupees of his shooting-coat, and bestowed them on the willing shikari.

Roland jumped to his meaning in a flash; it was the letters he wanted.

"It is not the order, Sahib," he explained, with an artistic cringe. "It is the order to take these letters to the Tehsildar of Skardu, and receive a paper from him."

"Nonsense!" said the stranger. "My own men can get this paper; I would not lose you for anything. See, I will give you each one hundred rupees."

"We cannot break an order, Sahib!" He assumed a gorgeous despair. "The master would punish us."

The stranger began to storm, but in vain. The travellers murmured the polite request for permission to leave the presence of the highness, and began to move toward the river, crossable in fairly dry weather by dint of many stones thrown in by gangs of villagers.

Suddenly out lashed the Englishman's revolver and a shot rang through the air. But he only pierced Roland in the thigh.

Long before his finger could press the trigger again, the huntsman had him by the waist; flung him far into the river of mud. Roland ran to save him, but in a trice he was tripped, and down, and the grey old ruffian kneeling on his chest.

"Useless, Sahib!" he hissed, "we have no ropes. He tried to kill you, Sahib, O my father and my mother."

The poor old fellow was in tears. Shriek after shriek came from the struggling murderer. "Allah has written it," the old man went on, "I saw the mark of death upon his brow."

In vain did Roland threaten, command, entreat. To all Salama answered, "The writing!" and kept his hold. The pain of his wound came home to Rex, and he half fainted.

Horrible were the curses of the wretch in the river. The whole valley shuddered. Yet he, too, ceased to struggle, slowly sucked in and down by the insidious mire. The lucid prologue of death's tragedy came upon him, of a sudden, at Roland's cry as he sat up, weak and bleeding, held now in his faithful servant's arms.

"Who are you, in God's name?" he shouted in English, "and what do you want with Roland Rex?"

"I am mad—I am dying—help! help!" cried the unhappy man. "How is it you seem to talk my tongue?"

"Why, I am Roland Rex; what do you want with me?"

"A curse on my wry shot," he shrieked, and fell back to his old raving madness. The calm again. "I wanted the great reward—the great reward! For news of your death, you fool. So near! So near success!" and again his fury foamed; blood broke black at his lips. But now the midstream strength took him; looking over as he lay half-strangled in the slime, he could see the horror of the Bralduh fifty feet below. The roar of it drowned his choking yells. Then, with a last heave and gurgle through its oily mire, the river fell with him and mighty silence swallowed up the scene. Even as he fell, the storm rolled up the valley, and the blaze broke upon the wounded man and his companion.

By now the wound was staunched, for it was but a slight flesh-wound. Limping from the bullet, shaking from the dread mystery of the scene, Roland Rex crossed the treacherous stream, and came to the apricot orchards of Gomboro.

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Stretched upon the green turf in the moonlight, Roland nursed his wound, whose ache, with the fiery events of the day, kept him from sleep.

He mused upon the cipher. The darkness of the letter and the darkness of the deed conspired; and there was light. "Austria to John!" Aha! Ivanhoe!—his thought burnt up—"The devil is unloosed. Look to yourself!" Then he must mean—oh! but that is too impossible. Let me consider.

And his mind ran back to the strange history of his family.

CHAPTER III

THE DOOM OF ERCILDOUNE

EWAN, fourth Marquis of Ercildoune, was riding alone through the park one drear November day, some eighty years before the beginning of this story. A proud man was he, tracing his descent from True Thomas, the holiest of the ancient Scottish Bards. Of his own house he had predicted glory and earthly power, yet closed it with the weird:

"A Red Star and a Waning Moon
Rede me this true rune;
A Gray Sun and a bastard loon
Ding doun Ercildoune."

High in favour with King George and his ministers, his name renowned in Wellington's campaigns, his power absolute as God's for many a mile beyond the eagle-sight from his castle, his wealth well-nigh boundless, four stalwart sons to bear up his age, and lift his honoured coffin to its grave, no man was more enviable in all the realm that the brave sun controls.

Yet his face was dark, and his hand closed convulsively upon the dagger that lurked at his hip. Also his mouth worked strongly.

Presently he dismounted, and, tying his horse to an oak, plunged deep into the glade. Familiar was the way, though obscure; yet even a stranger would have taken the self-same track, for the steady music of a cascade allured the step. High from its narrow channel it tumbled far out into a rock-bound pool, which overflowing rolled forth into a less dominant music among lesser obstacles. Here the Marquis paused a moment, then blew shrill upon a whistle. Instantly, as by enchantment, the volume of the falling water whitened and glowed, shot through by some interior light; then all was dark again. But the Marquis, seeming satisfied, probed his wary way around the base of the pool; the slippery rocks, the mossy knobs and treacherous fern-roots lent an ambiguous aid. He passed behind the water, and the path grew easy. Up into the cave he pressed, and after many twists came to the central hollow. Fashioned more by man than Nature, the room was large and nearly square. A curious table of brass stood in the centre, and a blue flame burnt variably thereon. Behind it stood a man of great stature, his face hidden by a monkish hood.

This man addressed the noble.

"Who art thou?"

"Ewan Dhu, Marquis of Ercildoune."

"Where is then thy brother the Marquis?"

"Under the heather." A second pause. "Shame!" the Marquis added, "have I come there that you should twit me with this paltry scandal? I never slew him."

"Not with the sword, but with the pen. Where is the Marquis, his son?"

"Who are you, to press the claim of that bastard brat?"

"I wished to see if the coward who did it was coward enough to lie to me about it."

The Marquis controlled himself with courage.

"You come to me," continued the other, "because your foolish dabbling in the false science of the stars has given you fear. You see a baleful planet threatening your house; you invoke the aid and counsel of the Brethren of the Rosy Cross. With unclean hands you come, Ewan Duh," cried the adept, raising his voice, "and the mire that you have played with shall engulf your proud head. For once your ignorance has taught you all that knowledge could. This is the doom of Ercildoune; your sons shall die before your eyes; your house shall fail utterly, and all your rank and wealth pass to the King. Solitary and silent I see you dying, dying through long months, and no man to take pity."

"I came to you," replied Ercildoune, "that you might aid me, not that you might curse me. I withdraw."

"Stay!" cried the adept, "what do you offer me for freedom?"

"Penitence, sincere penitence."

“You will make amends?”

“Never!” flamed he out, “for the boy is the vilest of mankind. Before God I say it, I will not believe him of my brother’s blood.”

“Then you must suffer the doom.”

“Then be it so! Farewell.”

And he turned to go.

The adept strode swiftly forward. “Now are you a man, Ewan Dhu!” he cried aloud, and grasped his hand. “The doom you must dree, for doom is doom; nor you nor I avail; but in—the right—you shall not suffer, and the End is with Him. Vale! Frater Rosae—”

“Et Crucis!” answered the nobleman.

Silently and gladly they parted.

The fulfilment of the curse is matter of history.

Taking shelter in a storm during a hunt, Malcolm, the eldest son, died by the lightning flash before his father's eyes. Duncan, the second, plunged into the sea, while they all strove to save a shipwrecked crew, and was drowned. Ivan, the third, racing his horse against his father, was thrown and died. Angus, the fourth, surprised some knowledge of the doom. Maddened by the fear of it, he hanged himself from his own window, even as the Marquis returned from London town, and cried his name to greet him. Then the old man turned melancholy, and shut himself into a Trappist Monastery, where in silence and solitude he died.

Title and estates passed to a cousin, one Lord Barfield, not yet to the King. This doom remained undone.

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This Lord Barfield, who had succeeded to the title and estates of Ewan Dhu, was an elderly man of recluse and studious habit. Many years in India had given him the secretiveness and cunning of that strange congeries of nations. He was a widower; his wife had borne him three sons and a daughter; the last had married a Mr. Rex, and Roland was the only issue of the marriage.

The Marquis had brought up his sons to follow the colours. Nothing had stirred his placid life until the Mutiny in India, where his eldest son, the Earl of Bannockburn by courtesy, was killed before the walls of Delhi.

Hard upon the news followed a curious box of ebony and silver from the East. Within he read the carved inscription, “Lord Barfield, with the compliments of the Marquis of Ercildoune,” and, lifting the tray, discovered, wrapped and embalmed in costly spices, the head of his best-loved son. This was all mystery, and he sought the clue in vain.

Three years later Lord Arthur, the second son, who was studying Russian in St. Petersburg, wrote wildly home that he was stricken by a terrible disease, and the old man, eagerly seeking aid from the Government, learnt that “studies in Russian” meant little more to Arthur than the acquisition of the gilded vices of that barbaric society. Hastily he dispatched his doctor, a wise old friend of the family, if haply skill and counsel might avail; but in vain. The next month's mail brought irretrievable disaster; Arthur was dead by his own hand.

But oh! strange horror! Clad in fantastic jewel-work, there came a little casket. Within was an empty poison-bottle and the diamond device, “Lord Barfield, with the complements of the Marquis of Ercildoune.”

The old man, mastering his grief, was roused.

He devoted his whole time and intelligence, his wealth, and influence, to the discovery of who had woven this chaplet of hell's vine for his grey head.

Who was this devil dressed in the grand name? Why did he pursue and faint not? If human power, and power of prayer, might serve, he would know.

But these availed him not. In the end, an accident lifted the veil. As duly shall follow.

CHAPTER IV

CONTINUES THE DOOM

'TWAS a pleasant morning in early October, and the birds were plentiful and strong. The old Marquis, in the joy of his skill, was half forgetting the misfortunes of his family; dwelling rather on the splendid appetite that his morning's pleasure had given him, and the glorious lunch that awaited the party at the corner of the next spinney.

The guests were few. Lord Adolphus Dollymount was an ass, but his friend, Guy Pendragon, was as fine a young man as England can show. Breeding without snobbery, intelligence without pedantry, marked him for a great place in public life. He had been brought up on the Continent, where (it appeared) his family, notorious Jacobites, had long lived in exile, and had, as it were, taken root in the strange soil. But, he explained, we had had enough of that. England for him, and to serve her was the only life worth living. Besides these were Lord Marcus Masters, the last of the sons of the house, two peers, a cabinet minister, and a famous surgeon, Sir John Bastow.

Guy Pendragon was in the line next to the Marquis, and as they walked, from the fault of one or the other, drew a shade too close together. On a sudden, birds rose, and one fine low-flying cock-pheasant whirred between them. Both swung round, but Pendragon, unable to get a fair shot without danger to his neighbour, withheld his fire and lowered his gun. The Marquis killed his bird.

Then the young man tripped and fell. His gun exploded, and the charge struck the old nobleman in the body. Instantly arose a mighty hubbub. All sprang to his aid; the despair of Pendragon was dreadful to witness. Yet he had sprained his ankle in the fall.

Sir John hurriedly examined the wounded man, pronounced the injuries grave, but not hopeless, rendered first aid, bound up the luckless sportsman's ankle, and saw to the improvising of an ambulance.

The two invalids were carried into the house. The Marquis, in pain as he was, could hardly refrain a smile, as one of the old keepers, boiling over with rage, shook his fist in Guy's face, while he hissed, “Ye damned fool!”

The fidelity of the servants of a great house like Ercildoune is a thing to restore confidence in human nature.

Soon, too, the old man declared that the accident had shaken him sadly; he would like to spend his last years with his brother's son in far Virginia. The Marquis gave him leave, and in due time he departed.

Pendragon, too, recovered, and went off to Monte Carlo.

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So much for Man; but Fate stepped in, and the carefully skinned poker hand was flung wide on the table by a sudden gust of the Everlasting Wings.

It was left to a nameless Anarchist to save the house of Ercildoune. His brain, tortured and diseased by famine of food and surfeit of cheap philosophy, conceived that the death of a few harmless folk would ease the evil of the Universe.

So he dragged a log of wood across the path of the Marseilles Rapide, and screwed it to the sleepers.

The train staggered, left the line, tore up its universe, crashed into a chaos of blind, foolish agony.

From among the wounded and slain young Guy Pendragon extricated himself.

“Here!” he called to another man, uninjured like himself, “help me to save my father—my father!”

Stolid and self-possessed, the stranger set himself steadily—for all his rabbit’s face and meek shabby-gentility—to the task, and in an hour's hard work that part of the wreckage was cleared. Night unto death, they dragged out an old grey man, and bore him to the relief train.

Then the stranger returned to the work of rescue, musing.

What was this man to Guy Pendragon? Father. How father? For this man was the old keeper from Ercildoune!

He knew it all; since long he had been chief of the detectives employed by Lord Ercildoune to track the murderer of his sons. Yet now? Inscrutable. Not altogether, perhaps: a seek-thought had sprouted in his mind; he smiled grimly, seeking amid the tangle of the train for further clues.

He found at last a small pocket-book in the wreck of Guy's portmanteau. The little therein was enough for his trained intelligence; the whole infamy lay bare.

He set wires to work; the authorities came in; and, torn howling from the yet warm corpse of his father, Guy Pendragon faced the rigours of an English court of justice.

Grayson, alias Lord Guy Masters, alias Pendragon, alias Schmidt, alias Laroche, etc., was informed by the Judge that the claim of this father to the Marquisate of Ercildoune was of no importance in the eyes of justice. It had been clearly proved that he did feloniously of his malice aforethought attempt to kill and murder one of his Majesty's subjects, a gentleman of high rank and dignity, who stood to him moreover in the position of host; further that he did conspire with his said father to commit the said murder; further, that all the sentimental considerations which his counsel had so eloquently urged were balanced by the fact that the accused had for years lived by fraud and robbery; and though he (the Judge) regretted that counsel for the Crown had seen fit to try and connect accused with the deaths of Lord Ercildoune's two sons, yet the main charge was abundantly clear, and he had no hesitation in sentencing him to Penal Servitude for Life.

The prisoner had but time to say: “I am Lord Ercildoune, my Lord, and you shall live to repent it,” before he was removed.

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Nine days, and London had forgotten.

CHAPTER V

DERELICT CORRESPONDENCE

LONDON had forgotten! yes, even Roland Rex had forgotten in the intensity of his three years' wandering in Central Asia. Now, as he lay in the moonlight in the apricot orchards of Gomboro, the whole history rolled its sinister waves upon him.

That devil unchained? Marcus dead? Was there a link between these evil-omened happenings? What of this strange sahib who travelled nine thousand miles, and risked, lost indeed, his life in the hope of meeting Rex or stealing his letters? As the Bralduh roared below, bearing high the funeral dirge of that murderous man of mystery, Roland echoed its eternal restlessness, its unmeaning wail. He could have plunged into the river, and wrested out the heart of that dead mystery. . . .

So came the dawn at last; so, sleepless and stiff, weak from the loss of blood, he and his faithful shikari bent themselves to the endless track that leads through that desperate valley at the end of the world to the green glories of Shigar and the whirlwind-haunted circuit of Skardu.

Two days of hellish agony; the torture of the wound, the torment of the sun, the atrocious thirst upon the bare rock walls through which the path winds up and down, and above all the agony of doubt. What should he do? Two years had passed and more. He knew nothing of affairs. To go home as Roland Rex might be the blindest walking into the trap. What might not have happened since? “Look to yourself” had said the message.

Just then a native passed, giving no salute. Roland started. There was the missing word of wisdom. A native he seemed, a native he would remain. Nothing would be easier; he need not even lack money. He could draw small cheques to his new self as Habib Ju, the first name that came to his mind; he need lack nothing. And it should go hard but he discovered much ere he reached England, and came secretly to his grandfather's house of Ercildoune.

Now they got a raft of swollen goat-skins, and sped down the rushing stream to Skardu. There he wrote a letter to the Tehsildar, stating his intention to remain in the Bralduh Nala for some weeks, and that the native stories of his disappearance were to cause no anxiety; their origin was quite inexplicable.

Thus he calmed official curiosity, and killing one horse on the Deosai Plains and two more between Burzil and Bandipur, came to Baramulla before alarm, either on his account or that of the other man, had yet disturbed the nights of the Tehsildar, a man naturally lazy, incredulous, and slow to action.

When alarm arose, indeed, it diminished almost as quickly. It was only necessary to construct a plausible, probable story of the death of the two sahibs. So the Tehsildar manufactured an avalanche, and was so thoughtful as to include among the victims not only the two white men, but also those of their servants who might possibly be implicated in any inquiry, and therefore thought that it would be best to lie low for awhile.

Thus, six months after, news came to England of the death of Roland Rex.

Meanwhile that worthy was ostensibly engaged in the pilgrimage to Mecca. But he slipped off at Jeddah and took passage in a coaster up the Red Sea. At Cairo he disclosed himself with all due caution to an old schoolfellow at Headquarters, and was able to continue the journey with a bronzed face, a trim foreign beard, and a suit of Greek-cut serge. Here, too, he was able to telegraph to his grandfather that all was yet well. He had only dared to send one other, from Bombay, and that expressed so cautiously that even the recipient might have been pardoned for failing to guess at its meaning.

Roland had not called for his letters at the agent's there, else he would not have missed the following epistle, which had lain awaiting him for more than two years.

"MY DEAR ROLAND," wrote his grandfather, "heavy news, heavy news! I fear grievous trouble. Young Grayson has escaped. It seems that while a working party were out in the fog he made a sudden dash for liberty. The whole affair must have been devilish well arranged, for no trace of the fugitives has ever been obtained—save one, of course. A month after the escape I received a parcel from Leipsig which, on being opened, revealed a convict costume with the inscription, beautifully embroidered in silk:

"'Lord Barfield, with the compliments of the Marquis of Ercildoune. Merely a memento."

"As usual! Leipsig is of course worse than no clue at all but one thing we know at least: there is a woman in it. I hope to send more and better news very shortly. I have wired Arkwright, the man who caught him before; he must do it again.

"Your affectionate grandfather,

"ERCILDOUNE.

"P.S. I am advertising you daily in many papers as your movements are so uncertain; it is but a chance if this letter reaches you.—E.

"P.P.S. For God's sake, dear lad, take care of yourself. Three years since Marcus married, and no child."

Receiving no answer to this, the Marquis did not write again. Shut up in Ercildoune, he read deep into the night, and always on the one subject. As a criminologist he had no rival; from his castle he directed a vast army of detectives.

Yet with no result. Grayson was lost again.

CHAPTER VI

FATHER AMBROSE

NOT only did Ercildoune seek Grayson to avenge his dead sons, but to save his heir. Lord Marcus Masters was a soft youth of a religious turn of mind. Only at his father's urgent command had he married. Even so, he married out of his class; it was the niece of the parish priest of Ercildoune that led him at last as a sheep to the slaughter. Meek and pious, like the hybrid of a praying mantis and a mouse, she had but little thought for worldliness. And that caused no grief to the old Marquis, who thought Marcus safer in the chapel than in the ball-room.

So sped their placid sheepish life; no bucolics were theirs to be disturbed by some such fiery line as "Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin." The idea of passion was foreign to them. Their idea of love was verbal; Caroline Masters would have resented the pressure of her husband's hand.

This indeed would have maddened the old noble, had he guessed it. But Arthur's debauches in Petersburg had determined him to keep Marcus innocent, and the frigidity of Caroline was a rare accident such as the wisest might fail to foresee.

As maturity grew, so religious ardour took the place of virile fervour. Day by day Marcus and his wife grew closer to Christ, so that in the end no hour of the day but was given to some devotion or another. Their guests were itinerant evangelists; their friends converted Atheist cobblers; their enemies imaginary Jesuits.

It so happened one fine summer that the fame of a certain Father Ambrose went abroad. He gave himself out to be a renegade monk from the Benedictine Monastery at Fort Augustus. Convinced of Prot-

estant Truth, he had (it seemed) suffered a martyrdom comparable only to that of Polycarp, and had eventually made his escape in circumstances only paralleled by those of Paul at Damascus.

The statement of the Lord Abbot that the said person had never been a monk at all carried little weight with those who, like Lord Marcus Masters, were acquainted with the depths of the Duplicity of the Devil in particular and the Roman Communion in general.

From town to town the fame of the young convert, who lent piquancy to his personality by retaining semi-monastic garb and traces of the tonsure, leapt like a beacon. He who at Glasgow was starving with a dozen draggle-tailed hearers, was dining well at Manchester, and, under the wing of a leading Elder, addressing some thousand enthusiasts in the local Bethel. At Birmingham the largest hall in the city overflowed. At London all the cranks of all the sects combined to welcome him; the new revival was in every mouth. Even the street-boys whistled the refrain of his famous Redemption Song, which ran:—

"There's salvation in Jesus!
in Jesus!
There's salvation in Jesus for you!
for Me!
There's salvation in Jesus for all of us!
There's salvation in Jesus, salvation in Jesus,
Salvation in Jesus for you—
and for Me!"

The very numerous other verses differed by substituting for the word "salvation" such words as "redemption," "grace," "resurrection," "immortality," "glory" and the like, I rejoice to say with little consideration for so purely pagan a matter as metre.

No society is so easily carried away by its cranks as London Society. "Father Ambrose" might have stayed with almost any Duchess in the Kingdom; but when at the end of a long and glorious season, with a ragged throat and a record bag of sinners, his medical adviser insisted on rest, it was the invitation of Lord and lady Marcus Masters that he accepted.

Absolutely perfect rest! was the doctor's last word; positively *no* society!

So we lose this interesting trinity for a moment and return to the Albert Hall at the close of the last of his meetings.

"Had the man a brother?" asked a rabbit-faced little nondescript of a man with a meek voice.

"I assure you he had not," replied his interlocutor—who might have been a dog-stealer out of work.

"But it is he himself then!" insisted the first. "I cannot mistake the voice and the gesture. The face is all wrong, I know, but . . ."

"Of course; what's in a face? But I went close, I tell you. I went to the 'glory form,' as they call it, and he prayed with me for twenty minutes."

"In full light?" asked the first.

"Quite full; yet I can't swear to it that the face is made up."

"Come, come!" interjected the first speaker, reproachfully.

"I can't, sir!" he insisted. "But what I can swear to is the eyes; a man can't fake his eyes."

"Well?"

"Our man's were grey, pale grey. This man's are a strange dark iridescent purple—very catlike."

"That settles it, of course. But yet—I wish I could feel satisfied."

A third man touched him on the arm. "News, sir!" he said: "strange, grave news!"

"Yes?" turned the other, swift as a snake.

"Father Ambrose is leaving London to-morrow."

"I knew that, Smithers;" he snapped.

"—with Lord and Lady Marcus Masters."

"Damn your eyes!" he yelled in excitement—"sorry, Jackson! I mean the evidence of his eyes; there's something up, depend on it. Follow to the office; I must work out a new plan to-night."

They moved off separately, the man Jackson cursing his superior for a dreaming fool who preferred intuition to plain fact.

CHAPTER VII

LITERALISM IN PRACTICE

DESPITE the merry detective and his gallant men, or possibly because of their unceasing vigilance, nothing whatever happened. Yet Lord Marcus grew ever more pious, and gloomier; he had strange fits of weeping which alarmed his gentle wife; curious blushes would come over him without apparent cause. He grew morose, unkind to village children, who lacked the accustomed smile. He began to neglect his appearance. "If thy right hand" (he cried one day, reproached for cruelly beating a dog—how unlike our gentle Marcus!) "offend thee, cut it off! For it is better for thee to enter into Life maimed, than having two hands to be cast into the lake of fire. How much more then, if my dog offend me?"

Father Ambrose was genuinely distressed by these scenes. His influence, and his alone, seemed to calm the unhappy pietist—yet these interviews, beneficial as they seemed at the time, left a deeper irritation behind. Lord Marcus began to treat his wife with contempt and aversion; his temper grew daily more uncertain.

One day his wife took Father Ambrose aside, and suggested that medical treatment would relieve the strain. But the good man forbade all profane interference with "the wonderful workings of the Lord with the soul."

"Believe me, dear lady," he would say, "in His own good time the dear Lord knows how to bring our dear Marcus into His marvellous light."

And she was fain to be satisfied.

So far no open scandal.

What brought matters to a climax was this.

One fine holiday, Lord Marcus, in his aimless way, was wandering in the village. Children were sporting in one corner with their big sisters and brothers; some game of forfeits was being played. Lord Marcus looked on moodily, hardly seeing, save to regret that these children were not all groaning over Sin in some damp Bethel.

A great clapping of hands. A buxom wench had broken some rule, or failed in some test; and must pay forfeit. The judge solemnly condemned her:—

> "By Peter and Andrew and Mary and Anne
> You must go and kiss the prettiest man!"

They all laughed shrill. But the wench, with a snigger, slyly approached the unconscious Marcus, threw her arms round him, and kissed him loud upon the lips.

Marcus started from his reverie, struck her fiercely in the face, and, crying "Accurséd! accurséd! accurséd!" fled up the street.

The shrieking girl, with her lip bleeding from his signet ring, stared after him—as one who has seen Satan. Sobered, the children ceased their game, and fell to weeping. Some of the lads threw stones at the maniac; some started to follow, with coarse oaths. But he ran like a hare, and shut himself into his house. For three days he would see nobody; at last Father Ambrose, who was going to America to start a great revival there, insisted on bidding him farewell.

The good man found his noble patron in bed, looking like death, yet with a strange light in his eyes.

What passed none knew; but the ex-monk, pale as ashes, came to bid adieu to Lady Marcus. He was deeply moved. "Do not intrude upon him!" he said, "the crisis is over. Your husband is a great saint!"

But the American crusade never caught fire. Or the preacher lacked the flint, or his audience the steel, and after a futile fortnight the revival fizzled out. Ambrose gave notice that he must seek counsel of the Lord; something (he thought) was the matter with his personal holiness that the dear Lord no longer saw fit to use him. He disappeared, and none knew whither.

But the Marquis?

One day by post from Lagos came to him a shameful, an atrocious, an abominable packet—a nameless horror. And on the wrapping there was written:

"Lord Barfield, with the compliments of the Marquis of Ercildoune."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHAPEL OF REVENGE

MARCUS MASTERS never rallied from the shock.

Tubercle caught his enfeebled frame in its grip; in less than a year he shrivelled to a corpse.

With the aged Marquis of Ercildoune the enemy had become a nightmare, an incubus, an obsession. The poor old man trembled at every whisper. Why did they whisper? What did they wish to hide from him? Some new misfortune? What did this stranger want at the house? Who was he? Lord Barfield feared even his own detectives.

Surely the shadow of the curse lay heavy on the House of Ercildoune.

A certain trusted valet, an old man whom he had known and loved from boyhood, long ere he took on him the fatal marquisate, was his daily companion. Deeply did he scrutinize each visitor to the once great house, now fallen and neglected. What did the Marquis care? Even his giant fortune-tree was somewhat lopped by the maintenance of what had grown to practically a standing army. In every country of the globe his men sought ceaselessly for traces of the escaped convict. Grayson had Ten Thousand Pounds upon his head; yet he seemed safe as Prince Charlie was among his Highland hearts.

Some men doubted nine-tenths of the history. At the worst Grayson must have died somewhere. A desperate life and a desperate death. Why not ere now? He had not been heard of assuredly for years. Wise men remarked that Father Ambrose was certainly not young Grayson. The Marquis was a madman who saw family feuds in stones, and Grayson in everything.

The detectives would joke about it. When one took cold, he would laugh, “Grayson getting at me again.” A funeral in the force was called a “Grayson.”

Grim laughter must have filled the soul of that strange man, wherever it was that he lurked.

Ay! the great house of Ercildoune was hushed. Men did not care to pass those portals. Even as the ivy gripped the walls of the castle, so the curse clung upon all the hearts of great house.

Long and earnestly, therefore, did the old watchdog of the Marquis gaze into the eyes of the strange bearded turbaned man that stole to the side gate one night and asked for admission.

Even so, he refused him. Then the Indian drew off his sandal, and from between the leathers took a scrap of paper. In the well-known cheirograph of Roland Rex, of late so longed-for, were the words, “Good news of me by mouth.”

The suspicion old man was not yet convinced. This devil Grayson of all devils was most clever to disguise himself as an angel of light.

But the Marquis thought otherwise. “Bring him in!” he cried. Some intuition told him that the words rang true.

Yet the obstinate old servant took his precautions like a wise general. He led the messenger through a dark passage, and, stumbling, took care to feel him for a hidden weapon. Nor, leading him into the very sight of Ercildoune, did he fail to cover him with his own pistol.

The old man lifted up his head. “You bring news of my grandson?” he asked in Hindustani.

“The best of news,” was the answer in English, and Roland Rex, shaking off his turban, stepped forward and kissed his grandsire’s trembling hand.

Like a stone god, steeled against all emotion, the ancient noble told in chill bleak words the hideous story of Marcus. Then he rose.

“Come!” he said.

At one end of the apartment was a tall door concealed by curtains of black velvet. Beyond lay a strange chapel. Here hung upon the walls the portraits of those dead Ercildounes. Above the altar with its lighted candles flaming was the terrible face of God, a God of Wrath and Vengeance, the awful God of Judgment, who visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children.

Upon the altar, draped all in black, stood the ghastly trophies of the curse, each in its casket, each with its sardonic inscription.

And on the empty monstrance was the scroll, “How long, O Lord, how long?”

Roland started. The terror of the place ate like a cancer into his soul. The curse came home to him. Unreal, in a sense, these old catastrophes had been. These monuments of infernal hate meant little. Now

he saw himself as the very target of those frightful arrows, and utmost fear smote him. He feared even lest his old grandfather were an enemy, some appalling avatar of his unresting foe.

Roland sank down before the altar and abased himself, reaching his hands up to Heaven.

Awhile he prayed; then he arose and swore that by God's help he would root out this monster from the fair earth polluted by his infamy.

The old man followed him in silence, approving. Together they left the chapel, with the echo still afloat in their ears.

The pair spent hours of dreary, profitless talk, wasting days in interviewing detectives, and drafting new plans of campaign. The only profitable work done was the reading of all the reports by Roland, afraid lest he should miss one clue.

At the end he shrugged his shoulders. "Accident helped us before," he said, "and may help us again. But before all let no man know that I am still alive, and I will enter that dark hall of namelessness where Grayson lives. There is, I fancy, one man that may help us, the man that sentenced him—Mr. Justice Laycock."

CHAPTER IX

MR. JUSTICE LAYCOCK

MR. JUSTICE LAYCOCK was a capital whip, and his four-in-hand was one of the sights of the Park in the season. If, during the off-season, he chose to keep his hand in by practice in St. John's Wood, at midnight, and indoors, well—it was his business, and not ours.

And a very merry old gentleman he was.

Roland Rex just missed him at the club. There was nothing for him to do. He was big and strong, and very tired of tragedy; he had not tasted the over-ripe fruits of London for four years; nor indeed had he the disposition to set his teeth in a hard sharp apple.

He lounged off, with a tired man's eagerness for pleasure, rolled in and out of the Pavilion, stood speechless on the brink of Scott's for minutes that passed like hours, too stupid to go anywhere.

To one who has fallen so far there is but one refuge:—the Continental.

Put your foot on the rung of that ladder, and your are safe to reach the bottom!

In sooth, a little past midnight he got away from the drunken turmoil—himself a little enlivened by the light and the laughter and the wine—at the cost of having pledged himself to protect from molestation a beautiful maiden with cheeks far too natural, teeth far too regular, hair far too well-groomed, shoulders far too white, breasts far too well-shaped, dress far too well-cut, to be anything but a hideous monstrosity in the eyes of the healthy man.

The chivalry of his conduct melted the frosty hesitation of the fair one; on arrival at her house she asked him in to rest for a few moments.

The sound of childish laughter from within assured him that he need not fear to disturb the household; so he followed the lady, who took her latchkey and slipped in.

Like an adder he darted back. "For God's sake, Kissums," he whispered, catching her by the priceless Mechlin sleeve of her, "there's the very man I want to see—and if he sees me now there's an end of it!"

For within the door stood Mr. Justice Laycock. He had harnessed four pretty girls in reins of blue ribbon, and was driving them gaily up and down the stairs with a whip, while he occasionally blew on the horn that hung from his neck.

It is said that Archimedes, having discovered the principle of the lever, leapt from his bath, shouting "Eureka" as his sole contribution to the usual toilet of a philosopher; and an equally brilliant idea must, one may believe, have seized the learned judge with equal intensity and suddenness. But if in this respect his costume as coachman seemed incongruous, the same complaint could not have been laid against his steeds, who reproduced the normal costume of a horse with the most scrupulous fidelity.

In the event, Roland suitably bestowed his fair charge at a great West-End Hotel, and repaired early in the morning to try and interview the judge in chambers.

But he had not appeared; and after an hour of useless waiting Roland strolled back to lunch at the Savoy, and a little later to his rooms.

About four o'clock the posters caught his eye——

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE
OF A
JUDGE

and a brief notice—vilely padded out to trick the public into the idea that the paper possessed some information—told him that it was Mr. Justice Laycock that was missing.

"Asses!" chuckled Roland from the height of his superior knowledge. "Somebody has run off with the old boy's clothes for a lark! Oh! won't I roast him over this!"

By ten o'clock the affair had grown fearful and wonderful. One paper had it that he had been seen at Folkestone: another said that he had received an urgent call to his sick son in Paris; and so on. All to be squelched by the official statement that he was not missing at all, but confined to his room by the very slightest of all possible indispositions, and would almost certainly be at work as usual on the morrow. So simple was this admirable lie that even Roland believed it. Two days elapsed, and he learnt only that "the indisposition of Mr. Justice Laycock had proved more severe than was at first supposed, and his medical advisers had recommended perfect rest for a week. There was no cause whatever for any anxiety."

But a few noticed that all this did not explain why he was at first reported missing; it did not explain why numberless strangers called at the judge's house: it did not explain the extraordinary activity of Scotland Yard in certain parts of the metropolis.

On the following Sunday *Reynolds's* asked broadly in fat type "WHERE IS LAYCOCK?" and Roland was still far from an answer when his bell rang, and an Inspector from Scotland Yard, accompanied by a little rabbit-faced man, asked for a private interview.

"It's about this business of Mr. Justice Laycock," began the Inspector. "I must ask you to keep it absolutely private, sir, but he is not ill at all. He is really missing; he left his club at nine o'clock last Friday and has not been seen since."

"Oh, yes, he has!" Roland cheerfully retorted. "I saw him myself at one o'clock the following morning—I must ask you to keep it absolutely private—driving a very pretty four-in-hand up and down the stairs at 40, Roumania Road, St. John's Wood."

The Inspector whistled. "That's the biggest lift yet," he said.

"Well, this gentleman"—indicating the rabbit-faced man—"will have it that there's some connection between this case and——"

"This," said the rabbit-faced man, coming forward.

"What make you think so?"

"This parcel is addressed to Lord Ercildoune, sir, and I think I know the writing." He really trembled as he said it. "You are fully responsible to his Lordship," he went on, "I take it; and between you and me, sir, I fear this parcel may be something of a shock, so we took the extreme liberty of delaying it."

"You did right," said Rex kindly.

"With your permission, sir, we will open it here and at once."

The Inspector cut the string and tore off the wrapping. A beautiful box of tortoise-shell inlaid with finest filigree of gold lay exposed.

The rabbit-faced man searched for the spring.

"Pull yourself together, sir!" he said sharply.

Lifting the lid, he disclosed a human tongue. To their horrified imagination it seemed still warm and quivering.

"Look! Look!"—the Inspector recovered himself quickly enough. Indeed, the inner lid of the box bore this inscription, beautifully chased in gold—

"The tongue that sentenced me.

"Lord Barfield, with the compliments of the Marquis of Ercildoune."

They stood, rooted to the ground. Upon that stupendous moment the hateful clamour of the telephone broke in. Rex rushed to it, more to silence than to answer it. But the voice came stern and loud—

"Is that Mr. Coffyn?"

"No—yes, of course! What is it?"

It was Rex's assumed name. In that supreme moment he forgot all accidents, stifled with the very breath of hell.

“Is Inspector Maggs with you, sir? May I speak to him?”

Roland handed across the receiver.

“Yes, I'm Maggs. Who are you?”

“Innes. Old Madame Zynscky has owned up: she's here now. Can you come?”

“Right. Ring off, please.”

“Will you come round with us, sir? Your evidence may be useful, if only to get the truth from Mother Zynscky.”

Roland took his hat. The scent was getting warm.

CHAPTER X

MADAME ZYNSCKY

MADAME ZYNSCKY was the Flaubourg St. Germain of the underworld. She had been magnificent, and retained alike the appearance and the pride. She was only too ready, once having taken the step, to throw herself into the arms of justice, and grease the wheels of the chariot of the Law.

Yet it was a black enough business. There was not only the corpse of one of his Majesty's Judges to explain away, but the corpse of a child to whom the most liberal cynic could not give fifteen summers.

The police had started sniffing around on the very morning of the murder, which she had not discovered till eleven o'clock, when, having no sign of her distinguished guest, she had applied her eye to the peephole of the room, and seen the two dead bodies, and a sickening stream of blood, already chill and clotted on the floor.

So much was easy to tell, even if she risked a dose of penal servitude—one could never tell what these police would do! Somehow, she fancied, the matter would not come into court.

But what the Inspector did want to know was this: Who had been there that night?

This she rolled off glibly, though she risked her livelihood.

But the police were a good sort; they would not hurt an honest woman's trade; she was useful enough to them in a hundred ways, God knew!

They would not let her clients know that she betrayed them. Well, thank God, there was one question that he did not ask; what women were there? That is, other than the ordinary.

Did the Inspector know who had done it? She thought perhaps he did. This was no ordinary crime.

Yes! it would be all right for her. They could never bring up the little girl against her; she had her answer for that! She was a cowardly fool not to have come straight to the police on that dreadful first morning, when a thousand expedients worse than foolish jostled each other in her shrewd old skull. No! perhaps it was better to give the man a chance to clear out. The police would prefer that too.

“Mr. Fitzgerald would like a word, sir!” came an interruption at the door.

Mr. Fitzgerald was Laycock's best friend.

“Any news, Inspector?” he whispered.

“The worst, sir, I'm sorry to say.”

“Dead?”

“Ay, sir, and worse!”

“Worse? You are mad!”

“Murdered, so that if I had Grayson here in this office, I wouldn't dare to lay a finger on him. I can't bear it, sir; it's a shame to the force. Go, sir, you must break it to his wife—bear up, sir. We must face it all like men. But—look what I've seen to-night, sir!”

And he silently handed over the tortoise-shell box.

“Look here, gentlemen,” said the rabbit-faced man, who with Roland had joined them at the door. “That man Grayson has never made but one mistake. He loved his father, and it cost him nigh two years in gaol. He won't do a silly thing like that again! He has committed every crime from petty larceny to murder, these thirty years—and tripped but once. Catch him!” and the little man laughed screechily.

It jarred them, one and all. Indeed there seemed a fate about it.

“I shall go to Lady Laycock,” said Fitzgerald shortly. “To you, Inspector, I only say one word: there is a God above.”

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

They went back to the adorable Zynscky, who was now quite at her ease. Indeed, had she been Queen of England for a decade she could hardly have borne herself more majestically.

The physical appearance of all her guests supplied her with an inexhaustible fund of talk. Suddenly the Inspector stopped her.

“By the way,” he said, “who was the little girl?”

Madame Zynscky was equal to the occasion.

“Inspector Maggs,” she said solemnly, “I pledge you my word that it has nothing to do with the case, and I strongly advise you not to ask.”

“H’m”—the Inspector was but half convinced.

“The whole affair will be hushed up—you know it as well as I do! Well!” the placid old voice rippled on, “I will tell you a little story.”

“Nonsense!” said the Inspector sternly.

“I knew a very clever policeman in Vienna—never mind how many years ago! who was engaged in a very similar case. That young man had his fingers on a very great criminal—one of the lowest blackguards in Vienna—but the night before he arrested him he had a very curious dream.”

“Yes?” said the Inspector, amused. “We don't dream much in London, Madame!”

“You'd better learn,” retorted the old woman grimly. “This young man dreamt that he was hunting for a superintendent's badge in the mud; his fingers closed on it, and—it was a Royal Crown. A red-hot Royal Crown, and it burnt him! ’Twas only the girl with his shaving water that touched his hand with the hot jug to wake him; but while he shaved he thought, and, while he thought, the criminal slipped out of Austria; and the very same post that brought that disappointing news consoled him with news of his appointment to that very ‘surintendance’ he had dreamed of.

“Now wasn't that funny?” she concluded, with a chuckle.

“The Inspector is a witty man,” interposed Roland, “but you go and try the joke on the most Noble the Marquis of Ercildoune. You'll find, Inspector,” he added, "that this affair won't hush up quite as smoothly as all that. I shall see you later. Good-bye!” and he strolled off.

“You may go, Madame,” said the Inspector; “we shall always know where to lay our hands on you—and I'll think it over.”

“Good afternoon, gentlemen!” and the disgusting creature swept out of the office with the airs of a duchess.

Left to themselves, the two men silently produced their pipes. They were nearly through the first before the rabbit-faced man opened his mouth.

“Tell you what, Maggs,” he said, "if I had Grayson here, I'd choke him right away, and chance what happened after.”

The Inspector reached out his hand.

“And not think twice about it,” was his only comment.

CHAPTER XI

THE CROWN PRINCESS

THE more Maggs thought about it, the less Maggs liked it. But the certainty of Ercildoune's resentment was bound to outweigh the dubious threats of the old harridan of Roumania Road. After all, she might be bluffing. He determined to go into the case with even more than his accustomed zeal.

But this peculiar case seemed to object to the process.

All his clues were woolly—everybody had a quite straightforward story to tell, and not a soul had heard or seen anything. Of the five or six dapper young men that frequented the house there was not one in the least like the missing Grayson. Every one of them was a fine strapping upstanding healthy clean-living youth, such as England is proud of. Every one of them lived in an honourable way and could be traced back to the cradle.

But they were frankly indifferent to the detective, and had all made a point of seeing and hearing a little less than nothing. Only one, a Mr. Segrave, the private secretary of the Crown Princess (as she was called by every one), offered to assist him.

"Look here, Inspector," he said, "for private reasons of my own I should like to see this matter cleared up. Now you're on the wrong tack altogether. Everybody knows all about old Zynscky's men. You have a look round at the women."

"Well," said Maggs, "I have quite certain information that it was done by a man."

"Or by a woman at his command. You're a smart man, Inspector Maggs; but if you leave out the women, they'll call you Maggots. You have a look round at the women."

"What do you know, sir?"

"I can tell you of two or three who were there that night—but I shan't. You can find out easily enough from other sources, and——"

"Thank you!" said Maggs, "you needn't change my name yet; you've told me."

And off he went.

"There was a Segrave in this case before, too," mused Maggs. "Of course. Captain Segrave, killed with Roland Rex in that avalanche. But, Great Scott! Mr. Rex was not killed. Where is Captain Segrave, then?"

These lying official reports! Perhaps even Mr. Rex himself would hardly know the truth of that story.

Nor did Roland, on being questioned, think the facts of the case good to report, and fubbed off the Inspector with the usual commonplaces of official stupidity.

Rex could hardly have explained this reticence, even to himself. Perhaps the shock of the affair had a good deal to do with it. In any case he held his tongue, and a really priceless clue was lost. The Inspector left young Segrave to himself, and busied himself with other threads. Yet, had he but known it, young Segrave was like a silken skein of Ariadne, to lead him to the hell-heart of the labyrinth.

* * * * * *

The young man went over to his mistress, to perform his daily secretarial duties. The Crown Princess was known and beloved all over England. The infamous conduct of her vile husband was perhaps but guessed; yet the one shameful bargain, the refusal to accede to which had cost her a throne, was well enough understood to make her the idol of that mean and obscene class of English people that love to think themselves generous and pure.

Divorced though she was, she commanded the esteem and affection of the Court as of the crowd; and if, as a few blackguard busybodies hinted, she sought elsewhere that solace which our beautiful social system had denied her, it was surely her own affair. Not that any decent person listened for an instant to the breath of scandal; in fact, one or two men had been soundly horsewhipped for something less than a whisper to her discredit.

The secretary found his mistress awaiting him. She lay on a magnificent divan of tigers' skins, seriously smoking a cigarette with long deep inhalations. There was more Eastern blood than Austrian in her veins; nay! but the naked Tartar showed clear as noonday in her supple gestures and savage face.

She rose as he entered. She was a woman of full six feet, her body strong and lithe as a leopard's; too slight almost to support the weight of her marvelous head. Of the semi-Mongolian type, with long sleepy eyes, and eyebrows bushy and black as a raven, the nose more snub than straight with the nostrils jutting like an animal's, the mouth a scarlet slit with thinnest lips crowned with a black down, the teeth strong and projecting, the jaw square and portentous. The cheeks were hollow, and they and the whole face glistened with that coarse dead blue (only enlivened by the purple of two moles upon the chin) that one only sees in Eastern Europe. All this was on a mighty model; its poise on the slight shoulders served to accentuate its great size; so did her lustrous hair. Of gleaming dead blue-black, it rolled and twisted tightly about her in innumerable coils. One would have said Medusa with her snakes!

Yet all the wonder and horror of the head was instantly blotted out when she spoke. 'Twas like some gentle far-off silver bell borne down on the Zephyr to one's listening ear. 'Twas of no great volume, but most utter sweet.

So also the sleepy nectar of her long oblique eyes set deep in the rocky fastness of cheekbone and eyebrows stole out to give you of the nectar of her soul.

Verily a marvel! That all the tenderness and truth of a Madonna should force itself to expression

through so dark a veil! Yet it did so. little children ran to kiss the ugly face. When she smiled, it was a world of beauty—and she always smiled.

A marvellous artifice of beauty thus to hide itself in repulsion! She stood upright on the tiger-skins, her body draped in a clinging cascade of scarlet and silver sequins in the half-light against the deep azure tapestry of the wall, and waited.

CHAPTER XII

MISS ARUNDELL

"MR. SEGRAVE," she said at last, "I have no letters this morning; but I have a task of some difficulty for you: well, of absurdity rather, but I assure you that it is of the last importance to my interests. You will please go out and buy at the first ironmonger's a hammer and three long French nails; with these proceed to Gildford Street near Russell Square. You will perceive upon a hoarding a poster bearing the words 'APPLE SOAP.' Kindly drive a nail into the centre of each letter P. You had better leave the motor at the corner of the street. Return, instantly and without looking round, to the car, drive to Brighton, and drop the hammer from the pier-head into the sea. Then leave this cipher message on the ground, and return. You may wait on me to-morrow morning at the same hour."

The secretary bowed and withdrew. "Send Miss Arundell to me as you go out," she added: "I wish to be read to."

In a few moments the door opened quietly, and Eileen Arundell appeared.

What a difference to her mistress was this true-hearted English maiden! Neither tall nor short, but of a graceful habit, the supple beautiful body was crowned with the daintiest face in the world. A shade piquant in expression, yet the glorious sincerity of her fearless eyes stamped her as no coquette. The lips were not too full, not too red; curved, yet not curved too much; and deliciously tiny was the whole mouth, set in the delicately chiselled face with its blush ever flaming over the creamy languor of her cheeks. The eyes were grey shaded with blue; the hair was of that fine gossamer gold of which the angels make their harpstrings.

She and her mistress loved each other like twin sisters; the gentle innocence of the one matched well with the sagacious kindliness of the other, and the subtle fascination of the ugly Princess was a splendid foil to the frank appeal of her lovely companion.

Princess Stephanie greeted her with an affectionate caress; then sank back upon her rugs. "Je suis énervée! read me of Flaubert—no, of Balzac. Ah! but not that horrible *Peau de Chagrin*, my beautiful. Read me *La Fille aux yeux d'or*.

Eileen knew the mood. Silently she found the book, and seating herself at the edge of the divan, close to the exquisite feet of the Princess, interpreted in her low melodious voice the inspired words of the great magician of Touraine.

"Eileen," said Stephanie, after an hour had passed, "old Mr. Jukes will be here this morning. I expect very important news of this projected loan, and I shall require to be quite undisturbed. You must lock the double doors, and see that nobody approaches. You understand quite clearly that a single whisper in the city at this juncture would ruin the whole scheme—and then where would your little fortune be?" she added playfully.

"Do you really mean it, Stephanie darling?" murmured the timid child. "You will really give me a thousand pounds of stock? I hardly believe there is so much money in the whole world."

"You have earned it well kitten!" laughed the Princess. "You have been very useful to us, I assure you. Who would suspect my beautiful kitten of negotiating a scheme that will startle four capitals when it is made public? Go now, darling one, and see that Mr. Jukes enters unobserved."

The fair girl kissed her mistress, and glided out of the room.

Left to herself, Stephanie gave rein to a tempest of warring passions. She rolled to and fro on the divan like one in grievous pain of body; she lighted a cigarette, and threw it away again; she tried to read, and was revolted by the stupidity of the author in not casting a dazzling light upon her immediate perplexity. She even tried to pray before the dim-lit icon in the little eastern niche; but the Madonna had no message for her.

The paroxysm was luckily soon cut short; the door moved slowly inwards, and the old financier stood before her. The door closed behind him, and Stephanie heard the swish of Eileen's dress, and the turning of the key in the outer lock. She herself made fast the inner door, and turned to greet her visitor.

Mr. Jukes was a bent old man of a pronounced Jewish cast of countenance, with bright eyes gleaming from under his shaggy eyebrows. He walked somewhat lamely, and leant upon his serviceable oaken staff.

Stephanie drew the curtains over the window.

The consultation was prolonged and intense. It seemed that the Princess was torn by the claws of many conflicting emotions, those vultures that scent the carcass of the dead soul from afar.

What awful grief had stunned her? What dreadful passion moved her?

How should the cold concentration of high finance admit elements so incongruous?

Nor was the old Jew unmoved by the strange episodes of which she had to inform him. Anger and fear held the situation in a fiery grip. Only the most dazzling brilliance of imagination could inspire dull ingenuity.

Long they talked loud; their voices slowly lessened in volume as the minutes passed; but it was an hour before the conversation sank to confidential whispers. The fusion of these two great intellects, triumphing over personal interest, had produced a gigantic masterpiece of intrigue.

Silently and secretly as he had come, the old Hebrew departed; and Eileen returned to her mistress and friend to find fresh vigour and delight replace the apathy and ennui of the morning.

“You have read me Balzac, dear,” she said; “I in my turn will tell you a stranger story than he ever imagined. First, I have good news for you. A certain young gentleman we know of is not dead at all, but in London.”

Eileen flamed all over with joyful blushes.

“Ah, but there is ill news, too. There are enemies of him and his family; desperate, powerful enemies—and they may seek his life.”

The fair girl paled, but kept her courage.

“I am your friend,” the Princess said, “and we will try and find a way to defeat them.”

Warmly the two women embraced; the child nestled into the strong white arms.

The tale of family distress that she unfolded has already been in part disclosed.

Some of the earlier, some of the most recent events were yet dark.

Indeed, the long tale which the Princess told to her dependant was but a partial and distorted view of the events.

We shall understand it better if we look on the affair from the impersonal standpoint, if we go back in time a hundred years, to the generation before Ewan Dhu.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

LONG years before, John, third Marquis of Ercildoune, had begotten two strong sons upon Margaret his wife. The elder, Dugal, had proved but a wild lad, and cared more to wander with the gipsy folk and run for lace and French brandy with the smugglers than to acquire the artificial polish of a noble, and to bow and scrape in the gilt flunkeydom of Court society. The old Marquis cared little; 'twas the wild old blood. If he risked life, what care?

But the wildness grew; the heir went wandering for a year and more at once; still the old Marquis went his way, and took but little heed.

Yet suddenly his folly's crown came on him.

Dugal, after an absence of some months, returned one Lammas Eve with a black-browed wench from Brittany for his wife.

Here was a tangle not to be cut; the devout Catholic was bound to respect the blessing of the Church. He could but pray for death to take her. A week they stayed in the castle; the woman sickened of the fine food and fair clothes; she bore herself like an harlot—as indeed she was—bold and impudent and free with the very lacqueys. Nor did her husband care; all day he drank in the great hall, and shamed

his father's roof-tree, while his lady, almost as drunk as he, romped with the scullions.

Then the old man, hard stricken, drove them forth to their mates, the outlaws, and set a curse upon his house that he should never enter it.

A year passed. Ewan, a sober goodly lad, did what he could to assuage his father's shame. But that was little. Still, he rode among the people, and sought to fit himself for the duties of a good magistrate.

One winter's night, as he rode homeward, he saw the red flame glitter over the fisher-village by the sea. He set spurs to his horse, and rode in. A band of smugglers, it seemed, had landed their cargo that night, and were carousing in honour of success. Merriness turned to madness, and in their frenzy they set light, for laughter, to some fisher's cot. The flames spread; the fishermen took alarm, and when the smugglers fought against their attempts to extinguish the fire, attacked them. When Ewan arrived, he saw the riot in the darkness lit by the fitful glare of the blazing huts. He joined the fight, and his long sword turned swiftly the issue. The smugglers fled, save one who wheeled a burning brand caught from the fire, and smote therewith lustily about him. The two champions faced each other, knew each other. Ewan let fall his sword. “Dugal!” he cried. “Jacob!” answered the other; then laughed: “But your hour is come, man Ewan!” and lifted his club to strike. But a fisher lad darted in, and with his clasp-knife struck him in the throat. The wild Lord Dugal fell without a sigh.

Death sobered all the storm: the winds and clouds joined in to aid the peace; a clamour of great rain rushed down and quenched the last of the fire. Ewan knelt by his dead brother in the darkness.

Death atoned for all; he bore him to the castle, and they buried him lordly; his life was forgotten, only his birth remembered. Four years passed by, and the old Marquis slept with his fathers; Ewan Dhu inherited the fiefs of Ercildoune. Again twelve years; Ewan was married, and bright sons were born to him.

All was at peace; the land prospered exceedingly. Yet trouble was in store. A hundred miles away in the hills lived an old witch, a miser. News came that she had been robbed and murdered. The runners were hard on the track of the murderer, and but a day after this news arrived Ewan, riding lonely through the park as was his wont, was held by an old woman and a youth. “Save me, mine uncle!” was his cry.

Then Ewan knew his brother's wife. “This is Lord Dugal's boy,” she wept, “Lord Dugal's foully slain when facing you in fight!” She wove a web of falsehood as to the cause for their plight; and he, always accusing himself of his brother's misfortunes, must haste to hide them in that cavern under the waterfall where, later, he was to meet the Rosicrucian, his master. But he had cherished snakes. The hue-and-cry after the murderer died away; Ewan conveyed the fugitives safely to America. Then they turned and struck. By force of law they sought to oust their benefactor from the Marquisate. But Ercildoune had learnt that it was the murderer of an old woman (though a witch) that he had hidden from the gallows; he determined to hold what he had. “Wild and foolish was Dugal,” he exclaimed, “but never sire to this hell-brat, born in wedlock through he may have been.” He sent a trusty servant to the priest who had married his brother, and by money and finesse obtained the mutilation of the register. With his wealth and influence he fought them to the death; it was held not proven that the boy was Dugal's son. It was held proven that two years before his death she had left him for a master-thief named Grayson, whom she had married. This marriage was held good, the former null.

Ewan had triumphed; but his sensitive nature left him never at ease. He sought consolation in the study of the stars, in the companionship of wise and holy men; he was admitted postulant to the mysterious brotherhood of the Rosy Cross. This availed him, maybe, to his own soul; but how could it avoid the Doom of Ercildoune?

As we have seen he surrendered to the curse, and put his trust in God.

Now even as the third distillation of a spirit is purer than the first, so in evil the thief Grayson was but a watery mixture, and the harlot but a child in iniquity. Their son was murderer and traitor from the breast; but genius leapt in him. Conquering his early errors, his futile pettiness of murdering an old woman for her hoarded sixpences, he rose to eminence in infamy. While yet young, he amassed a fortune in the New England States by a supreme exercise of the pharisaical hypocrisy and smug dishonesty for which the people of that part of the world have been and still are justly celebrated.

At thirty-five he had shuffled his now useless old mother into the workhouse, had married the only daughter of the richest man in Boston, had gotten a healthy son, and was ready to devote his life to re-

storing the rights of primogeniture.

A year in London, and the aid of the cleverest counsel, convinced him that he had no shadow of hope in law. Might should make right, he said, and let loose the leashed passions of his boyhood. A hideous plan leapt full-armed from his mighty yet devilish brain.

His achievements and failures have already been recounted, even unto that colossal stroke of irony that Fate so glibly played on the railway just north of Marseille, where this master-Anarch fell by the hand of the meanest of his tribe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLOWER OF THE MISCHIEF

THAT which was the dream of the father became the hope of the son. Rich enough to maintain an obsequious band of clever blackguards, it was easy to arrange his escape from prison, and assure himself a hundred safe retreats. Handsome and fascinating, with a subtle brain, he could bend to his will many of those beyond the lure of gold. He was sharp enough to see from the first that his only chance of regaining the lost glory was not only to carry out his father's ghastly revenge and so stamp out the house of Ercildoune, but to gain such domination in the houses of power that it should become the necessary interest of England herself to gloss over his offences, and establish him in the enviable seat.

To this end, therefore, he worked steadily. Many a lady of high rank was ready to throw herself into his arms, under one of his numberless disguises, which, deep as they might be, could never conceal the essential force and genius of the man. But he threw them aside as quickly as he picked them up. A month to subdue them, a month to test their influence and find it wanting, and a day to rid himself of them.

At last he met and conquered one who could answer fully his ambition. What mysterious levers she controlled he knew not; enough that she controlled him. It was through her that he found a man like Captain Segrave to sink himself in the nullity of a number—163—in his accurst band of cutthroats. It was through her that Ercildoune had fallen from favour in the Court; and was openly flouted as a madman.

A prevailing inner sense that Grayson was indeed the rightful Marquis, and likely innocent of all the crimes imputed to him, ruled in the inner circles round the throne. Nor had he failed to bind this woman to him by the deadliest bonds. Little by little he had led her from fairways to foul; at last he had wrought upon her even to this crowning horror—he had made her commit a crime to serve him. So thought the impostor; but even the most desperate criminal is not always right. Was it possible that for the love of him she had done a deed at whose very contemplation many a hardened ruffian would have blanched? Was it she who had lured Laycock to his doom by the innocent bait, and the knowledge of his hideous greed for maidenhood? Would she not have quailed as she took the knife and did a deed which—had any dared to publish it—would have set the world aghast?

But, whoever had done the deed, none dared to make it public. The newspapers reported all in good faith that Mr. Justice Laycock's indisposition had taken an unexpectedly serious turn; that pneumonia had supervened, and a weak heart had proved his bane. Barely a dozen people knew the dread secret; barely a score of others suspected some guile, they knew not what. And every mouth was sealed by interest or fear.

What was the use of Maggs and his determination to see the matter aired? What could he do to upset the bulletins and the death certificate? He threatened this and that; the holders of the secret smiled. He even forced himself upon Lady Laycock, and begged her to avenge her husband—glossing his crime. She half relented; bade him come again. But before the appointment the too zealous detective received a quiet snub from his official chief, and the same evening found in his mail an offer to go to Milan at a very large salary to organize the police force in that city.

What could he do but throw up the sponge? In vain Roland Rex, with whom he had a last stolen interview, urged him to continue his endeavours. Bribes and entreaties were alike of no avail; Maggs had had enough of the task, and rolled off to Italy easier in his mind.

There was but one hope in the fast failing house of Ercildoune. Roland yet lived, and might avenge. The toils closed fast; only this lion might haply break them. Yet hope might well have staggered, had but

Ercildoune once guessed that Roland's escape was known to his pitiless and powerful foes.

Nor had they grasped, even with all the evidence before them, the all-reaching mastery of that awful brain. All they had drunk was but the froth upon the hell-brew; they were yet to come down to the dregs.

For while the bastard Marquis yet lay hidden in London, gloating over his last hideous stroke of vengeance, his wily soul grasped out at an idea yet greater than aught he had yet planned.

One master-stroke, one quintessential draught of utmost villany, and the whole problem should be solved, alike on one side and the other, to complete the doom of Ercildoune not only with death but with disgrace.

How? On what obscure and desperate fulcrum would he lean his lever? What lure or menace could bring him to the grievous end? Hath Euclid proved in vain that two circles which cut one another cannot have the same centre? Ah, but geometry is not life.

Even as Roland in despair reached to his youth's dream as his one last hope, so did the deadly malice of the false Ercildoune spit out the name “Eileen Arundell.”

CHAPTER XV

LOVE AMONG THE HOOLIGANS

So far the adventure of Roland had led him no great distance. He haunted all the dens of vice in London; he consorted with the vilest criminals, and flattered with attention all the old ghouls that batten on the grave of England’s youth. He even gave himself out in various quarters as one of Grayson’s gang; but to no purpose. Soon, too, he saw that so far from tracking his quarry, he was on the contrary being most adroitly stalked. An unpleasant sensation, as any who have followed a wounded tiger into thick jungle may admit.

Thus, one day a load of bricks fell over him from a ladder, but luckily scattered, so that he escaped with a graze; a second day, his hansom took the wrong turning, and whirled him down strange streets before he was aware. In the upshot, he was free at the cost of a scuffle with a bully.

Several more incidents of this sort occurred. It never struck him that these were the clumsiest stratagems, that Grayson, if he were so minded, could probably have put him out of the way with ease. That did not occur to him: he attributed his escape to Providence and redoubled his precautions.

But the long search sickened him. Were it not for the terrific evidence of the arch-fiend's presence, he too could have believed him dead.

“I will take the risk,” he said to himself, “and declare myself to the Beloved One.”

For, ere the shadow of the Curse of Ercildoune fell on him, Roland’s youth had been idyllic. Boy and girl together, he had worshipped Eileen Arundell.

What came between them but this doom? His grandfather had taken him aside, and told him all the woe; after that day he had withdrawn himself, and gone to the unknown, if haply he might find forgetfulness. And she? She never guessed—how could she guess? For he had not trusted himself to say “Farewell!” to her—and so she kept the sorrow at her heart. Old Colonel Arundell died not long after, and left her well-nigh penniless. Fortunate that she had so good a friend as the Princess, who let her lack nothing.

She turned the cold scorn of her eyes on Segrave’s measured passion; wherein her faithfulness, though ’twere but a memory—as it chanced—availed to save her lover’s life. How, shall be told in its due place.

But how to disclose his identity to his beautiful without letting the world into the secret was harder even than his resolution to trust her had been to take. It might well chance that her great and holy happiness in seeing him alive again would be swallowed up in some dire and irremediable catastrophe. Yet he saw no other road. Her influence with the Crown Princess might restore Ercildoune to favour, and set once more the engines of administration at work upon his side; true! Yet even more important to himself that her simple faith and purity might in some inscrutable manner pierce the awful mask that had so long baffled wealth, intelligence and power.

Of her truth he never doubted; but his late experiences had made him distrust even the Post Office, that sheet-anchor of a Briton's faith.

Even as he sat in his little room in Stepney, where he was hiding since the numerous attempts upon his life had assured him that his enemies had discovered the fraud of the avalanche and were hot on his scent, the problem was solved, and that most strangely.

From the street came a sudden tumult of coarse laughter and jeers, then a cry of anger and alarm above them, then a growing clamour and clatter. He looked out, and saw—Great God!—the very woman of his phantasy—his own Eileen!—running hard with flushed face towards him, pursued by a yelling crowd of young hooligans, the flower of our wonderful social system, and our masters to-morrow when the ideals of Keir Hardie have triumphed over manhood.

In a second he had reached the street door and flung it wide, at the same moment blowing a police whistle with all his force. “In here, Miss Arundell!” he cried.

She knew him instantly, and obeyed. In another minute some half-dozen of the hooligans lay sprawling on the pavement; the rest sheered off. Roland wasted no more time on them; the police, strolling up sulkily, would attend to them. He found Eileen on the stairs in a dead faint.

Lightly he bore her to his room, and revived her. For awhile nothing was said; the tension of the silence grew and grew. Without a word or a look he compelled her by sheer will. For her, fear held her back, but as she gazed she lost the nauseous disease of personality; rapture suddenly overcame her, and with one intense exclaim: “Roland, ah Roland!” she found herself sobbing in his arms. Closer and yet closer he caught her; his head bowed down—was it in prayer? I believe it—then willed her face to his. . . .

That sun of glory looked up through the showers; the sweet chaste lips kindled, despite themselves; the world was blotted out; they kissed.

An hour later Eileen Arundell, with his mother's ring upon her finger, a new woman by the might of love, was telling her adventure.

The Princess had sent her with a message to one of the many Christian missions, offering her great house for a lecture on the East-End; she would gather many an exalted, many a wealthy listener. Eileen had barely completed her errand and turned homeward when far along the street a dozen boys had begun to follow her with insult. She took no notice; they increased, drew closer, threatened her. At last one bolder and coarser than the rest tore at her hat; she turned, menacing; and at that moment received a cruel blow. She cried for help, and seeing none, began to run.

Roland began to see. The clumsy failures to strike him down were to be followed up more subtly. First, they would perhaps kill her before his eyes. And a blind anguish filled him; a sense of helplessness, like that which grips men in some great earthquake, swallowed up his soul.

If they had hope at all, it was surely in the power and intellect of the Princess. They would go to her and tell the whole strange story; she could not but be moved; she would help, she would save. Yet Eileen hesitated. Might it not be to bring her into the danger? Was any one so strong, so high, as to escape? Would the hand that had pulled down a Marquis and a Judge be stayed for a Princess?

On the other hand, was not the doubt an insult? Would not the great lady burn red with shame if she could hear? Surely it was a crime to doubt her all-but divinity. Would she ever forgive Eileen if one sorrow of that child-heart were kept back from her? In Roland's absence, her father’s death, what sympathy but hers? At the false news of Roland’s death, had she not held her up with hope, fed her with sister tears, been as it were mother and sister and husband in one? Had she not already some knowledge of the great conspiracy, and offered her protection?

Then they would go to her. Together, an hour later, they mingled their tears and kisses at her feet, while the royal woman, in a very tiger rage, had sworn by her own soul to save them, to bring them back to happiness, and peace to Ercildoune.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MENTAL CONDITION OF MR. SEGRAVE

UNDER the aegis of this Kalmuc Minerva, Roland Rex enjoyed a measure of safety. The attempts on his life ceased; it seemed that the bloodhounds had lost the trail. The Princess hid him in a small house she had in Chelsea; he was wonderfully disguised by an old Hebrew named Jukes, a very master of the art of altering the human face. Luck was with him from the start; he fell in with one of Grayson's gang, and by nearly throttling the fellow in a certain low opium-den to which they had retired with the purpose of discussing in private various blackguard schemes, had obtained all sorts of valuable knowledge. Grayson had gone away; the Laycock scent was still warm; he would be back (and God knew Grayson would kill him if he discovered who had betrayed him) in some three months' time. Then let old Ercildoune beware of him! With much more of the same sort.

Roland could enjoy, too, now and again,—but not too often!—a stolen interview with exquisite Eileen. Hope and faith and love flowed back into the young man's soul: he felt no doubt as to the issue. When Grayson returned—by God, let him beware of Ercildoune!

It may or may not be true that every pleasure of ours is balanced by some other's pain, but in this instance it was surely so.

The mind of Mr. Segrave needed all his ultra-British hatred of visible emotion to hide its anguish from the world. He knew nothing of Roland's return; but he marked the love-light in the wondrous eyes of his adored Eileen, and knew that the flame was none of his kindling. While she was yet a virgin heart (or so he deemed, for the mask of sorrow hid her love) he could afford to wait, to work quietly, to win at his ease. As a jockey in the straight who should have eased his horse to a canter, and finds suddenly some despised outsider furious at his heels, he lost his head a little and lashed in a frenzy at his horse. One evening he caught Eileen alone, and poured out his whole passion.

Gently she put him by.

He could better have borne contempt. He caught her roughly, bruising her almond arms; he called her by the foulest names. Then, suddenly penitent, he flung himself upon the floor in a passion of hysterical weeping. She pitied him, caring little for her own pain and shame; she left him softly and said nothing. Segrave soon conquered himself, and shut himself up in his old suave mask of gentle courtesy and silent devotion, as from afar.

The Princess never guessed what beast might lurk beneath the cultured gentleman, dull in spite of all his intellect, that she had known so long.

Yet the beast grew in cunning and insight; the more Segrave disciplined and controlled it, the mightier it grew. Just as the discipline of physical exercise makes the man stronger at the end, so the first foolish brute impulse, working in ordered channels, became a force to be reckoned with.

Nor was there any one to reckon with it; Eileen herself never guessed that it was there. She thought his angry fit a passing flash; and her innocence slept sound.

Segrave's awakened judgment soon warned him of what was going on. The absences of Eileen became suspicious; his own foolish missions took on a sinister aspect; it was certain that the Princess was tricking him.

Even his brother's story (which had before seemed commonplace enough) loomed up as a mystery to his newfound subtlety. He reflected upon the sudden mad infatuation that had seized the straight-living soldier; the change in his way of life; the reticence that sat so ill on the frank face; the sudden senseless journey for a sport he had never affected; and the tragic end of him.

Young Segrave brooded overmuch upon these matters. He began to lose sight of the endless kindnesses of the Princess Stephanie; the fascination of her faded; he began to picture a monster, a vampire that fed upon the lives of men.

Ah! but he would be her master yet. And he began to look about him for a weapon. Always he had felt that he had little share in her true thought, that invisible bars fenced him from her soul. Well, he must penetrate. Perhaps Maggs could have helped him; Maggs knew a deal about most people and their ways. But Maggs was gone abroad. By chance he met the rabbit-faced man one day in Leicester Square. He knew him for an old intimate of Maggs, and the impulse came to him to talk to him. That evening he

dined him at his club.

It was a royal pumping-match. During dinner, by common consent, the talk was sterile; yet each casual futility that passed on politics was meant and interpreted alike as a feeler and a thrust. Over their cigars they turned from the skirmish to the battle, and far into the night they plied feint and attack, till the night itself seemed to weary rather than they.

Yet neither obtained much but the increased resolve of silence, and on Segrave's part, an icier gleam in his hatred of the Crown Princess.

As he walked back through the clear morning he swore again to penetrate her fastness, by whatever loophole offered, and to defeat some plan of hers, however trivial, so that he might not feel his manhood shamed.

If he could utterly rout her, and avenge his brother, whom he no longer doubted to have been a victim, in some ambiguous way, to her designs, so much the better.

Thinking over it, he decided to track down first his rival. He paid a man to follow Eileen to what were doubtless assignations. But the girl was clever at throwing off pursuers, and it was not for some weeks that the truth came out. What, then, was Segrave's wrath to find his rival in the person of Roland Rex.

Like all suspicious and jealous persons, he could put two and two together very quickly. But the sum was never less than five, and often reached three figures. So it took him but a moment to convince himself that Rex had killed his brother. Not so bad either! That is the worst of lunatic's arithmetic, the law of chance ordains that now and then the answer shall come right.

All threads, then, were but one. He had but to slay Roland, and the Princess was beaten, his loved Eileen set free (maybe his victory would bring her to his feet—and, by God! how he would trample her!), his brother avenged.

Mr. Segrave began to wish that he knew Grayson. That man should have at least one staunch ally. In the meanwhile, he would shadow his victim, even as the silent and terrible man-hunting snake of Yucatan.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOLY DIRK

LORD ERCILDOUNE kept lonely vigil in his ancient castle, brooding over the past terrors that had whitened his still luxurious locks, the future fears that threatened to overwhelm his house thus utterly. Yet tonight he was more cheerful than his wont. Roland's letters had been uniformly hopeful; he seemed to have felt at last upon his own true steel the hitherto invisible foil of his fiendish antagonist; surely, moreover, there was an end to all. “How long, O Lord, how long?” he murmured with more reverence and confidence than he had felt for many years. Before, the prayer was like a wild outcry for some doubtful justice; now, it seemed that the answer “Soon! soon!” came like a benediction on his brows. Also, the familiar words wooed him to the familiar way, and he moved solemnly into his little chapel, and bent him in prayer at the altar.

Then he was aware—as we all are at times by some strange sensorium whose paths are yet unknown—that some other person had been before him. A thing surely incredible? His first emotion was of fear. Had the murderer found him? Had the last hour of Ercildoune struck upon the clock of Destiny? Yet a glance reassured him. There was no place of concealment in the chapel.

He betook him again to his prayers.

Again the strange sensation caught him, and more strongly. Yes, there was something new. And on the altar—how did this come to pass? Strange, strange.

There lay upon the black cloth a silver-hilted dirk, sheath-less. To his amazement he beheld upon the hilt the well-known cipher of the Rosicrucians. They who had befriended his cousin the late Marquis—had they come at last to his aid? The mystery was explained, for the old man credited the Brotherhood with powers beyond the common. He reverently lifted the dirk. On the sharp shining steel he read in tiny letters of gold the legend—

"Master, ye shall sheathe me soon
And break the curse of Ercildoune."

With a sudden impulse he glanced once fearfully around, and hid the blade in his vest. Then, lingered long, mingling the accustomed prayer with new heart and hope into strains of praise, such as that gloomy chapel, the monument of so many iniquities and woes, had never yet echoed.

The day broke, and Ercildoune still grasped the dagger, and still prayed.

The days passed, and news increased both in volume and excellence. The rabbit-faced man had missed Grayson in Vienna by an hour; Grayson was in hiding, in flight; his band seemed broken up; he struck back no more; the little army of Ercildoune was closing on him. Any moment news might come that he was taken.

One day, too, when he chanced to be confined to the castle by a cold, there came a kindly message of inquiry from the King. It seemed he was restored to favour.

He had not lived as he lived now since he inherited the fatal Marquisate.

Surely Fate had tired of her enmity; he should yet go down to the grave in peace. Then a telegram reached him from London. "Grayson trapped. Your presence necessary." It was signed by Eileen Arundell.

All the hope of the last month had strengthened the old man; his virile force came back in floods of anger. "Now is the time to strike!" he thought; "now shall I sheathe the holy dirk in the heart of that devil of the pit!"

And, feeling younger and lighter than he had done for many a day, he hurried off to London.

Imagine his joy on reading the morning poster: "The Scottish Vendetta; Lord Ercildoune's enemy reported under arrest," as he passed Warrington; his positive rapture at Euston when the "Owl" flamed at him—

"GRAYSON SEEN IN LONDON—
"EXCITING CHASE"—

at his hotel when the newsboy followed him with——

"GRAYSON CAUGHT."

He bought a paper and read the following——

"The mysterious enemy of the Marquis of Ercildoune has, it is alleged, been at last identified. He was seen by one of Lord Ercildoune's private detectives in the act of leaving a famous house in the West-End. As he jumped into a private motor and drove off with all possible speed, it was impossible to arrest him at the moment; but the detective, who was fortunately the chief of Lord Ercildoune's numerous staff, and a man highly esteemed by the police—we break no confidence in mentioning his name, Arkwright, who aided the police so greatly in the recent Elmstead Tunnel Mystery—was able to set innumerable activities to work.

"The motor-car was seen last speeding through Ware, and hopes of an arrest at any moment are largely entertained. It will be remembered that Grayson broke prison some years ago——"

the paragraph trailed off into a washy *résumé* of the whole affair.

In the stop press column—

"Grayson has been caught at Royston."

But as the old man went gleefully down to dinner the tape-machine caught his eye. It clicked out—

"The reported arrest of Grayson is denied. Turning the sharp corner at Royston the suspected motor ran into a hedge and overturned. The chauffeur, arrested, proves not to be the convict at all. He declares that his master, an undergraduate at Cambridge University, can entirely clear him, and is indignant at his arrest. On the urgent demand of London, the man is, however, being detained for inquiries."

So the Marquis enjoyed his dinner but little after all. Much less, though, the rabbit-faced man Arkwright. His story as he told it to his most trusted colleague was as follows—

"I was strolling down Hill Street, thinking of nothing in particular, when I saw the door of a great

house open—and out walked my man.

“Grayson in the flesh, I tell you. Grayson as I saw him at Marseille; Grayson as he was in the dock and the prison. There wasn’t a doubt of it. Well, my gentleman flipped into a motor and is off. You know the rest.”

“No, I don't!” returned the other. “You're keeping back the best.”

“For God's sake let us be careful,” said Arkwright, “this is the biggest thing for years. I know now what old Zynscky meant.”

“What! Whose house was it?”

He whispered—“The Duchess of Eltham! There's his influence and this fool talk of his having been innocent all along! There's his base, and his cash, and his every mortal thing he wants!”

“Oh rot!” said his Thomasian colleague.

“Well, hear what I did! I inquired. Her Grace was ill, had been ill for three weeks. The very time, mark you, when Grayson's plans began to go a bit groggy! Where could I find the gentleman who had just left the house? My boy, they denied the whole affair!”

“Arkwright,” said the other, solemnly, “did not one thing strike you as very peculiar about that house?”

“No, by Jove! what?” He was rather annoyed if his usually stolid subordinate had an idea that he was missed. "What was peculiar?”

“Why, my boy, the blue rats on the ceiling and the pink leopards strolling up the stairs.”

Arkwright was too worried to be angry. He just gave him up.

“My dear man, you're absurd,” continued the critic, “Here's one of the first ladies in the land, a lady of stainless reputation—”

“Umph!” grunted the rabbit-faced man.

“A lady with the devotion of the handsomest husband, and the three prettiest children in London—I am to believe, am I, that she moves heaven and earth to harbour this convict, on your theory a triple murderer and mutilator and Lord knows what beside?—I’m sick of you! You've talked Ercildoune until you've caught the craze. Why! you ought to be in Parliament! That's the place for you.”

“Yes,” retorted the other, “and I'd make a law to drill your head full of holes and pump a little sense into it. All your argument is *a priori* drivel. Who stole Lady Oldbury's pearls? A prince of the blood royal!”

“Well, but he was mad,” said the sceptic, though a little shaken.

“Of course he was mad. So may Lady Eltham be mad! We're all mad—read your Lombroso, you nincompoop!” After which the conversation became profoundly theoretical, its obscurity hardly illuminated by the fact that neither party to the discussion understood the subject in the least.

We gladly draw a veil over so painful a scene.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CUP FLOWS OVER

ROLAND REX was down in the mouth. For one thing, he had been—so Jukes said—spotted during his morning walk by one of Grayson's creatures, and the whole afternoon had been spent in disguising him as a semi-clerical character. Old Jukes had been particularly careful with the make-up, altering it a dozen times till it exactly fitted his ideal. Which had been tedious. On another side, too, he had expected Eileen on the previous evening, and she had not appeared. The failure to capture Grayson had exasperated him, the more so as he knew his foe could not be far away, and might strike home at any moment. He seemed safe enough, yet—what if his previous surmise were correct, and the villain struck at him through his love? Eileen Arundell could not lurk in an obscure nook as he could do, she must be seen and known; she must wait on the Princess. Ah! there was hope. Would she who had helped him so splendidly fail with her own twin soul? Not much!

And even as he thought it, and laughed, came a peculiar knock, the familiar signal of old Jukes. He rose and admitted him; but the old man, usually so calm and steady, seemed perplexed, distressed. His trembling hand thrust a letter into that of Roland.

The latter tore it open. “Where is Eileen?” it ran. “She left the house to see you last night at eight,

and has not returned. I only got back from Brighton this morning, and of course the servants knew nothing. For God's sake, do something, Mr. Rex, I shall go mad.

"Your distracted STEPHANIE."

"I will go to her," he decided without the waste of a moment. "There must be some more facts to learn than these." And snatching up his broad-brimmed hat he ran madly to the great house.

He found the Princess in violent fits of rage and tears. She had telephoned to nearly everybody in London, useful or no. For once the giant intellect seemed to have broken down. Roland strove to make light of the affair, though the blackest certainty blotted out the light of all his hope.

Ten minutes, and the great lady was herself again, though now and then she broke into a moan, calling on her loved companion's name, and upon God. Yet she controlled herself, and sternly set herself with Roland to face the situation. Before she had finished imparting the full details of what had passed, the door opened, and a footman entered, with a small package on a silver tray. The Princess took it and opened it mechanically. A card dropped out. She read—"The Marquis of Ercildoune presents his compliments to ex-Princess Stephanie" (she stamped her pretty foot with anger at the outrage) "and begs her to hand the enclosed small parcel to Mr. Roland Rex, whose present address he despairs of discovering."

The parcel bore the words: "For Mr. Roland Rex."

He took in his hand. "I no longer fear," he said, "I know. There is no God. Leave me alone."

"No!" she answered, "you must bear yourself as a man should. I will stay with you, and show you what even a woman may endure."

In the certitude of calamity they had both grown preternaturally calm.

"So be it!" said Rex, and tore off the wrapper.

A gleam of ivory set with rubies met their eyes. Roland steeled his nerves and pressed the spring: the lid flew open and revealed a little tray beautifully engraved with the fantastic irony as of old—"Mr. Roland Rex, with the compliments of the Marquis of Ercildoune."

He lifted out the tray. There lay, fresh-lopped, the flaming lips of his beloved, in their nest of gossamer gold—the hair, the lips he had kissed a thousand times.

"I think, Princess," he said, "our jester goes too far. I think the occasion an excellent one for putting to the test our little theories about the existence of a God. You shall soon hear——" There was a sinister significance about his words. He kissed the little box and put it tenderly away.

But the Princess never answered. She sat like Memnon in the uttermost desert, and her eyes were hard and tearless.

Roland went softly from the room. "There *is* a God! There *is* a God!" he kept on muttering as he walked idly down the street. But for the ashen pallor of his face, men might have though him a mere curate walking early to his work. A pity old Jukes had not imagined a more rubicund parson!

His eyes sought out some clue—Nature seemed intelligible to him. He felt that every flag of the pavement was a clue, leading him straight to his enemy.

Or—was he mad? Was the dear God a heartless mocker as well as a cruel tyrant? What was this strange hallucination, then?

Across the road, cheerily striding, was the bronzed and bearded figure of—himself! Himself as he came back to England, hardly a year ago.

Then the truth flamed out in him—this was the very man! Grayson's last surprising masterpiece of insolence was to pass as Roland Rex.

"O Lord!" he cried, "Forgive me for my blasphemy—for Thou hast delivered mine enemy into mine hand!"

Just then the man jumped into a hansom: Roland into another, ordering the cabman to follow.

Up the Edgeware road they turned, and Roland began to wonder whether the pleasure of an interview with Madame Zynscky was to be included in his little outing. Strangely enough, he never gave a thought to his dead love. The horror of his heart had transcended itself, become a compelling purpose, far from the sphere of emotion. He had no doubt of the issue; God, who had shown the quarry, would speed the bolt. So he laughed gaily. The cabman may have wondered at this clerical gentleman apparently engaged in some joyous practical joke.

They went on into St. John's Wood; the first cab suddenly stopped at a large house with a garden.

The false Roland paid his cab, and swung the gate open. Roland flung half-a-sovereign to his man, stepped up to him, and said gravely, “Mr. Rex, I believe?” “Yes,” said Grayson, smilingly, “What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?”

“A few words in private, if it is not troubling you too much.”

“Not at all. Forgive me if I precede you.” And he led the way round the house to a conservatory, and opened the door. Just then a motor-car came noisily up, and stopped.

“It is nothing,” airily explained Grayson, “Only my grandfather, Lord Barfield!” Roland's politeness took a little jar.

Yet one more act of self-control, and the wrath of years should leap out and wither this cynical devil. He merely bowed his head at the taunt.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRAP CLOSES

GRAYSON noticed that the gate did not swing open behind them. It was not the old Marquis. Who was it then? Grayson dismissed so idle a query with a slight shrug.

“A seat, Mr. ——? I have not the honour of your acquaintance,” he said smiling, and pointing to a chair.

“Thank you, I will stand.” He cast his eye around. Heaven was still on his side; there was some loose rope in the corner. “My name is a small matter; I think I have had the honour of hearing from you—from your lordship, perhaps I should say—already this morning.”

Grayson laughed out loud. “Yes! I could not deprive you of such treasures.”

“Come, sir,” said Roland, moved out of all patience: "this is my errand, to hang you with these hands.

“Stir!” he said, as Grayson looked about him for a weapon, “and I will shoot you like a dog.”

The murderer held up his hands.

“The best way, Grayson, perhaps; for as the Lord liveth and as my soul liveth, I will surely hang you with these hands!”

“Ah!” smiled his enemy, “I am unarmed.”

“I take you at your word,” said Roland; “do you think there is no God?” And he laid aside his pistol.

“Really, I cannot discuss theology, even with so learned a divine,” he sneered, “at this early hour of the morning. A divine?” he seemed to muse.

Roland stood ready. “Ah! I have it,” suddenly yelled Grayson in a voice that shook the house. “You are Father Ambrose! Father Ambrose! Father Ambrose!”—then he closed with Roland in a death grip. They rolled over, fighting like cats.

But an answering cry woke in the house. From an inner door appeared two figures.

Ah, Roland, had you seen her! had you seen her!

There stood Eileen in life, scatheless and radiant, yet wild with a strange joy, and by her side the old Lord Ercildoune.

“There!” she cried, pointing to Roland, “Is the false priest that murdered poor Lord Marcus.”

Ercildoune with a boy's joy ran down, waving the holy dirk. “I sheathe thee,” he cried, “and break the curse of Ercildoune!” But as he lifted up his arm the outer door was burst, and Segrave, ever hot on Roland's track, rushed in and struck away the blade.

Roland had Grayson by the throat. He looked up.

“Grandfather!” he cried.

The old man started back in fear and wonder. How did this Ambrose speak in Roland's voice?

Eileen dashed in. “Don't you see,” she cried, “they are all wrong? That gasping cur is Grayson.”

Segrave cried out in terror. “I have saved the very man I meant to slay,” he roared, entirely losing his self-control.

Ercildoune's shrewd old mind grasped the situation.

“Mr. Segrave,” he said, “If you would save your skin, be a true witness of these proceedings. But if you move or cry, I fear there is but one retort.” He calmly possessed himself of Roland's abandoned revolver. “A chair, Mr. Segrave,” he added, courteous and calm even in that headlong hour.

Segrave subsided, scowling. “Eileen!” went on the old Marquis, “you will perhaps be good enough to report to the Princess. She may be anxious about you. I regret to have interrupted you, Roland my lad,” he went on, when she had left the room, “you had some business with this gentleman.”

“Sit up!” commanded Roland, whom the appearance of Eileen had transfigured with rapture. “You have been condemned to be hanged; we shall execute the sentence in a quarter of an hour; spend the short minutes in a confession of your sins to God and man.”

“Ah! you want a few things explained!” he jeered. “Well, then, what is it?”

“No parley,” answered the old Marquis. “Commit yourself to God!”

“You may as well know all,” he said wearily. “The whole thing’s been a plant right along. The game was to get you—Lord Barfield! to kill your own grandson. Then we should have got you hanged out of the way, had myself declared innocent and my branch legitimate, and—there was I with my rights.” He flamed up; it was plain that the man had been utterly sincere. His fancied wrongs had preyed upon his mind, and turned its mere original evil to a masterpiece of criminal genius.

“But how could you build up such a scheme?” asked Rex. “It was Miss Arundell herself who called on my grandfather to kill me.”

“Why, you fool, it was our plot from the beginning. We paid the hooligans who threw Eileen into your arms; old Jukes—I have been practically living with you for weeks as old Jukes!” The voice had an ineffable scorn. “I sent that dodderer his ridiculous dirk.”

“Those eyes of Father Ambrose?”

“Fluorescein,” he retorted; “why don't you teach your detectives just the rudiments of some one thing?”

“How did you get Lady Eltham to lie for you?”

“Not at all; I had a footman in my pay. I waited till I saw that rabbit-faced idiot nosing about and then gave him the trail—and the slip.”

“But why bring Miss Arundell into it at all?”

“How else could I get him to the intimacy of the Princess? Through that ass Segrave?” he snarled at the embarrassed secretary. “If I had you to myself for a minute, my boy, I'd teach you something about murder. How did you get here anyway?”

The poor coward winced. “I saw you hanging about,” he said; “I thought you were Mr. Rex. I wanted Eileen.”

“Pah!” said Grayson.

“But what has the Princess got to do with it?” asked Roland.

There was a rustle behind them, and two women swept into the doorway. “Everything,” cried the Princess.

CHAPTER XX

THE CURSE BREAKS

“YOU must hang me too,” said Stephanie, seeing Roland busy at his rope. “Why, I did everything. It was I that lured up the Marquis, and I that arranged for you to think Eileen was killed. Ah! sweet,” she purred, “you know I would never have let you come to harm. How it hurt me to sacrifice that lock of your gold hair you gave me!” But the girl turned away in horror. “You plot to kill my lover,” she said, “and say you would do nothing against me!” and she laughed harshly and hatefully.

“God! I have lost you too,” wailed the wretched woman. “Ah! let me die! . . .”

“Ah! you do not know! Yes, it was I that tore the lying tongue from Laycock, and killed the poor innocent that his . . .” she choked with rage and tears. "Ah! you shall never know what happened in that house! It is between me and God, and I shall not fear to meet Him.”

They all shrank back from her. She towered tremendous above them in the throes of her passion.

“My child,” she sobbed, “my child!”

Even Grayson gasped. Their loathing turned to mere terror; they were in presence of an elemental force. This was not a woman, but a tempest; they shrank from the right of judging her. The voice of the storm of heaven is louder than man’s petty cry.

Only Segrave was so little of a man that his querulous question broke—

"But why did you do it at all? What is this Mr. Grayson?"

She turned on him. Like a tree smitten by the lightning he shrank into himself, withered and dumb.

Swifter than an arrow she launched herself at the doomed Grayson. "Ercildoune!" and her voice was again the gentle far-off bell, "Ercildoune, my darling, what I have done is for you!"

Again they were still. A sort of mist blinded their apprehension. All this was all so new, so impossible. For a moment Roland dreamt that she was acting a part.

So indeed; yet like all great actresses, the part rang true because she felt its truth.

She kissed him. For an instant the whole world was blank.

Lord Ercildoune rose to end the scene. But she was swifter.

With one deft motion she drew a bottle from her bosom and dashed it on the ground. Dense choking fumes arose, and before anybody could recover from the confusion she had disappeared into the house with her lover.

Eileen had been nearest to the bottle when it broke, and priceless moments were spent in restoring her in the fresh air of the garden. When aid came, no trace could be discovered. Before half the rooms had been searched, the house was found to be on fire. When the engines appeared, it was already but a spout of flame.

Nobody had been seen to leave the garden; it was most sure that they had perished.

* * * * * *

"Roland!" chuckled the old grandfather in the smiling halls of Ercildoune. "The curse is lifted from us all at last. Eh, my dear? You are all the curse we have at present," he laughed across at Eileen, now his grandson's six months' bride.

"Well," answered Roland, with a half-serious shrug, "the Doom says that the lands shall go back to the King."

"How stupid you men are!" said Eileen. "Where were you at school, Roland, not to have learnt that Rex means King?"

"By heaven, she's hit it!" and they all shook hands.

A stalward ghillie brought in the mail.

Eileen, taking her letter, gave a little wondering cry. The Marquis had a small flat package; his eye fell upon it, and he groaned and fell forward. Roland raised him. "Wait till you know!" he said. The packet was addressed—

"The most noble the Marquis of Ercildoune."

Within was an old miniature on ivory.

"With this portrait of the fierce old father of all our mischief," the enclosing letter ran, "I resign the last of the links with Ercildoune. A great sinner asks your pardon for a great wrong."

"Children!" said the Marquis, "come with me." Again he led them to the Chapel of Vengeance.

But within there was a change. For the fierce God of Genesis had gone, and in its place was the loving and compassionate figure of the Christ. The monstrance with its angry reproach against the Master had been removed. Instead was a memorial tablet to the Claimant wreathed in flowers, with these words—

> "God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather
> that he should turn from his wickedness and live."

"Children," said the old man, with tears running down all over his cheeks, "you see there is a God that answers prayer."

Eileen looked at her letter, short and pointed:

"Forgive and forget my jealousy, dear one, and all the disastrous passions of an unhappy woman. The madness and misery are over for both of us; we too are married, and all the storm-beacon is burnt out to bliss.

"My love, ever my love!

"STEPHANIE."

Eileen kissed the letter; and, fondly glancing at her husband, slipped it into her bosom.

* * * * * *

Arkwright sat still with his dull colleague, and pulled more gloomily than ever at his pipe.

“So the Ercildoune case is over,” grumbled the dull one, “and a blessed lot of credit it brought you!”

“Umph!” grunted Arkwright, “’slong it is over, I won't complain. I call it a fair sickener.”

“Come, come!” returned the other, “’tain’t as bad as all that. Come to think of it, you must ’a’ made a tidy bit o’ money out o’ mad Lord Ercildoune, fust to last.”

“Well,” said the rabbit-faced man, “I suppose I did. Fust to last, a tidy bit o’ money. ’Ave another beer?”

FINIS