



CHAPTER V.

Among the many grand houses—or "palatial mansions," as the fashionable house agents in their ornate catalogues love to style them—which have the advantage of overlooking Hyde Park, that of Sir Richard Mortmain was by no means the least splendid or spacious.

Sir Richard was alone. A handsome man enough, so far as form and features went, with no reference to expression, tall, slender and of goodly presence. He was neither old nor young—thirty-three, perhaps—with a pale, resolute face, that was almost waxen in its pallor, hair as black as the raven's wing, very dark eyes, and very white teeth. But perhaps the most prominent feature, if it may be so called, of the baronet's face, was the long black mustache, carefully trimmed and trained, the arrangement of which often caused the lord of Mortmain to be mistaken by strangers for a foreigner. He was, indeed, a countenance rather Italian than English, eminently aristocratic, withal, but that would well have suited with the character and the deeds of some subtle connoisseurs of Borgia and Machiavelli—one of those white-handed patricians who plotted and stabb'd and poisoned smilingly.

Sir Richard Mortmain could not afford to live at Mortmain Park, the majestic old manor at which Queen Bess herself had in her time been a guest. But he had a hunting box hard by Market Harborough, and a tiny villa near Newmarket, and kept up the London mansion pretty well. Wages may have been in arrear sometimes, and bills unpaid, but there were liveried servants and carriages and horses and bachelor dinner parties, for all that, while ever and anon there would set in a halcyon period, a sort of financial flood tide, when ready money would abound.

"A person, Sir Richard, wishes very much, if you please, to see you for a minute. From abroad, I believe," said the discreet butler, who had entered quietly. "The man is very pertinacious, and won't away."

"Tell him to write, then," returned the baronet, arching his eyebrows, "or call the police. One can't afford in London to be open to all comers, as you ought to know."

Hinks the butler coughed apologetically under his employer's rebuke.

"I should not have thought of such a thing, Sir Richard," he said, mildly, "only that the party insisted that his name was well known—name of Crouch, please, Sir Richard, and—"

"I do remember such a name. Show him in," said the baronet, with a frown.

The visitor was promptly inducted into the room. A broad, short man, roughly dressed, in spite of the heat of the weather, in a coarse peacock, such as North Sea pilots wear, and with heavy boots besmeared by what was certainly not the mud of London streets—a man with a shaggy red beard that fell upon his breast, with a head of unkempt red hair, and with little restless eyes, like those of a wild boar at bay.

Sir Richard Mortmain, leaning against the corner of the massive marble chimney-piece, might have posed for an ideal portrait of aristocratic disdain as he languidly turned his handsome white face toward the importunate visitor.

"You—wished to speak to me—Mr. —" he said slowly.

"Crouch, Rufus Crouch," coolly returned the newcomer, as, uninvited, he selected an easy chair. "No new name to Sir R., now is it? But we may as well make ourselves comfortable before we begin our chat, mayn't we?" And as he spoke he threw himself back in the softly padded chair, and set down his battered hat among the gewgaws on the pretty little table within reach. "We're pals once; thick as thieves, as the saying is, hey, Sir R."

The face of Sir Richard Mortmain, as with a sudden surprise he looked down upon his extraordinary visitor, would have made the fortune of the painter who should have succeeded in transferring it to the canvas. The sleepy eyes were open now, and there were fire in their regard, while the poor old brows contracted frowningly, and the well-cut lips tightened beneath the shade of the black mustache. So might Caesar Borgia have looked at a vulgar tool of him who presumed to be insolent.

"Well, Crouch, back again, I see. Why, I thought you fairly settled, under an other name perhaps, in Australia," said the baronet, assuming a tone of genuine good nature, and playing his part very well.

"Tain't all of us, Sir R.," replied the man, provokingly, "that have the luck to be baronets, or to have the dirty acres entailed upon us, is it now, Sir R.? I know, and you know, how one chap may get hanged for peeping over the hedge, and another may steal the horse without a question asked; hey, Sir R.?"

The words were offensive, and the manner in which they were uttered was more offensive still. Sir Richard Mortmain was a proud man, apt to resent a liberty on the part of his social inferiors; but he merely laughed now.

"Always the same sort of chap, Rufus et al. he said, half playfully—"a crab apple, as we said in the West-country, as when you carried my second gun in the battles at Mortmain. How did Australia use you?"

"Much as Australia—and England, too, for that matter—nées than that haven't been born with a silver spoon in their mouths, Sir R.," rejoined the fellow, with great asperity. "If I got gold, I spent gold; and a dog's life, as a digger, I had of it. Not but what I learned a thing or two as to the lie of the gold and prospecting."

And here the man looked thoughtful, and there was a dash of vanity in his tone.

"Yes," he added, after a pause—"yes, the stuff's nigh everywhere, even here in England, only you trample over it, and are blind to it. But the days are done now for your independent digger o'ther side of the world. No more nuggetting; no more cradle rocking. It's a master's country now, not a poor man's, in Topsy-turvy land."

"And the bush?" asked the baronet, lightly.

"What do you mean by the bush?" growled Rufus, scowling at him fiercely as a tiger cat about to spring.

"Nothing, nothing; don't lose your temper," rejoined Sir Richard, equably. "And now, Crouch, what can I do for you? One thing I warn you of—ready money is as scarce with me as leaves on a birch at

white, impassive face of his aristocratic host, "at the first seven thousand pounds. It must be a goodish bit more by this, rolling up as it has been for years. Think, Sir R., what such a heap of ready cash would be to you."

There came a flash into Sir Richard's sleepy, dark eyes, and his whole countenance seemed to brighten. "Sure of the sum total, Crouch?" he asked, eagerly. The fellow nodded.

"Now for her surname, then?" inquired the baronet—"though if it were Sneeks or Snugs I could condone it, if only there's no mistake as to the money."

"No, Sir R.," interrupted the ex-gold-digger, gruffly. "And there's just as little mistake as to the young lady that owns it. Miss Violet Mowbray is her name, and from all I hear the Mowbrays are as good as even the Mortmain's, so far as pedigree goes. This young girl is an orphan. She has a small income, and her guardian, a tough old City bachelor, arranged for her to reside with his own niece, our parson's wife, Mrs. Langton. She has grown up in that quiet nook, and knows no more of the thumping sum she is entitled to than I do whether it will freeze or thaw next Christmas."

"How do you know it, Rufus?" asked the baronet. "Some will, eh, that formed part of your spoil on leaving your former employers?"

"Not will," answered Crouch, with a wink. "Wills may be revoked, and codicils added, but this is a snugger sort of thing. This is a trust deed." But that is about all I have to tell gratis, Sir R. Mortmain, Baronet."

And, indeed, nothing more by the most skillful diplomacy could be extracted from Rufus. He certainly had not brought the valuable document with him, nor would he give any further information as to its contents until a bargain had been struck, and his own recompense or share agreed to. Nor would he be on that occasion, name his price—that was a matter for future consideration. What he desired to know was whether Sir Richard would "come into it" head and soul, and take immediate steps to bring the scheme to a successful conclusion. Sir Richard was ready enough to lend his aid, but he demurred to taking what he called "a leap in the dark."

"I don't ask you to marry, Sir R.," said the former confidential clerk of Lawyer Bowman at last, "without better security than my bare word that the bride's little hand is weighted with much gold. My interest and yours go in the same groove, and what I advise is, come down to Yorkshire and judge for yourself."

"Perhaps it would be better so," returned the baronet slowly. "When first you spoke of Somersethshire, I recollect a dreary old place of my father's in those parts that I haven't seen since I was a boy, and never thought to see again—Hellsbottoms call it. The house has been shut up for years, but it belongs to me, after all, and it lies, I remember, just above the upper end of Beckdale and four miles from the sea. I might go down there, if this prize of yours be really worth winning."

"You never did a wiser thing in your life, Sir R., rely on it, than following up the golden clew that I have put into your hands," said Rufus Crouch, rising from his seat. "Our next talk with your leave, had better be in Yorkshire. Meanwhile, your humble servant."

And with no more formal leave taking, the ill-assorted confederates parted.

(To be continued.)

GREED BROUGHT DISASTER.

Vulture Got Away with a Cow's Carrass, but Suffered Capture.

A bird of prey as tall as a man! Such is the prize just captured by the superintendent of Richard Gird's ranch in the hills south of Chino, San Bernardino County.

The prisoner is a magnificent specimen of the California vulture, without doubt the largest ever taken captive. From the crown of its ferocious looking, red-wattled head to its strong, scaly talons it measures six feet. Its plucky captor is an inch or two shorter in his cowhide boots. The man has the advantage in weight, for the bird weighs 100 pounds. Still, that is a fair fighting weight to carry through the rarefied upper air. In order to accomplish this feat the vulture is provided with wings that have a spread of twelve feet. Withal, the ornithologists who have seen it say that it is merely a "second-story job" if they wished to acquire standing as "good men." A country house was watched for days till the habits of the occupants were known to the plotters. Observation was supplemented by dilutions of the servants, and at last a night was decided on for the burglary.

"Maybe you think it ain't nothing," he said, "to be sneaking through a house you don't know about. Most people are scared of men in the dark come to rob them. But I tell you the people that know the house and belong in it are on top every time. They know the ground. That night I trembled so me brother-in-law took away the candle out of my hand. I was all sweat and cold. The sounds was awful.

Everything creaked and the other follows seen I was dead scared. So Bob he up and just to show me picked up a big pot and flung it against the wall. It blew up like a cannon and fell in pieces with a rattle on the wood floor. I stood still, my hair crept over me head, and me knees—oh, say, I'll never forget that. I couldn't run or I would a'. And they laughed, on Rob did. My brother-in-law only smiles like. He said afterwards he wasn't scared, but he was."

Bob's bit of bravado was unprofessional. He and his pals are second-rate burglars.

They struck a frightened woman in the face with a revolver that night, and the result was the case attracted extraordinary attention, and the burglars were run down and sent to prison. They were out for adventure, and with that purpose was mixed up the idea of having something to brag about to bigger thieves. Even these burglars, however, did not talk about what they stole. That was utterly subordinate to the excitement and the tickled vanity, for they thought, of course, the reporter admired them.

"Good men," in criminal and police parlance, are thieves who do "clean work." That is to say, they plan a robbery and carry it through without injury, without injuring anyone, and without leaving a clue behind them. It is a rule among such men never to shoot. They carry arms and draw them with a revolver over their shoulder.

Mr. Gird probably does not exaggerate the value of his acquisition. The California vulture is very nearly extinct, owing to the traps laid for birds of prey by settlers.—San Francisco Bulletin.

Well-Considered Verdict.

A coroner in Australia recently reasoned out a verdict more sensibly than one-half the verdicts usually rendered. It appeared that an Irishman, concealing that a little powder thrown upon some green wood would facilitate its burning, directed a small stream from a keg upon the burning piece, but not possessing a hand sufficiently quick to cut this supply off, was blown into a million pieces, says Pearson's Weekly.

The following was the verdict, delivered with great gravity by the official: "Can't be called suicide, because he didn't mean to kill himself; he didn't do want of breath; for he hadn't anything to breathe with; it's plain he didn't know what he was about, so I shall bring in—died for want of common sense."

Secret of the Bicycle's Popularity.

Now the bicycle has offered to the great majority of citizens a means of athletic exercise and open-air enjoyment for which they need not be specially equipped by nature, man and woman, weak and strong, dwarf and three-hundred-pounder—all sorts and conditions of men—can and do learn to wheel, and with comparatively small perseverance become as proficient for all practical purposes as the most hand-some endowed athletes of them all. This is the true secret of the bicycle's firm hold on the public, and here is its greatest value.—Scribner.

"Suppose the burglar isn't a good man," objected the reporter.

"Then he'll do something so we can send him up for life."

This gave a glimpse of the detective's professional view of crime, which is limited and unconventional like the thief's. To hear a detective and a criminal talk about a crime is to get the facts in much the same light. Both speak of the skill displayed in it. But the detective is only the dilettante after all. The burglar talks with the sensitive appreciation of the accomplishment which is professional in the broadest sense of the word. He has his vanity. Indeed, this weakness is so abnormally developed that it is frequently the cause of his ruin. He must tell the women he knows and other criminals that he has "done a job," especially if it is a good one. The

ODD FEELINGS OF THIEVES

SOMETIMES HAVE NO REASON OR WISH TO STEAL.

Criminals Work for the Excitement of the Thing—Revelations by a Member of the Dark Fraternity.

Thieves are not always mercenary. They do not themselves know very often why they steal, but in talk has been brought to metropolitan police headquarters they have shown unintentionally that many attractions besides plunder keep them what they are. Except with the kleptomaniac, gain may have been the primal motive. The experienced thief, however, like the criminal born, is so far beyond the material view of his trade that he seldom reverts to that aspect of it. He has forgotten what he was after.

"If you only could know 'the feel' of 'lifting' a watch when the man what carries it is looking right at you, and hear him apologize for shoving against you when you shove against him to make him not feel the lift."

A pickpocket said this one day, and as he spoke a light came into his eyes not unlike that with which an artist illuminates his praise of a bit of technique. It is an unfinished sentence, but that is the way thieves and politicians have of expressing themselves on such subjects. They assume intelligence upon this weakness constantly through their agents. Captain O'Brien has reduced the method to a minimum of sacrifices; he says he makes none. But his staff have their "connections" out all the time. The difficulty is to prove a case after the culprit is known. Captain O'Brien knows, for example, who robbed the Dennett restaurant. The men who did that left a "clean job"; they were "good men," but they had to talk a little, and what they said reached the bureau. That was all the good it did. They could not be convicted. So with the Brentano safe burglary; the thieves were named to the police, who had them sent away to another city for a crime there. Conviction here was impossible. Another difficulty that springs from the same appreciation of crime is that of confessions to "good work" by lesser thieves who did not do it. They would be willing to go to prison if they could go with the glory of such a crime among the convicts who understand such things.

This vanity and the statement quoted of the pickpocket show that there is an aesthetic sense of crime as of other things. It may be pretty hard to turn one's mind far enough around to see crime in such a way as to perceive the applicability of the term, but the nervous excitement of a shoplifter as she is reaching for the object selected for theft is often the sensation that keeps her stealing. Some women not known as thieves at all, not in any need of their stealings, women well provided for in good homes, rob counters daily.

A FEAT OF PENMANSHIP

More than 7,000 Words on One Postal Card.

Walter D. Wellman, a bookkeeper in the employ of Anslinger Brothers, the commission merchants, has performed the remarkable feat of writing in long hand 7,068 words on an ordinary postal card. About two months ago M. C. F. Grincourt, a Frenchman, succeeded in writing 5,454 words in French on a postal card. Mr. Grincourt's feat made a great sensation, and his postal card was for a long time on exhibition at the Examiner. An account given in the columns of the Examiner represented this as the finest and closest writing ever accomplished.

But Mr. Wellman has far exceeded the Frenchman, not only in the number of words he has succeeded in getting upon the postal card, but in the length of the words he used also. M. Grincourt copied a portion of one of Victor Hugo's novels, in which the words were notoriously short. Mr. Wellman copied eight columns of the *Bulletin*, selected from three distinct articles, so that he could not be accused of copying from one writer whose vocabulary consisted chiefly of short words. There were 110 lines on M. Grincourt's postal card, and 154 on Mr. Wellman's.

Mr. Wellman also asserts that he had plenty of room to spare and could easily have gotten in 8,500 words. He worked on it for fifteen days, at odd moments, when he could escape from his business duties. He says he could have accomplished it in six hours of steady work. He wrote it at the pace of fifteen words a minute, while his pace in writing the ordinary size is from thirty-five to forty a minute.

The postal can easily be read with a glass, and a person with a good eye can read it without the help of a glass. A fellow-clerk of Mr. Wellman easily read the postal with his naked eye, but begged off from all postals being written in this fashion.

The 7,068 words are written with an ordinary steel pen in violet ink. The ink is a mere matter of chance, and has nothing to do with the fitness of the work.

Mr. Wellman has never done any work of this kind before. His only practice was in writing the Lord's Prayer. Without the slightest difficulty he accomplished the feat of writing these seventy-two words in a space no larger than a gold quarter of a dollar.

The writer of this curiosity is a young American, twenty-eight years old. He is near-sighted and wears glasses, but his eyes must be very strong, as he has suffered no pain nor inconvenience whatever from this close work. In fact, he trembled so that night I trembled so me brother-in-law took away the candle out of my hand. I was all sweat and cold. The sounds was awful.

I contend that my hand-bag was already in the carriage and my place taken, and eventually got in, the men pushing against me to the last, and then disappearing. Immediately the train was in motion, I found that in those pushes my inner pocket was torn out, and my pocket-book and money gone.

I telegraphed back to the Florence station from the first stopping place, and wrote to all the authorities at Florence. Two days afterwards I was summoned to the Roman railway station and had the usual silly examination (afterward six times repeated on six different days at different Roman police offices) as to my exact age occupation, and place of birth, the Christian name of my father, etc. Then I was asked if I should recognize my robbery if I saw them. Of this I felt doubtful, as on the March evening on which I was robbed it was already almost dark.

But the police official said: "A group of men will come into the end of this room; see if you recognize any of them." I said: "Yes, the second from the wall on the left." Then he said, "Now another group will come in," and again I pointed out a man, and it proved that those were the two men who had just been arrested for other flagrant robberies at Florence station. I saw their body which had been taken—a mass of purses and pocket-books, a large pile of watches, chains, and ladies' ornaments. The authorities said that no English notes had been found.

A fortnight later I was summoned to the Roman prison of the Carceri Nuove. There again I picked out my two robbers, each out of a group of other men, and each time proved right. Though I have never had any hope of recovering my money, I have since lingered on in Italy, expecting to be summoned to give evidence at their trial; but I have heard nothing; the case is probably dropped.

But at table d'hôte, in railway carriages, omnibuses, etc., the last railway robbery is now always the topic of con-

versation. All experienced Italian travelers set out on their journey feeling that their boxes are likely to be robbed, and Italians themselves bring the very utmost possible baggage into the carriage with them. Lace and jewels intrusted to travelling trunks are more than likely to disappear. Small articles, such as pocket handkerchiefs, scarfs, etc., are very generally taken.

There is no redress. The underpaid guards are practically allowed and encouraged to add to their salaries in this way.