

SLAVES OF THE KEYBOARD.

Five and thirty black slaves,
Half a hundred white;
All their duty but to sing
For the queen's delight
Now with throats of thunder
Now with dulcet tips,
While she rules them royally
With her finger tips.

Then she quits her palace
All her slaves are dumb;
Dumb with dolor till the queen
Back to court is come;
Dumb the throats of thunder
Dumb the dulcet tips!
Lacking all the sovereignty
Of her finger tips.

Dusky slaves and pallid,
Ebony slaves and white,
When the queen was on the throne,
How you sang to-night;
All the throats of thunder!
Ah! the dulcet tips!
All the gracious tyrannies
Of her finger tips!

Silent, silent, silent,
All your voices now;
Was it then her lips alone
Did your lips endow?
Waken, throats of thunder!
Waken, dulcet tips!
Touched to immortality
By her finger tips!

—Musical Record.

THE OLD MILL MYSTERY

By Arthur W. Marchmont, B. A.

Author of "Miser Howell's Secret," "Madeline Power," "By Whose Hand," "Isa., &c., &c.

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CHAPTER XXVIII—CONTINUED.

"There you are, that's just it. I see what you're thinking again. It's just because I was afraid of bringing thoughts like yours into everybody's head that I haven't dared to speak. I'll tell you the whole job in a few words. I meant cutting it. I was sick of hanging about here doing nothing, and I meant clearing off once for all. But I'd no coin, and I couldn't go empty-handed; and then as those beggars at the mill had ruined me, I determined to try and help myself to a little payment. I know every inch of the place, as you know; and on that Friday night, I knew where to start when I wanted to get in. I waited till all was right and clear, and made for that window in Watercourse lane. I suppose somebody spotted me—though I didn't see anyone about—and mistook me for Tom Roylance. But more likely they got put up to it by somebody else, as you'll think when I've told you all. Well, I got in easily enough, and made for the office—you know the way—across the blowing-room and up the stairs and through the long rooms where the old machines are running."

"I know," said Mary, nodding her head in her eagerness.

"I went quietly, of course, and when I got to the door of the office I happened to catch a chink of light coming through the keyhole. This gave me a bit of a start, I can tell you, for I didn't know what the dickens to make of it. I waited a bit, listening like a cat, and couldn't hear a sound. All was still as a tomb. Then I remembered the glass door between the two offices, and I crept to the door of Gorringe's room. This was shut, but all seemed dark as death inside; so I opened it and went in. It was empty, and I crept on tiptoe and peeped through into the other room, and when I saw what was there you might have knocked me down with a feather."

"What was it?" asked Mary, breathlessly, as the other paused a moment.

"Old Coode was at the table sitting in his arm-chair, with his body doubled forward, and his head resting face downwards on his left arm, which lay on the table. The table itself was littered with papers and books, except in one space near him, where there was any amount of money in gold and silver and notes, which he seemed to have been counting when he had dropped asleep. The sight of that money just woke up the devil in me, and I glared at it and at the man, till I swore I would have some of it, no matter what the consequence might be."

Mary shot a swift and questioning look at him at this.

"Wait," he said, noticing it. "Don't be in a hurry to suspect. I told you this was no murder. I waited a long time; don't know how long. He never moved so much as a finger-nail, and this gave me an idea. I was desperate, and ready to risk his waking. But first I hit on a plan to make sure he was asleep. I scraped my foot and made enough noise to have attracted his attention if he had been only thinking; but not enough to wake him from sleep. He never moved, and I was glad. I didn't want to hurt him; but I meant having the money."

"Well, I turned the handle of the door between the two rooms, where I was standing, and to my joy it was unlocked. I opened it, and keeping my eyes riveted on the motionless figure, ready lest he should wake and catch me, I crept up to the table. The first thing I did was to turn down the gas, so that if he should wake it would be less difficult to identify me. Then I made certain that the other door was unlocked, and I left it ajar to render my escape the easier. Then I turned again to the table, and my eyes gleamed over the rich haul I was going to make. I took some gold and silver coins, and crammed them into my pocket, and then, in some clumsy way, I touched the right hand which was lying among some papers. The effect of this frightened me nearly out of my breath. The hand and arm slid slowly off the table, and hung listlessly and nervelessly at the man's side, while some papers and coins which the hand had dragged down in falling, clattered and rolled over the floor in a way that made me start with terror and put myself in a defensive position, expecting each second that he would awake and discover me."

"Did he not?" asked Mary.

"No; and the strange unnatural stillness made me think there must be something wrong. I went to his side, and bent over him to listen to his breathing. But I heard nothing. Then I ventured to take the hand that hung by his side and laid a finger on his

pulse. It was motionless. I thrust my hand then on to his heart. It had stopped. I lifted the man's head, gazed into the face. It was set and rigid and white; and the eyes were fast glazing with the dullness of death. The man was as dead as a stone. I dropped the head in horror, and it fell back into the same position on the left arm. I was alone in the place with a dead man; and it flashed on me that if caught robbing the place, they would say I had killed him. I grew cautious instantly, and taking only a few more gold coins and as much silver as I could easily carry, I turned to creep from the place of death. Then my blood seemed to freeze within me, for, when I reached the door, I heard footsteps coming through the mill toward the office."

He stopped and trembled as if in memory of that spasm of fear.

"Go on," said Mary, whose interest was intense. "Who was it?"

"I didn't know what to do for the minute, but with a big effort I managed to creep back into the dark room—Gorringe's office—and just got the door shut and locked, when some one came into the room where the dead man was. He stopped dead on the threshold, as if in surprise at seeing Mr. Coode there, and as he stood staring at the still figure by the table, I recognized Reuben Gorringe."

"What?" cried Mary. "Reuben Gorringe!"

"Reuben Gorringe. Listen. He evidently didn't know what to make of matters; but after a moment he went up to the figure and touched the shoulder, calling his name. I watched him, and then I saw in him the change, which had no doubt shown in me, as it dawned on him gradually that the man was dead. He felt the pulse, laid his hand on the heart, and looked into the eyes, as I had done, and then rushed from the room, as I thought, to get asistance."

"Well?" said Mary.

"I flashed on me then that I was in a worse fix than ever. If he brought a lot of people there I was sure to be found, and then I should be safe to be convicted of robbery, and perhaps of something a deal worse. I opened the door and ran out after Gorringe, intending to escape the way I had come in, but I had barely crossed the room when I heard him coming back as quickly as he had gone. I ran back again like a cat. He had changed his mind. I could see that by his face though I little thought, then, what he meant to do. He was white and stern and looked as much like a devil as any one well could. As soon as he came to make the closest examination, evidently to satisfy himself that the other was dead. Then I saw him search among the papers on the table and watched him pick out a lot which he laid on one side."

"What papers were they?" burst from the listening girl.

"Don't know. Couldn't see that. But he gave the grin of a devil when he was looking at them. He did not look long, however; he didn't mean wasting time. As soon as he saw he'd got what he wanted, he shoved 'em in his pocket, and set to work to carry out his plan. He went to one of the cupboards in the place and took out a short broken bar."

"Ah, I see now!" ejaculated Mary, unable to restrain her feelings, as she remembered the discovery in Tom's cottage. "Eh? See what?" said Gibon, breaking off in surprise. "I could see what it was clearly enough because he carried it up to the gas light to examine it. I didn't dream what he meant to do, even then; but I soon saw. He turned the body over—it had slipped on to the floor after his close examination of it—and then he got to work and bashed the head and face in with the broken bar with terrific blows, struck with all his force. It was a sickening job to watch, I can tell you. He seemed to find it bad, too; for as soon as he finished, he shied the things in the room about quickly, to make it look as if there had been a bit of a rough and tumble scrimmage, and turned over the chairs, strewed the papers all over the place, and was just going to turn the lamp out when a thought seemed to strike him. He took the broken iron bar he'd been using, and wrapped it up in some of the papers which he had stuck in his pocket. Then he turned off the gas and pitched the lamp, shade and all, into the general wreck of things that lay strewn all about. After that, he went out and shut the door behind him, and I heard him go out of the mill."

"The villain!" exclaimed Mary.

"Ah, you'd have said that right enough if you'd been in the fix in which he left me in that night. Not only was I alone with a dead man in the place, but with a man that not one in ten thousand could help thinking had been murdered. I nearly died of fright when I thought what would happen to me if I were caught either in the place or getting out of it. I was never so sneered in my life. I crept out of the room, thinking no more about the money, I can tell you. I just struck a match and had a look at the ghastly work which Gorringe had done; and a beastly sight it was. He had just beaten the face and head out of all recognition and I fled away horrified. I got out of the mill somehow, after starting a dozen times and then rushing back in fear. But nobody saw me, and I crept into my lodging and into bed. That's what happened on Friday night in the mill."

"What a villainous traitor!" cried Mary, when the other had finished.

"And there he was coming to me all the time, pretending to be full of desire to help me in getting Tom acquitted, although unable to see how he could possibly be innocent. That iron bar he hid in Tom's cottage, wrapped up in the papers which were taken from the mill. What foul treachery!"

At that moment there was a knock at the door of the cottage, and the sergeant of police, who had more than once shown much friendly sympathy with the girl, and had been present at the interview between her and Tom, came in.

"I have news for you, Mary," he said, "some official, some private. Officially, I have to go round at once to the police station to see the superintendent about last night's business. Unofficially, I'll tell you what's up. Mr. Gorringe is all but dead, and he's made a most extraordinary statement to show that Mr. Coode wasn't murdered, but that he, Gorringe, found him dead in the office and knocked in the mill-owner's face that he might seem to have been murdered; and after that, he got to work to plant the whole thing on Tom Roylance, first making up the evidence and then actually getting him arrested by having you followed. It's a rum story, and no mistake; but it'll free Tom Roylance, whether it's true or not."

"It's true! Here's some one who can bear it out," cried Mary. "He was in the mill that night, and saw all that happened. He has just told me."

"What were you doing there, Gibon?" asked the sergeant, suspiciously turning to him,

"Watching Gorringe," was the short, dry answer.

"Well, you'd best come along, too."

"What about Savannah?" asked Mary.

"She's all right, so far at least as being under lock and key is concerned; for, of course, she's locked up. But she's just like a mad woman," said the sergeant.

"She may well be like one," exclaimed Gibon, "for she is one! Her name's Lucy Howell, and she was shut up in Wadsworth asylum and ought to be there now—aye, and would be there, too, if there hadn't been a bit of clumsy fooling on some one's part or other. She's already committed one murder."

"Ah! there's not much doubt about that. Gorringe won't live many hours; that's the truth. Well, it serves him right in a way," added the sergeant, sententiously. "He's been using her as his tool for his own purpose. But come, please. The super's waiting; and supers are apt to be short-tempered when they're kept waiting, especially when they've been up a good part of the night, and haven't had breakfast." And with that the three went to the police station.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TOM IS FREE.

It made a strange story when all was known; and when Mary had learnt it all, she wondered first that she had not seen throughout the hand that had guided everything, and afterwards that she and Tom had escaped ship wreck.

Reuben Gorringe had planned all. When he had learned that Mary and Tom were to be married he set to work to ruin his rival and separate the two lovers. Knowing the thread of irresolution and susceptibility that ran through Tom Roylance's character, he threw in his way the girl Savannah Morbyn, or, as he knew her, Lucy Howell. He had known her before she was in the asylum, and hearing of her release just at the moment when he wanted a tool of the kind, he had forced her to do his will by holding his knowledge of her madness and herdread of the asylum over her head. Her great beauty and strange, subtle charm had fascinated Tom against his better sense, as Gorringe had thought they would; and under his orders Tom had been lured to the brink of ruin.

The books of his secretaryship had been falsified; all his savings had been lent to the girl; and she it was who, learning where the money of the sick fund was kept, had stolen it just at the time when, acting on a cunningly given hint from Gorringe, the other men had swooped down and demanded an investigation.

The theft at the mill had also been concocted by Gorringe, and he had instigated Mr. Coode to drive Tom from the village in disgrace. Then it was that, going by chance to the mill, the manager found the old man dead, and the idea had occurred to him of making it seem as if a murder had been committed, suspicion for which he could fasten on Tom. How he carried out the design is known; manufacturing bit by bit the evidence in such a way that he alone knew it; the price of his silence being the hand of the girl, for love of whom he had planned all.

One great flaw, and one only there was, in his plan.

Savannah Morbyn, or Lucy Howell, had fallen in love with him. He had had, therefore, to simulate an affection for her; and it was this which had foiled his plans. In consequence of the pressure which she brought to bear upon him, he had had to force matters to a crisis with Mary, and Lucy Howell, who had often been at the mill at night when the two were laying their plans for Tom's ruin, had followed him on that night, and had thus heard enough of his love for Mary to show her that she herself had been deceived.

Barely had these things been explained to Mary when a messenger came from Gorringe. He was dying, thinking no more about the money, I can tell you. At first she was unwilling, remembering all his wrong; but afterwards she consented.

He was at the very point of death. That was clear, even to her. His face was pale, his lips bloodless, and his brow clammy with the dew of death. His eyes, looking unnaturally large and deep sunken beneath their shaggy black brows, were fixed on the door, and seemed to brighten a little—very little—when the girl entered. His hand, which lay on the coverlet, made a faint motion, as he attempted to raise it; but he was too weak to stir it.

She went to him and, answering the appealing look she thought she read in his eyes, bent over him to catch any few faint, feeble words he might wish to be able to say.

"Forgive me." The words came very slowly in a voice so low and husky that she could barely hear them.

"I forgive you," she said, taking his hand.

His eyes fixed upon her face and his lips moved as if he would have smiled the thanks he could not utter.

Then, after a long pause, he seemed

to gather himself for another effort, and the girl felt his hand move slightly in hers.

"Glad to die now," came in a broken whisper. "I love—"

That was all she could hear, but the eyes rested on hers with a more restful and contented look than she had yet seen; and they gradually closed. He had fainted from the effort of even saying so little, and while the nurse and doctor came to restore him Mary left.

It was better he should die, if only he could be brought to repent; and she was glad she had been able to comfort him at the last. She was very thoughtful as she walked home to her cottage to get ready to go to the police court to hear her lover released.

But when she entered the cottage she cried out with delight and surprise, for Tom caught her in his arms and strained her to his breast.

"How is this, Tom? How are you here so soon?"

"The magistrates met earlier than they had arranged; as soon as the news was known. They thought I had been punished long enough for doing nothing; so they set me free as soon as possible, and I came here straight to you."

"Never to part again, lad, eh?" she cried. "Let me get near to your heart."

"Never to leave it again, my wife," he said, partly echoing her words.

Within a week they were man and wife—just two days after the wretched woman who had so nearly separated them had been taken back to Wadsworth asylum.

All the village were at the wedding, for everyone seemed anxious to show some kind of reparation to Tom for the wrong that had been done in suspecting him. No one was more eager in this than Mr. Charnley. He insisted on arranging for all the little festivities by which the marriage, quiet and simple enough itself, was celebrated by the mill hands after the bride and bridegroom had gone away on a bridal holiday which he made them take.

That was only a very small part of what he did. He was determined, he said, that Tom should have some cause to remember with pleasure even the black time of the fearful charge made against him; and, as compensation for all, he put him in Reuben Gorringe's place as manager of the old Walkden mill he is this day.

[THE END.]

MIKE AND THE BEAR.

Bruin Didn't Fancy Being Prodded with a Pitchfork.

In "The Heart of the White Mountains" the following bear story is told in the words of an old stage driver. "There used to be," he said, "a tame bear over to the Alpine house, in Gorham. One night the critter got loose, and we called him back to the woods. Any how we hunted high and low, but no bear."

"Waal, you see, one forenoon our hostler, Mike, went up in the barn chamber to pitch some hay down to the horses.

"Mike hadn't no sooner jabbed his pitchfork down, so as to get a big bunch, when it struck something soft-like, and then, before he knew what ailed him, the haymow riz right up afore him, with the tremendous growl comin' out on't was ever heard in any maynager this side of Noah's ark!

"Waal, the long and short of it was this: That air bear had buried himself under the haymow and was a-snoozin' it, comfortable and innocent as you please, when Mike prodded him in the ribs with his pitchfork.

"The fast any of us knew, we see Mike come a-flyin' out o' the barn chamber window and the bear arter him. Mike led him a length. Maybe that Irishman didn't streak it for the house! Bless you, he never tetch'd the ground arter he struck it!

"The boys couldn't do nothin' for laughin'; and Mike was so scared he forgot to yell. But he got away into the house. That bear turned savage arter that, and was so hoppin' wild we had to kill him."

"If anybuddy wants to make Mike fightin' mad any time, all't they've got to do is to ask him to go up in the barn chamber and pitch down a bear."

—Young Sportsman.

Slaughered for Their Pelts.

An idea of the enormous number of fur-bearing animals annually slaughtered for their pelts may be gained from the following figures of skins offered for the January sales in London