

THE MAIL

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE.

The Dead Secret.

(Continued from Sixth page.)

two had hardly resumed their intercourse of early days, when the quarrel occasioned by Captain Treverton's marriage broke it off forever. From that time, for all social interests and purposes, Andrew was a lost man. From that time, he met the last remonstrances that were made to him by the last friends who took any interest in his fortunes, always with the same bitter and hopeless form of reply: "My dearest friend forsook and cheated me," he would say. "My only brother has quarreled with me for the sake of a play actress. What am I to expect of the rest of mankind after that? I have suffered twice for my belief in others—I will never suffer a third time. The wise man is the man who does not disturb his heart at its natural occupation of pumping blood through his body. I have gathered my experience abroad and at home; and have learned enough to see through the delusions of life which look like realities to other men's eyes, but which have betrayed them selves years ago to mine. My business in this world is to eat, drink, sleep and die. Every thing else is superfluity—and I have done with it."

The few people who ever cared to inquire about him again, after being repulsed by such an avowal as this, heard of him, three or four years after his brother's marriage, in the neighborhood of Bayswater. Local reports described him as having bought the first cottage he could find, which was cut off from other houses by a wall all around it. It was further rumored that he was living like a miser; that he had got an old man servant, named Shrowl, who was even a greater enemy to mankind than himself; that he allowed no living soul, not even an occasional char woman to enter this house; that he was letting his beard grow, and that he had ordered his servant Shrowl to follow his example. In the year eighteen hundred and forty-four the fact of a man's not shaving was regarded by the enlightened majority of the English nation as a proof of unsoundness of intellect. At the present time, Mr. Treverton's beard would only have interfered with his reputation for respectability. Thirteen years ago it was accepted as so much additional evidence in support of the old theory that his intellects were deranged. He was at that very time, as his stock broker could have testified, one of the sharpest men of business in London; and the physical exhaustion of his later days had so wasted and worn him away that he looked his brother's elder by almost twenty years. With unbrushed hair and unwashed face, with a tangled gray beard, and an old patched, dirty flannel dressing gown that hung about him like a sack, this descendant of a wealthy and ancient family looked as if his birthplace had been the workhouse, and his vocation in life the selling of cast off clothes.

It was breakfast time with Mr. Treverton—that is to say, it was the time at which he felt hungry enough to think about eating something. In the same position over the mantle piece in which a looking glass could have been placed in a household of ordinary refinement, there hung in the cottage of Timon of London a side of bacon. On the deal table by the fire stood half a loaf of heavy looking brown bread; in a corner of the room was a barrel of beer with two battered pewter pots hitched on to nails in the wall above it; and under the grate lay a smoky old gridiron, left just as it had been thrown down when last used and done with. Mr. Treverton took a greasy clasp knife out of the pocket of his dressing gown, cut off a rasher of bacon, jerked the gridiron on to the fire, and began to cook his breakfast. He had just turned the rasher, when the door opened, and Shrowl entered the room, with his pipe in his mouth, bent on the same eating errand as his master.

"You just let me alone—will you?" he said, sitting down sulky to his breakfast. "I've done joking for to-day, suppose you finish too. What's the use of talking nonsense about your money? You must leave it to somebody."

"Yes, I will," said Mr. Treverton. "I will leave it, as I have told you over and over again, to the first Somebody I can find who honestly despises money, and who can't be made the worse, therefore, by having it."

"That means nobody," grunted Shrowl.

"I know it does!" retorted his master.

"But you can't leave it to nobody," persisted Shrowl. "You must leave it to somebody. You can't help yourself."

"Can't I?" said Mr. Treverton. "I rather think I can do what I please with it. I can turn it all into bank notes, if I like, and make a bonfire with them in the brew-house before I die. I should go out of the world then, knowing that I hadn't left materials behind me for making it worse than it is—and that would be a precious comfort to me I can tell you!"

Before Shrowl could utter a word of rejoinder, there was a ring at the gate bell of the cottage.

"Go out!" said Mr. Treverton, "and see what that is. If it's a woman visitor show her what a scarecrow you are, and frighten her away. If it's a man visitor—"

"It's a man visitor," interposed Shrowl, "I'll punch his head for interrupting me at my breakfast."

Mr. Treverton filled and lit his pipe during his servant's absence. Before the tobacco was well a light, Shrowl returned, and reported a man visitor.

"Did you punch his head?" asked Mr. Treverton.

"No," said Shrowl, "I picked up his letter. He poked it under the gate, and went away. Here it is."

The letter was written on foolscap paper, superscribed in a round legal hand. As Mr. Treverton opened it, two slips cut from newspapers dropped out. One fell on the table before which he was sitting; the other fluttered to the floor. This last slip Shrowl picked up, and looked over its contents, without troubling himself to go through the ceremony of first asking leave.

After slowly drawing in and slowly puffing out again one mouthful of tobacco smoke, Mr. Treverton began to read the letter. As his eye fell on the lines his lips began to work round the mouth piece of the pipe in a manner that was very unusual with him. The letter was not long enough to require him to turn over the leaf of it—it ended at the bottom of the opening sheet. He read it down to the signature—then looked up to the address, and went through it again from the beginning. His lips still continued to work round the mouthpiece of the pipe, but he smoked no more. When he had finished the second reading, he set the letter down very gently on the table, looked at his servant with an unaccustomed vacancy in the expression of his eyes, and took the pipe out of his mouth with a hand that trembled a little.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Treverton, pointing with indignant surprise at Shrowl's breast. "You ugly brother, you've got a clean shirt on!"

"Thank you, Sir, for noticing it," said Shrowl, with a sarcastic affection of extreme humility. "This is a joyful occasion, this. I couldn't do less than put a clean shirt on when it's my master's birthday. Many happy returns, Sir. Perhaps you thought I should not remember that to-day was your birthday? Lord bless your sweet face, I wouldn't have forgot it on any account. How old are you to-day, Sir? Long time ago, Sir, since you was a plump, smiling little boy, with a frill round your neck, and marbles in your pocket, and trowsers and waistcoat all in one, and kisses and presents from Pa and Ma and uncle and aunt, on your birthday. Don't you be afraid of me wearing out this shirt by too much washing. I mean to put it away in lavender against your next birthday or against your funeral, which is just likely at your time of life—isn't it, Sir?"

"So you will," muttered Shrowl, turning the slip over to see if there was any thing worth reading at the back of it.

"I wonder what he thought about me when he was dying?" said Mr. Treverton, abstractedly taking up the letter again from the table.

"He didn't waste a thought on you or any body else," remarked Shrowl. "If he thought at all, he thought about how he could save his life. When he had done thinking about that he had done living, too. With that expression of opinion Mr. Shrowl went to the beer barrel, and drew his morning draught.

"Damn that player woman!" muttered Mr. Treverton. As he said these words his face darkened and his lips closed firmly. He smoothed the letter out on the table. There seemed to be some doubt in his mind whether he had mastered all its contents yet—some idea that there was more in it—or that there ought to be more in it—than he had yet discovered. In going over it for the

third time, he read it to himself aloud and very slowly, as if he was determined to fix every separate word firmly in his memory.

"Sir (he read)—As the old legal adviser and faithful friend of your family, I am desired by Mrs. Frankland, formerly Miss Treverton, to accept this communication. The event occurred on board the ship of which he was captain, during a gale of wind in which the vessel was lost on a reef of rocks off the island of Antigua. I enclose a copy of the original paper containing a memoir of the deceased gentleman.

"Before closing this communication I must add that no will has been found, after the most rigorous search, among the papers of the late Captain Treverton. Having disposed of your property, he left nothing but a legacy under the form of endowing a public charity. If you want to give a woman the best chance in the world of getting a good husband, leave her a legacy."

"I will, Sir," said Shrowl, obedient servant.

"You obedient servant, " said Mr. Treverton, "Rich men who leave money behind them are the farmers who raise the crop of human wickedness. When a man has any spark of generosity in his nature, if you want to put it out, leave him a legacy. When a man is bad, if you want to make him worse, leave him a legacy. If you want to collect a number of men together for the purpose of perpetrating corruption and oppression on a large scale, leave them a legacy under the form of endowing a public charity. If you want to give a woman the best chance in the world of getting a good husband, leave her a legacy."

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