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# THE MARK OF CAIN

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I. – A Tale of Two Clubs

*"Such arts the gods who dwell on high Have given to the Greek." —Lays of Ancient Rome.*

In the Strangers' Room of the Olympic Club the air was thick with tobacco-smoke, and, despite the bitter cold outside, the temperature was uncomfortably high. Dinner was over, and the guests, broken up into little groups, were chattering noisily. No one had yet given any sign of departing: no one had offered a welcome apology for the need of catching an evening train.

Perhaps the civilized custom which permits women to dine in the presence of the greedier sex is the proudest conquest of Culture. Were it not for the excuse of "joining the ladies," dinner-parties (Like the congregations in Heaven, as described in the hymn) would "ne'er break up," and suppers (like Sabbaths, on the same authority) would never end.

"Hang it all, will the fellows *never* go?"

So thought Maitland, of St. Gatien's, the founder of the feast. The inhospitable reflections which we have recorded had all been passing through his brain as he rather moodily watched

the twenty guests he had been feeding – one can hardly say entertaining. It was a "duty dinner" he had been giving – almost everything Maitland did was done from a sense of duty – yet he scarcely appeared to be reaping the reward of an approving conscience. His acquaintances, laughing and gossipping round the half-empty wine-glasses, the olives, the scattered fruit, and "the ashes of the weeds of their delight," gave themselves no concern about the weary host. Even at his own party, as in life generally, Maitland felt like an outsider. He wakened from his reverie as a strong hand was laid lightly on his shoulder.

"Well, Maitland," said a man sitting down beside him, "what have *you* been doing this long time?"

"What have I been doing, Barton?" Maitland answered. "Oh, I have been reflecting on the choice of a life, and trying to humanize myself! Bielby says I have not enough human nature."

"Bielby is quite right; he is the most judicious of college dons and father-confessors, old man. And how long do you mean to remain his pupil and penitent? And how is the pothouse getting on?"

Frank Barton, the speaker, had been at school with Maitland, and ever since, at college and in life, had bullied, teased, and befriended him. Barton was a big young man, with great thews and sinews, and a broad, breast beneath his broadcloth and wide shirt-front. He was blonde, prematurely bald, with an aquiline commanding nose, keen, merry blue eyes, and a short, fair beard. He had taken a medical as well as other degrees at the University;

he had studied at Vienna and Paris; he was even what Captain Costigan styles "a scoientific cyarkter." He had written learnedly in various Proceedings of erudite societies; he had made a cruise in a man-of-war, a scientific expedition; and his *Les Tatouages, Étude Médico-Lêgale*, published in Paris, had been commended by the highest authorities. Yet, from some whim of philanthropy, he had not a home and practice in Cavendish Square, but dwelt and labored in Chelsea.

"How is your pothouse getting on?" he asked again.

"The pothouse? Oh, the *Hit or Miss* you mean? Well, I'm afraid it's not very successful I took the lease of it, you know, partly by way of doing some good in a practical kind of way. The working men at the waterside won't go to clubs, where there is nothing but coffee to drink, and little but tracts to read. I thought if I gave them sound beer, and looked in among them now and then of an evening, I might help to civilize them a bit, like that fellow who kept the Thieves' Club in the East End. And then I fancied they might help to make *me* a little more human. But it does not seem quite to succeed. I fear I am a born wet blanket But the idea is good. Mrs. St. John Delo-raine quite agrees with me about *that.* And she is a high authority."

"Mrs. St. John Deloraine? I've heard of her. She is a lively widow, isn't she?"

"She is a practical philanthropist," answered Maitland, flushing a little.

"Pretty, too, I have been told?"

"Yes; she is 'conveniently handsome,' as Izaak Walton says."

"I say, Maitland, here's a chance to humanize you. Why don't you ask her to marry you? Pretty and philanthropic and rich – what better would you ask?"

"I wish everyone wouldn't bother a man to marry," Maitland replied testily, and turning red in his peculiar manner; for his complexion was pale and unwholesome.

"What a queer chap you are, Maitland; what's the matter with you? Here you are, young, entirely without encumbrances, as the advertisements say, no relations to worry you, with plenty of money, let alone what you make by writing, and yet you are not happy. What is the matter with you?"

"Well, you should know best What's the good of your being a doctor, and acquainted all these years with my moral and physical constitution (what there is of it), if you can't tell what's the nature of my complaint?"

"I don't diagnose many cases like yours, old boy, down by the side of the water, among the hardy patients of Mundy & Barton, general practitioners. There is plenty of human nature *there!*"

"And do you mean to stay there with Mundy much longer?"

"Well, I don't know. A fellow is really doing some good, and it is a splendid practice for mastering surgery. They are always falling off roofs, or having weights fall on them, or getting jammed between barges, or kicking each other into most interesting jellies. Then the foreign sailors are handy with their knives. Altogether, a man learns a good deal about surgery in

Chelsea. But, I say," Barton went on, lowering his voice, "where on earth did you pick up – ?"

Here he glanced significantly at a tall man, standing at some distance, the centre of half a dozen very youthful revellers.

"Cranley, do you mean? I met him at the *Trumpet* office. He was writing about the Coolie Labor Question and the Eastern Question. He has been in the South Seas, like you."

"Yes; he has been in a lot of queerer places than the South Seas," answered the other, "and he ought to know something about Coolies. He has dealt in them, I fancy."

"I daresay," Maitland replied rather wearily. "He seems to have travelled a good deal: perhaps he has travelled in Coolies, whatever they may be."

"Now, my dear fellow, do you know what kind of man your guest is, or don't you?"

"He seems to be a military and sporting kind of gent, so to speak," said Maitland; "but what does it matter?"

"Then you don't know why he left his private tutor's; you don't know why he left the University; you don't know why he left the Ninety-second; you don't know, and no one does, what he did after that; and you never heard of that affair with the Frenchman in Egypt?"

"Well," Maitland replied, "about his ancient history I own I don't know anything. As to the row with the Frenchman at Cairo, he told me himself. He said the beggar was too small for him to lick, and that duelling was ridiculous."

"They didn't take that view of it at Shephard's Hotel"

"Well, it is not my affair," said Maitland. "One should see all sort of characters, Bielby says. This is not an ordinary fellow. Why, he has been a sailor before the mast, he says, by way of adventure, and he is full of good stories. I rather like him, and he can't do my moral character any harm. *I'm* not likely to deal in Coolies, at my time of life, nor quarrel with warlike aliens."

"No; but he's not a good man to introduce to these boys from Oxford," Barton was saying, when the subject of their conversation came up, surrounded by his little court of undergraduates.

The Hon. Thomas Cranley was a good deal older than the company in which he found himself. Without being one of the hoary youths who play Falstaff to every fresh heir's Prince Harry, he was a middle-aged man, too obviously accustomed to the society of boys. His very dress spoke of a prolonged youth. À large cat's-eye, circled with diamonds, blazed solitary in his shirt-front, and his coat was cut after the manner of the contemporary reveller. His chin was clean shaven, and his face, though a good deal worn, was ripe, smooth, shining with good cheer, and of a purply bronze hue, from exposure to hot suns and familiarity with the beverages of many peoples. His full red lips, with their humorous corners, were shaded by a small black mustache, and his twinkling bistre-colored eyes, beneath mobile black eyebrows, gave Cranley the air of a jester and a good fellow. In manner he was familiar, with a kind of deference,

too, and reserve, "like a dog that is always wagging his tail and deprecating a kick," thought Barton grimly, as he watched the other's genial advance.

"He's going to say good-night, bless him," thought Maitland gratefully. "Now the others will be moving too, I hope!"

So Maitland rose with much alacrity as Cranley approached him. To stand up would show, he thought, that he was not inhospitably eager to detain the parting guest.

"Good-night, Mr. Maitland," said the senior, holding out his hand.

"It is still early," said the host, doing his best to play his part. "Must you really go?"

"Yes; the night's young" (it was about half-past twelve), "but I have a kind of engagement to look in at the Cockpit, and three or four of your young friends here are anxious to come with me, and see how we keep it up round there. Perhaps you and your friend will walk with us." Here he bowed slightly in the direction of Barton.

"There will be a little *bac* going on," he continued – "*un petit bac de santé*; and these boys tell me they have never played anything more elevating than loo."

"I'm afraid I am no good at a round game," answered Maitland, who had played at his Aunt's at Christmas, and who now observed with delight that everyone was moving; "but here is Barton, who will be happy to accompany you, I daresay."

"If you're for a frolic, boys," said Barton, quoting Dr. Johnson,

and looking rather at the younger men than at Cranley, "why, I will not balk you. Good-night, Maitland."

And he shook hands with his host.

"Good-nights" were uttered in every direction; sticks, hats, and umbrellas were hunted up; and while Maitland, half-asleep, was being whirled to his rooms in Bloomsbury in a hansom, his guests made the frozen pavement of Piccadilly ring beneath their elegant heels.

"It is only round the corner," said Cranley to the four or five men who accompanied him. "The Cockpit, where I am taking you, is in a fashionable slum off St. James's. We're just there."

There was nothing either meretricious or sinister in the aspect of that favored resort, the Cockpit, as the Decade Club was familiarly called by its friends – and enemies. Two young Merton men and the freshman from New, who were enjoying their Christmas vacation in town, and had been dining with Maitland, were a little disappointed in the appearance of the place. They had hoped to knock mysteriously at a back door in a lane, and to be shown, after investigating through a loopholed wicket, into a narrow staircase, which, again, should open on halls of light, full of blazing wax candles and magnificent lacqueys, while a small mysterious man would point out the secret hiding-room, and the passages leading on to the roof or into the next house, in case of a raid by the police. Such was the old idea of a "Hell;" but the advance of Thought has altered all these early notions. The Decade Club was like any other small club. A current of

warm air, charged with tobacco-smoke, rushed forth into the frosty night when the swinging door was opened; a sleepy porter looked out of his little nest, and Cranley wrote the names of the companions he introduced in a book which was kept for that purpose.

"Now you are free of the Cockpit for the night," he said, genially. "It's a livelier place, in the small hours, than that classical Olympic we've just left."

They went upstairs, passing the doors of one or two rooms, lit up but empty, except for two or three men who were sleeping in uncomfortable attitudes on sofas. The whole of the breadth of the first floor, all the drawing-room of the house before it became a club, had been turned into a card-room, from which brilliant lights, voices, and a heavy odor of tobacco and alcohol poured out when the door was opened. A long green baize-covered table, of very light wood, ran down the centre of the room, while refreshments stood on smaller tables, and a servant out of livery sat, half-asleep, behind a great desk in the remotest corner. There were several empty chairs round the green baize-covered table, at which some twenty men were sitting, with money before them; while one, in the middle, dealt out the cards on a broad flap of smooth black leather let into the baize. Every now and then he threw the cards he had been dealing into a kind of well in the table, and after every deal he raked up his winnings with a rake, or distributed gold and counters to the winners, as mechanically as if he had been a croupier at Monte Carlo. The

players, who were all in evening dress, had scarcely looked up when the strangers entered the room.

"Brought some recruits, Cranley?" asked the Banker, adding, as he looked at his hand, "*J'en donne!*" and becoming absorbed in his game again.

"The game you do not understand?" said Cranley to one of his recruits.

"Not quite," said the lad, shaking his head.

"All right; I will soon show you all about it; and I wouldn't play, if I were you, till you *know* all about it. Perhaps, after you know *all* about it, you'll think it wiser not to play at all At least, you might well think so abroad, where very fishy things are often done. Here it's all right, of course."

"Is baccarat a game you can be cheated at, then – I mean, when people are inclined to cheat?"

"Cheat! Oh, rather! There are about a dozen ways of cheating at baccarat."

The other young men from Maitland's party gathered round their mentor, who continued his instructions in a low voice, and from a distance whence the play could be watched, while the players were not likely to be disturbed by the conversation.

"Cheating is the simplest thing in the world, at Nice or in Paris," Cranley went on; "but to show you how it is done, in case you ever do play in foreign parts, I must explain the game. You see the men first put down their stakes within the thin white line on the edge of the tabla Then the Banker deals two cards to one

of the men on his left, and all the fellows on that side stand by *his* luck. Then he deals two to a chappie on his right, and all the punters on the right, back that sportsman. And he deals two cards to himself. The game is to get as near nine as possible, ten, and court cards, not counting at all. If the Banker has eight or nine, he does not offer cards; if he has less, he gives the two players, if they ask for them, one card each, and takes one himself if he chooses. If they hold six, seven, or eight, they stand; if less, they take a card. Sometimes one stands at five; it depends. Then the Banker wins if he is nearer nine than the players, and they win if *they* are better than he; and that's the whole affair."

"I don't see where the cheating can come in," said one of the young fellows.

"Dozens of ways, as I told you. A man may have an understanding with the waiter, and play with arranged packs; but the waiter is always the dangerous element in *that* little combination. He's sure to peach or blackmail his accomplice. Then the cards may be marked. I remember, at Ostend, one fellow, a big German; he wore spectacles, like all Germans, and he seldom gave the players anything better than three court cards when he dealt One evening he was in awful luck, when he happened to go for his cigar-case, which he had left in the hall in his great-coat pocket. He laid down his spectacles on the table, and someone tried them on. As soon as he took up the cards he gave a start, and sang out, 'Here's a swindle! *Nous sommes volés!*' He could see, by the help of the spectacles, that all the nines and

court cards were marked; and the spectacles were regular patent double million magnifiers."

"And what became of the owner of the glasses?"

"Oh, he just looked into the room, saw the man wearing them, and didn't wait to say good-night. He just *went!*"

Here Cranley chuckled.

"I remember another time, at Nice: I always laugh when I think of it! There was a little Frenchman who played nearly every night. He would take the bank for three or four turns, and he almost always won. Well, one night he had been at the theatre, and he left before the end of the piece and looked in at the Cercle. He took the Bank: lost once, won twice; then he offered cards. The man who was playing nodded, to show he would take one, and the Frenchman laid down an eight of clubs, a greasy, dirty old rag, with *théâtre français de nice* stamped on it in big letters. It was his ticket of readmission at the theatre that they gave him when he went out, and it had got mixed up with a nice little arrangement in cards he had managed to smuggle into the club pack. I'll never forget his face and the other man's when *Théâtre Français* turned up. However, you understand the game now, and if you want to play, we had better give fine gold to the waiter in exchange for bone counters, and get to work."

Two or three of the visitors followed Cranley to the corner where the white, dissipated-looking waiter of the card-room sat, and provided themselves with black and red *jetons* (bone counters) of various values, to be redeemed at the end of the

game.

When they returned to the table the banker was just leaving his post.

"I'm cleaned out," said he, "*décavé*. Good-night," and he walked away.

No one seemed anxious to open a bank. The punters had been winning all night, and did not like to desert their luck.

"Oh, this will never do," cried Cranley. "If no one else will open a bank, I'll risk a couple of hundred, just to show you beginners how it is done!"

Cranley sat down, lit a cigarette, and laid the smooth silver cigarette-case before him. Then he began to deal.

Fortune at first was all on the side of the players. Again and again Cranley chucked out the counters he had lost, which the others gathered in, or pushed three or four bank-notes with his little rake in the direction of a more venturesome winner. The new-comers, who were winning, thought they had never taken part in a sport more gentlemanly and amusing.

"I must have one shy," said Martin, one of the boys who had hitherto stood with Barton, behind the Banker, looking on. He was a gaudy youth with a diamond stud, rich, and not fond of losing. He staked five pounds and won; he left the whole sum on and lost, lost again, a third time, and then said, "May I draw a cheque?"

"Of course you may," Cranley answered. "The waiter will give you *tout ce qu'il faut pour écrire*, as the stage directions say; but

I don't advise you to plunge. You've lost quite enough. Yet they say the devil favors beginners, so you can't come to grief."

The young fellow by this time was too excited to take advice. His cheeks had an angry flush, his hands trembled as he hastily constructed some paper currency of considerable value. The parallel horizontal wrinkles of the gambler were just sketched on his smooth girlish brow as he returned with his paper. The bank had been losing, but not largely. The luck turned again as soon as Martin threw down some of his scrip. Thrice consecutively he lost.

"Excuse me," said Barton suddenly to Cranley, "may I help myself to one of your cigarettes?"

He stooped as he spoke, over the table, and Cranley saw him pick up the silver cigarette-case. It was a handsome piece of polished silver.

"Certainly; help yourself. Give me back my cigarette-case, please, when you have done with it."

He dealt again, and lost.

"What a nice case!" said Barton, examining it closely. "There is an Arabic word engraved on it."

"Yes, yes," said Cranley, rather impatiently, holding out his hand for the thing, and pausing before he dealt. "The case was given me by the late Khédive, dear old Ismail, bless him! The word is a talisman."

"I thought so. The case seemed to bring you luck," said Barton.

Cranley half turned and threw a quick look at him, as rapid and timid as the glance of a hare in its form.

"Come, give me it back, please," he said.

"Now, just oblige me: let me try what there is in luck. Go on playing while I rub up my Arabic, and try to read this ineffable name on the case. Is it the word of Power of Solomon?"

Cranley glanced back again. "All right," he said, "as you are so curious – j'en donne!"

He offered cards, and lost. Martin's face brightened up. His paper currency was coming back to him.

"It's a shame," grumbled Cranley, "to rob a fellow of his fetich. Waiter, a small brandy-and-soda! Confound your awkwardness! Why do you spill it over the cards?"

By Cranley's own awkwardness, more than the waiter's, a little splash of the liquid had fallen in front of him, on the black leather part of the table where he dealt. He went on dealing, and his luck altered again. The rake was stretched out over both halves of the long table; the gold and notes and counters, with a fluttering assortment of Martin's I O U's, were all dragged in. Martin went to the den of the money-changer sullenly, and came back with fresh supplies.

"Banco?" he cried, meaning that he challenged Cranley for all the money in the bank. There must have been some seven hundred pounds.

"All right," said Cranley, taking a sip of his soda water. He had dealt two cards, when his hands were suddenly grasped as in

two vices, and cramped to the table. Barton had bent over from behind and caught him by the wrists.

Cranley made one weak automatic movement to extricate himself; then he sat perfectly still. His face, which he turned over his shoulder, was white beneath the stains of tan, and his lips were blue.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "What trick are you after now?"

"Are you drunk, Barton?" cried some one.

"Leave him alone!" shouted some of the players, rising from their seats; while others, pressing round Barton, looked over his shoulder without seeing any excuse for his behavior.

"Gentlemen," said Barton, in a steady voice, "I leave my conduct in the hands of the club. If I do not convince them that Mr. Cranley has been cheating, I am quite at their disposal, and at his. Let anyone who doubts what I say look here."

"Well, I'm looking here, and I don't see what you are making such a fuss about," said Martin, from the group behind, peering over at the table and the cards.

"Will you kindly – No, it is no use." The last remark was addressed to the captive, who had tried to release his hands. "Will you kindly take up some of the cards and deal them slowly, to right and left, over that little puddle of spilt soda water on the leather? Get as near the table as you can."

There was a dead silence while Martin made this experiment.

"By gad, I can see every pip on the cards!" cried Martin.

"Of course you can; and if you had the art of correcting

fortune, you could make use of what you see. At the least you would know whether to take a card or stand."

"I didn't," said the wretched Cranley. "How on earth was I to know that the infernal fool of a waiter would spill the liquor there, and give you a chance against me?"

"You spilt the liquor yourself," Barton answered coolly, "when I took away your cigarette-case. I saw you passing the cards over the surface of it, which anyone can see for himself is a perfect mirror. I tried to warn you – for I did not want a row – when I said the case 'seemed to bring you luck.' But you would not be warned; and when the cigarette-case trick was played out, you fell back on the old dodge with the drop of water. Will anyone else convince himself that I am right before I let Mr. Cranley go?"

One or two men passed the cards, as they had seen the Banker do, over the spilt soda water.

"It's a clear case," they said. "Leave him alone."

Barton slackened his grip of Cranley's hands, and for some seconds they lay as if paralyzed on the table before him, white and cold, with livid circles round the wrists. The man's face was deadly pale, and wet with perspiration. He put out a trembling hand to the glass of brandy-and-water that stood beside him; the class rattled against his teeth as he drained all the contents at a gulp.

"You shall hear from me," he grumbled, and, with an inarticulate muttering of threats he made his way, stumbling and catching at chairs, to the door. When he had got outside, he

leaned against the wall, like a drunken man, and then shambled across the landing into a reading-room. It was empty, and Cranley fell into a large easy-chair, where he lay crumpled up, rather than sat, for perhaps ten minutes, holding his hand against his heart.

"They talk about having the courage of one's opinions. Confound it! Why haven't I the nerve for my character? Hang this heart of mine! Will it never stop thumping?"

He sat up and looked about him, then rose and walked toward the table; but his head began to swim, and his eyes to darken; so he fell back again in his seat, feeling drowsy and beaten. Mechanically he began to move the hand that hung over the arm of his low chair, and it encountered a newspaper which had fallen on the floor. He lifted it automatically and without thought: it was the *Times*. Perhaps to try his eyes, and see if they served him again after his collapse, he ran them down the columns of the advertisements.

Suddenly something caught his attention; his whole lax figure grew braced again as he read a passage steadily through more than twice or thrice. When he had quite mastered this, he threw down the paper and gave a low whistle.

"So the old boy's dead," he reflected; "and that drunken tattooed ass and his daughter are to come in for the money and the mines! They'll be clever that find him, and I shan't give them his address! What luck some men have!"

Here he fell into deep thought, his brows and lips working

eagerly.

"I'll do it," he said at last, cutting the advertisement out of the paper with a penknife. "It isn't often a man has a chance to *star* in this game of existence. I've lost all my own social Lives: one in that business at Oxford, one in the row at Ali Musjid, and the third went – to-night. But I'll *star*. Every sinner should desire a new Life," he added with a sneer.*

* "Starring" is paying for a new "Life" at Pool.

He rose, steady enough now, walked to the door, paused and listened, heard the excited voices in the card-room still discussing him, slunk down-stairs, took his hat and greatcoat, and swaggered past the porter. Mechanically he felt in his pocket, as he went out of the porch, for his cigarette-case; and he paused at the little fount of fire at the door.

He was thinking that he would never light a cigarette there again.

Presently he remembered, and swore. He had left his case on the table of the card-room, where Barton had laid it down, and he had not the impudence to send back for it.

"*Vile damnum!*" he muttered (for he had enjoyed a classical education), and so disappeared in the frosty night.

# CHAPTER II. – In the Snow

The foul and foggy night of early February was descending, some weeks after the scene in the Cockpit, on the river and the town. Night was falling from the heavens; or rather, night seemed to be rising from the earth – steamed up, black, from the dingy trampled snow of the streets, and from the vapors that swam above the squalid houses. There was coal-smoke and a taste of lucifer matches in the air. In the previous night there had been such a storm as London seldom sees; the powdery, flying snow had been blown for many hours before a tyrannous northeast gale, and had settled down, like dust in a neglected chamber, over every surface of the city. Drifts and "snow-wreathes," as northern folk say, were lying in exposed places, in squares and streets, as deep as they lie when sheep are "smoored" on the sides of Sundhope or Penchrist in the desolate Border-land. All day London had been struggling under her cold winding-sheet, like a feeble, feverish patient trying to throw off a heavy white counterpane. Now the counterpane was dirty enough. The pavements were three inches deep in a rich greasy deposit of mud and molten ice. Above the round glass or iron coverings of coal-cellars the foot-passengers slipped, "ricked" their backs, and swore as they stumbled, if they did not actually fall down, in the filth. Those who were in haste, and could afford it, travelled, at fancy prices, in hansoms with two horses driven tandem.

The snow still lay comparatively white on the surface of the less-frequented thoroughfares, with straight shining black marks where wheels had cut their way.

At intervals in the day the fog had fallen blacker than night. Down by the waterside the roads were deep in a mixture of a weak gray-brown or coffee color. Beside one of the bridges in Chelsea, an open slope leads straight to the stream, and here, in the afternoon – for a late start was made – the carts of the Vestry had been led, and loads of slush that had choked up the streets in the more fashionable parts of the town had been unladen into the river. This may not be the most; scientific of sanitary modes of clearing the streets and squares, but it was the way that recommended itself to the wisdom of the Contractor. In the early evening the fog had lightened a little, but it fell sadly again, and grew so thick that the bridge was lost in mist half-way across the river, like the arches of that fatal bridge beheld by Mirza in his Vision. The masts of the vessels moored on the near bank disappeared from view, and only a red lamp or two shone against the blackness of the hulks. From the public-house at the corner – the *Hit or Miss*– streamed a fan-shaped flood of light, soon choked by the fog.

Out of the muddy twilight of a street that runs at right angles to the river, a cart came crawling; its high-piled white load of snow was faintly visible before the brown horses (they were yoked tandem) came into view. This cart was driven down to the water-edge, and was there upturned, with much shouting and cracking

of whips on the part of the men engaged, and with a good deal of straining, slipping, and stumbling on the side of the horses.

One of the men jumped down, and fumbled at the iron pins which kept the backboard of the cart in its place.

"Blarmme, Bill," he grumbled, "if the blessed pins ain't froze."

Here he put his wet fingers in his mouth, blowing on them afterward, and smacking his arms across his breast to restore the circulation.

The comrade addressed as Bill merely stared speechlessly as he stood at the smoking head of the leader, and the other man tugged again at the pin.

"It won't budge," he cried at last. "Just run into the *Hit or Miss* at the corner, mate, and borrow a hammer; and you might get a pint o' hot beer when ye're at it. Here's fourpence. I was with three that found a quid in the *Mac*,[1] end of last week; here's the last of it."

He fumbled in his pocket, but his hands were so numb that he could scarcely capture the nimble fourpence. Why should the "nimble fourpence" have the monopoly of agility?

"I'm Blue Ribbon, Tommy, don't yer know," said Bill, with regretful sullenness. His ragged great-coat, indeed, was decorated with the azure badge of avowed and total abstinence.

"Blow yer blue ribbon! Hold on where ye are, and I'll bring the bloomin' hammer myself."

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[1] A quid in the *Mac*– a sovereign in the street-scrapings. called *Mac* from Macadam, and employed as mortar in building eligible freehold tenements.

Thus growling, Tommy strode indifferent through the snow, his legs protected by bandages of straw ropes. Presently he reappeared in the warmer yellow of the light that poured through the windows of the old public-house. He was wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, which he then thrust into the deeps of his pockets, hugging a hammer to his body under his armpit.

"A little hot beer would do yer bloomin' temper a deal more good than ten yards o' blue ribbon at sixpence. Blue ruin's more in *my* line," observed Thomas, epigram-matically, much comforted by his refreshment. Aid with two well-directed taps he knocked the pins out of their sockets, and let down the backboard of the cart.

Bill, uncomforted by ale, sulkily jerked the horses forward; the cart was tilted up, and the snow tumbled out, partly into the shallow shore-water, partly on to the edge of the slope.

"Ullo!" cried Tommy suddenly. "E're's an old coat-sleeve a sticking out o' the snow."

"'Alves!" exclaimed Bill, with a noble eye on the main chance.

"'Alves! of course, 'alves. Ain't we on the same lay," replied the chivalrous Tommy. Then he cried, "Lord preserve us, mate; *there's a cove in the coat!*"

He ran forward, and clutched the elbow of the sleeve which stood up stiffly above the frozen mound of lumpy snow. He might well have thought at first that the sleeve was empty, such a very stick of bone and skin was the arm he grasped within it.

"Here, Bill, help us to dig him out, poor chap!"

"Is he dead?" asked Bill, leaving the horses' heads.

"Dead! he's bound to be dead, under all that weight. But how the dickens did he get into the cart? Guess we didn't shovel him in, eh; we'd have seen him?"

By this time the two men had dragged a meagre corpse out of the snow heap. A rough worn old pilot-coat, a shabby pair of corduroy trousers, and two broken boots through which the toes could be seen peeping ruefully, were all the visible raiment of the body. The clothes lay in heavy swathes and folds over the miserable bag of bones that had once been a tall man. The peaked blue face was half hidden by a fell of iron-gray hair, and a grizzled beard hung over the breast.

The two men stood for some moments staring at the corpse. A wretched woman in a thin gray cotton dress had come down from the bridge, and shivered beside the body for a moment.

"He's a goner," was her criticism. "I wish *I* was."

With this aspiration she shivered back into the fog again, walking on her unknown way. By this time a dozen people had started up from nowhere, and were standing in a tight ring round the body. The behavior of the people was typical of London gazers. No one made any remark, or offered any suggestion; they simply stared with all their eyes and souls, absorbed in the unbought excitement of the spectacle. They were helpless, idealess, interested and unconcerned.

"Run and fetch a peeler, Bill," said Tommy at last.

"Peeler be hanged! Bloomin' likely I am to find a peeler. Fetch

him yourself."

"Sulky devil you are," answered Tommy, who was certainly of milder mood; whereas Bill seemed a most unalluring example of the virtue of Temperance. It is true that he had only been "Blue Ribbon" since the end of his Christmas bout – that is, for nearly a fortnight – and Virtue, a precarious tenant, was not yet comfortable in her new lodgings.

Before Tommy returned from his quest the dusk had deepened into night The crowd round the body in the pea-coat had grown denser, and it might truly be said that "the more part knew not wherefore they had come together." The centre of interest was not a fight, they were sure, otherwise the ring would have been swaying this way and that. Neither was it a dispute between a cabman and his fare: there was no sound of angry repartees. It might be a drunken woman, or a man in a fit, or a lost child. So the outer circle of spectators, who saw nothing, waited, and patiently endured till the moment of revelation should arrive. Respectable people who passed only glanced at the gathering; respectable people may wonder, but they never do find out the mystery within a London crowd. On the extreme fringe of the mob were some amateurs who had just been drinking in the *Hit or Miss*. They were noisy, curious, and impatient.

At last Tommy arrived with two policeman, who, acting on his warning, had brought with them a stretcher. He had told them briefly how the dead man was found in the cart-load of snow.

Before the men in blue, the crowd of necessity opened. One

of the officers stooped down and flashed his lantern on the heap of snow where the dead face lay, as pale as its frozen pillow.

"Lord, it's old Dicky Shields!" cried a voice in the crowd, as the peaked still features were lighted up.

The man who spoke was one of the latest spectators that had arrived, after the news that some pleasant entertainment was on foot had passed into the warm alcoholic air and within the swinging doors of the *Hit or Miss*.

"You know him, do you?" asked the policeman with the lantern.

"Know him, rather! Didn't I give him sixpence for rum when he tattooed this here cross and anchor on my arm? Dicky was a grand hand at tattooing, bless you: he'd tattooed himself all over!"

The speaker rolled up his sleeve, and showed, on his burly red forearm, the emblems of Faith and Hope rather neatly executed in blue.

"Why, he was in the *Hit or Miss*," the speaker went on, "no later nor last night."

"Wot beats me," said Tommy again, as the policeman lifted the light corpse, and tried vainly to straighten the frozen limbs, "Wot beats me is how he got in this here cart of ours."

"He's light enough surely," added Tommy; "but I warrant *we* didn't chuck him on the cart with the snow in Belgrave Square."

"Where do you put up at night?" asked one of the policemen suddenly. He had been ruminating on the mystery.

"In the yard there, behind that there hoarding," answered Tommy, pointing to a breached and battered palisade near the corner of the public-house.

At the back of this ricketty plank fence, with its particolored tatters of damp and torn advertisements, lay a considerable space of waste ground. The old houses that recently occupied the site had been pulled down, probably as condemned "slums," in some moment of reform, when people had nothing better to think of than the housing of the poor.

There had been an idea of building model lodgings for tramps, with all the latest improvements, on the space, but the idea evaporated when something else occurred to divert the general interest. Now certain sheds, with roofs sloped against the nearest walls, formed a kind of lumber-room for the parish.

At this time the scavengers' carts were housed in the sheds, or outside the sheds when these were overcrowded. Not far off were stables for the horses, and thus the waste ground was not left wholly unoccupied.

"Was this cart o' yours under the sheds all night or in the open?" asked the policeman, with an air of penetration.

"Just outside the shed, worn't it, Bill?" replied Tommy.

Bill said nothing, being a person disinclined to commit himself.

"If the cart was outside," said the policeman, "then the thing's plain enough. You started from there, didn't you, with the cart in the afternoon?"

"Ay," answered Tommy.

"And there was a little sprinkle o' snow in the cart?"

"May be there wos. I don't remember one way or the other."

"Then you *must* be a stupid if you don't see that this here cove," pointing to the dead man, "got drinking too much last night, lost hisself, and wandered inside the hoarding, where he fell asleep in the cart."

"Snow do make a fellow bloomin' sleepy," one of the crowd assented.

"Well, he never wakened no more, and the snow had covered over his body when you started with the cart, and him in it, unbeknown. He's light enough to make no difference to the weight. Was it dark when you started?"

"One of them spells of fog was on; you could hardly see your hand," grunted Tommy.

"Well, then, it's as plain as – as the nose on your face," said the policeman, without any sarcastic intentions. "That's how it was."

"Bravo, Bobby!" cried one of the crowd. "They should make you an inspector, and set you to run in them dynamiting Irish coves."

The policeman was not displeased at this popular tribute to his shrewdness. Dignity forbade him, however, to acknowledge the compliment, and he contented himself with lifting the two handles of the stretcher which was next him. A covering was thrown over the face of the dead man, and the two policemen, with their burden, began to make their way northward to the

hospital.

A small mob followed them, but soon dwindled into a tail of street boys and girls. These accompanied the body till it disappeared from their eyes within the hospital doors. Then they waited for half an hour or so, and at last seemed to evaporate into the fog.

By this time Tommy and his mate had unharnessed their horses and taken them to stable, the cart was housed (beneath the sheds this time), and Bill had so far succumbed to the genial influences of the occasion as to tear off his blue badge and follow Tommy into the *Hit or Miss*.

A few chance acquaintances, hospitable and curious, accompanied them, intent on providing with refreshments and plying with questions the heroes of so remarkable an adventure. It is true that they already knew all Tommy and Bill had to tell; but there is a pleasure, in moments of emotional agitation, in repeating at intervals the same questions, and making over and again the same profound remarks. The charm of these performances was sure to be particularly keen within the very walls where the dead man had probably taken his last convivial glass, and where some light was certain to be thrown, by the landlady or her customers, on the habits and history of poor Dicky Shields.

# CHAPTER III. – An Academic Pothouse

The *Hit or Miss* tavern, to customers (rough customers, at least) who entered it on a foggy winter night, seemed merely a public by the river's brim. Not being ravaged and parched by a thirst for the picturesque, Tommy and his mates failed to pause and observe the architectural peculiarities of the building. Even if they had been of a romantic and antiquarian turn, the fog was so thick that they could have seen little to admire, though there was plenty to be admired. The *Hit or Miss* was not more antique in its aspect than modern in its fortunes. Few public-houses, if any, boasted for their landlord such a person as Robert Maitland, M.A., Fellow of St. Gatien's, in the University of Oxford.

It is, perhaps, desirable and even necessary to explain how this arrangement came into existence. We have already made acquaintance with "mine host" of the *Hit or Miss*, and found him to be by no means the rosy, genial Boniface of popular tradition. That a man like Maitland should be the lessee of a waterside tavern, like the *Hit or Miss*, was only one of the anomalies of this odd age of ours. An age of revivals, restorations, experiments – an age of dukes who are Socialists – an age which sees the East-end brawling in Pall Mall, and parties of West-end tourists personally conducted down Ratcliffe Highway – need not wonder

at Maitland's eccentric choice in philanthropy.

Maitland was an orphan, and rich. He had been an unpopular lonely boy at a public school, where he was known as a "sap," or assiduous student, and was remarked for an almost unnatural indifference to cricket and rowing. At Oxford, as he had plenty of money, he had been rather less unpopular. His studies ultimately won him a Fellowship at St. Gatien's, where his services as a tutor were not needed. Maitland now developed a great desire to improve his own culture by acquaintance with humanity, and to improve humanity by acquaintance with himself. This view of life and duty had been urged on him by his college "coach," philosopher, and friend, Mr. Joseph Bielby. A man of some energy of character, Bielby had made Maitland leave his desultory reading and dull hospitalities at St. Gatien's and betake himself to practical philanthropy.

"You tell me you don't see much in life," Bielby had said. "Throw yourself into the life of others, who have not much to live on."

Maitland made a few practical experiments in philanthropy at Oxford. He once subsidized a number of glaziers out on strike, and thereon had his own windows broken by conservative undergraduates. He urged on the citizens the desirability of running a steam tramway for the people from the station to Cowley, through Worcester, John's, Baliol, and Wadham Gardens and Magdalene. His signature headed a petition in favor of having three "devils," or steam-whoopers, yelling in different

quarters of the town between five and six o'clock every morning, that the artisans might be awakened in time for the labors of the day.

As Maitland's schemes made more noise than progress at Oxford, Bielby urged him to come out of his Alma Mater and practise benevolence in town. He had a great scheme for building over Hyde Park, and creating a Palace of Art in Poplar with the rents of the new streets. While pushing this ingenious idea in the columns of the *Daily Trumpet*, Maitland looked out for some humbler field of personal usefulness. The happy notion of taking a philanthropic public-house occurred to him, and was acted upon at the first opportunity. Maitland calculated that in his own bar-room he could acquire an intimate knowledge of humanity in its least sophisticated aspects. He would sell good beer, instead of drugged and adulterated stuff He would raise the tone of his customers, while he would insensibly gain some of their exuberant vitality. He would shake off the prig (which he knew to be a strong element in his nature), and would, at the same time, encourage temperance by providing good malt liquor.

The scheme seemed feasible, and the next thing to do was to acquire a tavern. Now, Maitland had been in the Oxford movement just when æstheticism was fading out, like a lovely sun-stricken lily, while philanthropy and political economy and Mr. Henry George were coming in, like roaring lions. Thus in Maitland there survived a little of the old leaven of the student of Renaissance, a touch of the amateur of "impressions" and of

antiquated furniture. He was always struggling against this "side," as he called it, of his "culture," and in his hours of reaction he was all for steam tramways, "devils," and Kindergartens standing where they ought not. But there were moments when his old innocent craving for the picturesque got the upper hand; and in one of those moments Maitland had come across the chance of acquiring the lease of the *Hit or Miss*.

That ancient bridge-house pleased him, and he closed with his opportunity. The *Hit or Miss* was as attractive to an artistic as most public-houses are to a thirsty soul When the Embankment was made, the bridge-house had been one of a street of similar quaint and many-gabled old buildings that leaned up against each other for mutual support near the rivers edge. But the Embankment slowly brought civilization that way: the dirty rickety old houses were both condemned and demolished, till at last only the tavern remained, with hoardings and empty spaces, and a dust-yard round it.

> The house stood at what had been a corner. The red-tiled roof was so high-pitched as to be almost perpendicular. The dormer windows of the attics were as picturesque as anything in Nuremberg. The side-walls were broken in their surface by little odd red-tiled roofs covering projecting casements, and the house was shored up and supported by huge wooden beams. You entered (supposing you to enter a public-house) by a low-browed door in front, if you passed in as ordinary customers did. At one corner was an odd little

board, with the old-fashioned sign:

"Jack's Bridge House.
"*Hit or Miss*– Luck's All."

But there was a side-door, reached by walking down a covered way, over which the strong oaken rafters (revealed by the unflaking of the plaster) lay bent and warped by years and the weight of the building. From this door you saw the side, or rather the back, which the house kept for its intimates; a side even more picturesque with red-tiled roofs and dormer windows than that which faced the street. The passage led down to a slum, and on the left hand, as you entered, lay the empty space and the dust-yard where the carts were sheltered in sheds, or left beneath the sky, behind the ruinous hoarding.

Within, the *Hit or Miss* looked cosey enough to persons entering out of the cold and dark. There was heat, light, and a bar-parlor with a wide old-fashioned chimney-place, provided with seats within the ingle. On these little benches did Tommy and his friends make haste to place themselves, comfortably disposed, and thawing rapidly, in a room within a room, as it were; for the big chimney-place was like a little chamber by itself. Not on an ordinary night could such a party have gained admittance to the bar-parlor, where Maitland himself was wont to appear, now and then, when he visited the tavern, and to produce by his mere presence, and without in the least intending it, an Early Closing

Movement.

But to-night was no common night, and Mrs. Gullick, the widowed landlady, or rather manager, was as eager to hear all the story of the finding of poor Dicky Shields as any of the crowd outside had been. Again and again the narrative was repeated, till conjecture once more began to take the place of assertion.

"I wonder," asked one of the men, "how old Dicky got the money for a boose?"

"The money, ay, and the chance," said another. "That daughter of his – a nice-looking girl she is – kept poor Dicky pretty tight."

"Didn't let him get – " the epigrammatist of the company was just beginning to put in, when the brilliant witticism he was about to utter burst at once on the intellect of all his friends.

"Didn't let him *get* tight, you was a-goin' to say, Tommy," howled three or four at once, and there ensued a great noise of the slapping of thighs, followed by chuckles which exploded, at intervals, like crackers.

"Dicky 'ad been 'avin' bad times for long," the first speaker went on. "I guess he 'ad about tattooed all the parish as would stand a pint for tattooing. There was hardly a square inch of skin not made beautiful forever about here."

"Ah! and there was no sale for his beastesses and bird-ses nuther; or else he was clean sold out, and hadn't no capital to renew his stock of hairy cats and young parrots."

"The very stuffed beasts, perched above old Dicky's shop, had got to look real mangey and mouldy. I think I see them now: the

fox in the middle, the long-legged moulting foreign bird at one end, and that 'ere shiny old rhinoceros in the porch under them picters of the dying deer and t'other deer swimming. Poor old Dicky! Where he raised the price o' a drain, let alone a booze, beats me, it does."

"Why," said Mrs. Gullick, who had been in the outer room during the conversation, "why, it was a sailor gentleman that stood Dicky treat A most pleasant-spoken man for a sailor, with a big black beard He used to meet Dicky here, in the private room up-stairs, and there Dicky used to do him a turn of his trade – tattooing him, like. 'I'm doing him to pattern, mum,' Dicky sez, sez he: 'a *facsimile* o' myself, mum.' It wasn't much they drank neither – just a couple of pints; for sez the sailor gentleman, he sez, 'I'm afeared, mum, our friend here can't carry much even of *your* capital stuff. We must excuse' sez he, 'the failings of an artis'; but I doesn't want his hand to shake or slip when he's a doin' *me*,' sez he. 'Might > spile the pattern,' he sez, 'also hurt' And I wouldn't have served old Dicky with more than was good for him, myself, not if it was ever so, I wouldn't I promised that poor daughter of his, before Mr. Maitland sent her to school – years ago now – I promised as I would keep an eye on her father, and speak of – A hangel, if here isn't Mr. Maitland his very self!"

And Mrs. Gullick arose, with bustling courtesy, to welcome her landlord, the Fellow of St. Gatien's.

Immediately there was a stir among the men seated in the ingle. One by one – some with a muttered pretence at excuse,

others with shame-faced awkwardness – they shouldered and shuffled out of the room. Maitland's appearance had produced its usual effect, and he was left alone with his tenant.

"Well, Mrs. Gullick," said poor Maitland, ruefully, "I came here for a chat with our friends – a little social relaxation – on economic questions, and I seem to have frightened them all away."

"Oh, sir, they're a rough lot, and don't think themselves company for the likes of you. But," said Mrs. Gullick, eagerly – with the delight of the oldest aunt in telling the saddest tale – "you 've heard this hawful story? Poor Miss Margaret, sir! It makes my blood – "

What physiological effect on the circulation Mrs. Gullick was about to ascribe to alarming intelligence will never be known; for Maitland, growing a little more pallid than usual, interrupted her:

"What has happened to Miss Margaret? Tell me, quick!"

"Nothing to *herself*, poor lamb, but her poor father, sir."

Maitland seemed sensibly relieved.

"Well, what about her father?"

"Gone, sir – gone! In a cartload o' snow, this very evening, he was found, just outside o* this very door."

"In a cartload of snow!" cried Maitland. "Do you mean that he went away in it, or that he was found in it dead?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; dead for many hours, the doctor said; and in this very house he had been no later than last night, and quite steady, sir, I do assure you. He had been steady – oh, steady for

weeks."

Maitland assumed an expression of regret, which no doubt he felt to a certain extent But in his sorrow there could not but have been some relief. For Maitland, in the course of his philanthropic labors, had known old Dicky Shields, the naturalist and professional tattooer, as a hopeless *mauvais sujet*. But Dicky's daughter, Margaret, had been a daisy flourishing by the grimy waterside, till the young social reformer transplanted her to a school in the purer air of Devonshire. He was having her educated there, and after she was educated – why, then, Maitland had at one time entertained his own projects or dreams. In the way of their accomplishment Dicky Shields had been felt as an obstacle; not that he objected – on the other hand, he had made Maitland put his views in writing. There were times – there had lately, above all, been times – when Maitland reflected uneasily on the conditional promises in this document Dicky was not an eligible father-in-law, however good and pretty a girl his daughter might be. But now Dicky had ceased to be an obstacle; he was no longer (as he certainly had been) in any man's way; he was nobody's enemy now, not even his own.

The vision of all these circumstances passed rapidly, like a sensation rather than a set of coherent thoughts, through Maitland's consciousness.

"Tell me everything you know of this wretched business," he said, rising and closing the door which led into the outer room.

"Well, sir, you have not been here for some weeks, or you

would know that Dicky had found a friend lately – an old shipmate, or petty-officer, he called him – a sailor-man. Well-to-do, he seemed; the mate of a merchant vessel he might be. He had known Dicky, I think, long ago at sea, and he'd bring him here 'to yarn with him,' he said, once or twice it might be in this room, but mainly in the parlor up-stairs. He let old Dicky tattoo him a bit, up there, to put him in the way of earning an honest penny by his trade – a queer trade it was. Never more than a pint, or a glass of hot rum and water, would he give the old man. Most considerate and careful, sir, he ever was. Well, last night he brought him in about nine, and they sat rather late; and about twelve the sailor comes in, rubbing his eyes, and 'Good-night, mum,' sez he. 'My friend's been gone for an hour. An early bird he is, and I've been asleep by myself. If you please, I'll just settle our little score. It's the last for a long time, for I'm bound to-morrow for the China Seas, eastward. Oh, mum, a sailor's life!' So he pays, changing a half-sovereign, like a gentleman, and out he goes, and that's the last I ever see o' poor Dicky Shields till he was brought in this afternoon, out of the snow-cart, cold and stiff, sir."

"And how do you suppose all this happened? How did Shields get *into* the cart?"

"Well, that's just what they've been wondering at, though the cart was handy and uncommon convenient for a man as 'ad too much, if 'ad he '*ad*; as believe it I cannot, seeing a glass of hot rum and water would not intoxicate a babe. May be he felt faint, and

laid down a bit, and never wakened. But, Lord a mercy, what's *that*?" screamed Mrs. Gullick, leaping to her feet in terror.

The latched door which communicated with the staircase had been burst open, and a small brown bear had rushed erect into the room, and, with a cry, had thrown itself on Mrs. Gullick's bosom.

"Well, if ever I '*ad* a fright!" that worthy lady exclaimed, turning toward the startled Maitland, and embracing at the same time the little animal in an affectionate clasp. "Well, if *ever* there was such a child as you, Lizer! What is the matter with you *now*?"

"Oh, mother," cried the bear, "I dreamed of that big Bird I saw on the roof, and I ran down-stairs before I was 'arf awake, I was that horful frightened."

"Well, you just go up-stairs again – and here's a sweet-cake for you – and you take this night-light," said Mrs. Gullick, producing the articles she mentioned, "and put it in the basin careful, and knock on the floor with the poker if you want me. If it wasn't for that bearskin Mr. Toopny was kind enough to let you keep, you'd get your death o' cold, you would, running about in the night. And look 'ere, Lizer," she added, patting the child affectionately on the shoulder, "do get that there Bird out o' your head. It's just nothing but indigestion comes o' you and the other children – himps they may well call you, and himps I'm sure you are – always wasting your screws on pasty and lemonade and raspberry vinegar. Just-nothing but indigestion."

Thus admonished, the bear once more threw its arms, in a tight

embrace, about Mrs. Gullick's neck; and then, without lavishing attention on Maitland, passed out of the door, and could be heard skipping up-stairs.

"I'm sure, sir, I ask your pardon," exclaimed poor Mrs. Gullick; "but Lizer's far from well just now, and she did have a scare last night, or else, which is more likely, her little inside (saving your presence) has been upset with a supper the Manager gave all them pantermime himps."

"But, Mrs. Gullick, why is she dressed like a bear?"

"She's such a favorite with the Manager, sir, and the Property Man, and all of them at the *Hilarity*, you can't *think*, sir," said Mrs. Gullick, not in the least meaning to impugn Maitland's general capacity for abstract speculation. "A regular little genius that child is, though I says it as shouldn't. Ah, sir, she takes it from her poor father, sir." And Mrs. Gullick raised her apron to her eyes.

Now the late Mr. Gullick had been a clown of considerable merit; but, like too many artists, he was addicted beyond measure to convivial enjoyment. Maitland had befriended him in his last days, and had appointed Mrs. Gullick (and a capital appointment it was) to look after his property when he became landlord of the *Hit or Miss*.

"What a gift, sir, that child always had! Why, when she was no more than four, I well remember her going to fetch the beer, and her being a little late, and Gullick with the thirst on him, when she came in with the jug, he made a cuff at her, not to hurt her,

and if the little thing didn't drop the jug, and take the knap! Lord, I thought Gullick would 'a died laughing, and him so thirsty, too."

"Take the knap?" said Maitland, who imagined that "the knap" must be some malady incident to childhood.

"Oh, sir, it's when one person cuffs at another on the stage, you know, and the other slaps his own hand, on the far side, to make the noise of a box on the ear: that's what we call 'taking the knap' in the profession. And the beer was spilt, and the jug broken, and all – Lizer was that clever? And this is her second season, just ended, as a himp at the *Hilarity* pantermime; and they're that good to her, they let her bring her bearskin home with her, what she wears, you know, sir, as the Little Bear in 'The Three Bears,' don't you know, sir."

Maitland was acquainted with the legend of the Great Bear, the Middle Bear, and the Little Tiny Small Bear, and had even proved, in a learned paper, that the Three Bears were the Sun, the Moon, and the Multitude of Stars in the Aryan myth. But he had not seen the pantomime founded on the traditional narrative.

"But what was the child saying about a big Bird?" he asked. "What was it that frightened her?"

"Oh, sir, I think it was just tiredness, and may be, a little something hot at that supper last night; and, besides, seeing so many queer things in pantermimes might put notions in a child's head. But when she came home last night, a little late, Lizer was very strange. She vowed and swore she had seen a large Bird, far bigger than any common bird, skim over the street. Then when I

had put her to bed in the attic, down she flies, screaming she saw the Bird on the roof. I had hard work to get her to sleep. To-day I made her lay a-bed and wear her theatre pantermime bearskin, that fits her like another skin – and she'll be too big for it next year – just to keep her warm in that cold garret. That's all about it, sir. She'll be well enough in a day or two, will Lizer."

"I am sure I hope she will, Mrs. Gullick," said Maitland; "and, as I am passing his way, I will ask Dr. Barton to call and see the little girl. Now I must go, and I think the less we say to anyone about Miss Shields, you know, the better. It will be very dreadful for her to learn about her father's death, and we must try to prevent Her from hearing how it happened."

"Certainly, sir," said Mrs. Gullick, bobbing; "and being safe away at school, sir, we'll hope she won't be told no more than she needn't know about it."

Maitland went forth into the thick night: a half-hearted London thaw was filling the shivering air with a damp brown fog.

He walked to the nearest telegraph office, and did not observe, in the raw darkness and in the confusion of his thoughts, that he was followed at no great distance by a man muffled up in a great-coat and a woollen comforter. The stranger almost shouldered against him, as he stood reading his telegram, and conscientiously docking off a word here and there to save threepence,

"From Robert Maitland to Miss Marlett.
"The Dovecot, Conisbeare,
"Tiverton.

> "I come to-morrow, leaving by 10.30 train. Do not let Margaret see newspaper. Her father dead. Break news."

This telegram gave Maitland, in his excited state, more trouble to construct than might have been expected. We all know the wondrous badness of post-office pens or pencils, and how they tear or blot the paper when we are in a hurry; and Maitland felt hurried, though there was no need for haste. Meantime the man in the woollen comforter was buying stamps, and, finishing his bargain before the despatch was stamped and delivered, went out into the fog, and was no more seen.

# CHAPTER IV. – Miss Marlett's

Girls' schools are chilly places. The unfortunate victims, when you chance to meet them, mostly look but half-alive, and dismally cold. Their noses (however charming these features may become in a year or two, or even may be in the holidays) appear somehow of a frosty temperature in the long dull months of school-time. The hands, too, of the fair pupils are apt to seem larger than common, inclined to blue in color, and, generally, are suggestive of inadequate circulation. À tendency to get as near the fire as possible (to come within the frontiers of the hearth-rug is forbidden), and to cower beneath shawls, is also characteristic of joyous girlhood – school-girlhood, that is. In fact, one thinks of a girls' school as too frequently a spot where no one takes any lively exercise (for walking in a funereal procession is not exercise, or Mutes might be athletes), and where there is apt to be a pervading impression of insufficient food, insufficient clothing, and general unsatisfied tedium.

Miss Marlett's Establishment for the Highest Education of Girls, more briefly known as "The Dovecot, Conisbeare," was no exception, on a particularly cold February day – the day after Dicky Shields was found dead – to these pretty general rules. The Dovecot, before it became a girls' school, was, no doubt, a pleasant English home, where "the fires wass coot," as the Highlandman said. The red-brick house, with its lawn sloping

down to the fields, all level with snow, stood at a little distance from the main road, at the end of a handsome avenue of Scotch pines. But the fires at Miss Marlett's were not good on this February morning. They never *were* good at the Dovecot. Miss Marlett was one of those people who, fortunately for themselves, and unfortunately for persons dwelling under their roofs, never feel cold, or never know what they feel. Therefore, Miss Marlett never poked the fire, which, consequently used to grow black toward its early death, and was only revived, at dangerously long intervals, by the most minute doses of stimulant in the shape of rather damp small coals. Now, supplies of coal had run low at the Dovecot, for the very excellent reason that the roads were snowed up, and that convoys of the precious fuel were scarcely to be urged along the heavy ways.

This did not matter much to the equable temperature of Miss Marlett; but it did matter a great deal to her shivering pupils, three of whom were just speeding their morning toilette, by the light of one candle, at the pleasant hour of five minutes to seven on a frosty morning.

"Oh dear," said one maiden – Janey Harman by name – whose blonde complexion should have been pink and white, but was mottled with alien and unbecoming hues, "*why* won't that old Cat let us have fires to dress by? Gracious, Margaret, how black your fingers are!"

"Yes; and I cant get them clean," said Margaret, holding up two very pretty dripping hands, and quoting, in mock heroic

parody:

> "Ho, dogs of false Tarentum,
> Are not my *hands* washed white?"

"No talking in the bedrooms, young ladies," came a voice, accompanied by an icy draught, from the door, which was opened just enough to admit a fleeting vision of Miss Mariettas personal charms.

"I was only repeating my lay, Miss Marlett," replied the maiden thus rebuked, in a tone of injured innocence —

> "'Ho, dogs of false Tarentum,'"

– and the door closed again on Miss Marlett, who had not altogether the best of it in this affair of outposts, and could not help feeling as if "that Miss Shields" was laughing at her.

"Old Cat!" the young lady went on, in a subdued whisper. "But no wonder my hands were a little black, Janey. You forget that it's my week to be Stoker. Already, girls, by an early and unexpected movement, I have cut off some of the enemy's supplies."

So speaking, Miss Margaret Shields proudly displayed a small deposit of coals, stored, for secrecy, in the bottom of a clothes-basket.

"Gracious, Daisy, how clever! Well, you are something *like* a stoker," exclaimed the third girl, who by this time had finished dressing: "we shall have a blaze to-night."

Now, it must be said that at Miss Marlett's school, by an unusual and inconsistent concession to comfort and saniitary principles, the elder girls were allowed to have fires in their bedrooms at night, in winter. But seeing that these fires resembled the laughter of the wicked, inasmuch as they were brief-lived as the crackling of thorns under pots, the girls were driven to make predatory attacks on fuel wherever it could be found. Sometimes, one is sorry to say, they robbed each other's fireplaces, and concealed the coal in their pockets. But this conduct – resembling what is fabled of the natives of the Scilly Islands, that they "eke out a precarious livelihood by taking in each other's washing" – led to strife and bickering; so that the Stoker for the week (as the girl appointed to collect these supplies was called) had to infringe a little on the secret household stores of Miss Marlett. This week, as it happened, Margaret Shields was the Stoker, and she so bore herself in her high office as to extort the admiration of the very housemaids.

> "Even the ranks of Tusculum
> Could scarce forbear to cheer,"

if we may again quote the author who was at that time Miss Shields' favorite poet. Miss Shields had not studied Mr. Matthew Arnold, and was mercifully unaware that not to detect the "pinchbeck" in the *Lays* is the sign of a grovelling nature.

Before she was sent to Miss Marlett's, four years ere this

date, Margaret Shields' instruction had been limited. "The best thing that could be said for it," as the old sporting prophet remarked of his own education, "was that it had been mainly eleemosynary." The Chelsea School Board fees could but rarely be extracted from old Dicky Shields. But Robert Maitland, when still young in philanthropy, had seen the clever, merry, brown-eyed child at some school treat, or inspection, or other function; had covenanted in some sort with her shiftless parent; had rescued the child from the streets, and sent her as a pupil to Miss Marlett's. Like Mr. Day, the accomplished author of "Sandford and Merton," and creator of the immortal Mr. Barlow, Robert Maitland had conceived the hope that he might have a girl educated up to his own intellectual standard, and made, or "ready-made," a helpmate meet for him. He was, in a more or less formal way, the guardian of Margaret Shields, and the ward might be expected (by anyone who did not know human nature any better) to blossom into the wife.

Maitland could "please himself," as people say; that is, in his choice of a partner he had no relations to please – no one but the elect young lady, who, after all, might not be "pleased" with alacrity.

Whether pleased or not, there could be no doubt that Margaret Shields was extremely pleasing. Beside her two shivering chamber-mates ("chamber-dekyns" they would have been called, in Oxford slang, four hundred years ago), Miss Shields looked quite brilliant, warm, and comfortable, even in the eager and the

nipping air of Miss Marlett's shuddering establishment, and by the frosty light of a single candle. This young lady was tall and firmly fashioned; a nut-brown maid, with a ruddy glow on her cheeks, with glossy hair rolled up in a big tight knot, and with à smile (which knew when it was well off) always faithful to her lips. These features, it is superfluous to say in speaking of a heroine, "were rather too large for regular beauty." She was perfectly ready to face the enemy (in which light she humorously regarded her mistress) when the loud cracked bell jangled at seven o'clock exactly, and the drowsy girls came trooping from the dormitories down into the wintry class-rooms.

Arithmetical diversions, in a cold chamber, were the intellectual treat which awaited Margaret and her companions. Arithmetic and slates! Does anyone remember – can anyone forget – how horribly distasteful a slate can be when the icy fingers of youth have to clasp that cold educational formation (Silurian, I believe), and to fumble with the greasy slate-pencil? With her Colenso in her lap, Margaret Shields grappled for some time with the mysteries of Tare and Tret. "Tare an' 'ouns, *I* call it," whispered Janey Harman, who had taken, in the holidays, a "course" of Lever's Irish novels. Margaret did not make very satisfactory progress with her commercial calculations. After hopelessly befogging herself, she turned to that portion of Colenso's engaging work which is most palpitating with actuality:

"If ten Surrey laborers, in mowing a field of forty acres, drink twenty-three quarts of beer, how much cider will thirteen

Devonshire laborers consume in building a stone wall of thirteen roods four poles in length, and four feet six in height?"

This problem, also, proved too severe for Margaret's mathematical endowments, and (it is extraordinary how childish the very greatest girls can be) she was playing at "oughts and crosses" with Janey Harman when the arithmetic master came round. He sat down, not unwillingly, beside Miss Shields, erased, without comment, the sportive diagrams, and set himself vigorously to elucidate (by "the low cunning of algebra") the difficult sum from Colenso.

"You see, it is like *this*," he said, mumbling rapidly, and scribbling a series of figures and letters which the pupil was expected to follow with intelligent interest. But the rapidity of the processes quite dazed Margaret: a result not unusual when the teacher understands his topic so well, and so much as a matter of course that he cannot make allowance for the benighted darkness of the learner.

"Ninety-five firkins fourteen gallons three quarts. You see, it's quite simple," said Mr. Cleghorn, the arithmetic master.

"Oh, thank you; I *see*," said Margaret, with the kind readiness of woman, who would profess to "see" the Secret of Hegel, or the inmost heart of the Binomial Theorem, or the nature of the duties of cover-point, or the latest hypothesis about the frieze of the Parthenon, rather than be troubled with prolonged explanations, which the expositor, after all, might find it inconvenient to give.

Arithmetic and algebra were not this scholar's *forte*; and no

young lady in Miss Marlett's establishment was so hungry, or so glad when eight o'clock struck and the bell rang for breakfast, as Margaret Shields.

Breakfast at Miss Marlett's was not a convivial meal. There was a long narrow table, with cross-tables at each end, these high seats, or *dais*, being occupied by Miss Marlett and the governesses. At intervals down the table were stacked huge piles of bread and butter – of extremely thick bread and surprisingly thin butter – each slice being divided into four portions. The rest of the banquet consisted solely of tea. Whether this regimen was enough to support growing girls, who had risen at seven, till dinnertime at half-past one, is a problem which, perhaps, the inexperienced intellect of man can scarcely approach with confidence. But, if girls do not always learn as much at school as could be desired, intellectually speaking, it is certain that they have every chance of acquiring Spartan habits, and of becoming accustomed (if familiarity really breeds contempt) to despise hunger and cold. Not that Miss Marlett's establishment was a *Dothegirls Hall*, nor a school much more scantily equipped with luxuries than others. But the human race has still to learn that girls need good meals just as much as, or more than, persons of maturer years. Boys are no better off at many places; but boys have opportunities of adding bloaters and chops to their breakfasts, which would be considered horribly indelicate and insubordinate conduct in girls.

"Est ce que vous aimez les tartines à l'Anglaise," said Janey

Harman to Margaret.

"Ce que j'aime dans la tartine, c'est la simplicité prime-sautière da sa nature," answered Miss Shields.

It was one of the charms of the "matinal meal" (as the author of "Guy Livingstone" calls breakfast) that the young ladies were all compelled to talk French (and such French!) during this period of refreshment.

"Toutes choses, la cuisine exceptée, sont Françaises, dans cet établissement peu recréatif," went on Janey, speaking low and fast.

"Je déteste le Français," Margaret answered, "mais je le préfère infiniment à l'Allemand."

"Comment accentuez, vous le mot préfère, Marguerite?" asked Miss Marlett, who had heard the word, and who neglected no chance of conveying instruction.

"Oh, two accents – one this way, and the other that," answered Margaret, caught unawares. She certainly did not reply in the most correct terminology.

"Vous allez perdre dix marks," remarked the schoolmistress, if incorrectly, perhaps not too severely. But perhaps it is not easy to say, off-hand, what word Miss Marlett ought to have employed for "marks."

"Voici les lettres qui arrivent," whispered Janey to Margaret, as the post-bag was brought in and deposited before Miss Marlett, who opened it with a key and withdrew the contents.

This was a trying moment for the young ladies. Miss Marlett

first sorted out all the letters for the girls, which came, indubitably and unmistakably, from fathers and mothers. Then she picked out the other letters, those directed to young ladies whom she thought she could trust, and handed them over in honorable silence. These maidens were regarded with envy by the others. Among them was not Miss Harman, whose letters Miss Marlett always deliberately opened and read before delivering them.

"Il y a une lettre pour moi, et elle va la lire," said poor Janey to her friend, who, for her part, never received any letters, save a few, at stated intervals, from Maitland. These Miss Shields used to carry about in her pocket without opening them till they were all crumply at the edges. Then she hastily mastered their contents, and made answer in the briefest and most decorous manner.

"Qui est votre correspondent?" Margaret asked. We are not defending her French.

"C'est le pauvre Harry Wyville," answered Janey. "Il est sous-lieutenant dans les Berkshires à Aldershot Pourquoi ne doit il pas écrire à moi, il est comme on diroit, mon frère."

"Est il votre parent?"

"Non, pas du tout, mais je l'ai connu pour des ans. Oh, pour des ans! Voici, elle à deux dépêches télégraphiques," Janey added, observing two orange colored envelopes which had come in the mail-bag with the letters.

As this moment Miss Marlett finished the fraternal epistle of Lieutenant Wyville, which she folded up with a frown and

returned to the envelope.

"Jeanne je veux vous parler à part, après, dans mon boudoir," remarked Miss Marlett severely; and Miss Herman, becoming a little blanched, displayed no further appetite for tartines, nor for French conversation.

Indeed, to see another, and a much older lady, read letters written to one by a lieutenant at Aldershot, whom one has known for years, and who is just like one's brother, is a trial to any girl.

Then Miss Marlett betook herself to her own correspondence, which, as Janey had noticed, included *two* telegraphic despatches in orange-colored envelopes.

That she had not rushed at these, and opened them first, proves the admirable rigidity of her discipline. Any other woman would have done so, but it was Miss Marietta rule to dispose of the pupils' correspondence before attending to her own. "Business first, pleasure afterward," was the motto of this admirable woman.

Breakfast ended, as the girls were leaving the room for the tasks of the day, Miss Marlett beckoned Margaret aside.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.