

GOING TO THE BAD.

BY EDWARD TAYLOR.

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE AVENTURE.

The hostile meeting between Colonel Willamette and Sir Frederick Randall, of which the former had spoken so lightly, had not been arranged with as little difficulty as the colonel made it appear in his conversation with his friend, Wilbur Hoyt. Not that Sir Frederick was any less ready to quarrel, or even to push the quarrel to any extremity, than his would-be antagonist; but it is probably more difficult to arrange for a duel in England than any other country in the world, and this arises from the fact that the few personal encounters of late years have been things to be laughed at rather than wept over, and that a considerable amount of ridicule is attached to the mere idea of a duel.

Sir Frederick Randall, who was, like most men, without any sense of humor, keenly susceptible to the thought of being ridiculed, was equally susceptible to the punctilio of his rank. His moral character might be as bad as people said it was, but he had the dignity of his position to uphold, and it would be impossible, he felt, for him to go out with some unknown man whose social status no one could guarantee.

Moreover, another fatal source, of inconvenience was to be found in the rose-colored domino hanging on his arm. This lady had recently made the acquaintance of Sir Frederick, who had taken a great fancy to her, and finding that he was rich, unparading in his presents, and lavish in his hospitality, she naturally did not desire the occurrence of anything which might threaten to put an end to their intimacy.

And she was wonderfully quick and observant. By many women the rapid, brilliant conversation exchanged between the two men would not have been observed, or if observed, would not have been comprehended.

Hortense Caracron was a French woman who, for the past five years of her life, had been known as one of the most brilliant, most audacious actresses on the Parisian stage, and who had been the cause of many desperate quarrels among the hot-headed youth of that gay metropolis, so that although she understood but few words of the English language, her quick intellect, experience, and knowledge of pantomime enabled her at once to perceive what was the purport of the discussion.

Accordingly, when she and Sir Frederick were free of the crowd, on their arrival at the top of the staircase, she turned to him, and speaking rapidly in French, told him that she had followed what he had said to the stranger, and that she forbade him, if he valued her regard, to proceed further in the matter.

It was an old story of Sir Frederick Randall's that he never permitted himself to be taken aback or allowed his face to show the emotions passing through his mind, so he turned to his companion with a look of surprise and a half laugh, and said:

"You fancy yourself quite able to understand English, Hortense, but you are evidently unacquainted with American, and it was in that language that that gentleman just now addressed me. His manner is short and brusque, I allow, but it is manner and nothing more. You will recollect that the vicomte who introduced me to you told you I had married an American lady—you see I know he told you everything about me—and the fact is, that that gentleman is her brother."

"The more reason that what I say is true," responded Hortense, "and that he should try to find occasion to quarrel with you."

"There is no question of quarreling at all," said Sir Frederick. "I have, as you know, determined upon separating from my wife, and her brother has come over with a view of making final arrangements. I must devote the next day and two to him and my lawyers, and in a week's time the affair will be finished. Here we are, at the door of our box; let me ask you to excuse me for five minutes; you will find several friends there, and, at the end of that time I will join you."

So saying, and having seen his fair companion safely within the box, Sir Frederick bowed and hurried to rejoin Colonel Willamette.

He found the colonel stamping up and down the corridor. The usual coolness of the English baronet, who had by this time sobered down from the debauch of his dinner, formed a marked contrast with the passionate impetuosity of the American.

"I am here, sir," said Sir Frederick, lifting his hat with special courtesy, "to receive your apology for the double insult you have placed upon me—first, by rudely pushing against my companion, and secondly, by the offensive nature of your words."

"You had better learn then at once," said Colonel Willamette, "that you are expecting what you never will receive. I am fully prepared to uphold both my actions and my words."

Sir Frederick looked at him curiously. He saw at once that the insult had been premeditated—the duel determined on. For a moment he wondered whether what he had merely given in an excuse to Hortense was really the case; whether this man was really some relation of Minnie's determined to punish him for his conduct towards her.

A strange thrill ran through him like an electric shock. Was the time really come when he was to answer for all his misdeeds? Was this man so suddenly appearing before him, so desperately intent on the purpose which possessed him, the destined instrument of his punishment?

In that moment Sir Frederick Randall lost his self-control; a feeling akin to that which crept over him when he saw, as he imagined, the ghost of his murdered wife, seemed again to take possession of him; but he quickly recovered himself, and setting his teeth tightly together, turned upon his adversary with furious determination.

"Let it be, then, as you say, sir," he said. "I, too, am fully prepared to resist any attempt at being bullied or coerced. You demand an explanation—you refuse to give one."

"I will give you any explanation you choose, at the end of my pistol-barrel," said Colonel Willamette; "but in no other way."

"I do not see," said Sir Frederick Randall, slowly, and regarding the colonel with hauteur, "that as yet, I should be justified in giving you the satisfaction which you seek. My rank and position in society are well defined; but what of yours?"

"I am an American gentleman—a colonel in the army."

"Everybody is a colonel in the army in America," said Sir Frederick with a sneer. "Your sarcasm, sir, leaves me unharmed," said Colonel Willamette. "I hold a commission in the regular army of the United States. I have served not without distinction, I may say, in the recent war. You can make inquiry for yourself. My name is Henry Willamette, and—"

"How should I know you to be the person you represent yourself?" asked Sir Frederick.

"I can refer you to the American Legation," said Henry Willamette, excitedly; "but that would take up too much time for the business I have in hand. My most intimate personal friend is Mr. Wilbur Hoyt, who, as owner of the 'Columbia,' and a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, at Cewes, is well known in the best English society."

Sir Frederick Randall bowed. "I am acquainted with Mr. Hoyt's name, though I have never had the pleasure of meeting him," he said.

"Mr. Hoyt will act for me in this matter. That I presume, is sufficient reference," said Willamette.

"Quite," said Sir Frederick, pencil in hand. "This is the address of my friend, Major Murdock. He is at this ball I know. I will make it my business to hunt him up, and send him to the Army and Navy Club, where, in an hour's time, Mr. Hoyt will find him. We can leave all preliminaries to them."

"All minor preliminaries," said the colonel, "but we may ourselves agree as to the time and place. The time, tomorrow; the place, Calais sands."

"You are somewhat peremptory, sir, in your demands, but I have no objection to offer, so let it be," and, with a grave bow, he retired.

On leaving the American gentleman, with whom he had so strange a rencontre, Sir Frederick was making his way towards his box, when he was met by a tall, bearded man, who, in a loud voice, expressed his delight at finding him.

"Just sent to look for you, my dear Frederick," he said. "Hortense is in a great state of mind. Says she overheard a row between you and some stranger, and that there is sure to be murder. I told her it was all stuff, but she would not be pacified until I came."

"There is some foundation for what she says, Murdoch," said the baronet; "and I was just now seeking for you. As I was walking with Hortense, I was insulted by a man, who turns out to be an American colonel. I thought, at first, he had pushed against me by accident, but it proved, afterwards, to be an insult given with a manifest purpose and that purpose to provoke me to a meeting."

"Indeed!" said the major. "What is his object? Did you ever do him a bad turn?"

"His object he keeps to himself, but I have a suspicion of it. However, that is neither here nor there."

"Yes, but who is the man?" cried the major. "You can't go out with every fellow!"

"This is a gentleman," said Sir Frederick Randall, raising his hat. "He has named as his friend, Mr. Wilbur Hoyt."

"I know," interrupted the major; "good-tempered, hospitable Yankee; man who owns the 'Columbia.' Saw him at the Cowes ball, last August—very decent sort of fellow—for a Yankee."

"That is the man," said Sir Frederick. "I have told this gentleman, whose name is Colonel Willamette, that Mr. Hoyt will find you at the 'Rag' in an hour's time—you had better go there and prepare for him."

"All right," said the major, "and you get home to bed. I will just stop round to Winton's and tell him to prepare Hortense and the rest of them for your absence. Go home and get a few hours' rest; you are a pretty cool hand in these matters, I know by experience; but you have been knocking about a good deal lately, and keeping late hours, and lifting your elbow too much; your nerves are a little unstrung—by the way, did this Yankee say anything about when and where?"

"He was urgent for both," said Sir Frederick. "To-morrow on Calais sands."

"Calais!" cried the major. "What a nuisance! that confounded channel passage always upsets a man, and renders his shooting hand unsteady. However, one comfort, you are a good sailor. Now good night. I will come to Park Lane as soon as I have seen Mr. Hoyt, and leave a note with your man, Foster, telling you where to meet me."

The major was moving away, but Sir Frederick called after him, "stay; stay a minute—there is something more to be said."

"Nothing—nothing, my good fellow," said the major, hastily. "We are tolerably pressed for time as it is—good night; and he hurried away."

Sir Frederick remained looking after him until he disappeared in the crowd. "Murdock is right, I suppose," he muttered to himself. "I had better go home and get what rest I can, and yet I seem to have the strangest repulsion going to that house—the strangest desire to do anything, no matter what, to fill up the time and keep me away from it. If I go through this affair well, I will change my whole style of life—cut this never-ending round of dissipation, and seek for rest, and health, and variety on the American prairies, or the Norwegian fjords. If I get safely through this—what is this strange presentiment that seems to hang so gloomily over me? I have been face to face with death before now, and never felt this strange sinking of the heart—this sense of an impending fatality which oppresses me now—I am out of tune altogether, and as nervous as a girl. A course of German baths, and then a three months' camping out in the fresh air, with plenty of exercise, and nothing but fresh water, will make another man of me."

He yawned as he spoke, and pulling it

himself together, with a mighty effort, strolled out of the theater. The usual crowd of roughs, link-bos, and hangers-on, was collected round the doors, and one of them ran for a cab.

Sir Frederick gave him a small fee for his trouble, and was stepping into the vehicle, when he suddenly drew back.

"What's that?" he cried, pointing into the corner of the carriage; "who is sitting there?"

The linkman put in his head and looked round the cab. On withdrawing it, he said:

"I don't see anything—what do you mean?"

"It is gone now," said Sir Frederick, after a hasty glance. "Stand aside, let me get in."

The linkman closed the door upon him, and as the cab drove on, turned to his mates and said: "That cove's off his head. I thought he'd got the delirium tremens, or something of that sort. Bless if I didn't think by his face he had seen a ghost in the carriage; and there was nothing there, not even Joe's nose-bag."

Sir Frederick Randall threw himself back in the cab, and pressed his hands upon his eyes. What was the matter with him? Was he going to have a fit or a paralytic stroke? Unquestionably, he had seen something—some undefined shape—lying there in the vehicle; but on mentioning it, he had only exposed himself to the ridicule of the bystanders; yet, even at that moment, he was half-fearful of looking towards the corner of the vehicle where he had seen the figure.

All right now; nothing there; he was a little unstrung, that was all; but he could set that right in a moment with a glass of brandy. He recollected that in a few minutes the cab must pass by one of his clubs, and as they passed the door, he stopped the driver and descended.

The hall porter was dozing in his easy-chair as the baronet brushed past him, but he roused at the footstep, and stared at the visitor with an eager gaze, very different from his usual respectful manner.

Sir Frederick noticed it. "What the deuce are you looking at, John?" he asked.

"Nothing," Sir Frederick, replied the man; "having a little doze, Sir Frederick—woke up suddenly, that's all."

Sir Frederick passed into the billiard-room, and called for a glass of brandy. There were only a few men there, just finishing a game of pool. He knew none of them, but thought they seemed to eye him curiously, so he tossed off his liquor and withdrew.

The generous spirit renewed the heart within him; as he passed out of the door the hall porter noticed the change in his face.

"Looks like himself again, now," he muttered. "Ruin himself by late hours—what the devil does he sit up for, when they are not obliged to, for their own pleasure, I never could understand."

No shadowy figures in the cab now. With his breast aglow, Sir Frederick does not even throw a glance before him, but bids the cabman to drive on to Park Lane, and jumps into the vehicle.

His train of thought has changed very much, and his anticipations are now roseate-hued. He shall shoot this man who has insulted him; he feels that! Not kill him, but merely sufficiently disable him to prevent the possibility of his heckling over or bullying English gentlemen for some time to come.

"What would have made the man, a total stranger, anxious to pick a quarrel with me, unless, indeed, he was a relative, or a relative of Lady Randall's, or perhaps a former lover?" Sir Frederick smiled grimly to himself, as that idea came into his mind. "If I thought that were the cause," he said, "I would certainly kill him! I have no particular love for mildity, but if I did not make an example of the first man who tries to bully me for her sake, there is no knowing how many more I may have to deal with."

"Home at last!" Not even a policeman to be seen in the long perspective of the deserted street, not a footfall on the ear. As Sir Frederick slams the door of the cab on quitting it, the noise re-echoes among the surrounding buildings, and he hears the roll of the departing wheels long after the vehicle is out of sight.

For he does not go in on the instant, but stands on the door-step, his hand in his pocket searching for his key, his thoughts wandering. Something of the old feeling of horror has come upon him again, but he strives against it. He finds the key, lets himself into the hall, and closes the door behind him.

The hall strikes cold and chilly. It is lumbered with packages of things which he has selected from among the furniture and ornaments, and which he is going to send to the store-house. It is quite dark and Sir Frederick stumbles against these packages, as he gropes his way towards the marble slab on which Foster, the valet, is in the habit of leaving a candle and matches for his master.

Here is the slab, but the candle is not there, nor are the matches! Then Sir Frederick recollects that he had given Foster leave to go into the country for two or three days to see his relations. The valet will not be there, then, when Major Murdock comes the next morning, and he, Sir Frederick, will have to be roused up to hear the message which the Major brings.

Angry at his own forgetfulness, the baronet cautiously feels his way through the hall and along the broad passage opposite, at the end of which is the room in which he has slept since his return from the hotel. There are matches there, he knows; knows too, where to lay his hand upon them.

Why does he pause, on reflection, half draw back, and then, leaning forward, strive to peer into the darkness beyond? Why does he turn his head aside, and listen eagerly? Can it be heard, that sound of hard and regular breathing, or is it merely his imagination.

Another instant and he stepped into the room; the matches are there, as he expected, on the mantel-shelf, and he has no difficulty in striking a light. As the gas flares up, he looks quickly round him.

Nothing out of place—all as he left it.

He yawned as he spoke, and pulling it

And yet this strange, nervous feeling continues!

He draws his breath thickly, and glances stealthily behind him.

Look at the bed. It is made of mahogany, in the French fashion, broad and heavy, and there is no space between it and the ground for a man to hide. Not so the wardrobe, in the far corner! Its deep recesses would afford a splendid place for concealment—and its heavy doors stand an inch or two open; he may with ease turn and tuck the key in them, and feel safer than he does.

He advances for this purpose, when suddenly the wardrobe doors fly open, and something—he knows not what—springs out!

In an instant he is on his back, the something which he now makes out to be a man kneeling on his chest, with one hand pressed tightly on his throat, and the other pulling at a rope which his arms are lassoed and bound.

He roars at aloud, but the grip at his throat is too tight—growing tighter, too, at each attempt he makes to speak. The suffocation becomes terrible.

Are his senses leaving him? No, he feels a hot breath in his face, he hears a deep voice at his ear. And this is what it says:

"Die, dog! die! Here you lie, helpless and hopeless—no one to hear you cry—no one to lend you aid. You hour has come, Frederick Randall! Do you know whose knees are at your throat? Dick Phillimore—Dick Phillimore, whom you insulted and struck, who has owed months of madness and misery to your brutality, now has you in his power, and avenges himself and Kitty Moreton at the same time!"

The old housekeeper rapped at the master's door next morning, and, after waiting some time without getting an answer, entered the room.

The shutters were closed, but the gas was still burning; and the first thing that struck her sight was the dead body of Sir Frederick, curled upon the floor, with his arms lashed to his sides by a rope, and the face horribly discolored.

BE CONTINUED.

Traveler's Column.

INTERCOLONIAL RAILWAY.
St. John, Miramichi, Campbellton, &c.

1877.—SUMMER ARRANGEMENT.—1877.
ON and AFTER MONDAY, MAY 17th, until further notice, Trains will run as follows:

Express leaves St. John at 8:10 a.m., arriving at Miramichi at 2:15 p.m., Chatham Junction at 4:30 p.m., (at Chatham Junction 5:30 p.m.) Miramichi at 4:40 p.m., Bathurst at 7:10, and Campbellton at 8:10 p.m. Train.

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