

Literature, & c.

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THE WHITE LACE BONNET.
Continued from our last.

In all the luxury of my own little table, with my own little salt-seller, my own cruet-stand, my beer glass, and its younger brother for wine, I sat awaiting the arrival of my fare, and puzzling my brains as to the unknown travellers. Now had they been but clothed in the ordinary fashion of the road—if the lady had worn a plaid cloak and a beaver bonnet—if the gentleman had a brown Tagliani and a cloth cap, with a cigar case peeping out of his breast pocket, like every body else in this smoky world—had they but the ordinary allowance of trunks and boxes—I should have been coolly conning over the leading article of "The Times," or enjoying the spicy leader in the last *Examiner*,—but no—they had shrouded themselves in a mystery, though not in garments; and the result was, that I, gifted with that inquiring spirit which Paul Pry informs us is the characteristic of the age, actually tortured myself into a fever as to who and what they might be—the origin, the course, and the probable termination of their present adventure—for an adventure I determined it must be. "People do such odd-things now a-days," said I, "there's no knowing what the deuce they may be at. I wish I even knew their names, for I am certain I shall see to-morrow or next day in the second column of the *Times*: 'Why will not W. P. and C. P. return to their afflicted friends? Write at least, write to your bereaved parents, No. 12, Russell-square; or, if F. M. S. will not inform her mother whether she has gone, the deaths of more than two of the family will be the consequence.' Now could I only find out their names, I could relieve so much family apprehension"—here comes the soup, however—admirable relief to a worried brain—how every mouthful swamps reflection—even the platitude of the waiter's face, is, as the Disenters say, "a blessed privilege," so agreeably does it divert the mind of a thought the more, and suggest that pleasant vacuity so essential to the hour of dinner. The tureen was gone, and then came one of those strange intervals which all taverns bestow, as if to test the extent of endurance and patience of their guests.

My thoughts turned at once to their old track. "I have it," said I, as a bloody minded suggestion shot through my brain. "This is an affair of charcoal and oxalic acid—this is some damnable device of arsenic and sugar-lead—these young wretches have come down here to poison themselves, and be smothered in that mode latterly introduced among us. There will be a double-locked door and smell of carbonic gas through the key hole in the morning. I have it all before me, even to the maudlin letter, with its twenty-one verses of bad poetry at the end of it. I think I hear the coroner's charge, and see the three shillings and eightpence halfpenny produced before the jury, that were found in the youth's possession, together with a small key, and a bill for a luncheon at Birmingham. By Jove, I will prevent it though; I will spoil their fun this time; if they will have physic, let them have something just as nauseous but not so injurious. My own notion is a basin of this soup and a slice of the joint, and here it comes," and thus my meditations were again destined to be cut short, and reverie give way to reality.

I was just helping myself to my second slice of mutton, when the young man entered the coffee room, and walked towards me. At first his manner evinced hesitation and indecision, and he turned to the fire place as if with some change of purpose, then, as if suddenly summoning his resolution, he came up to the table at which I sat, and said—

"Will you favor me with five minutes of your time?"

"By all means," said I, "sit down here, and I'm your man; you must excuse me though, if I proceed with my dinner, as I see it is past six o'clock, and the packet sails at seven."

"Pray, proceed," replied he, "your doing so will in part excuse the liberty I take, in obtruding myself upon you."

He paused, and although I waited for him to resume, he appeared in no humour to do so, but seemed more confused than before.

"Hang it," said he, at length, "I am a very bungling negotiator, and never, in my life, could manage a matter of any difficulty."

"Take a glass of sherry," said I, "try if that may not assist to recall your faculties."

"No, no," cried he, "I have taken a bottle of it, and, by Jove, I rather think my head is only the more addled. Do you know that I am in a most confounded scrape, I have run away with that young lady; we were at an evening party last night together, and came straight away from the supper table to the train."

"Indeed!" said I, laying down my knife and fork, not a little gratified that I was at length to learn the secret that had so long teased me. "And so you have run away with her?"

"Yes; it was no sudden thought, however—at least, it was an old attachment; I have known her these two months."

"Oh, oh," said I; "then, there was prudence in the affair."

"Perhaps you will say so," said he, quickly, "when I tell you she has £30,000 in the Funds, and something like £1,700 a year besides—not that I care a straw for the money—but, in the eye of the world, that kind of thing has its assist."

"So it has," said I, "and a very pretty *ecclat* it is, and one that, somehow or another, preserves its attractions much longer than most surprises; but I do not see the scrape after all."

"I am coming to that," said he, glancing timidly around the room. "The affair occurred this wise: we were at an evening party—a kind of *dejeune*, it was, on the Thames—Charlotte came, with her aunt—a shrewish old damsel, that has no love for me; in fact, she very soon saw my game, and resolved to thwart it. Well, of course, I was obliged to be most circumspect, and did not venture to approach her, not even to ask her to dance, the whole evening. As it grew late, however, I either became more courageous or less cautious and I did ask her for a waltz. The old lady bristled up at once, and asked for her shawl. Charlotte accepted my invitation, and said she would certainly not retire so early; and I, to cut the matter short, led her to the top of the room. We waltzed together, and then had a 'gallop,' and after that some champagne, and then another waltz; for Charlotte was resolved to give the old lady a lesson—she has spirit for anything! Well, it was growing late by this time, and we went in search of the aunt at last; but, by Jove, she was not to be found. We hunted every where for her, looked well in every corner of the supper room, where it was most likely we should discover her; and at length, to our mutual horror and dismay, we learned, that she had ordered the carriage up full hour before, and gone off, declaring that she would send Charlotte's father to fetch her home, as she herself possessed no influence over her. Here was a pretty business—the old gentleman being, as Charlotte often told me, the most choleric man in England. He had killed two brother officers in duels, and narrowly escaped being hanged at Maidstone, for shooting a waiter who delayed bringing him hot water to shave—a pleasant old boy to encounter on such an occasion as this!

"He will certainly shoot me—he will shoot you—he will kill us both!" were the only words she could utter; and my blood actually froze at the prospect before us. You may smile if you like; but let me tell you, that an outraged father, with a pair of patent revolving pistols is no laughing matter. There was nothing for it, then, but to "bolt." She saw that as soon as I did; and although she endeavored to persuade me to suffer her to return home alone, that, you know, I never could think of; and so, after some little demurrings, some tears, and some resistance, we got to the Euston square station, just as the train was starting. You may easily think, that neither of us had much time for preparation. As for myself I have come away with a ten pound note in my purse, not a shilling more have I in my possession, and here we are now, with half of that sum spent already, and how we are to get on to the north, I cannot, for the life of me, conceive."

"Oh, that's it," said I, peering shrewdly at him from under my eyelids.

"Yes, that's it, don't you think it is bad enough; and he spoke the words with a reckless frankness, that satisfied all my scruples. 'I ought to tell you,' said he, 'that my name is Blunden; I am a lieutenant in the Buffs, on leave; and now that you know my secret, will you lend me twenty pounds? which, perhaps, may be enough to carry us forward—at least, it will do, until it will be safe for me to write for money.'"

"But what would bring you to the north," said I; "why not put yourselves on board the mail packet this evening, and come to Dublin? We will marry you there, just as cheaply; pursuit of you will be just as difficult; and, I'd venture to say, you might choose a worse land for the honeymoon."

"But I have no money," said he; "you forgot that."

"For the manner of money," said I, make your mind easy. If the young lady is going away with her own consent—if, indeed, she is as anxious to get married as you are, make me the banker, and I'll give her away, be the bride's-maid, or anything else you please."

"You are a trump," said he, helping himself to another glass of my sherry; and then filling out a third, which emptied the bottle, he elapped me on the shoulder, and said, "here's your health; now come up stairs."

"Stop a moment," said I, "I must see her alone—there must be no tampering with the evidence."

He hesitated for a second, and surveyed me from head to foot, and whether it was the number of my double chins, or the rotundity of my waistcoat, divested his mind of any jealous scruples; but he smiled coolly, and said, "So you shall old buck—we will never quarrel about that."

Up stairs we went accordingly, and into a handsome drawing room on the first floor, at one end of which, with her head buried in her hands, the young lady was sitting.

"Charlotte," said he, "this gentleman is kind enough to take an interest in our fortunes, but he desires a few words with you alone."

I waved my hand to him to prevent him making any further explanation and as a signal to withdraw—he took the hint and left the room.

Now, thought I, this is the second act of the drama—what the deuce am I to do here. In the first place, some might deem it my duty to admonish the young damsel on the impropriety of the step, to draw an affecting picture of her family, to make her weep bitter tears, and end by persuading her to take a first class ticket in the up-train. This would be the grand parental line, and I shame to confess it, it was never my forte. Secondly, I might pursue the inquiry suggested by myself, and ascertain her real sentiments. This might be called the amice-auxiliary line. Or, lastly, I might try a little what might be done on my own score,

and not see £30,000 and £1,700 a year squandered by a cigar smoking lieutenant in the Buffs. As there may be different opinions about this line, I shall not give it a name. Suffice it to say, that, notwithstanding a sly peep at as pretty throat, and as well rounded an instep as ever tempted a "government Mercury," I was true to my trust, and opened the negotiation on the honest footing.

"Do you love him, my little darling," said I; for somehow consolation always struck me as own-brother to love-making. It is like endorsing a bill for a friend, which, though he tells you he'll meet, you always feel responsible for the money.

She turned upon me an arch look. By St. Patrick, I half regretted I had not tried number three, as in the sweetest voice imaginable, she said—

"Do you doubt it?" I wish I could, thought I to myself. No matter, it was too late for regrets, and so I ascertained, in a very few minutes, that she corroborated every portion of the statement, and was as deeply interested in the success of the adventure as himself.

"That will do," said I. "He is a lucky fellow—I always heard the Buffs were;" and with that I descended to the coffee room, where the young man awaited me with the greatest anxiety.

"Are you satisfied," cried he, as I entered the room.

"Perfectly," was my answer. "And now let us lose no more time; it wants but a quarter to seven, and we must be on board in ten minutes."

As I have already remarked, my fellow-travellers were not burdened with luggage, so there was little difficulty in expediting their departure; and in half an hour from that time we were gliding down the Mersey, and gazing on the spangled lamps which glittered over that great city of soap, sugar, and sassafras, train-oil, timber, and tallow. The young lady soon went below, as the night was chilly; but Blunden and myself walked the deck until near twelve o'clock, chatting over whatever came uppermost, and giving me an opportunity to perceive that, without possessing any remarkable ability or cleverness, he was one of those off-handed, candid, clearheaded, young fellows, who, when trained in the admirable discipline of the mess, become the excellent specimens of well-conducted, well-mannered gentlemen our army abounds with.

We arrived in due course in Dublin. I took my friends up to Morrison's, drove with them after breakfast to a fashionable milliner's, where the young lady, with an admirable taste, selected such articles of dress as she cared for, and I then saw them duly married. I do not mean to say that the ceremony was performed by a bishop, or a royal duke gave her away; neither can I state that the train of carriages comprised the equipages of the leading nobility. I only vouch for the fact that a little man, with a black eye and a sinister countenance, read a ceremony of his own composing, and made them write their names in a great book, and pay thirty shillings for his services; after which I put a fifty pound note into Blunden's hand, saluted the bride, and wishing them every health and happiness, took my leave.

They started at once with four posters for the north, intending to cross over to Scotland. My engagements induced me to leave town for Cork, and in less than a fortnight I found at my club, a letter from Blunden, inclosing the fifty pounds, with a thousand thanks for my prompt kindness and innumerable affectionate reminiscences from Madame. They were as happy as confound it, every one is happy for a week or a fortnight, so I crashed the letter—pitched it into the fire—was rather pleased with myself for what I had done, and thought no more of the whole transaction.

Here then my tale should have an end, and the moral is obvious. Indeed, I am not certain but some prefer it, to that which the succeeding portion conveys, thinking that the codicil revokes the body of the testament. However that may be, here goes for it.

It was about a year after this adventure that I made one of a party of six, traveling up to London by the "Grand Junction." The company were chatty, pleasant folk, and the conversation, as often happens among utter strangers, became anecdotic; many good stories were told in turn, and many pleasant comments made on them, when at length it occurred to me to mention the somewhat singular rencontre I have already narrated, as having happened to myself.

"Strange enough," said I, "the last time I journeyed along this line, nearly this time last year, a very remarkable occurrence took place. I happened to fall in with a young officer of the Buffs, eloping with an exceedingly pretty girl; she had a large fortune, and was in every respect a great 'catch'; he ran away with her from an evening party, and never remembered until he arrived at Liverpool, that he had no money for the journey. In this dilemma, the young fellow, rather spoony about the whole thing, I think would have gone quietly back by the next train, but, by Jove, I couldn't satisfy my conscience that so lovely a girl should be treated in such a manner. I rallied his courage; took him over to Ireland in the packet, and got them married next morning."

"Have I caught you at last, you old, meddling scoundrel," cried a voice, hoarse and discordant with passion, from the opposite side, and at the same time a short, thick-set, old man, with shoulders like a Hercules, sprung at me; with one hand he clutched me by the throat, and with the other he pummelled my head against the panel of the conveyance, and with such violence, that many people in the next carriage averred that they thought we had run into the down train. So sudden was the old wretch's attack, and so infuriate withal, that

it took the united force of the other passengers to detach him from my neck; and even then, as they drew him off, he kicked at me like a demon. Never has it been my lot to witness such an outbreak of wrath; and, indeed, were I to judge from the symptoms it occasioned, the old fellow had better not repeat it, or assuredly apoplexy would follow.

"That villain—that old ruffian," said he, glaring at me with flashing eyeballs, while he menaced me with his closed fist, "that cursed, meddling scoundrel is the cause of the greatest calamity of my life."

"Are you her father, then," articulated I faintly, for a misgiving came over me that my boasted benevolence might prove a mistake. "Are you her father?" The words were not out, when he dashed at me once more, and were it not for the watchfulness of the others, inevitably had finished me.

"I've heard of you, my old buck," said I, affecting a degree of ease and security in my heart, sadly belied, "I've heard of your dreadful temper already—I know you can't control yourself. I know all about the waiter at Maidstone. By Jove, they did not wrong you, and I am not surprised at your poor daughter leaving you—but he would not suffer me to conclude, and once more his wrath boiled over, and all the efforts of the others were barely sufficient to calm him into a semblance of reason.

There would be an end to my narrative if I endeavoured to convey to my reader the scenes which followed, or recount the various outbreaks of passion, which ever and anon interrupted the old man, and induced him to diverge into sundry little by-ways of lamentation upon his misfortune, and curses upon my meddling interference. Indeed his whole narrative was conducted more in the staccato style of an Italian opera father, than in the homely wrath of an English parent. The wind-up of these dissertations being always to the one purpose, and with a look of scowling passion, directed towards me, he said, "Only wait 'till we get to the station, and see if I won't do for you."

His tale, in few words, amounted to this. He was the Squire Blunden—the father of the lieutenant in the "Buffs." The youth had formed an attachment to a lady, whom he had accidentally met in a Margate steamer. The circumstances of her family and fortune were communicated to him in confidence by herself, and although she expressed her conviction of the utter impossibility of obtaining her father's consent to an untitled match, she as resolutely refused to elope with him. The result however was as we have seen; she did elope—was married—they made a wedding tour in the Highlands, and returned to Blunden-Hall two months afterwards, where the old gentleman, welcomed them with affection and forgiveness. About a fortnight after their return, it was deemed necessary to make inquiry as to the circumstances of her estate and funded property, when the young lady fell upon her knees, wept bitterly—said she had not a sixpence—that the whole thing was a "ruse;" that she had paid five pounds for a choleric father, three ten, for an aunt, warranted to wear "satins" in fact, that she had been twice married before, and had heavy misgivings that the husband were still living.

There was nothing left for it but to compromise. "I gave her," said he, "five hundred pounds to go to the devil, and I registered the same day, a solemn oath, that if I ever met the same Tramp, he should carry the impress of my knuckles on his face to the day of his death." The train reached Harrow as the old gentleman spoke. I waited until it was again in motion, and flinging wide the door, I sprang out, and from that day to this, have strenuously avoided forming acquaintance with a white lace bonnet, even at a distance, or ever befriending a lieutenant in the Buffs.

From Blackwood's Magazine.

The following highly interesting extract, pointing out the state of affairs in Europe, the commencement of the French Revolution, is taken from "Marston, or the Memoirs of a Statesman," in the above named periodical.

By midnight I was on my journey. My route lay through the Flemish provinces, which had now recovered all their luxuriance, and derived additional animation from the scene which every where follows the movement of a successful army. Troops marching to the general advance frequently and strikingly diversified the scene. Huge trains of commissariat were continually on the road. Little civic authorities we doubly conscious of the dignity of functions which brought them into contact with soldiery, from the remotest master up to the general. But the consequence of the tumult which I left behind me—the quietness of the scenes around me—the anxiety, and the restlessness of a camp, with the calm of the fields, with the regularity which seemed to govern all the operations of farming life, and with the grandeur of the old mansions, which seemed to be formed for the natural receptacles of the wealth of Flemish fields—at once re-established after the mental fever in which I had tossed so long, and perhaps impressed on me more deeply the parting advice of my friend the philosopher.

But, from the moment when I touched British ground, the whole sleepy tranquillity which gathers over every man in the provinces of Flanders, where man seems to have followed the same plough from the deluge, had utterly vanished. I was in the midst of a fermentation in a ferment. The war was the sal topic; party was in full life. From an inn at Dover up to the waiting-room at Horse-Guards, I heard nothing but the conduct of our army—the absurdity