

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

EXPERIENCES OF A BARRISTER.

THE MOTHER AND SON.

(Concluded.)

'Well,' said I, as Dr Curteis and Mr — the eminent surgeon entered the library at Mount Place the following morning after a long absence.

'As I anticipated, replied the doctor with a choking voice, 'he has been poisoned.'

I started to my feet. 'And who is the murderer?'

'Our suspicions still point to young Bourdon; but the persons of both mother and son have been secured.'

'Apari?'

'Yes; and I have despatched a servant to request the presence of a neighbor,—a county magistrate. I expect him momentarily.'

After a brief consultation, we all three directed our steps to the summer-house which contained young Bourdon's laboratory. In the room itself nothing of importance was discovered; but in an inclosed recess which we broke open, we found a curiously fashioned glass bottle half full of iodine.

'This is it,' said Mr —; 'and in a powdered state too—just ready for mixing with brandy or any other available dissolvent.' The powder had somewhat the appearance of fine black lead. Nothing further of any consequence being observed, we returned to the house, where the magistrate had already arrived.

Alfred Bourdon was first brought in; and he having been duly cautioned that he was not obliged to answer any questions, and that what he did say would be taken down, and, if necessary, used against him, I proposed the following questions:

'Have you the key of your laboratory?'

'No; the door is always open.'

'Well, then, of any other door or cupboard in the room?'

At this question his face flushed purple; he stammered, 'There is no'—and abruptly paused.

'Do I understand you to say there is no cupboard or place of concealment in the room?'

'No; here is the key.'

'Has any one had access to the cupboard or recess of which this is the key, except yourself?'

The young man shook as if smitten with ague; his lips chattered, but no articulate sound escaped them.

'You need not answer the question,' said the magistrate, 'unless you choose to do so. I again warn you that all you say, will, if necessary, be used against you.'

'No one,' he at length gasped, mastering his hesitation by a strong exertion of the will—no one *can* have had access to the place but myself. I have never parted with the key.'

Mrs Bourdon was now called in. After interchanging a glance of intense agony, and, as it seemed to me, of affectionate intelligence with her son, she calmly answered the questions put to her. They were unimportant, except the last, and that acted upon her like a galvanic shock. It was this—'Did you ever struggle with your son on the landing leading to the bedroom of the deceased for the possession of this bottle?' And I held up that which we had found in the recess.

A slight scream escaped her lips; and then she stood rigid, erect, motionless, glaring alternately at me and the fatal bottle with eyes that seemed starting from their sockets. I glanced towards the son; he was also affected in a terrible manner. His knees smote each other, and a clammy perspiration burst forth and settled upon his pallid forehead.

'Again I caution you,' iterated the magistrate, 'that you are not bound to answer any of these questions.'

The woman's lips moved. 'No—never,' she almost inaudibly gasped, and fell senseless on the floor.

As soon as she was removed, Jane Withers was called. She deposed that three days previously, as she was, just before dusk, arranging some linen in a room, a few yards distant from the bedroom of her late mistress, she was surprised at hearing a noise just outside the door, as of persons struggling, and speaking in low but earnest tones. She drew aside a corner of the muslin curtain of the window which looked upon the passage or corridor, and there saw Mrs Bourdon strive to wrest something from her son's hand. She heard Mrs Bourdon say, 'You shall not do it, or you shall not have it,' she could not be sure which. A noise of some sort seemed to alarm them; they ceased struggling, and listened attentively a few seconds; then Alfred Bourdon stole off on tip-toe, leaving the object in dispute, which witness could not distinctly see, in his mother's hand. Mrs Bourdon continued to listen, and presently Miss Armitage, opening the door of her mother's chamber, called her by name. She immediately placed what was in her hand on the marble top of a side-table standing in the corridor and hastened to Miss Armitage. Witness left the room she had been in a few minutes afterwards, and curious to know what Mrs Bourdon and her son had been struggling for, went to the side table to look at it. It was an oddly shaped glass bottle, containing a good deal of blackish grey powder, which, as she held it up to the light, looked like black lead.

'Would you be able to swear to the bottle if you saw it?'

'Certainly I should.'

'By what mark or token?'

'The name of Valpy or Vulpny was cast in to it—that is, the name was in the glass itself.'

'Is this it?'

'It is, I swear most positively.'

A letter was also read which had been taken from Bourdon's pocket. It was much creased, and was proved to be in the handwriting of Mrs Armitage. It consisted of a severe rebuke at the young man's presumption in seeking to address himself to her daughter, which insolent ingratitude, the writer said, she would never, while she lived, either forget or forgive. This last sentence was strongly underlined in a different ink from that used by the writer of the letter.

The surgeon deposed to the cause of death. It had been brought on by the action of iodine, which, administered in certain certain quantities, produced symptoms as of rapid atrophy, such as had appeared in Mrs Armitage. The glass bottle found in the recess contained iodine in a pulverised state.

I deposed that, on entering the library on the previous evening, I overheard young Mr Bourdon addressing his mother, say, 'Now that it is done past recall, I will not shrink from any consequences, be they what they may.'

This was the substance of the evidence adduced; and the magistrate, at once committed Alfred Bourdon to Cheshamford Jail, to take his trial at the next assize for 'wilful murder.' A coroner's inquisition a few days after also returned a verdict of wilful murder against him on the same evidence.

About an hour after his committal, and just previous to the arrival of the vehicle which was to convey him to the county prison, Alfred Bourdon requested an interview with me. I very reluctantly consented; but steeled as I was against him, I could not avoid feeling dreadfully shocked at the change which so brief an interval had wrought upon him. It had done the work of years. Despair—black utter despair—was written in every lineament of his expressive countenance.

'I have requested to see you,' said the unhappy culprit, rather than Dr Curteis; because he, I know, is bitterly prejudiced against me. But you will not refuse, I think the solemn request of a dying man—for a dying man I feel myself to be—however long or short the interval which stands beneath me and the scaffold. It is not with a childish hope that any assertion of mine can avail before the tribunal of the law against the evidence adduced this day, that, I with all the solemnity befitting a man whose days are numbered, declare to you that I am wholly innocent of the crime laid to my charge. I have no such expectation; I seek only that you, in pity of my youth and untimely fate, should convey to her whom I have madly presumed to worship this message:—'Alfred Bourdon was mad, but not blood guilty; and of the crime laid to his charge he is as innocent as the unborn child.'

'The pure and holy passion, young man,' said I, somewhat startled by his impressive manner, 'however presumptuous, as far as social considerations are concerned, it might be, by which you affect to be inspired, is utterly inconsistent with the cruel, dastardly crime of which such damning evidence has an hour since been given.'

'Say no more, Sir,' interrupted Bourdon, sinking back in his seat, and burying his face in his hands: 'it were a bootless errand; she could not, in the face of that evidence, believe my unsupported assertion! It were as well perhaps she did not. And yet, Sir, it is hard to be trampled into a felon's grave, loaded with the maledictions of those whom you would coin your heart to serve and bless! 'Ah Sir,' he continued, whilst tears of agony streamed through his firmly closed fingers, 'you cannot conceive the unutterable bitterness of the pang which rends the heart of him who feels that he is not only despised, but loathed, hated, execrated by her whom his soul idolises. Mine was no boyish, transient passion, it has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength. My life has been but one long dream of her. All that my soul had drunk in of beauty in the visible earth and heavens—the light of setting suns—the radiance of the silver stars—the breath of summer flowers, together with all which we imagine of celestial purity and grace, seemed to me in her incarnated, concentrated and combined. And now lost—lost—forever lost! The violence of his emotions choked his utterance; and deeply and painfully affected I hastened from his presence.

Time sped as ever onwards, surely, silently; and justice, with her feet of lead, but hands of iron, closed gradually upon her quarry. Alfred Bourdon was arraigned before a jury of his countrymen, to answer finally to the accusation of wilful murder preferred against him.

When called upon to address the jury, he delivered himself of a speech rather than a defence; of an oratorical effusion, instead of a vigorous, and, if possible, damaging commentary upon the evidence arrayed against him. It was a labored, and in part eloquent, exposition of the necessary fallibility of human judgment, illustrated by numerous examples of erroneous verdicts. His peroration I jotted down at the time:—

'Thus, my Lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it is abundantly manifest, not only by these examples, but by the testimony which every man bears in his own breast, that God could not have willed, could not have commanded his creatures to perform a pretended duty, which he vouchsafed them no power to per-

form righteously. Oh, be sure that if he had intended, if he had commanded you to pronounce irreversible decrees upon your fellow-men, quenching that life which is his highest gift, he would have endowed you with gifts to perform that duty rightly! Has he done so? Ask not alone the pages dripping with innocent blood which I have quoted but your own hearts!—Are you, according to the promise of the serpent tempter 'Gads, knowing good from evil?' of such clear omniscience that you can hurl an unprepared soul before the tribunal of its maker, in the full assurance that you have rightly loosed the silver cord which he had measured, have justly broken the golden bowl which he had fashioned! Oh my Lord, he concluded, his dark eyes flashing with excitement, 'it is possible that the first announcement of my innocence of this crime, to which you will give credence, may be proclaimed from the awful tribunal of him who alone cannot err. How if he whose eye is even now upon us, should then proclaim, 'I, too, sat in judgment on the day when you presumed to doom your fellow worm; and I saw that the murderer was not in the dock but on the bench.' Oh, my Lord, think well on what you do—pause ere you incur such fearful hazards; for be assured that for all these things God will bring you to judgment!'

He ceased, and sank back exhausted. His fervid declamation produced a considerable impression upon the auditory, but it soon disappeared before the calm, impressive charge of the judge, who reassured the startled jury by reminding them that their duty was to honestly execute the law, not to dispute about its justice. For himself, he said, sustained by a pure conscience, he was quite willing to incur the hazard hunted at by the prisoner. After a careful and luminous summing up, the jury, with very slight deliberation, returned a verdict of 'Guilty.'

As the words passed the lips of the foreman of the jury, a piercing shriek rang through the court, it proceeded from a tall figure in black, who, with closely drawn veil, had sat motionless during the trial, just before the dock. It was the prisoner's mother. The next instant she rose, and throwing back her veil, wildly exclaimed, 'He is innocent—innocent, I tell ye!—I alone!'

'Mother! mother! for the love of heaven be silent,' shouted the prisoner with frantic vehemence, and stretching himself over the dock as if to grasp and restrain her.

'Innocent I tell you,' continued the woman. 'I alone am the guilty person! It was I alone that perpetrated the deed. He knew it not, suspected it not till it was too late. Here,' she added, drawing a sheet of paper from her bosom—'here is my confession with each circumstance detailed!'

As she waved it over her head, it was snatched by her son, and, swift as lightning torn to shreds. 'She is mad,' cried her not; believe her not! He at the same time shouted at the top of his powerful voice, 'She is distracted, mad! Now, my lord, your sentence! Come!'

The tumult and excitement in the court no language which I can employ would convey an adequate impression of. As soon as calm was partially restored, Mrs Bourdon was taken into custody: the prisoner was removed; and the court adjourned, of course without passing sentence.

It was even as his mother said. Subsequent investigation, aided by her confession, amply proved that the fearful crime was conceived and perpetrated by her alone, in the frantic hope of securing for her idolised son the hand and fortune of Miss Armitage. She had often been present with him in his laboratory, and had thus become acquainted with the uses to which certain agents could be put. She had purloined the key of the recess; and he, unfortunately too late to prevent the perpetration of the crime, and by mere accident discovered the abstraction of the poison. His subsequent declarations had been made for the determined purpose of saving his mother's life by the sacrifice of his own.

The wretched woman was not reserved to fall before the justice of her country. The hand of God smote her ere the scaffold was prepared for her. She was smitten with frenzy, and died raving in the Metropolitan Lunatic Asylum. Alfred Bourdon, after a lengthened imprisonment was released. He called on me by appointment, a few days previous to his leaving this country forever; and I placed in his hands a small pocket Bible, on the fly-leaf of which was written one word—'Ellen!' His dim eye lighted up with something of its old fire as he glanced at the characters; he then closed the book, placed it in his bosom and waving me a mute farewell—I saw he durst not trust himself to speak—hastily departed. I never saw him more.

From Hogg's Instructor.

PARLIAMENTARY SKETCHES.

THE MINISTERIAL BENCH.

Next in the importance of his office—foremost perhaps in the measure of his abilities—comes Lord Palmerston, the veteran Secretary for Foreign Affairs. A member of nearly every government that has ruled England for the last thirty years, his course may yet be said to have been a consistent one, for he has always been in the race of his party—first among the liberal-minded Tories while he was a Tory, and far from lagging behind in the race of improvement since he joined the Whigs. His personal appearance, too, is prepossessing. A little above the middle size, his figure is stout and well proportioned—his air speaks more than any other man in the house, the

well-bred gentleman; while, though he is now on the shady side of sixty, his briskness and activity indicate a much less advanced stage of life. The neatness and elegance of his dress make him a pattern to all, and have occasioned him to be distinguished by the sobriquet of Cypid. But it is not by qualities like these alone that he is remarkable. Possessed of boundless fertility of resource, an unfailing fund of good temper, and with a courage that always rises with the approach of danger, he presents to us perhaps the only type we now possess of the statesmen of a former age—the Wellinghams or the Chathams who made England great. Like them, too, his devotion to his country appears to amount almost to a passion. We say this in the perfect recollection that a charge has been gravely advanced against him, of having sold himself to the promotion of the interests of Russia. But this charge, the production of monomania or of interested malignity, has never been thought worthy of a serious answer. The conduct of a life disproves it. To advance the glory of England, to signalise her name among the nations, to realise the high aims which every patriot believes to be her destiny—such are the objects which Lord Palmerston appears to propose to himself. In pursuit of these aims his means have often varied—his end has ever been the same. It is remarkable, too, that at various times his policy has been subjected to contradictory censures from politicians, who were unable to comprehend his plans, but who were not deterred on that account from criticising his measures. Thus, when, under Lord Grey, he was first appointed Secretary for Foreign Affairs, he formed a close alliance with the Revolutionary government of France in 1831, this course was censured with unsparing severity by the opposition party. It mattered nothing to them that by this alliance he kept the whole Absolutist force of Europe at bay, and was enabled to wrest from their teeth the two kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, to whom he would have given constitutional freedom if they had been able to appreciate the blessing. But when, at a subsequent period, in 1840, he separated from France, and, at his own risk, tore Syria from the lion-like grasp of Mehmet Ali, then his former censurers changed their tone. It mattered nothing to them that he had now exhibited what they had before insisted upon—the independent action of England; regardless of their former cries, the whole party went round, and exclaimed as much against his reckless separation from France as they had before done against his pusillanimous alliance. Such is the tortuous policy of party! In the meantime, it might have occurred to more candid judges that the course of England's foreign secretary was throughout one and the same—the advancement of his country's honour: with France if that were possible; if not, still his country's advancement. As a secondary object, his aim has constantly been the advancement of constitutional liberty in foreign countries. And here it is, perhaps, that his greatest failings may be discerned. He has pursued his point with a steady attachment to the end in view, but he has not always been sufficiently mindful either of the nature of the people with whom he had to deal, or of the means by which his object was to be accomplished. Forgetful of the profound maxim of Burke, that constitutions are not made, but grow, he has been too apt to imagine that every paper constitution stuffed full with the assertion of abstract rights which no one ever denied in theory, and scarce any one ever redressed to practice, was all that was necessary to set a constitutional form of government in motion, and to lead the influence of England to its support accordingly, though perhaps three-fourths of the people all the while never heard of representative government, the blessings of which had descended so unexpectedly upon them; and the mode in which he gave the influence of England was not always in the most straightforward manner. There was no declaration of war, nor even in every case a rupture with the established government, when the forces of England were co-operating with insurgent forces. Yet if no errors in this, he errs in common with great names and following high examples. Such was the policy pursued in the days of Elizabeth, when, without a declaration of war, the Earl of Leicester led a force against the Spanish troops in support of the Dutch insurgents; while Drake ravaged the towns and plundered the ships of his Catholic Majesty in the Spanish main.

One other point of his lordship's policy is worth adverting to, as illustrative of the thorough identification of his mind with English feeling. We allude to his efforts for the suppression of the slave-trade. Called to the administration of foreign affairs in 1830, when the public feeling was strong upon this point, he entered warmly into the subject, and with his whole heart laboured for its suppression. To this end he sought to engage all states, both European and continental, in one great network of treaties for the combined suppression of this nefarious traffic. How other countries have left their plighted faith, how they have evaded their engagements and wriggled out of the most solemn obligations; how, finally, they have turned round in savage anger against the man that sought to hold them to the engagements of their pledged word, needs not be here told. It is more to the purpose to mention, that when the national feeling of England began to wax dull upon the subject, when, sick with deferred hopes, and agitated at the heavy expense, especially in this hour of financial embarrassment, the public feeling has begun to waver as to the propriety of maintaining a squadron for suppressing the slave-trade, Lord Palmerston has never flinched from his early faith, but, in impassioned language, conveying lofty aspirations, he advocates the maintenance of the policy hitherto pursued, as sure to end in ultimate success, and thus add to the long