

LITERATURE, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A POLICE OFFICER.

THE TWINS.

THE records of police courts afford but imperfect evidence of the business really affected by the officers attached to them. The machinery of English criminal law is, in practice, so subservient to the caprice of individual prosecutors, that instances are constantly occurring in which flagrant violations of natural justice are, from various motives, corrupt and otherwise, withdrawn not only from the cognizance of judicial authorities, but from the reprobation of public opinion. Compromises are usually affected between the apprehension of the inculpated parties, and the public examination before a magistrate. The object of prosecution has been perhaps obtained by the preliminary step of arrest, or a criminal understanding has been arrived at in the interval; and it is then found utterly hopeless to proceed, however manifest may have appeared the guilt of the prisoner. If you adopt the expedient of calling the attendance of the accused, it is, in nine cases out of ten, mere time and trouble thrown away. The utter forgetfulness of memory, the loose recollection of facts so vividly remembered but a few hours before, the delicately scrupulous hesitation to depose confidently to the clearest verities evinced by the reluctant prosecutor, render a conviction almost impossible; so that, except in cases of flagrant and startling crimes, which are of course earnestly prosecuted by the Crown Lawyers, offences against our sovereign lady the Queen, her crown and dignity, as criminal indictments run, if no aggravated subject voluntarily appears to challenge justice in behalf of his liege lady, remain unchastised, and not unfrequently unexposed. From several examples of this prevalent abuse which have come within my own knowledge, I select the following instances, merely changing the names of the parties:

My services, the superintendent late one afternoon informed me, were required in a perplexed and entangled affair, which would probably occupy me for some time, as orders had been given to investigate the matter thoroughly.

'There is a Mr Repton, added the superintendent, a highly respectable country solicitor's card. He is from Lancashire, and is staying at Webb's Hotel, Picadilly. You are to see him at once. He will put you in possession of all the facts—surmises rather. I should say, for the facts to my apprehension are scant enough—connected with the case, and you will then use all possible diligence to ascertain first if the alleged crime has been really committed, and if so, of course to bring the criminal to justice.'

I found Mr Repton, a stout, bald-headed, gentlemanly person, about sixty years of age, just in the act of going out. 'I have a pressing engagement for this evening, Mr Waters,' said he, after glancing at the introductory note I had brought, 'and cannot possibly go into the business with the attention and minuteness it requires till the morning. But I'll tell you what: one of the parties concerned, and one too with whom you will have especially to deal, is, I know to be at Covent Garden Theatre this evening. It is of course necessary, that you should be thoroughly acquainted with his person; and if you will go with me in the cab that is waiting outside, I will step with you into the theatre and point him out.' I assented, and on entering Covent Garden pit, Mr Repton who kept behind me to avoid observation, directed my attention to a group of persons occupying the front seats of the third box in the lower tier from the stage, on the right-hand side of the house. They were—a gentleman, of about thirty years of age; his wife, a very elegant person a year or two younger; and three children, the eldest of whom, a boy, could not have been more than six or seven years old. This done, Mr Repton left the theatre, and about two or three hours afterwards, I did the same.

The next morning I breakfasted with the Lancashire solicitor by appointment. As soon as it was concluded business was at once entered upon.

'You closely observed Sir Charles Malvern yesterday evening, I presume?' said Mr Repton.

'I paid attention to the gentleman you pointed out to me, I answered. 'If he be Sir Charles Malvern.'

'He is, or at least—But of that presently. First let me inform you that Malvern was, a few months ago, a beggarly gamester, to speak with precision. He is now in good bodily health, has a charming wife and a family to whom he is much attached, an unencumbered estate of about twelve thousand a year, and has not gambled since he came into possession of the estate. This premised, is there, think you, anything remarkable in Sir Charles's demeanor?'

'Singularly so. My impression was that he was labouring under a terrible depression of spirits, caused, I imagined by pecuniary difficulties. His manner was restless, abstracted. He paid no attention whatever to anything going on on the stage, except when his wife or one of the children especially challenged his attention; and then, a brief answer returned, he relapsed into the same restless inattention as before. He is very nervous too. The box door was suddenly

opened once or twice, and I noticed his sudden start each time.'

'You have exactly described him. Well, that perturbed, unquiet feverishness of manner has constantly distinguished him since his accession to the Redwood estate, and only since then. It strengthens me and one or two others in possibly, an unfounded suspicion, which—But I had better, if I wish to render myself intelligible, relate matters in due sequence.'

'Sir Thomas Redwood, whose property in Lancashire is chiefly in neighborhood of Liverpool, met his death as did his son, Mr Archibald Redwood, about six months ago, in a very sudden and shocking manner. They were out trying a splendid mare in harness which Sir Thomas had lately purchased at a very high price. Two grooms on horseback were in attendance, to render assistance if required, for the animal was a very powerful and high spirited one. All went very well till they arrived in front of Mr Meredith's place, Oak Villa. This gentleman has a passion for firing off a number of brass cannon on the anniversary of such events as he deems worthy of the honor. This happened, unfortunately, to be one of Mr Meredith's gunpowder days; and as Sir Thomas and his son were passing, a steam of light flashed directly in the eyes of the mare, followed by the roar of artillery, at no more than about ten paces off. The terrified animal became instantly unmanageable, got the bit between her teeth, and started off at the wildest speed. The road is a curved and rugged one; and after tearing along for about half a mile, the off-wheel of the gig came, at an abrupt turn, full against a milestone. The tremendous shock hurled the two unfortunate gentlemen upon the road with frightful violence, tore the vehicle almost completely asunder, and so injured the mare that she died the next day. The alarmed grooms who had not only been unable to render assistance, but even to keep up with the terrified mare, found Mr Archibald Redwood quite dead. The spine had been broken close to the nape of the neck; his head, in fact, was doubled up, so to speak, under his body. Sir Thomas still breathed, and was conveyed to Redwood Manor House. Surgical assistance was promptly obtained; but the internal injuries were so great, that the excellent old gentleman expired a few hours after he had reached his home. I was hastily sent for; and when I arrived Sir Thomas was still fully conscious. He imparted to me matters of great moment, to which he requested I would direct, after his decease, my best care and attention. His son, I was aware, had just returned from a tour on the continent, where he had been absent for nearly a twelvemonth; but I was not aware, neither was his father till the day before his death, that Mr Archibald Redwood had not only secretly espoused a Miss Ashton—of a reduced family—but belonging to our best gentry—but had returned home, not solely for the purpose of soliciting Sir Thomas's forgiveness of his unauthorised espousals, but that the probable heir of Redwood might be born within the walls of the ancient manor house. After the first burst of passion and surprise, Sir Thomas, one of the best hearted men in the universe, cordially forgave his son's disobedience—partly, and quite rightly, imputing it too his own foolish urgency in pressing a union with one of the Lacy family, with which the baronet was very intimate, and whose estate adjoined his.'

'Well, this lady, now a widow, had been left by her husband at Chester, whilst he came on to seek an explanation with his father. Mr Archibald Redwood was to have set out the next morning in one of Sir Thomas's carriages to bring home his wife; and the baronet with his dying breath bade me assure her of his entire forgiveness, and his earnest hope and trust that through her offspring the race of the Redwoods might be continued in a direct line. The family estates, I should tell you, being strictly entailed on heirs male, devolved if no son of Mr Archibald Redwood should bar his claim, upon Charles Malvern, the son of a cousin of the late Sir Thomas Redwood. The baronet had always felt partially towards Malvern, and had assisted him pecuniarily a hundred times. Sir Thomas also directed me to draw as quickly as I could, a short will, bequeathing Mr Charles Malvern twenty thousand pounds out of the personals. I wrote as expeditiously as I could, and by the time the paper was ready for his signature, Sir Thomas was no longer conscious. I placed the pen in his hand, and I fancied he understood the purpose, but his fingers closed faintly upon it; but the power to guide was utterly gone, and only a slight scrambling stroke marked the paper as the pen slid across it in the direction of the falling arm.'

'Mr Malvern arrived at the manor house an hour after Sir Thomas breathed his last. It was clearly apparent through all his sorrow, partly real, I have no doubt, as well as partly assumed, that joy, the joy of riches, splendor, station, was dancing at his heart, and spite of all his efforts to subdue or conceal it, sparkling in his eye. I briefly, but as gently as I could, acquainted him with the true position of affairs. The revulsion of feelings which ensued entirely unmanned him; and it was not till an hour afterwards that he recovered his self possession sufficiently to converse reasonably and coolly upon his position. At last he became apparently reconciled to the sudden overclouding of his imaginatively brilliant prospects, and it was agreed that, as he was a relative to the widow, he should at once set off to break the sad news to her. Well, a few days after his departure I received a letter from him, stating that Lady Redwood—I do not think, by the way, that, as he

husband died before succeeding to the baronetcy, she is entitled to the appellation of honor; we, however call her so out of courtesy—that Lady Redwood, though prematurely confined in consequence of the intelligence of her husband's untimely death, had given birth to a female child, and that both mother and daughter were as well as could be expected. This, you will agree was perfectly satisfactory?'

'Entirely so.' 'So I thought. Mr Malvern was now unquestionably, whether Sir Charles Malvern or not, the proprietor of the Redwood estates, burdened as with a charge, in accordance with the conditions of the entails, of a thousand pounds life annuity to the late Mr Redwood's infant daughter.'

'Sir Charles returned to Redwood Manor House, where his wife and family soon afterwards arrived. Lady Redwood had been joined, I understood by her mother, Mrs Ashton, and would, when able to undertake the journey, return to her maternal home. It was two months after Sir Thomas Redwood's death that I determined to pay Lady Redwood a visit, in order to the winding up of the personal estate, which it was desirable to accomplish as speedily as possible; and not till then a new and terrible light flashed upon me.'

'What in heaven's name! I exclaimed, for the first time breaking silence—'what could there be to reveal?'

'Only,' rejoined Mr Repton, 'that ill, delicious as Lady Redwood admitted herself to have been, it was her intimate, unconquerable conviction, that she had given birth to twins.'

'Good God! And you suspect—' 'We don't know what to suspect. Should the lady's confident belief be correct, the missing child might have been a boy. You understand?'

'I do. But is there any tangible evidence to justify this horrible suspicion?'

'Yes; the surgeon apothecary and his wife, a Mr and Mrs Williams, who attended Lady Redwood, have suddenly disappeared from Chester, and from no explainable motive having left or abandoned a fair business in that place.'

'That has an ugly look.' 'True; and a few days ago I received information that Williams has been seen in Birmingham. He was well dressed, and not apparently in any business.'

'There certainly appears some ground for suspicion. What plan of operations do you propose?'

'That,' replied Mr Repton, 'I must leave to your more practised sagacity. I can only undertake that no means shall be lacking that may be required.'

'It will be better, perhaps, I suggested, after an interval of reflection, 'that I should proceed to Birmingham at once. You have of course, an accurate description of the person of Williams and his wife ready?'

'I have; and very accurate pen and ink descriptions I am told they are. Besides these, I have also here,' continued Mr Repton taking from his pocket book a sheet of carefully folded satin paper, 'a full description of the female baby, drawn up by its mother, under the impression that twins always—I believe they generally do—closely resemble each other. Light hair, blue eyes, dimpled chin,' and so on. The lady, a very charming person, I assure you, and meek and gentle as a fawn—is chiefly anxious to recover her child. You and I should our suspicions be confirmed, have other duties to perform.'

'This was pretty nearly all that passed between us, and the next day I was in Birmingham.'

The search, as I was compelled to be very cautious in my enquiries, was tedious, but finally successful. Mr and Mrs Williams I discovered living in a pretty house, with neat grounds attached, about two miles out of Birmingham, on the coach road to Wolverhampton. Their assumed name was Burridge, and I ascertained from the servant girl, who fetched their dinner and supper beer, and occasionally wine and spirits, from a neighboring tavern, that they had one child, a boy, a few months old, of whom neither father nor mother seemed very fond. By dint of much perseverance, I at length got upon pretty familiar terms with Mr Burridge, alias Williams. He spent his evenings regularly in a tavern; but with all the pains-taking, indefatigable ingenuity I employed, the chief knowledge I acquired, during three weeks of assiduous endeavor, was, that my friend Burridge intended immediately after a visit which he expected shortly to receive from a rich and influential gentleman in London, to emigrate to America, at all events to go abroad. This was, however, very significant and precious information; and very rarely indeed, was he, after I had obtained it, out of my sight or observation. At length perseverance obtained its reward. One morning I discerned my friend, much more sprucely attired than ordinarily, make his way to the railway station, and there question with eager looks every passenger that alighted from the first class carriages. At last, a gentleman whom I instantly recognised, spite of his shawl and other wrappings, arrived by the express train from London. Williams instantly accosted him, a cab was called, and away they drove. I followed in another, and saw them both alight at a hotel in New Street. I also alighted, and was mentally debating how to proceed, when Williams came out of the tavern, and proceeded in the direction of his home. I followed, overtook him, and soon contrived to ascertain that he and his wife had important business to transact in Birmingham, the next morning, which would render it impossible he should

meet me, as I proposed, till two or three o'clock in the afternoon at the earliest; and the next morning my esteemed friend informed me, he would leave the place probably forever. An hour after this interesting conversation, I, accompanied by the Chief of the Birmingham police, was closeted with the landlord of the Hotel in New Street, a highly respectable person, who promised us every assistance in his power. Sir Charles Malvern had, we found, engaged a private room for the transaction of important business with some persons he expected in the morning, and our plans were soon fully matured and agreed upon.

I slept little that night, and immediately after breakfast hastened with my Birmingham colleague to the hotel. The apartment assigned for Sir Charles Malvern's use had been a bedroom, and a large wardrobe, with a high wing at each end, still remained in it. We tried if it would hold us, and with very little stooping and squeezing, found it would do very well. The Landlord soon gave us the signal to be on the alert, and in we jammed ourselves, locking the wing doors on the inside. A minute or two afterwards Sir Charles and Mr and Mrs Williams entered, and, paper, pen, and ink having been brought, business commenced in right earnest. Their conversation it is needless to detail. It will suffice to observe that it was manifest Sir Charles, by a heavy bribe, had induced the archrouser and his wife to conceal the birth of the male child, which, as I suspected, was that which Williams and his spouse were bringing up as their own. I must do the fictitious baronet the justice to say that he had from the first the utmost anxiety that no harm should befall the boy. Mr Malvern's nervous dread lest his confederates should be questioned, had induced their hurried departure from Chester, and it now appeared that he had become aware of the suspicions entertained by Mr Repton, and could not rest till the Williamses and the child were safe out of the country. It was now insisted, by the woman more especially, that the agreement for the large annual payment to be made by Sir Charles should be fairly written out and signed in plain 'black and white,' to use Mrs Williams's expression, in order that no future misunderstandings might arise. This Mr Malvern strongly objected to; but finding the woman would accept of no other terms, he sullenly complied, and at the same time reiterated, that if any harm should befall the boy—to whom he intended, he said, to leave a handsome fortune—he would cease, regardless of consequences to himself, to pay them a single farthing.

A silence of several minutes followed, broken only by the scratching of the pen on the paper. The time to me seemed an age, squeezed, crooked, stifled as I was in that narrow box, and so I afterwards learned it did to my fellow sufferer. At length Mr Malvern said, in the same cautious whisper in which they had all hitherto spoken, 'this will do. I think,' and read what he had written. Mr and Mrs Williams signified their approval; and as matters were now fully ripe, I gently turned the key and very softly pushed open the door. The backs of the amiable trio were towards me, and as my boots were off, and the apartment thickly carpeted, I approached unperceived, and to the inexpressible horror and astonishment of the parties concerned, whose heads were bent eagerly over the important document, a hand, which belonged to neither of them, was thrust silently but swiftly forward, and grasped the precious instrument. A fierce exclamation from Mr Malvern as he started from his seat, and a convulsive scream from Mrs Williams as she fell back in hers, followed; and to add to the animation of the tableau, my friend in the opposite wing emerged at the same moment from his hiding place.

Mr Malvern comprehended at a glance the situation of affairs, made a furious dash at the paper. I was quicker as well as stronger than he, and he failed in his object. Resistance was of course out of the question; and in less than two hours we were speeding on the rail towards London, accompanied by the child, whom we intrusted to William's maid servant.

Mr Repton was still in town, and Mrs Ashton, Lady Redwood, and her unmarried sister, in their impatience of intelligence, had arrived several days before. I had the pleasure of accompanying Mr Repton with the child and his temporary nurse to Osborne's Hotel in the Adelphi; and I really at first feared for the excited mother's reason, or that she would do the infant a mischief, so tumultuous, so frenzied, was her rapturous joy at the recovery of her lost treasure. When placed in the cot beside the female infant, the resemblance of the one to the other was certainly almost perfect. I never saw before nor since so complete a likeness. This was enough for the mother; but, fortunately, we had much more satisfactory evidence, legally viewed, to establish the identity of the child in a court of law, should the necessity arise for doing so.

Here as far as I am concerned, all positive knowledge of this curious piece of family history ends. Of subsequent transactions between the parties I had no personal cognisance. I only knew there was a failure of justice, and I can pretty well guess from what motives. The parties I arrested in Birmingham were kept in strict custody for several days; but no inducement, no threats, could induce the institutors of the inquiry to appear against the detected criminals.

Mrs and Miss Ashton, Lady Redwood and her children, left town the next day for Redwood Manor; and Mr Repton coolly told the angry superintendent that "he had no instructions to prosecute." He, too, was speedily out