

# HIS CONFESSION.

It was late one chilly autumn afternoon about fifteen—no, stop, it must be twenty years ago—that the young rector of a little English church stepped out through the church yard gate, locked it behind him and stood for a moment gazing wistfully off at the blue tops of the Cornish hills, among which the village was poked much as we're poked away here. This young clergyman—what shall I call him? Blake will do as well as any name, for of course, I wouldn't give you the real name—wasn't over and above popular with his parishioners, for he had high church notions which went way above the heads of the plain peasant folk—communion candles and embroidered altar cloth and confession of sins, I see this is all Greek to you, Boice; but it was Roman to the parishioners, and they understood it just enough to strongly disapprove.

Nevertheless, as he walked slowly home through the fields with his head bent, not one of them who passed him withheld a respectful and sympathetic greeting, for the hat which he carried in his hand bore a deep crape band, the emblem of a grief which was tearing out his heart. The mourning was for his cousin, a beautiful girl, with whom he had been brought up in brother and sister style.

"Which didn't prevent him from falling in love with her, I'll bet," interrupted Carter. "Exactly. Your perspicacity does you credit, Carter. He did love her, and when she married a young physician—

"Why, in the name of thunder, thick headedness didn't he marry her himself?" This second interpolation was Boice's.

"He couldn't. That was part of his High Church platform—the celibacy of the clergy. Till she married, and to a man whom he believed to be only in love with her fortune, he never realized his true feelings toward her; and when she died, after a brief year of married life—well, we're none of us children; we've all loved women, and we know what he suffered."

"Poor Blake, poor fellow!" murmured Boice, the most soft-hearted of men who was ever stranded by mistake in a Rocky mountain mining camp. After a pause Brandreth continued:—

"When he reached home his housekeeper said: 'There was a stranger here looking for you. Did you meet him?' Blake shook his head for 'No,' and, after eating the most frugal of ascetic repasts, he called the woman to him and told her that he was summoned to London on important business and would be back in a week. Then, after himself packing his small travelling bag he gave the key of the church into her charge and bade her goodbye. From that time he was never seen or heard of in the village again."

"Who killed him?" Boice's tone was awe-struck as that of a child. "Wasn't the stranger?"

"No," said Brandreth. "He abruptly rose and laughed. They did not like his laugh. 'I don't think I'll tell you any more of this tale. It isn't a pretty one, and as it stands it is dramatic enough, in my opinion.'"

"Not in mine," said Carter. "Come we must have the remainder, since there is a remainder. You've no right to rouse our curiosity to only leave us—and your hero—in the lurch."

"An' you haven't proved your point yet," added the other man. "Concerning the blame cross-eyedness of law an' justice, you know."

Thus urged, Brandreth drew a deep breath and went on: "Well they never heard of him again. They wondered and speculated for a while and wrote to Scotland Yard once, but he was as completely lost as though the side of one of the Cornish mountains had opened and swallowed him up, and in six months they had a new rector, and in a year the old one was practically forgotten. But the newcomer had scarcely been installed before he made a singular discovery. The church linen was all gone. Surplices, altar cloth, even the white napkins which are used in the communion service, all but a few pieces had been taken from the cedar chest in the vestry room where they had been kept."

"This excited almost more wonderment than the disappearance of their austere young priest, for they all argued that a man could walk away on his two feet and of his own volition, but an altar-cloth could not be spirited off without hands. Boice, since you're playing the host, hand me down the bottle out of the cupboard, will you?"

The cattle king obeyed with lumbering alacrity. Carter, who was abstemious beyond anyone's comprehension, shook his head, but the other two men drank deeply after which Brandreth sat silent for several moments, his eyes staring into the darkness outside the door. Both his companions had strong nerves, but there was something in that dull, heavy unseeing gaze which made it a relief when he turned his face toward them and spoke again:—

"Well, murder will out! You think I'm too long-winded in coming to the point, I know, so I'll say at once what their next discovery was. It was horrible enough, I assure you, to make an excuse for all my mauling and wandering. The sexton was called on for some reason to descend into the cobwebs and darkness of the church vault, which in the days when they didn't think such things wicked had been used as a wine cellar, but had for long years been empty and unvisited. There, prone on the floor, lay a white, stark thing—a man's body. Wrapped up like a mummy, in—I suppose you can guess?"

"The stolen linen," hazarded Carter.

"Yes, the consecrated altar-cloths and napkins and stoles, all wound around the ghastly thing. His head had been beaten on the stones of the floor, which were spattered with blood, until his face was past recognition. But by the clothes which the mummy wrapping had partly preserved he was identified as the stranger who had been searching for the clergyman, Blake, on the day of his disappearance. In the skeleton hand something was convulsively grasped—

the table, and began in a slow, impressive monotone:—

"It was late one chilly autumn afternoon about fifteen—no, stop, it must be twenty years ago—that the young rector of a little English church stepped out through the church yard gate, locked it behind him and stood for a moment gazing wistfully off at the blue tops of the Cornish hills, among which the village was poked much as we're poked away here. This young clergyman—what shall I call him? Blake will do as well as any name, for of course, I wouldn't give you the real name—wasn't over and above popular with his parishioners, for he had high church notions which went way above the heads of the plain peasant folk—communion candles and embroidered altar cloth and confession of sins, I see this is all Greek to you, Boice; but it was Roman to the parishioners, and they understood it just enough to strongly disapprove."

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a gold cuff button with the initial 'B' engraved on it and a shred of cloth still hanging to it.

"That's all there is of the story, really, except that the man who did it—yes, Boice, you are quite right, it was the parson—had already changed his name, his identity, his country so securely that the dogs of the law, with all their reputed keenest of scent, have never found his trail. So that years have passed by, years in which all who were interested in pushing the search may have died, or forgotten, but he still lives, safe, hidden, unsuspected, in a community of blameless men!"

He had risen, and the spark of excitement in his small, hazel eyes made them burning foci of lurid light. His voice was shrill, triumphant, almost menacing. "Detectives have been put on his track—aye, time and again—and gone back to Scotland Yard, baffled, empty-handed. So much can a clever man do, when his life is the prize in question!"

Carter spoke, "Brandreth, why did he do it?"

"Ah, that's what no one ever knew save two, one dead, one living. What if it had been the murder of the woman he loved that Blake avenged? Would your just, your merciful law have spared him the gallows? What if he had repeated the secret whispered to him in the confession by a soul in torment—the story of a base and cunning crime, the murder of an innocent girl by a husband to whom she was but the incubance he took with her gold? Would the law have believed him and punished the murderer? There was but one way and Blake took it. Boice, was there any other way? Carter, was there?"

He seized a wrist of each with trembling fingers and gripped them fast as he poured out the words: "No one knew, though they might have guessed that Hugh Blake, the saint, the ascetic, the man of pure ideals, was not so suddenly turned into a beast of prey for nothing. A strange thing that, the conscience of a murderer. He had the cool hand, the steady nerve, the heart of iron, hunted peace and found none, with that heavy lead of an unrequited crime in his breast. And then, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper, 'he bethought him of the confessional; ah, yes, the confessional! He little knew to whom he was betraying himself; whose hands, inspired by a blind fury of avenging anger, one of the old Berserker rages of his barbaric ancestors, dragged him down the stone steps of the vault to a death too quick, too kind for such a foul creature! It would have been better, after all, to leave him with the stone in his breast to drag him down, down, year by year, to a perdition of despair.'"

Carter came over and touched him. He had that wild, unseeing look in his eyes again, and started at the touch. "Brandreth, how did you come to know of it?"

"I'm oh, indifferently, and with a quick return of his usual manner, he told me. Another case of the conscience of Can. Couldn't stand it till he had shared his secret with some one, I suppose. They say no murderer can."

"Another secret of the confessional?" asked Carter.

"What do you mean?"

Oh, I just had a feeling that at some time in your varied career you, too, had worn the carstock and listened to penitents with your ear at a little door. That's all. Just as in my day I have figured as—what do you imagine?"

As he spoke he sprang quickly to the door, placed his back against it in the attitude which always means defiance, and turned and faced them with stern penetrating eyes. Brandreth shook as with the ague before his gaze, but it was the Cattle King who, with pale lips whispered, "What?"

With a rapid movement he tore open his close coat and showed the sinister gleam of the detective's star. Great heavy drops of sweat stood out on his brow, and more than one tremor passed over his slight wiry frame, but he spoke slowly, almost impassively: "Trapped, Hugh Brandreth! Yes, I saw the name in your prayer book. You thought your judgment slumbered, did you? You thought the law had forgotten, the while it was watching you, living with you, sleeping and eating with you, only waiting for you to betray yourself into its hands as you have done tonight."

"Traitor!" Brandreth hissed between his deadly white lips. "I was prepared, though—"

He had drawn his revolver, but the other man's pistol was already pointed at his head.

"I, too, was prepared," said Carter, grimly. "You remember I carried it for you on the way home from the town tonight? I loaded it then, when your back was turned. I am not a traitor. I am the representative of the law."

He held his pistol steadily pointed at the trembling man, while with the other hand he drew a pair of baraquets from somewhere on his person. "Put them on him, Boice."

"I couldn't lock him up in them things if it was I was to swing on the gallows and not he."

"You know you will be held responsible for refusing to aid in the capture of a criminal?"

"I didn't know it, but I don't care. I won't help to get away, but I'll be damned before I'll help to trap him. There you have my intentions fair and square." He sat down with a dogged look on his face.

"If I move will you shoot?" asked the outlaw of his whilom friend, with a slight, shivering smile.

"No," said Carter. "I'm to bring you back alive, Hugh Brandreth, and not to help you escape—by any road. What! Stop him. Boice, in the name of the law!"

A sound like the bursting of a bomb and a dense curtain of flame filled the cabin before the words were well out of his mouth. It was never clear who overturned the lamp—Boice stoutly protested that he had not done it—and that in his



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leap for liberty and the open window. Brandreth had dashed it to the floor. At the moment there was but one thought—self preservation. The cattle king dragged Carter away from the flames and falling timbers, but the detective shook him off and attempted to re-enter the now roofless structure. A hot wind like a blast from the mouth of Gonnenna and a barrier of tongues of fire beyond which no man might pass without risk of his life, beat him back. Silently he turned and rejoined the cattle king, and silently they stood together and witnessed the swift destruction of the light frame building and all that it contained. Now and then thoughts of the now charred body which was hidden from their sight by the veil of flame sent a shudder through each, but to each there came another thought which took part of the sting from the horror.

"There was only one way," whispered Boice to Carter, as the red wind of death wrapped the remnants of the cabin still closer in its embrace, and they shrank back further from its burning breath.

"Yes," was the reply, "and Brandreth took it—thank God!"—Louise Beets Edwards in Philadelphia Times.

## A Trio of Afflictions.

VARIED AGONIES FOR LONG YEARS

A Man of Seventy-four Years Feels Young Again.

Paine's Celery Compound Gives Him New Blood, Activity and Strength.

The Great Medicine Removes His Troubles and Burdens

His Cure Vouched For by a Justice of the Peace.

Mr. Thomas R. Baxter of Karsdale, N. S., aged 74 years and fast nearing the grave from a terrible complication of diseases—erysipelas for 40 years, bleeding piles for 15 years, and sciatic rheumatism for over a year—was rescued from torture, agony and death by Paine's Celery Compound after all other means had failed.

After reading the following statement, vouched for by a Justice of the Peace, how can any sane man or woman entertain doubts as to the curing virtues of earth's only honest life giving medicine?

Mr. Baxter writes as follows: "I desire to let you know about my wonderful cure by your precious medicine, Paine's Celery Compound."

"I was afflicted by three complaints that made my life a misery and a burden. I had erysipelas for 40 years, bleeding piles for 15 years, and sciatic rheumatism for over a year."

"I tried the doctors and all kinds of medicines, but no help or relief was afforded me, and I could not eat or sleep. I was then advised to use Paine's Celery Compound, and, oh, what a mighty change! The use of the first bottle enabled me to eat and sleep, and after using seven bottles I was quite another man; was perfectly cured, and felt young again. All that I have written can be proven by merchants, doctors, magistrates, and by three ministers of the Gospel, and by scores of other people. I shall always thank you and your wonderful medicine, Paine's Celery Compound."

"I hereby certify that Paine's Celery Compound has made a well man of Thomas R. Baxter."

JAMES H. THORNE, Justice of the Peace.

## THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

An Experience That Followed a Call at Night.

Four or five physicians were talking up town the other evening at the home of one, and the conversation later turned to shop. One of them had recently moved his office down town, and there was some discussion as to the advisability of separating house and office.

"Well," said the separatist, "I can't see any difference so long as I am at my office during office hours."

"Let me tell you a story," remarked the oldest man in the party. "Thirty years ago, when I began practice, I lived in Virginia, and for a year or two I slept in my office. Then I married, and my wife owned a nice house, and I went to it to live. It sat back from the street about 50 feet, and we decided that it would be much nicer if we had my office out on the street in the far corner of the lot. Only 50 feet away, you will observe, but still it was enough. In order to see such callers as came during the night I had a night bell and a speaking tube connecting the front door of the office with my bedroom. You see I did not want a patient to escape under any circumstances."

"Well, everything went nicely enough for three years or so, when one night a ring came to my bell. It was then about 2 o'clock in the morning, and the ring was a hot one. I asked who it was, and the answer came from a friend of mine to the effect that he was a mighty sick man and wanted to see me at once. I told him to come around to the house and I would meet him at the door and take care of him. Then I got up, and, putting on my dressing gown and slippers, I proceeded to the front door. But there was no one there and no one in sight on the way between the gate and the house."

"That was odd, and I went back and called through the tube to know what was wrong. I received no answer, and, being quite unable to account for it, I took my lamp—it was a very dark and still night—and started to go out and investigate. Just as I was about to step off the porch I lowered my lamp to get a better light on the step, and there at the foot of the porch lay a body. I turned it over at once, and as the light fell on the face I saw it was my friend who had only a minute before spoken to me. He was quite dead. And when an examination was made, it was discovered that he had died of heart disease, and so near to me that I could almost have touched him. Possible I could not have been of any service to him if I had seen him when he first rang the bell, but the possibility that I might so affected me that from that day to this I have had my office as near my bed as I could get it."—Exchange.

## INJURY AND NEGLECT.

He Failed in Health and Strength—His Kidneys Ached and He Took Dodd's Kidney Pills.

DESERONTO, FEB. 15. (Special)—Among business people here, and especially by his fellow workmen great interest has been taken in the case of Mr. James Stokes, who for the past fifteen years has been shipper for the Rathbun Company. Lately he had run down in health and strength to the point of being compelled to quit work and his recovery now as the result of using Dodd's Kidney Pills, is the talk of the town. On seeing Mr. Stokes he said:—

"From overlifting and strain I suffered greatly from kidney trouble, being advised after all else had failed, to use Dodd's Kidney Pills, from the first dose I got relief, and hundreds of people here can vouch for my cure."