

A Murderer's Confession.

BY R. L. FARJEON.

Yes, I will make my confession. The chaplain will think that I do it because of his exhortations. Let him think so. Try as hard as he likes, he can't make me believe that I can earn heaven or hell by simply writing a few words on a sheet of paper. What I am going to do is for my own sake.

To keep it any longer to myself will drive me mad, and I want to keep my reason to the last—if I can. The secret presses upon me like red hot bands of steel. I must burst them asunder. The fire of silence and the anguish of it is more than I can bear; it is eating into my heart. I must, I must confess!

They did not bring me a steel pen, with which I could have opened a vein in the middle of the night, but a soft quill, quite useless for the purpose of self destruction. But even were the means within my reach, and I could screw my courage to the sticking point (I heard that in a play once, and the actress was speaking of murder), even then I doubt whether I should be able to accomplish it. I should require to be alone to carry my design into execution. And I was never alone! It is not only that I am watched and guarded by human forms; if that were not so, and if they left me to myself, I should have company.

Oh, God! The accusing eyes, the terrible white face, with its stains of blood! She was pretty, when she lived, with soft red lips, and her white teeth shining with smiles, but now she is appalling. My guardian devil, in the shape of a living warder, who sits in a corner of my cell pretending to watch me, has no consciousness of the awful figure standing between me and him. It stands there now; I have but to raise my eyes to see it. If he could see it as I do he would leap to his feet and shriek and beat down the door to escape from the terror. Why do I not make an effort to rid myself of it? I did at first; I writhed on the ground and then, rising in a fury of despair, strove to grasp and strangle it.

But it encompassed me instead and breathed an agony into my limbs, so that I could not stand upright in its presence. I know now that it will never leave me in this world. Will it in the next, or am I doomed through all eternity to be cursed with its horrible companionship? If it is light there, it will be some small relief of the torture; but if darkness surrounds me, and it—I will not dare not think of it! You cannot see the phantom, can you, my watchful warder, sitting on your bench, quiet and calm, with your sly eyes observing every movement I make, and ready, upon the slightest indication, to prevent me from doing myself any harm?

They are very careful of me. Oh, very, very careful! Never was my life so precious as now—as now, when they have resolved to strangle it out of me! If I scratched my finger with a splinter of wood and a drop of blood were to appear that would rush for the doctor and put ointment on my flesh and treat me as tenderly as a mother treats her first babe.

O my God—what have I written! It was my mother's first babe—her dearest, her most cherished, upon whom she lavished all her love. She did not care for my sister as she cared for me, and yet Patsie, with her large blue eyes and golden curls, was a pretty little thing. She worshipped me, too, in her own sweet, childlike way. It was I who was the idol of the home, the hero, the prince, whom they adored and bowed down to.

The honors I won at school were greater in their eyes than the achievements of the greatest conquerors in the world's history. Even when Patsie died, my mother was grateful that she was taken instead of me. We sat in the dark on the night of the funeral, and I knew from the words my mother spoke that she was glad I was by her side instead of Patsie.

"It is so hard for girls to get along in the world," she said, between her sobs, "and they don't remember their mothers as boys do. 'A son is a son all the days of his life; a daughter is a daughter till she becomes a wife.' I must not repine. I have much to be grateful for. You will not forget me, darling?"

"No, mother," I answered, "never."

From that day she worshipped me with even a deeper, more profound worship. You see, I was all in the world she had to love. Ah, the future she had mapped out for me! The joy she was to draw from my honored manhood! She conjured up pictures of the future, the happy future she was to share with me.

"And when my dear lad is married," she said, "and has a little son of his own—"

"Merciful God! Is it all a dream? A dream? No. Was not my old mother here yesterday, pale and thin, and we-begone, with patches of white hair sticking out of her temples, looking at me sorrowfully and reproachfully, her eyes so full of tears, that I felt as if she had looked at me as a child?"

"Be calm, my child, be calm," she said, "and dare he look them in the face after what he has done?"

Her wistful voice, its trembling accents, stabbed me to the heart. No thought of herself—but that was ever so. By my selfishness and extravagance I brought her to poverty's door, and never from her lips have I heard one word of remonstrance or reproach. It was not possible, in her loving thoughts of me, that I could do wrong, that I could swerve from the straight path of duty and right doing.

"Be calm, my child, be calm."

"Oh, mother, mother!" I sobbed.

She sat in the court during my trial, quivering, panting, enduring such anguish as never yet fell to a loving mother's lot, and when my eyes met hers she strove to comfort and strengthen me by wan, pitiful smiles. Before and afterwards, when my doom was pronounced, she did not ask me if I was innocent. Such a question would have been a treason to love. And now, in this last interview, with one hand upon my head and the other raised to heaven, she called down vengeance upon those who had unjustly condemned me.

"I pray day and night," she said, "upon my bended knees, with all the strength of my heart and soul, I pray that the murderer may be discovered before the dreadful hour that is so near. Oh, my boy, my boy! My darling, innocent boy!"

And all the while she spoke the appalling phantom was standing just behind her, with its eyes fixed upon mine. Then it was that I felt myself compelled to suggest the doubt, which mercifully, had never yet occurred to her.

"Mother, you do not believe I am guilty, do you?"

"Gracious God!" she cried. "Why do you ask me such a question? Is it to try me?" Am I a monster that such a wicked thought could enter my mind? Believe you guilty, my innocent, suffering child? No! Though an angel from heaven were to accuse you, I would not believe it. I should know it was done for some purpose—to try me, perhaps, as you are trying me; but if my soul's salvation depended upon it they could not make me believe a thing so monstrous, so false, so cruel!"

The lips of the appalling phantom standing behind her moved, and I seemed to see the words:

"Tell her. Make confession."

It was not an entreaty; it was a command. I hardened my heart, and did not speak.

Then my mother related a strange story of what had occurred to her on the previous night. She was alone in her miserable garret—yes, I brought her to that by my selfish demands upon her. Many and many a time has she given me her last piece of money and gone without food, to gratify me.

My father left her a comfortable home. I robbed her of it. He left her an income sufficient for her wants. I robbed her of it, to the last farthing, and upon the altar of a mother's unfathomable love, she sacrificed it willingly, cheerfully, gladly. How often has she said to me, "Here, my darling, take it, and God bless you!" And I took it, heedlessly, and left her to starve.

Is there anything on your conscience, you watchful limb of the law, that you could not stand and face it out; that you could not summon courage enough to drag me from my coffin, and ask me what the devil I was grinning for, when I ought to be lying like a log of wood in my box gray and dead, waiting for what was going to happen next? There is such a conscious strength in righteousness, you know, that it ought not to be scared by such a light thing as a dead man's mirth. Have you committed a crime so horrible that people shudder at the mere mention of it? Here take my pen, and confess as I am about to do.

And there was my old mother, kneeling, pressing me to her breast, and telling me that she was going to save her innocent boy; while the dread phantom looked down upon me with its accusing eyes. My mother recalled such tender reminiscences to comfort me as a memorable holiday in the country, by the seaside in the summer, when she and I and Patsie played upon the sands, and rowing in a boat on the blue sea, and listened to the boatman's stories—false, no doubt—about whales and storms and shipwreck. We had a wagonette and a picnic in the woods, where we pelted each other with flowers.

"Patsie is up there," said my mother, raising her eyes to the black ceiling. "waiting for us. But we will not go until we are called in a natural way, and until my darling's innocence is established. Patsie is working for you there, as I am working here."

Then she sang a hymn, in a thin, piping voice, and would have liked me to join with her in the singing. But I could not; my throat was parched.

The jailer laid his hand upon her and lifted her to her feet.

"This is up," he said, in a low tone; "you must go."

"Cannot I take my dear boy with me," she said, "only for a few minutes to breathe the fresh air?"

He shook his head, but did not answer in words.

"See," she said, taking some coins from her pocket, "these are for you. It is all I have got."

I shuddered, she looked so hungry and pinched. The sum she held out to me was threepence halfpenny.

"I would give you more if I had it," she whispered. "Take it; no one will know."

He shook his head again, and he dared not allow her to remain any longer.

"To-night," she said to him with vacant nods of her head, and smiling piteously at me, "to-night I will bring the real murderer to you, and you will set my son free. You will— you will tear you to pieces. Oh, such things have been done, and prisons have been broken open! If I do not bring the murderer to-night I will to-morrow night. You shall not murder my innocent boy! God will not permit you!"

The coppers she had offered him fell to the ground; he picked them up and pressed them into her hand.

"What is the use?" she moaned. "If I had gold you would do what I want you. Oh, I know you would! Justice can be bought."

She pressed me in her arms again; her tears ran down my sinful face. I shook like a leaf. He disengaged her arms gently from my neck. She was too exhausted to resist, and as he supported her fainting form to the door she murmured:

"To-night, to-night! Or if not to-night, to-morrow night! Keep the gates open for me! I shall see you again, my darling, in a few hours. Don't lose heart. Your old mother will save you!"

She was gone. The last human link that bound me to this world was snapped. Never again—never again!

I thought of her last night, tramping the streets. It was raining hard, the warden told me.

"I haven't asked a favor of you yet," I said. "Tell me something more."

"What do you want to know?"

"Has my mother been outside of prison walls today?"

"I have not seen her myself," he replied. "I was told she had been hanging about."

"Is she not there now?"

"No, she is not there now?"

It was a foolish question. I knew where she was—toiling through the pelting rain in search of the man she had followed the night before. A startling contrast presented itself to me. I saw her as she was at the present time, shivering, attenuated, starving; her few poor clothes drenched with rain; and as she used to be in the days of my childhood, a blooming, pretty woman, with ever a smile on her lips, with ever a look of tenderness for me; the pride of her loving heart. There was an old fashioned song she used to sing.

"Let us haste to Kelvin Grove, Bonnie Lassie O!" How sweetly she sang it! How supremely happy she was! And now, there upon the bridge, she was flinging last night, and will linger tonight, in vain hope of saving the innocent child, the guilty man. Tonight! My last night on earth! The stars will shine no more for me. My last, last night! I must hasten with my confession, for time is wasting fast.

My confession! What a sensation it will create! The newspapers will be filled with it. The reporters will be running like mad in all directions, and their pens will be flying over the paper, tearing and scratching at it, like bloodhounds tearing at the earth for evidence of a crime hidden beneath. The telegraph will be flashing the tempting news all over the world. The placards will blazon it in enormous letters, and some of them will be printed in red ink.

The snug policemen will walk their beats, with their heads an inch nearer the sky. When a man whom they have apprehended confesses to the murder it adds distinction to their calling. But why don't they discover the others? If I had been as cunning as some, I too might now be a free man. The newspapers will bawl out the delicious morsel in the street, screaming at the top of their voices, in tones of exultant excitement: "The murderer's confession! Full and particular account of it! Horrible disclosures!"

There they are winking at each other at the trade they are driving, and wishing there was a murder like this every day. The rascals will charge two pence, three pence, six pence for a penny paper—I have paid it myself, when a big murder case was over. What bustle and animation everywhere! It will be like a holiday. Hundreds of pounds will be poured into the newspaper tills. I can see my old mother staggering through the streets with the horrid din in her ears.

"What! My baby boy, my darling innocent lad confess to a crime he never committed! You liars—you yourselves sell your papers! Don't believe them, gentlemen, don't believe them!"

The crowd follow her as she stumbles on, pleading, moaning, wringing her hands.

"Who is she?" some ask of the others.

"Who is she? Why, his mother—the murderer's mother! Hooray! Hooray!"

They tear after her, they surround her, they jeer at her white hair, they laugh in her despairing face. There hasn't been such a treat in the streets for months and months. And when she manages to escape from them, and hides herself in her garret, lying on the floor, moaning and sobbing at the wickedness of the world, the mob of people outside linger for hours and point out the house which hides the murderer's mother from their pitiless gaze. Why, if she were to exhibit herself in the music halls and sing a song about me, she would make a fortune in a month.

I can see the newspaper boys treating themselves to the galleries of the theaters, and afterwards to hot pies baked potatoes, paid for with the money they have made out of my confession. Add what will all these people do for me? Will they cast one compassionate thought upon me,

waiting here in my prison cell, counting the strokes of the church clock, and counting up how many more I shall hear before death folds me in its arms, tight, tight, tight, till I am done for?

Damn them, one and all! I will not confess!

Africa's Great Forests.

The great forest through which Stanley recently passed, which he estimated to cover 246,000 square miles, is only a small part of the great African forest which extends almost unbrokenly from the west coast in the Gaboon and Ogowe regions, with a width of over several hundred miles, in the great lakes. This belt of timber, trending away to the heart of the continent in a direction a little south of east, is the greatest forest region in the world, according to the New York Sun. A part of it strikes south of the Congo at the great northern bend of that river, and the country embraced within the big curve is covered with a compact forest, the towering and wide-spreading trees shutting out a large part of the sunlight.

In these forests, completely shut out from the rest of the world, live hundreds of thousands of people who are almost unknown to the tribes living in the savanna regions outside. Scattered through the big woods within the Congo bend are little communities of Batwa dwarfs, of whose existence the traveler has no inkling until he suddenly comes upon them. Here also, along the Sankuru River, are the tree habitations described by Dr. Wolf, where the natives live in huts built among the branches to escape the river floods. It was in great clearings made in these forests that Kund and Tappenbeck discovered some of the most notable villages yet found in Africa, where well-built huts, with gabled roofs, live both sides of a neatly kept street that stretches away for eight or nine miles. These villages are even more interesting than the street towns in the more sparsely timbered regions south of them, which were regarded as very wonderful when they were first discovered by Wissmann. It was his account of these villages that led Bishop Taylor to choose this part of Africa as the goal he wished to reach.

Last year the Commercial Company which is investigating the trade resources of the Congo, sent its steamer, the Roi des Belges, up the Ikatta River into this great timber land, and the explorers described the country along the banks as "covered with an almost impenetrable virgin forest. It is a veritable ocean of verdure, from which emerges here and there a wooded mountain." Greenfell penetrated the forest for long distances on several southern tributaries of the Congo, and on the upper courses of these rivers he sometimes found the wide-spreading branches forming a complete roof above the stream.

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LIVELY TURNS OF THOUGHT.

A London milliner has invented a more exact. It is made wholly of the back of the cork tree and is very light.

There is a southern superstition that anyone who digs into an Indian burial mound is sure to meet with quick and summary retribution.

Cooking dandelions in a frying pan with a little water and a thin slice of bacon is the latest recommended way for making a toothful spring dish.

Minnesota has passed a law providing for executions before sunrise, and allowing the condemned to invite three persons to witness their execution.

The largest circulation on record is that attained by the volume "Hymns, Ancient and Modern." Twenty million copies have been sold in the eighteen years of its existence.

There is in the poor house at Albany, Ga., a negro who says he is 122 years old, and that he used to see George Washington, often, and "kiss my hat and say bonny to him."

It is alleged that the United States buys all the cheap tea grown in China, while the best grades go to England and France. In return, however, we send to China all the poorest and cheapest canned goods.

The average woman walks further in a week than a drover, she stands on her feet more than a blacksmith, she defies the laws of health more than the Indian, and then wonders why she isn't well like other folks.

In a case in a Rhode Island court the other day it was shown a farmer wanted a ramp to saw three cords of wood as a way for lodgings and breakfast; and when the man refused he was set upon and badly beaten.

Miss Kate Drexel, who was left a fortune of \$2,000,000 by her father, entered the convent of the Sisters of Mercy at Pittsburgh recently. She was received as a novice, and at the end of two years will receive the black veil.

Some recent experiments made in France prove that a person sitting in a draught, no matter how warm the wind, will catch cold in from three to ten minutes. Even a change of neckties gave one subject a cold in the head.

Two families living in the same house in St. Louis buy a keg of beer at the time and the keg is kept at both ends and each family draws from a separate spigot. In this way, as they figure, neither can get more than his fair share.

The ravages of the birds in the corn fields of Barnwell county, South Carolina, are almost without precedent. In many places the birds have been planted the second time, and now the birds are devouring the young corn as fast as it appears.

Hattie Clark and Fannie Pennington, two young ladies of Lincoln, Neb., astonished their friends recently by eloping with a party of Gypsies consisting of two men and one old woman. The girls are about sixteen years old and quite handsome.

Some essential oil distillers at Salisbury, Pa., are now busily extracting oil from the birch, which is very plentiful in the vicinity. The oil is used for medicine, perfume and candy flavoring. The raw article is a favorite with country school-boys.

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A cow belonging to Isaac Whitesides of Jeffersonville, Ind., was bitten by a rapid dog and showed symptoms of hydrophobia. She broke out of her stable and charged everything in sight, several persons having very narrow escapes. A daring youth intercepted the animal and cut her throat.

The greatest harvest reaped by New Yorkers during the centennial was from window lettings and the next by the liquor trade. The hotels and restaurants also did an immense business. The fashionable stores, on the other hand, were almost deserted. No one wanted to go shopping at such a time.

Woman's right to clothe herself in masculine garments is fast being recognized in Paris. Formerly it was prosecuted, but is now tolerated by the police, and is recognized as permissible in high social circles. One well-known authoress is said to exhibit herself almost every day on the boulevards in the disguise of a man.

Instead of encouraging emigration, as hitherto, the authorities of Ireland are discouraging it, the people are leaving the country so fast. At Limerick the matter is creating much attention. So many emigrants for the United States are passing through the town that there is almost a fear that the country will be depopulated.

It is said that once in every twenty years the common swamp cane of Georgia blooms. W. H. Carpenter, of Elbert county, says that in 1829 all the brakes were in bloom in that county, and that now, in 1899 they are again in flower. The bloom is as blue as indigo. He also says it is a sure sign of a good crop year, for in 1899 it bloomed and it was the best crop year ever known in that section.

Many cruelties are said to be practiced on the Indians of the Flathead reservation in Montana by the native police. The religious and moral teachers are said to encourage the savage in these customs. Easter Sunday is made a grand whipping day at the mission, and the women are especially chastised. An Indian woman was recently whipped with her hands tied behind her back and then thrust into prison, while imprisoned the unfortunate victim gave birth to a dead infant, according to the Portland Oregonian. An investigator by the government authorities at Washington might develop some startling facts.

What are known by the name of iron bricks have been satisfactorily introduced as paving material in some parts of Germany. These bricks are made by mixing equal parts of finely ground red argillaceous slate and finely ground clay, with the addition of 5 per cent of iron ore. The ingredients thus mixed together are then moistened with a solution of 25 per cent of sulphate of iron ore, to which fine iron ore is added, until the mass shows a consistency of 38 degrees Baume. After this the compound is shaped in a press, dried, dipped once or more in a nearly concentrated solution of steel ground iron ore and then baked in a crucible for about forty-eight hours in a reducing flame.

Ready With an Answer.
Benjamin F. Butler, in the early days of his practice at the bar, was required to give some legal notice in a suit in which he was engaged. The judge asked him to name the newspaper in which he desired the advertisement inserted. Butler was at that time an ardent northern Democrat, and The Lowell Advertiser, a journal entirely ignored by most of the community, was the only organ of his party in the judicial district.

"In what paper?" asked the clerk contemptuously, when told to insert the notice in The Advertiser. "I don't know such a paper."

"May it please your honor," Butler replied, "I trust the clerk will not interrupt the proceedings by attempting to tell us what he doesn't know, because if he does, we might as well adjourn till after the day of judgment."—San Francisco Argonaut.