

# TRACKED.

PART FIRST.  
CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DEAD CHILD AND THE LIVING ONE.

The facts elicited at the inquest were to this effect. Mrs. Blakely's maid was the most important witness, and her deposition was as follows:

Edith had gone to her bed about ten o'clock, and saying that she was sleepy and would not require anything more, had dismissed her. After leaving her mistress, the woman, intending to remain up until the party should return from the ball, sat down to needle work in her own room. It so happened that, for some reason which did not transpire, she had been shifted from the chamber close to her mistress, which she usually occupied, to one in the opposite wing of the building.

This fact was particularly insisted upon, as it accounted for the murderer being able to commit the deed without her hearing any sounds that might have aroused her alarm. At about one o'clock she thought she would look into Mrs. Blakely's room to see if she was sleeping. All was dark. Wondering who could have extinguished the night-light, she groped about for the matches. In doing so, she stumbled over some soft substance which was lying upon the floor; stooping down to feel what it was, she discovered it to be a pillow. With a feeling that something was wrong, she struck a light, and lit one of the wax candles that stood upon the dressing-table. And then an awful sight met her view.

The bed was all in disorder, as though it had been the scene of a violent struggle; and lying back upon the bolster, with her face swollen and discolored, was her mistress, quite dead. Her piercing shrieks soon brought other servants to her assistance. A messenger was dispatched, post haste, to break the terrible news to Mr. Blakely. The horror created by the intelligence may be imagined. The ball was broken up. Pale and trembling, the unhappy husband rushed from the room, and springing upon the servant's horse, rode furiously homeward. The rest of the party, accompanied by several others, followed in their carriages as quickly as possible.

When Robert Blakely drew up at the Hall, he reeled, and would have fallen from the horse's back, had not a servant caught him in his arms; and when he reached his wife's apartment he would have swooned dead had not given him brandy. His grief did not vent itself in sobs or cries—it seemed to paralyze his faculties; he sat cowering in a chair, his face white and rigid, his eyes gazing on vacancy, giving no sign of life beyond an occasional shiver.

But who had done the deed? The only article missing was a magnificent gold watch, set with diamonds, and bearing upon the back the initials E. and R., in small rubies and emeralds. It was a present made by Robert to his wife upon his accession to the estates. Edith always wore the watch, and used at night to place it upon her dressing-table. It was nowhere to be found.

But something else was found that seemed to give a clue to the murderer. A cambric pocket handkerchief, in one corner of which was written, in marking ink, "Ernest Wieland." This was found upon the floor near the bed.

Where was Ernest Wieland? He was nowhere to be found.

He had mysteriously disappeared from the ball room soon after eleven o'clock, without assigning any reason even to Helen, with whom he was the last to dance. He had borrowed a horse from his host's stable, upon which he rode back to the Hall. The servant who admitted him said that it was a little before twelve o'clock when he arrived there; and the groom, to whom he threw the bridle of his horse, remarked that, cold as the night was, the animal was reeking with perspiration, as though it had been hard ridden. Wieland had gone at once to his own room, and had never been seen since. He could not have quitted the house by the front door without being seen, and the approaches to the side and back entrances all lay through the servants' quarters. How, then, he managed to get away unobserved was another mystery.

Upon searching his apartment, all his books, trinkets, and clothes—except the dress suit he had worn—were in their usual places. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed except his desk, which lay open—empty, every scrap of writing having been taken out of it.

Of course, everybody at once concluded that he was the guilty party. A reward was issued for his apprehension, and rigid inquiries respecting his past life were set on foot.

As being a friend of some long standing, it was naturally supposed that Mr. Blakely could furnish the police with important information. But when it came to the point, it appeared that that gentleman knew little or nothing of the man who had been his guest so many months.

He had been a fellow-lodger with him in some shady quarter of London in his poor days, and they had gradually formed an acquaintance with each other. Mr. Blakely believed that he wrote for some newspapers and some journals, but not being a reading man himself, he had never cared to inquire the names.

Then Helen Deerebrook was examined. She could only repeat what her brother-in-law had said before. "Mr. Wieland was a very close man," she said; "one who never talked of his family or affairs." She believed that he was mixed up with political plots. In short, her evidence amounted to nothing.

To the reward of one hundred

pounds offered by Government, the bereaved husband added another. Months passed away, but brought no intelligence of the missing man.

In accordance with the usual system of the estate English police, while eagerly following up the one clue, they never gave a moment's consideration to the probability that they might be upon the wrong scent; it never entered their heads to extend their researches and inquiries in any other direction. To the one point they tenaciously clung, and utterly overlooked every fact or indication that did not lead to that point.

And thus the Blakely Hall tragedy was added to the already long list of undiscovered crimes.

But far exceeding the mystery of the murder was the mysterious disappearance of the infant. Was it probable, even supposing he had committed the crime, that Wieland would elude his movements with a child who would afford so strong a clue to his pursuers? Again supposing him to have murdered it, what possible motive could he have for the commission of the double atrocity?

The effect of these events upon Robert Blakely were terrible. In a week he appeared to age ten years; there was a stoop in his shoulders, deep furrows in his face; his favorite pursuits were utterly forsaken, and, from being one of the most active of men, he sank into a state of listless despondency. Helen Deerebrook was also deeply affected by her sister's sad fate. No one had given her credit for entertaining so strong an affection for the poor girl as she now showed in her pale face, listless eyes, and dejected demeanor.

A few days after poor Edith's funeral, Helen departed for London. The Robert Blakely paid off all the domestics at the Hall, and leaving it in the charge of an old housekeeper, departed for the Continent, where he had continued to reside ever since.

"Now there was one strange thing happened on the night of the murder," said Bilge, "that I think is only known at the present time to myself and two other people. Mrs. Blakely's maid was a married woman; her husband was the coachman. On that very night their baby—a boy, born about a month or six weeks before her mistress—died in a fit of croup. In the uproar, nobody heard anything about it, except the parents. Now mark this! In the dead of the night the father himself pulled it down in a deal box that he put together with his own hands, and buried it in the churchyard unknown to anybody; but the next morning there was a live infant in the cradle just the same as before, and nobody knows but what it was the one born to 'em, to this day. And now shall I tell you what the maid's name was? It was Helen, and is still, Sarah Gandy."

"But do you mean to say that I am the son of Robert Blakely, and the heir of Blakely Hall, instead of the child of John and Sarah Gandy?" cried Charley, starting up.

"I mean to say nothing of the kind. I only say that such a thing might be."

## CHAPTER IV.

DOUBTS AND SUSPICIONS.

On the conclusion of his story, Bilge shouldered his basket of wriggling eels, and the two walked toward the town. By this time the mist had cleared away; and the sun shone with dazzling radiance; the most distant object stood forth clearly and distinctly; the deep blue waves broke in foam-crested ripples at their feet; and a soft air, impregnated with the odor of the sea-weed, blew refreshingly in their faces.

"Stop!" said Charley, halting suddenly. "I have just thought of an insuperable obstacle to your theory of my being the child who was abducted. Why would the murderer take me to my mother's maid? Why should she connive? Why, good heavens! that would implicate her in the murder! She must have been accessory to the fact, to have taken charge of me. What motive could she have in this concealment? Oh, no, no; what you have told me is all idle imaginings."

"There's no getting at the bottom of it, I must confess," said Bilge, somewhat disconcertedly. "It was whispered about at the time, that Sarah Gandy knew more of the affair than ever she told; indeed nobody gave their evidence in a downright straightforward manner; there was a hanging back. If it wasn't Squire Blakely's baby that took the place of Sarah Gandy's in her cradle, whose was it? That's what I want to know."

"But the child must have been recognized by the people about." "Bah!" interrupted Bilge. "If fifty babies were all dressed alike, and put into a basket, their mothers wouldn't know which was which beyond the color of their eyes. Besides, who'd ever a thought of looking there for the lost child? The story I've told you's true. My uncle, Jacob Grime, was gardener at the Hall, and saw the whole dodge. He told me of it just before he died; and I've heard him hint that if he chose to open his mouth, he could have thrown more light on the murder than anybody. But he was a close old chap; and as nobody asked him anything about it, he didn't meddle with what didn't concern him."

"We none of us too minutely scrutinize an argument in which we desire to believe; and Charley found it so much more pleasant to believe himself to be the heir of Robert Blakely, Esq., of the Hall, than to be the son of William Gandy, huxter, that he willingly abandoned his doubts."

"Were you ever at Blakely Hall?" he inquired. "Lots o' times." "How is it then, they do not recognize you, or have they done so?" "Don't know me from Adam," replied Bilge, positively. "Never came in contact with 'em at the Hall for 'em to recognize me."

"Then they have no idea that you

are acquainted with the facts you have just told me?" inquired Charley after they had walked some distance in silence. He already felt a difficulty in giving his reputed parents a name.

"What, the Gandys?" Charley nodded. "No; I've given 'em hints at times that I knew something, but not what it was." "And what was your motive for telling me all this so suddenly? How is it you have not done so before?" asked Charley, stopping and fixing his eyes upon his companion.

"What was my motive?" The question somewhat staggered Bilge for a moment. "Well, as far as that goes, I felt in the humor. Besides, I didn't think you were old enough before, and—But, Lor' bless us! do you think that people can always tell why they do things to-day, and didn't do 'em yesterday?"

"With a brain too crowded with bewildering thoughts to dwell upon one point, Charley scarcely heard this incoherent explanation, his mind being already engaged upon other ideas.

"What is your opinion of the murderer? By whom do you think it was committed?" he asked abruptly. "I should be sorry to give an opinion about what puzzled my better," was a cautious reply.

"I should like to see the place," said the youth musingly.

"Well, I think we might manage that," answered Bilge, quickly, as though seizing upon a lucky thought. "Do you—how?" asked Charley, eagerly.

"Well, Mother Gandy's mother is the housekeeper that's been left in charge of the place all these years, and she couldn't very well refuse her grandson—or, leastways, he who passes for such—a sight of the old place."

It was then arranged that they should start upon their expedition the next morning. Bilge wanted to postpone it for some days, but Charley would not consent. A carrier went on that day every week as far as Holy Hill, a village situated within five miles of the Hall. They proposed to avail themselves of his cart so far, and walk the remaining distance. They could return by the same conveyance in the evening.

"I've got an old newspaper at home with an account of the murder in it, and a plan of the house," said Bilge; "so that we shall be able to trace all the rooms. And now I don't think it advisable for you and me to be seen together; so, as your time's all your own and mine isn't I'll just go forward and you can follow presently."

So, after arranging their meeting-place in the morning, they parted about a mile from the quay Charley sat down upon the shelving bank of the footpath, while Bilge pursued his way toward the town.

"Well, I think I've found out a way to pay you with interest for your half-pound of sugar, Mother Gandy," he muttered to himself as he plodded along. "With a little management I can make this spongy boy a puppet in my hands, and a profitable one, too, if things turn out to be as I suspect. The only trouble will be to keep 'em quiet, and from going blabbing to the old 'oman. I must keep 'em busy with summat. Going to look at the Hall was a good thought. That'll amuse 'em for to-morrow, and p'raps by that time I shall think of summat else."

And so Jack Bilge went his way, rejoicing in the prospect of a satisfactory revenge.

After an hour of dreaming, Charley slowly strolled homeward. Mrs. Gandy, according to her wont, after what her husband phrased as "a reg'lar flare up," had been somewhat milder of temper during the last two days, and when he entered the shop, she greeted him with an expression as like good humor as her sour visage was capable of, and a "Just in time for dinner, Charley." But the thorn had been necessary to the murder of my mother? It was an awful suspicion, but he could never shake off the shuddering repugnance that from that hour he felt towards her.

Just before they sat down to dinner she cried out, "There's the postman across the road; run and see if he has any letter for me, Charley."

"There was none, and Mrs. Gandy's face fell. Charley observed her manner. "Bilge is right, he said to himself; 'she is expecting a letter about me.'"

He would have begun the system prescribed by that astute adviser, of "worrying the old 'oman," but the aspect of her face warned him of foul weather coming on, and, desirous of avoiding any disagreement with her in his present state of mind, he took the first opportunity to leave the house unobserved. He wandered in to the fields, and, casting himself beneath the shadow of a tree, mused and dreamed the day away, and did not return home until supper time. He found Mrs. Gandy still what her husband phrased "grumpy;" but, being silent during the meal, and going to bed immediately after it, he contrived to avoid any collision with her.

## CHAPTER V.

WHAT CHARLEY FOUND AT BLAKELY HALL.

Next morning, as the clock struck six, Charley was at the carrier's door, and was, a few minutes afterwards, joined by Bilge. Another half-hour, and they were fairly started upon the road.

During the journey, Charley carefully read through the account of the murder contained in the old newspaper that his companion had brought for his perusal. As Bilge had said, it contained a plan of Hall, and the situation of the different chambers mentioned in the evidence.

Seated at the back of the cart, among the goods and packages, Charley gave himself up to the silent study of this record of an almost forgotten crime, while Bilge and the carrier,

seated side by side, smoking their morning pipes, discussed congenial subjects, or lapsed into quiet enjoyment of their tobacco.

It was half-past ten before they reached Holy Hill, as various packages had to be left at different houses upon the road. They stopped at an inn for half an hour, where Charley stood fast. Then he and Bilge set forward upon the pedestrian portion of the journey, but not mentioning to any one their destination. For the first three miles the country was bare and flat; but after that distance had been passed over, its aspect grew more picturesque.

"All you see about you now is the Blakely estate," said Bilge. Charley's heart gave a leap. Could it be possible that he was the heir of all this land?

Presently they came to a high wall that bounded the road on either side, and above which rose thickly-planted trees.

"This wall encloses the grounds," again said Bilge; "we shall be at one of the lodges directly."

And in a few moments they stood before a tall stone gateway, surmounted by two large globes. The stonework was spotted with gray and lichens, and the iron bars of the gate were corroded by rust. Through these bars they could perceive a broad winding carriage-drive, darkened by the dense foliage of the trees with which grass grew up rankly in the ope carefully-kept gravelled path, and the shrubs and flowers by which it was bordered straggled wildly over it, and the trees cast upon it their withered leaves. Just within the gate was a pretty Gothic lodge, over which the woodbine and roses trailed luxuriantly, loading the air with perfume.

Leaving their hands against the gate they found it gave way to the pressure. They pushed it open and passed through. The lodge door stood wide open; but there was no person within; so, without further ceremony they walked up the drive. How refreshing it was beneath the cool shadow of those trees, after the hot, dusty road! How fragrant to their nostrils the pleasant damp smell of the woods! Gradually the trees became less dense, and through the thinner canopy of foliage the sunlight made a golden tracery upon the ground, a tracery of ever changing patterns, as the light wind quivered among the leaves.

Presently they caught a glimpse of the Hall, with a large lawn in front of it. It was a heavy-looking building, erected in the time of the first Georges. It had a flat facade of red-brick, only relieved by the white stone-work of the windows and of the pediment. At each end was a cumbersome-looking wing. A portion, supported by clumsy Doric pillars, formed the grand entrance. There was an air of profound desolation over the house and all its surroundings. The windows, where they were not hidden by rotten shutters, were begrimed with the dirt of years. Upon the lawn the grass grew rankly; weeds choked up the flower-beds. The overgrown, that had once been trimmed into the shape of peacocks or of geometrical figures, had long since outgrown their artificial proportions, and looked like grim, distorted monsters. The statues, and urns, and the fountain were now broken and discolored. The bright, cheerful sun, so symbolical of teeming life, only served to heighten the corpse-like stagnation of the scene.

The two men walked up to the house, stood contemplating it for a few moments, then passed round to the back of one of the wings, just in time to see an old woman issue out of a door with a bottle of wine, covered with cobwebs, in her hand. At the sight of the strangers she stood still, and eyed them suspiciously.

"Isn't that Mrs. Miller?" said Bilge advancing to her.

"That's my name," was the answer. In anything rather than an encouraging tone.

"I thought it was, though it's many a year since I saw you. You haven't forgot old Jacob Grime, I s'pose?" "Oh, no; I ain't forgot 'im," answered the old woman, dryly. "But you ain't he; he's been dead this many a year."

"Oh, yes; I ain't he, come to pay you a visit from 'olther world," answered Bilge, jocularly. "I am his nephew. You remember Jack Bilge, the sailor; and this here's your grandson."

"My what?" cried the old woman, sharply. "Your grandson. Sarah Gandy's boy." "I don't want anything to do with Sarah Gandy, or her son either," answered Mrs. Miller, sourly. "She's never come near me these seventeen years; and I don't want anything to do with her, or anybody belonging to her. And I must tell you that strangers ain't allowed in these grounds."

"Well, but you can't call us strangers, Mrs. Miller," said Bilge, deprecatingly. "I don't know either of you, and don't want to; and I must trouble you both to leave the grounds at once," she answered, yet more sourly.

"Well, you ain't over civil to an old acquaintance, mother," said Bilge.

"You are no acquaintance of mine; and do you call it civility to trespass upon a gentleman's grounds?" cried the old woman shrilly. "Never heard of such a piece of impudence in all my born days! A couple of fellows walking up here without 'By your leave,' or 'With your leave!' If you don't be off, I'll call the gamekeepers, and have you locked up for a couple of traps!"

During this speech, Bilge had thro' it prudent to beat a retreat. Charley, however, would have stopped to expostulate, had not his companion seized him by the arm, and hurried him by main force.

"Come along, and don't be a fool!" he said. "That old cat would as soon have us taken up for poachers as she'd

look. The sooner we're outside the gate, the better."

"But we shan't be able to see the place—" "Hold your tongue, and leave things to me! We ain't done yet, I tell you; and we shall be, if you don't keep quiet."

These words were spoken in low, hurried tones, for the old woman was close behind them, muttering the most uncomplimentary epithets.

The moment they were outside the gate, she slammed and locked it. "A pretty thing," she muttered as she hobbled into the lodge—"a pretty thing that I couldn't leave the place for a few minutes, just to go to the cellar to get a bottle of wine, but what two great hulking fellows must have the impudence to walk in! Old Jacob Grime, indeed!—a nice sort of fellow he was! I remember you, too, Master Jack Bilge—a nice rascalion you was! Sarah's son, too—Sarah's son! I don't want anything to do with the ungrateful wench; to go away in the manner she did, without ever telling me where she was going, or even saying good-bye! And that's Sarah's son!—dear, dear, how like he is to what Master Robert was at his age! I wonder what them chaps wanted here? And where's that girl got to, I wonder?—got out with the chaps, I s'pose, and left the place to take care of itself!"

And so she muttered on. When Charley found himself in the road, he could no longer control his vexation.

"I wish I had spoken to her!" he said, irritably. "I would not have been put off so easily; I would have offered her money, and—"

"I dare say you'd have done wonders," sneered Bilge. "Do you think you'd ha' gotten over Mother Gandy?—you know you wouldn't. Well—like mother, like daughter. The harder you'd ha' tried her, the more wixenish and obstinate she'd ha' got." "Well, then, I suppose we may as well turn round and walk back to Holy Hill," said Charley, sulkily. "Stop a bit, and let me think; you youngsters want everything in such a hurry."

As a stimulus to thought he lit his pipe, and then sat down upon the road side bank.

"I don't like to be done by that old catamaran," he said, pulling hard at the damp tobacco that would not light. "About a mile further up, if I don't mistake, there's a lane that leads round to the back of the grounds where there's no wall, only wooden palisades, that must be precious rotten by this time. Now, perhaps we might manage to crawl through some hole, or pull a stave out, for the matter of that. Once inside, we might manage to find one of the lower windows unfastened, or even open, and then—"

"The very thing!" cried Charley, excitedly, and not waiting for the completion of the sentence. "Come along, and don't let us lose any more time."

"We should look pretty if we were caught," said Bilge, as they walked up the road. "They'd have us up afore the bench for poachers or thieves."

"I should quickly tell them that I believed myself to have the right of entering that house," replied Charley, haughtily.

Bilge stood still, stared at the youth, took his pipe out of his mouth, and gave a long whistle.

"Well, my young rooster, you're beginning to crow early, and no mistake!" he said. "If you was to talk like that to old Parson Ball, if he's still alive and on the bench, he'd give you three months extra for impudence, as he did the man who, when he was asked why he pulled a turnip up, said it was because he was starving; blessed if the old parson didn't clap three months extra to his sentence, for impudence!"

Bilge's topographical knowledge had not deceived him. They found the lane and the palisades, just as he had described. The palisades were rotten and broken away, and after looking cautiously around to see that no one was observing them, they forced a way through an opening, and through some bushes, and found themselves in an orchard, among the trees of which, at a short distance off, they caught sight of the house, which they now approached with great caution.

Bilge tried several of the windows, and found all fastened and shuttered. At last they came to the door, out of which they had seen Mrs. Miller issue, sharply. Pushing it mechanically, rather than with any hope of finding it unfastened, to his surprise it yielded to his touch. He pushed it open. The key had been turned, but the lock had not caught.

It was very dark within; the air stunk damp and chill even on that warm summer noon, and was laden with an odor of decay. Bilge struck a match, and by its feeble light they saw themselves in a long stone passage. Along this they proceeded, by the light of more matches, until they came to a door, turning the handle of which they found themselves in another passage, which ran at a right angle with the one they had just quitted. A small window at the further end admitted a dim light, by which they perceived several doors on each side.

"If we could only find our way upstairs, we should be able to see what we are about, as there's only blinds to the upper windows," whispered Bilge.

After groping about for some minutes, and looking into every room, they came at last to a large door that lay back in a recess, upon opening which a flood of light broke in upon them from a large dome-shaped window at a great height above. They were in the grand hall. There were doors leading to the ground floor apartments, and a broad stair case of polished oak leading to the drawing-room suite.

Up the stairs ascended the two men, and entered the magnificent suite of reception-rooms—vast, lofty apartments, that had once been splendid in

paint and gilding, but which now looked tarnished and mildewed. The furniture and the great chandelier were muffled in brown holland wrappings, upon which the dust lay thick and black. Dust was the presiding genius of the place. It covered every object that met the eye; it rose in clouds at every step upon the rotting carpets; it was inhaled in every breath.

But the intruders did not linger among these ruins of past magnificence; it was those rooms over which there hung the shuddering memories of the dark tragedy that had brought about all this desolation and decay they sought. Guided by the plan of the Hall in the old newspaper, they passed through a small door that stood within a niche upon the right hand side of the ball room, and opened upon a passage communicating between the centre and the right wing of the building, in which latter part of the Hall was situated the apartment occupied by Wieland, and the bed-chamber of Mrs. Blakely's maid.

These rooms were only a few feet apart.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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