That Mysterious Major...

...BY...

ETHEL A. SOUTHAM

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"Oh, dear, yes!" assented Falkland readily. "It was the talk of London. Well, what have they discovered?"

"Why, that a man who answers to the description of a suspicious-looking person who disappeared from England in rather peculiar circumstances at the time of all those forgeries is supposed to have left New York on the steamer City of Chicago on the 12th of this month; and, should this really be so, he ought to have arrived in Liverpool at the beginning of the week. Just as you were speaking of this Brown of London it struck me——"

"That he might be the forger himself? Ah, perhaps he is," exclaimed Evelyn, with a gleam of amusement in her eyes. "Let us all keep a careful watch upon him, and do our best to gain the reward which somebody has offered for him."

"Very well, Miss Eve; you may depend upon me to help you in your investigations. My services are at your disposal whenever you may require them," was Falkland's reply; but, though the words were uttered lightly, there was a sort of resolution lying latent beneath his apparent carelessness. "Only do not forget to take care of your own cheque-books, or in the meanwhile you may find he has been dipping pretty heavily into your exchequers as well. But goodby for the present. I shall be coming again to see for which night you will like tickets for the theater, and then I will telephone down."

As the door closed behind the tall, rather gaunt, but at the same time prepossessing form of Gilbert Falkland, Lady Howard sank back in her chair with a sign of supreme satisfaction.

"Dear me, what should we do without that man? He is really too good in troubling himself so much about us and our concerns."

Lady Howard spoke feelingly. Nobody could have ever taken the reins of government more unwillingly into her own hands than her ladyship had done upon the death of her husband three years before, when she had been left a rich but somewhat helpless widow, with a large estate and three growing children. In the years of her married life everything had devolved upon Sir Wilfred; and, though, as time wore on, she became more accustomed to her sense of perfect independence, and had actually consented to an additional care in the shape of the guardianship of her niece, her brother's child, she was still only too thankful if any one would relieve her a little of the weight of the responsibilities which hung so heavily upon her shoulders.

Consequently Gilbert Falkland, whom they had chanced to meet upon the continent for the first time only a month before, but who had introduced himself as one of the late Sir Wilfred's oldest friends, had found his attentions thoroughly acceptable to the widow; and, as it happened that he had been going by the same route as Lady Howard and her niece, he had constituted himself courier and guide, and had taken upon his own shoulders all the troubles and worries inseparable from continental traveling.

At home in England once more, fortune had thrown Mr. Falkland across their path again, and Lady Howard was only too pleased if he would still do anything for her, even if it were merely to arrange a drive or decide which of the pieces at the theaters was really worth seeing.

But Evelyn scarcely heard the sigh of contentment which had followed Mr. Falkland's departure. Her thoughts were running in quite another direction; for, in spite of the nonchalance with which she had laughed away Gilbert Falkland's observations upon the encounter with the man in the hall, his words had carried more weight than he had had the satisfaction of imagining.

At the time it had never struck her as peculiar that a man who was an absolute stranger to her should have been able to single out from the number of letters one in particular for her, thus showing that he knew her address perfectly. It puzzled her though, considerably now, especially as the idea flashed through her mind, as it had done before even as she stood in the hall that that letter was not lying among the others when she had first looked over the table. It had seemed a trifling matter at the time; she would never have troubled to think anything more about it if Mr. Falkland had not declared that this man must have known something of her name and had taken the earliest opportunity of trying to make her acquaintance.

But now, since he had told her what really villainous characters were constantly to be found at such quiet seaside hotels as the "Royal George," she began to realize that, if this Mr. Brown were one of the number, he would be capable of anything, and, seeing her coming, had probably hidden her letter in order to obtain the necessary excuse for addressing her.

"Well, at any rate, he shall not speak to me again!" mentally resolved Miss Luttrell, as she stirred her coffee and buttered a piece of toast. "Mr. Brown of London is mistaken if he imagines that Aunt Lydia and I are two helpless individuals whom he can take in and impose upon as he likes. He had better try—that is all!"

CHAPTER IV.

Evelyn, however, had reckoned without her host. Later in the morning she was hurrying upstairs with a message to her aunt's maid, when, as she was somewhat breathlessly mounting the last flight, a tall figure, which she recognized at a glance as Major Brown's, suddenly appeared at the top of the staircase, which he was just about to descend.

Summoning all her dignity to her aid and with her head set proudly back, Miss Luttrell had prepared to pass on quickly without deigning him more than a coldly regal bow, when to her amazement, as his eyes met hers, he immediately paused before her.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Luttrell, but I believe I have found some lost property of yours. Did you not drop a handkerchief in the dining room last evening?"

It was a trifling question, certainly, still it sent the color flaming into the girl's cheeks.

"A handkerchief?" she repeated. "No; I am sure I did not"—with a decided shake of her head.

"Are you quite sure, though, because I feel certain it is yours—at least it has your initials on it?" he returned, producing the article in question and holding up the corner where the crest of the Luttrells was embroidered over the initials "E. C. L." "This is it. Is it not yours?"

Evelyn looked at it astonished. It was impossible to deny the ownership.

"Oh, yes—it—it is mine!"

The admission was made with such reluctance that Major Brown was conscious of a feeling that in delivering up the handkerchief to its rightful owner he was rather under an obligation to her for deigning to accept it than that she owed anything to him.

He was therefore quite astonished at the polite but distant "thank you" which rewarded his efforts, and stood for some minutes lost in contemplation of the slight graceful figure as it retreated down a long corridor.

"It is no go, I am afraid, this time," he muttered half aloud. "Sambo's mistress has scented mischief already."

Yes, undoubtedly his scheme had failed. She had not been so blind as to believe that in both cases his effort to speak to her was merely chance; and the major realized with a sense of the keenest disappointment that, as matters stood, it was practically useless hoping to make the slightest progress toward a more intimate acquaintance.

There was nothing for it therefore but to let things take their own course for a day or two, in the meanwhile preserving such a strict silence, when chancing to encounter Miss Luttrell, as to disarm her of all suspicions, and then to trust to fate to throw her in some way across his path. At any rate, he was prepared to remain an occupant of No. 40, on the second floor of the "Royal George," even if he had to remain until doomsday for that auspicious moment to arrive.

Until doomsday! Yet, when only one hot sultry afternoon, one cool dewey evening, and one sunshiny morning had passed, Major Brown was thoroughly impatient.

It was the afternoon of the second day after his decision, and he was standing at the open window of the smoking room with a most dejected expression upon his face. It seemed such a hopeless case to imagine that by keeping aloof from her in this way he was making the slightest progress towards the stage of friendship at which he was resolved sooner or later to arrive. What should he do with himself? Go for a stroll in the town? Yes; anything would be better than dawdling away his time as he had been doing all the morning. He was on the point of withdrawing when footsteps beneath the window and voices in slight but decided altercation arrested his attention.

"No; it is of no use—you are not to come! I want to have a quiet afternoon under the trees, so that I can read my book without any chance of an interruption. I have just reached a most exciting point, and I am dying to see how it all ends."

"But how can my presence affect your peace and comfort if I promise not to speak? Surely, if I bring plenty of literature of my own in which I am equally interested, you cannot object——"

"Yes; but I do. I know so well what would happen. Just at the most pathetic part, when the hero and heroine were plunged in the depths of despair, you would look calmly up from one of Reuter's most matter-of-fact telegrams, to discover me with tears streaming down my cheeks. No, Mr. Falkland—go into Saltcliffe, as you had arranged, buy a new flower for your coat and——"

But at that point the voices and footsteps passed out of hearing.

The Major shrugged his shoulders and knocked the ashes somewhat impatiently off his cigar as he suddenly found himself lost in a vague mental speculation as to how far those entreaties would fail or succeed. All the same, there was a slight frown upon his forehead as he turned away from the window; and, apparently forgetting his resolution to take a walk round the town, he threw himself into a low chair, to puff away at his cigar with renewed energy.

The hour of three had struck in loud measured tones before he roused himself again; and then, as though by instinct, he returned to his post at the window just in time to catch a glimpse of Miss Luttrell and a large white parasol disappearing across the lawn in the direction of an inviting clump of trees.

So the fellow had failed, after all! Involuntarily a smile rose to the Major's face, a particularly unsympathetic smile.

"Poor beggar!" he ejaculated.

(To be continued.)

"OH, YES—IT—IT—IS MINE!"

Ancient Wedding Houses.

In olden times certain towns and villages in England used to possess a wedding house, where poor couples, after they had been wedded at church, could entertain their friends at small cost, the only outlay being the purchase of such provisions for their guests as they brought with them, the house for the day being given free of payment. At Braughing (or Brachinges), in Hertfordshire, there was a wedding house of this kind, which had a large kitchen with a cauldron, large spits and dripping pan; a large room for merriment, and a lodging-room, with good linen. At Great Yeldham, in Essex, there was another such house, which was used by the poorer folk for dining in after they returned from the church. As the practice became obsolete the wedding house was turned into a school. In 1456 Roger Thornton granted to the mayor and community of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the use of the hall and kitchen belonging to Thornton's hospital, for the use of young couples, when they were married to make their wedding dinner in, and receive the offerings and gifts of their friends.

Why Purple Became the Imperial Color

Purple became the imperial color because of its enormous cost and rarity. The only purple known to the ancients was the Tyrian purple, which was obtained in minute quantities only from a Mediterannean species of shell fish, called the murex. In the time of Cicero, wool, double dyed with this color, was so excessively dear that a single pound weight cost a thousand denarii, or about thirty-five pounds sterling. A single murex only yielded a little drop of the secretion, consequently very large numbers had to be taken in order to obtain enough to dye even a very small amount of wool. Amongst more than one of the nations of antiquity it was death for any person but the sovereign or supreme judges to wear garments dyed with Tyrian purple. Upon the accession of Julius Caesar a law was passed forbidding any private person to wear it.

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

EASY DIVORCES, LAST SUNDAY'S SUBJECT.

"What Therefore God Hath Joined Together Let Not Man Put Asunder" Matt. 19: 6—Skeletons All Over the House as Well as in the Closet.

That there are hundreds and thousands of infelicitous home in America no one will doubt. If there were only one skeleton in the closet, that might be locked up and abandoned; but in many a home there is a skeleton in the hallway and a skeleton in all the apartments. "Unhappily married" are two words descriptive of many a homestead. It needs no orthodox minister to prove to a badly mated pair that there is a hell; they are there now. Sometimes a grand and gracious woman will be thus incarcerated, and her life will be a crucifixion, as was the case with Mrs. Sigourney, the great poetess and the great soul. Sometimes a consecrated man will be united to a fury, as was John Wesley, or united to a vixen, as was John Milton. Sometimes, and generally, both parties are to blame, and Thomas Carlyle is an intolerable grumbler, and his wife has a pungent retort always ready, and Froude, the historian, pledged to tell the plain truth, has to pull aside the curtain from the lifelong squabble at Craigenputtock and 5 Cheyne row.

Some say that for the alleviation of all these domestic disorders of which we hear, easy divorce is a good prescription. God sometimes authorizes divorce as certainly as he authorizes marriage. I have just as much regard for one lawfully divorced as I have for one lawfully married. But you know and I know that wholesale divorce is one of our national scourges. I am not surprised at this when I think of the influences which have been abroad militating against the marriage relation. For many years the platforms of the country rang with talk about a free-love millennium. There were meetings of this kind held in the Academy of Music, Brooklyn; Cooper institute, New York; Tremont temple, Boston, and all over the land. Some of the women who were most prominent in that movement have since been distinguished for great promiscuity of affection. Popular themes for such occasions were the tyranny of man, the oppression of the marriage relation, women's rights, and the affinities. Prominent speakers were women with short curls and short dress and very long tongue, everlastingly at war with God because they were created women; while on the platform sat meek men with soft accent and cowed demeanor, apologetic for masculinity, and holding the parasols while the termagant orators went on preaching the gospel of free love. That campaign of about twenty years got more devils into the marriage relation than will be exorcised in the next fifty. Men and women went home from such meetings so permanently confused as to who were their wives and husbands that they never got out of the perplexity, and the criminal and the civil courts tried to disentangle the Iliad of woes, and this one got alimony, and that one got a limited divorce, and this mother kept the children on condition that the father could sometimes come and look at them, and these went into poorhouses, and those went into insane asylums, and those went into dissolute public life, and all went to destruction. The mightiest war ever made against the marriage institution was that free-love campaign, sometimes under one name and sometimes under another.

Another influence that has warred upon the marriage relation has been polygamy in Utah. That is a stereotyped caricature of the marriage relation, and has poisoned the whole land. You might as well think that you can have an arm in a state of mortification and yet the whole body not be sickened, as to have any territories or states polygamized and yet the body of the nation not feel the putrefaction. Hear it, good men and women of America, that so long ago as 1862 a law was passed by congress forbidding polygamy in the territories and in all the places where they had jurisdiction. Thirty-seven years have passed along and nine administrations. Yet not until the passage of the Edmunds law in 1882 was any active policy of polygamic suppression adopted. Armed with all the power of government, and having an army at their disposal, the first brick had not till then been knocked from that fortress of libertinism. Every new president in his inaugural tickled that monster with the straw of condemnation, and every congress stultified itself in proposing some plan that would not work. Polygamy stood in Utah and in other of the territories, more entrenched, more brazen, more puissant, more bragart and more internal than at any time in its history. James Buchanan, a much-abused man of his day, did more for the extirpation of this villainy than all the subsequent administrations dared to do up to 1882. Mr. Buchanan sent out an army, and although it was halted in its work, still he accomplished more than the subsequent administrations, which did nothing but talk, talk, talk. Exen at this late day, and with the Edmunds act in force, the evil has not been wholly extirpated. Polygamy in Utah, though outlawed, is still practiced in secret. It has warred against the marriage relation throughout the land. It is impossible to have such an awful sewer of iniquity sending up its miasma, which is wafted by the winds north, south, east, and west, without the whole land being affected by it.

Another influence that has warred against the marriage relation in this country has been a pustulous literature, with its millions of sheets every week choked with stories of domestic wrongs, and infidelities, and massacres, and outrages, until it is a wonder to me that there are any decencies or any common sense left on the subject of marriage. One-half of the news stands of our great cities reek with the filth.

"Now," say some, "we admit all these evils, and the only way to clear them out or to correct them is by easy divorce." Well, before we yield to that cry, let us find out how easy it is now. I have looked over the laws of all the states, and I find that while in some states it is easier than in others, in every state it is easy. The state of Illinois, through its legislature, recites a long list of proper causes for divorce, and then closes up by giving to the courts the right to make a decree of divorce in any case where they deem it expedient. After that you are not surprised at the announcement that in one county of the state of Illinois, in one year, there were 833 divorces. If you want to know how easy it is, you have only to look over the records of the states. In Massachusetts, 600 divorces in one year; in Maine, 478 in one year; in Connecticut, 461 divorces in one year; in the city of San Francisco, 333 divorces in one year; in New England, in one year, 2,113 divorces, and in twenty years in New England, 20,000. Is that not easy enough? If the same ratio continue, the ratio of multiplied divorce and multiplied causes of divorce, we are not far from the time when our courts will have to set apart whole days for application, and all you will have to prove against a man will be that he left his slippers in the middle of the floor, and all you will have to prove against a woman will be that her husband's overcoat was buttonless. Causes of divorce doubled in a few years, doubled in France, doubled in England, and doubled in the United States. To show how very easy it is, I have to tell you that in Western Reserve, Ohio, the proportion of divorces to marriages celebrated was in one year one to eleven; in Rhode Island, one to thirteen; in Vermont, one to fourteen. Is not that easy enough?

I want you to notice that frequency of divorce always goes along with the dissoluteness of society. Rome for 500 years had not one case of divorce. Those were her days of glory and virtue. Then the reign of vice began, and divorce became epidemic. If you want to know how rapidly the empire went down, ask Gibbon. Do you know how the Reign of Terror was introduced in France? By 20,000 cases of divorce in one year in Paris. What we want in this country, and in all lands, is that divorce be made more and more difficult. Then people before they enter that relation will be persuaded that there will probably be no escape from it, except through the door of the sepulchre. Then they will pause on the verge of that relation, until they are fully satisfied that it is best, and that it is right, and that it is happiest. Then we shall have no more marriages in fun. Then men and women will not enter the relation with the idea it is only a trial trip, and if they do not like it they can get out at the first landing. Then this whole question will be taken out of the frivolous into the tremendous, and there will be no more joking about the blosoms in a bride's hair than about the cypress on a coffin.

What we want, is that the congress of the United States move for the changing the national constitution so that a law can be passed which shall be uniform all over the country, and what shall be right in one state shall be right in all the states, and what is wrong in one state will be wrong in all the states. How is it now? If a party in the marriage relation gets dissatisfied, it is only necessary to move to another state to achieve liberation from the domestic tie, and divorce is effected so easily that the first one party knows of it is by seeing it in the newspaper that Rev. Dr. Somebody a few days or weeks afterward introduced into a new marriage relation a member of the household who went off on a pleasure excursion to Newport or a business excursion to Chicago. Married at the bride's house. No cards. There are states of the union which practically put a premium upon the disintegration of the marriage relation, while there are other states, like the state of New York, which has the preeminent idiocy of making marriage lawful at 12 and 14 years of age.

The congress of the United States needs to move for a change of the national constitution, and then to appoint a committee—not made up of single gentlemen, but of men of families, and their families in Washington—who shall prepare a good, honest, righteous, comprehensive uniform law that will control everything from Sandy Hook to Golden Gate. That will put an end to brokerages in marriage. That will send divorce lawyers into a decent business. That will set people agitated for many years on the question of how they shall get away from each other to planning how they can adjust themselves to the more or less unfavorable circumstances.

More difficult divorce will put an estoppal to a great extent upon marriage as a financial speculation. There are men who go into the relation just as they go into Wall street to purchase shares. The female to be invited into the partnership of wedlock is utterly unattractive, and in disposition a suppressed Vesuvius. Everybody knows it, but this masculine candidate for matrimonial orders, through the commercial agency or through the country records, finds out how much estate is to be inherited, and he calculates it. He thinks out how long it will be before the old man will die, and whether he can stand the refractory temper until he does die, and then he enters the relation; for he says, "If I cannot stand it, then through the divorce law I will back out." That process is going on all the time, and men enter into the relation without any moral principle, without any affection, and it is as much a matter of stock speculation as anything that was transacted yesterday in Union Pacific, Wabash, and Delaware and Lackawanna. Now, suppose a man understood, as he ought to understand, that if he goes into that relation there is no possibility of his getting out, or no probability, he would be more slow to put his neck in the yoke. He should say to himself, "Rather than a Caribbean whirlwind with a whole fleet of shipping in its arms, give me a zephyr off fields of sunshine and gardens of peace."

Rigorous divorce law will also hinder women from the fatal mistake of marrying men to reform them. If a young man, by 25 years of age or 30 years of age, have the habit of strong drink fixed on him, he is as certainly bound for a drunkard's grave as that a train starting out from Grand Central depot at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning is bound for Albany. The train may not reach Albany, for it may be thrown from the track. The young man may not reach a drunkard's grave, for something may throw him off the iron track of evil habit, but the probability is that the train that starts tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock for Albany will get there, and the probability is that the young man who has the habit of strong drink fixed on him before 25 or 30 years of age will arrive at a drunkard's grave. She knows he drinks, although he tries to hide it by chewing cloves. Everybody knows he drinks. Parents warn, neighbors and friends warn. She will marry him; she will reform him. If she is unsuccessful in the experiment, why then the divorce law will emancipate her, because habitual drunkenness is a cause for divorce in Indiana, Kentucky, Florida, Connecticut and nearly all the states. So the poor thing goes to the altar of sacrifice. If you will show me the poverty-struck streets in any city, I will show you the homes of the women who married men to reform them. In one case out of ten thousand it may be a successful experiment. I never saw the successful experiment. But have a rigorous divorce law and that woman will say: "If I am affianced to that man it is for life, and if now in the ardor of his young love, and I the prize to be won, he will not give up his cups, when he has won the prize surely he will not give up his cups." And so that woman will say to the man: "No, sir, you are already married to the club, and you are married to that evil habit, and so you are married twice and you are a bigamist. Go!"

UNIQUE SCHEME.

By Which a Clever Man Made a Living by Eating Oysters.

New Orleans Times-Democrat: "I used to know a young man here who made a living by eating oysters," said one of a little group about the counter of the Grunewald. "Ate them on a wager, eh?" asked an Englishman in the party. "No," replied the first speaker, "he had a much better scheme than that. He would stroll into an oyster bar—you know how many there are in New Orleans—and order a dozen on the deep shell, always selecting a time when several customers were present. After swallowing two or three he"— "Two or three customers?" interrupted the Englishman. "Naw!" said the story-teller, frowning, "two or three oysters. After he put them away he would stop all of a sudden and feel in his mouth. 'Look here!' he would sing out to the bartender, 'what kind of things do you keep in your oysters, anyhow? I've nearly broken a tooth!' With that he would take a beautiful big pearl from between his lips. Of course, there was no questioning the genuineness of a gem in that way, and everybody in the crowd would look envious. Some one was morally certain to make a guess as to its value. 'Oh, well,' the oyster-eater would say, 'I don't know anything about pearls, and I'd be glad to sell this one for $5.' I don't think he ever failed to make a trade on the spot, and as soon as he got the five in his inside pocket he would saunter out and work another bar. He used to find about four pearls a week, and as long as he kept it down to that game was perfectly safe. But he grew avaricious at last, and found so many that folks got suspicious and he considered it healthy to leave for another fishery. He bought the pearls by the gross from a house in New Jersey. They were very pretty pearls, and cost him about 6½ cents apiece net. I have one in a scarf-pin now.

How They Rewarded Madame Sterling.

Madame Antoinette Sterling, the contralto singer and evangelist, had an experience in the Bombay presidency, India, which is as quaint as any of Kipling's tales of the hills. She was campaigning with Pundita Ramabai, and through her magnificent voice was drawing thousands of natives to her meetings. They had never seen that kind of a missionery before, and had never heard a voice like hers. They were so pleased with her work that they said to themselves: "This is a foreign woman guru, and for fear of giving offense to us she has omitted to put her begging-bowl outside of her door for us to put in the customary contributions." In India, every guru or holy person carries a brass, wood or clay begging-bowl into which the devout put some small sum of money. Madame Sterling walked out upon the veranda of her bungalow one morning, and there, to her amazement, found two begging-bowls. One, a little one, with a few annas in it intended for the Pundita, and one, an enormous affair, containing a handsome sum of annas and rupees for herself. The only explanation she could ever extract from the servant was this: "Little bowl—little money for the little Pundita with little voice. Big bowl—big money for big Missahib with big voice." Madame Sterling was one of the principal speakers among the American women at the International council recently held in London.

The shiftless man accuses fortune of being blind.