

The Secret of the Stopped Clock. By TOM GALLOP.

IT WAS always on the lookout for curious or remarkable things; indeed, at that time of my life, I may be said to have been a diligent student of the newspapers. Consequently, when old Anthony Gayfield died at Roemister, and the curious circumstances attending to his life and to his death were chronicled, I was one of the first to be interested. I saw a possibility that that strange house in which he had lived and died might have a fascinating interest for certain morbid readers of illustrated papers; and I determined to go down to Roemister and get some photographs if possible. I did not know then what curious happenings were to be held upon my resolve. Briefly, the newspapers chronicled the fact of the death of a certain Anthony Gayfield, of Stone House, Roemister. Incidentally they mentioned that his death, in all probability, would close an old romance that had haunted the house to be pointed out to visitors. The old romance was this: That, years before, the beloved wife of this Anthony Gayfield had died suddenly in her chair in her room; that the man, broken hearted, had caused the house to be stopped, as it were, from that moment, just as her life had stopped; that more than twenty years after her death the clocks still pointed to the hour at which she had died—the rooms remained the same, covered in dust and cobwebs, and long since fallen into decay. The man himself, it was said, had been seen many a time walking about the grounds which surrounded the house, clad in the garments he had worn on that fatal day, more than a score of years before. Now it happened that he, in his turn, had died and had gone to meet the woman he had so loved; and the house was to be under that ban no longer.

My friend Enoch Voyce cordially indorsed the suggestion that I should go down to Roemister; he expressed a wish to accompany me, and it is scarcely necessary to add that I eagerly embraced his offer.

"Life and death, my dear Battenbury," he said in his whimsical way, "are such ordinary, commonplace things, generally speaking, that if one can find something out of the common it is as well to see it, apart from business reasons. In the case of the house which I like to think of a man who severs his connection with the world the moment that that person who was all his world has passed out of it. Let us then go and worship at the shrine of Anthony Gayfield's love."

We went to Roemister accordingly. It is a delightful, sleepy old cathedral town, with quaint old houses and comfortable inns. The grounds which surround the town, and is surrounded by gardens which, under proper management, would be beautiful; when we saw them they were a neglected wilderness. I asked Enoch if he knew to whom the property now belonged. Enoch had a way of picking up scraps of information, and he answered me readily enough.

"It all goes to a brother of the dead man—and I believe it is a valuable property too—plenty of money in safe securities. The dead man had a son who is cut off with the proverbial shilling."

"What—the son of the woman he loved left out of the will?" I asked, in some astonishment.

"Yes," replied Enoch, scratching his chin thoughtfully. "It would appear that our dead friend has one son, but in his heart only, and that was for his wife. The son disapproved him in some way—ran contrary to his desires—and has paid the penalty. The brother takes everything."

We were destined to see that brother soon. Coming to the house—a square stone building, with no possible pretensions to architectural beauty—we rang, and stated our errand. After a little delay we were ushered into a large furnished little room at one side of the hall, and found ourselves in the presence of one of the sleekest looking men I have ever met. And this sleek looking individual was the fortunate brother—Jacob Gayfield.

We had expected to encounter some opposition, and I had looked to Enoch to play our cards as usual, but for once I found that there was no opposition to be met; that Jacob Gayfield, while exhibiting a chastened sorrow for the death of his brother, yet took a certain pride in that story connected with the house, and was only too willing to allow me to take photographs. He stipulated, however, with a little modest cough, that his name should be mentioned freely when the photographs were reproduced.

He accompanied us himself over the place, and I am bound to say that the general effect upon us both was saddening in the extreme. How any one could have lived in such a house passed my comprehension—cobwebs and dirt and dust were everywhere, the plaster had fallen from the ceiling, and the floor was nothing more than a mass of rot. Whatever had been broken during that desolate time had remained broken—a witness to the miserable perversity of one man. Perhaps I should say that that man had been buried beside the woman he had loved some two days before our arrival.

Our sleek looking friend proved garrulous. He showed us everything, and took us everywhere about the house and grounds. Above all, he took us into the room in which the woman had died, and in which Anthony Gayfield had passed the remainder of his life. That room was a little more comfortable than the others—in that a



chair had been kept dusted, and a table ready for use, but nothing else had been disturbed.

"You will find everything in the house the same," said our guide, in a hushed voice. "You will observe that the clock is stopped at a little over a quarter past seven—the moment at which my unfortunate sister-in-law died. All other clocks in the house are stopped at the same moment. From the fact that both my brother and his wife died in this room—for both were discovered dead in this chair, though with more than twenty years' lapse between those deaths—this is the most interesting room in the house."

I arranged my camera to take a photograph of it—from the fireplace which that mourning man had sat for all those years, until death mercifully stopped in and closed his sorrow. It required, of course, a long exposure, and I left the camera there while we visited other parts of the house and grounds. And always our guide talked quite freely.

"My brother had a great affection for me," he said, mournfully turning up his eyes, and shaking his head. "A great affection indeed. I was with him frequently. I was with him at the last. There are those who have not hesitated to say that I used an undue influence over him, to induce him to give me his property; but that is false. It was his constantly expressed wish that I should have everything."

And he left his son quite out of his calculations," asked Enoch.

"His most unworthy son was remembered at the last, but only as one who had offended and who could not possibly be forgiven. 'Tell him,' said my brother, 'that I leave all I possess to one who will look better how to look after it and to carry out my wishes.' Those were the very words which my brother said at that time. Besides, his mind had been made up for years; the will in which everything was left to me was made some five years ago."

"At the time young Bailey Gayfield ran away from home," broke in Enoch Voyce. Then, as he saw a look of surprise in the eyes of Jacob Gayfield, he added: "Yes, I know the story pretty well; I've heard it from several lips."

"Bailey was a most unnatural and ungrateful son, who did much to break his father's heart," said our guide, shaking his head sorrowfully.

I took my camera away finally, having secured some excellent results; and Enoch and I returned to our inn. We were staying at an old-fashioned place called "The Swan with Two Necks," for I had made up my mind that I would take a few views of the charming old city of Roemister before going back. And while we stood in the coffee room waiting for our lunch a young man entered, and, taking no notice of us, walked across to the window looking out to the High Street, and began drumming upon the panes with impatient fingers. I took no particular note of him until I observed presently, as our lunch was placed upon the table, that Enoch Voyce had got into conversation with him and was inviting him to take a seat at the same table.

The young man courteously declined. He had lunched already with his wife, he added with a smile; she had but just gone to her room. Enoch Voyce began to draw him out a little as to the reason for his stay in so quiet a place as Roemister; we were both a little surprised to hear the young man say that he had never before seen the place called Stone House.

"Then you are Bailey Gayfield?" exclaimed Enoch.

"Why, how in the world do you know that?" asked the other.

"Because we have been looking over the house that should have been yours this morning, and because we know your story," I broke in.

"You do well to say it should have been mine!" exclaimed young Gayfield bitterly. "I don't mind who knows it. All the world may know it. I've been cheated out of my birthright—I and my dear wife."

"You mean that your father has left the property to your uncle, when it should have come to you?" suggested Enoch, turning on calmly with his lunch.

"I mean nothing of the kind!" exclaimed the boy savagely. "My father made a will in my favor only a couple of weeks before he died. That will was witnessed, and was kept by the old man under his pillow. At his death it could not be found; and the earlier will, leaving everything to my uncle, of course takes effect."

"That is rather a grave charge to bring against any one," I said. "I understand that your father had cast you off, as it had refused to have anything to do with you."

"Yes; but at last, feeling his end coming, the poor old fellow sent for me to come home. I found my uncle installed as his chief adviser; indeed, it was with difficulty that he was able to see my father at all. But one day, during my uncle's absence, he made the will of which I have spoken, and it was witnessed by two of the old servants."

"Well, they can be brought forward to swear to that," said Enoch quickly.

"They have been got out of the way," replied young Gayfield; "sent away by my uncle because they protested about the will they had witnessed. In any case, unless the document can be found all the swearing in the world is useless; it will simply be suggested that my father repented at the eleventh hour, and destroyed the will."

"Is that probable?" asked Enoch Voyce.

"Certainly not!" replied Bailey Gayfield. "He died in my arms almost—at all events, I was with him half an hour before the time when he crept out of his bed and downstairs to the chair wherein he was found dead."

At that moment the door opened, and a young girl came in—just the sort of young girl, to tell the truth, that I should have expected this nice boy to have married. He introduced us—after first laughingly asking for our names—and we fell to talking again about the will, although we all agreed sadly enough that nothing could be done. Finally I left them chatting with Enoch Voyce, and went off to develop my plates.

I thought a great deal about the youngster and the lost fortune. I am bound to say that I had uncon-

sciously ranged myself on his side, rightly or wrongly, because I had taken a curious dislike to the other man. The sleekness of Jacob Gayfield had got upon my nerves, and I had a ridiculous feeling that I would do anything to discover that lost will, if by any chance it was to be discovered. I mentioned my feelings to Enoch Voyce, and my old friend cordially indorsed them.

"There is in all these matters," he said, "a large element of chance, and when you deal with chance you have to reckon temperaments and character and a great deal besides. Now, I believe the boy's story."

"I think that in all probability we have a rascal to deal with in the person of Jacob Gayfield."

"There is not the slightest doubt of that," I said. "But what can we do?"

"I scarcely know at present," was the thoughtful response; "but if by any chance the man now dead did not destroy the will, it undoubtedly exists."

"Why do you say that?" I demanded.

"For several reasons," replied Enoch. "In the first place, while this man might hide it, he would be afraid to destroy it; I refer, of course, to our friend Jacob. To fear it up, or to burn it, however carefully, would be dangerous; a scrap of paper, or the ashes of a scrap of paper, have betrayed a man to his undoing before this. On the other hand, if it is hidden, it is hidden in that house, and it would be a tall order to ask any one to find it. I'm afraid it's hopeless, unless Jacob Gayfield betrays himself. Let's think no more about it. How are the photographs coming out?"

This was on the day following the taking of the photographs; and as the light had been remarkably good, I had already got some rough prints. Enoch Voyce looked at them carefully—if, indeed, he ever did anything carefully—and handed them back to me. Nothing more was said at the time, but late that night Enoch Voyce suddenly announced his intention of going out. As it was evident he desired that I should accompany him, I got my hat, and we set out together.

Perhaps I was not altogether surprised when I found that he was making straight for Stone House. I put a question to him once or twice, but could get no satisfactory reply; so that at last we walked out together in silence. Coming to the house we turned into the grounds, and went cautiously forward over the rank grass and amid the heaps of fallen leaves of many past seasons. Coming to the house itself, we made out that it was apparently in total darkness, and all locked up. I had begun to think that we had had our walk for nothing, when, turning an angle of the house suddenly, we found ourselves facing a window, at the side of which a little shaft of light pierced the darkness. Enoch Voyce laid a hand on my arm and crept forward; an instant later he silently beckoned to me to join him.

Being through the crack left between the blind and the window frame, I could see into a room; and in that room, at a table, sat a man looking over a wallet of papers. I saw that one paper seemed to interest him particularly; he held it balanced in his hand, and

although I could not see his face at the moment, I seemed instinctively to guess who he was, and what was the paper he held. A moment later he leaned back in his chair, and I had a full view of his face in the light of the candle upon the table. It was Jacob Gayfield, with his eyes turned upon the ceiling, and the edge of the folded paper tapping thoughtfully against his lips.

We watched him, fascinated. There was nothing we could do; because to raise an alarm would mean the loss of the photograph, and the destruction of the proof to be the one in which we were interested. Once I saw him lower it towards the candle flame, until it was almost scorched; then he drew it hastily back. Finally he thrust all the papers, with that exception, into the wallet, and locked the wallet in a drawer; then, with that paper in his hand, stooped and blew out the candle. With instant action the picture faded and we were left in the darkness.

Once outside in the road again, Enoch spoke. "He has made up his mind, as I thought, not to burn it," he said. "Somewhere in that house it is hidden; yet, if he once thinks that any one is on the track of it, the life of the paper may be numbered by seconds. How to find it and yet not let him know that search is being made, that is the pretty problem we have to face."

When we reached the inn again, Enoch Voyce asked for another sight of the photographs; he scratched his chin thoughtfully over them for quite a long time. In answer to my questioning, however, he would say nothing; he merely thrust a completed print into his pocket, and announced his intention of calling on Jacob Gayfield the next morning with it. I had too much respect for the astuteness of my old friend not to know that he had lighted upon some solution of the mystery. I waited with what patience I might until the morrow.

Jacob Gayfield received us as charmingly as before. He appeared delighted to know that we had taken so much interest in the house and in the curious story attached to it.

Enoch Voyce assured him of our gratitude to him and asked that we might once more have the pleasure of seeing some of the rooms. Enoch, for his part, wished to carry away a strong remembrance of so remarkable a house.

A little surprised, but still perfectly courteous, Jacob Gayfield led the way.

We went into two or three of the rooms and I saw Enoch Voyce looking about him sharply. Once, indeed, he fixed his keen eyes on Jacob Gayfield with such a murderous look, when that gentleman's attention was called to something else, that I felt for a moment that my old friend had made up his mind that the man carried that paper with him and that he was about to tear it from him. However, nothing desperate happened until we came into that room in which old Anthony Gayfield had died. Nothing had been disturbed there, so far as we could see; yet Enoch Voyce lingered, on one pretext and another, until even Jacob Gayfield began to show signs of impatience. He looked at his watch and frowned and coughed. And still Enoch Voyce went on asking foolish questions and talking about the dead man and about young Bailey Gayfield until even I felt that we were outwearing our welcome. But at last he said something which struck me as curious.

"When the late Mrs. Gayfield died her devoted husband stopped all the clocks at the moment of her death," he said slowly.

"Yes—I have already told you that," said Jacob Gayfield, with open impatience. "And now, gentlemen, I must really ask you to excuse me; I have a great deal to attend to."

"One moment, sir," said Enoch, standing before the fireplace and holding a forefinger up at the man. "Every clock in this house points at this present minute to seventeen minutes past 7; a photograph taken of this room by Jacob Gayfield until seven minutes past 7, instead of seven minutes past 7, shows the clock pointing to seven. He swung round suddenly and pointed to the clock. 'Look at that!'" he cried.

The man started and made a sudden movement towards him; Enoch cried out and raised a warning hand.

"Keep off!" he cried. "This clock differs from the photograph, in that the minute hand points to nineteen minutes past 7, instead of seven minutes past 7. This photograph was taken some one has accidentally touched the pendulum and started the clock; then stopped it again, two and a half minutes later."

"You leave my business alone—and get out of the house!" exclaimed Jacob Gayfield, roughly, advancing towards him, but a sign from Enoch I stepped forward and held the man back.

Enoch had turned the clock round and dexterously wrenched off part of the back; that back appeared to be double, and from it there fell a folded paper. Jacob Gayfield was struggling fiercely, but I had him in a tight grip; for one so mild and courteous his language was awful.

"This is the most interesting of the papers," said Enoch, as the last will and testament—perfectly legal and straightforward—of the late Anthony Gayfield, leaving all to his dear son, Bailey Gayfield. I will take it to the young man at once."

The Unfolding of All False Girls. By R. MURRAY GILCHRIST.

HE SLEEK little curate cousin with the crooked mouth had willingly consented to escort Mrs. Campion and Marion from their house in the Woodlands to the Darrand agricultural show. The old pheasant, which had been the great attraction of the show, was on the occasion, and the still older pony clipped and burnished and newly shod. It was to be Marion's first glimpse of the outer world, for since Mr. Campion's death his widow had lived in absolute retirement.

The girl was oddly excited; as the farm lad was finally preparing the van to take us every where about the house and grounds. Above all, he took us into the room in which the woman had died, and in which Anthony Gayfield had passed the remainder of his life. That room was a little more comfortable than the others—in that a

again; but after a moment's deliberation opened her work-box and hid it beneath the skirts of silk. It was her first love letter, and must be carefully preserved. In the crowd she might lose it, strange feet might trample it into the ground.

As she closed the lid lingeringly she heard the sound of her mother's approach. Mrs. Campion fluttered in, almost as fair and fragile in middle age as when she had willfully blinded herself to class prejudice and married a yeoman. She had loved her husband, and their wedded life had been cloudlessly happy, but she had never forgotten that she was the daughter of a baron, although from the first she had renounced her place in society. Today, since this was her girl's first appearance in public, her pride had risen to fever heat; she moved as gracefully as if she were playing cynosure at one of the assemblies she had known in youth. Two strikes and three eves had been sold for their gowns and hats; she wore dove-colored silk and a black lace mantle—the latter brought from Spain by a great uncle who had won a victory in the Peninsular War; Marion wore soft white muslin that clipped tenderly the curves of her budding figure.

The mother's staidness called forth a fitting response; Marion dismissed forever the last marks of boyhood. Mrs. Campion took her gloved hand and drew her to a milwedge mirror, where they gazed upon their reflection. Then she turned abruptly and kissed her daughter on the cheek.

"You must know, child," she said, "that you are lovely. Today I am to have my little triumph—God knows if I shall ever have another! There will be folk at Darrand who remember me before my marriage—they shall see that the child I have borne has lost nothing by my withdrawal. My dear one, when you are as old as I, you'll know who my heart says."

The lad brought the phaeton to the terrace, and Gervase held open the door while they entered, then followed and took the reins. An imaginative student of history might have compared the party with two court ladies of different generations, accompanied for contrast's sake by an insignificant dwarf. When the highroad was reached Marion, half turning, gave a little cry of pleasure.

"O, mother, there's Jason Wright on Bluebell! she's to win two competitions."

A young farmer drew up aside the phaeton. He was big and fair, with a bright yellow mustache. The sight of their gala costume abashed him; he could only stammer out a greeting. Mrs. Campion blessed him good fortune; today there was a slight imperceptible shade of coldness in her voice. Marion's eyes blazed with delight as she contemplated the well-groomed man and mare; the curate frowned and averted his face.

Jason rode on again. Marion leaned sideways and watched him disappear behind a limestone crag that jutted through the trees. Her mother touched her gently on the arm.

"You must cultivate more reserve, my dear," she whispered. "It is unwise to display too great an interest in such a trivial matter. Of course we all wish that Mr. Wright may win; still, such open eagerness is indiscreet."

And after that, for the remainder of the drive, Marion sat in elegant composure, and her mother understood that she was learning her first lesson in worldliness. At the forecourt of the Ashford Arms they alighted, and when the ostler had led the pony across the road to the great stable yard, Gervase conducted them to the coffee room, where, by Mrs. Campion's instructions, he had reserved a table. The other partakers of lunch cast many admiring glances at the two women; near the end window a shriveled old man and his stout, overdressed wife were so entranced that they forgot to eat and did naught but whisper and gape. Mrs. Campion's gaze swept over the other folk present, half in the hope of seeing some one associated with her past; but although a goodly number of gentry mingled with the bourgeoisie, she recognized none.

Marion found her manner imperative; she behaved with the dignity of one accustomed to command. The best wines were brought, and the supply of napkins, which the head waitress had long since declared exhausted by the excess of visitors, was miraculously replenished.

As Marion stopped to examine a cluster of white bloom, she felt a soft touch on her sleeve, and turning, saw Jason Wright for the second time. Her eyes sparkled brightly; a pretty flush rose to her cheeks.

"I scarce dare speak to you, Marion," he said, in a low voice. "See—every one stares—they forget to look at the flowers when you are by."

Mrs. Campion's back was towards them at that moment.

"I wish you luck once more," said Marion.

Wright tore a bunch of blue ribbons from his button-hole. "Wear my colors," he pleaded, "and the mare will have no chance of losing."

She fastened the knot at her throat; Wright moved away, for Mrs. Campion was coming slowly towards them, accompanied by an elderly man, tall and handsome, with a wonderful distinction in his high brow, clean shaven face, Gervase followed servilely, like a cowed lackey. The pride that had lain dormant for so many years in the widow's heart was now magnificently apparent.

"The duke of Ashford," she said, "my daughter Marion."

The girl knew his story of a brief but marvellously happy married life of twenty years spent untrammelled. Her lips curved charmingly as he bent over her hand in courtly fashion. The onlookers hung back, watching eagerly.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Campion," he said, slowly. "I had not thought that our country could produce such perfection nowadays."

Then, bowing once more, he passed on to take his place on the top of the Ashford family coach. Marion's eyes met Wright's, and read there both anger and resentment. Mrs. Campion took her arm and drew her to the open air.

"I remember him as Lord Charles Greenlowe," she said. "He married shortly before I did. I have always thought him the handsomest man I ever knew—save your father. Now, let us go to the grand stand, child; this walking to and fro tires me and I want to rest."

The folk outside parted to make way for them; they passed between two rows of enraptured faces. Marion heard their amazed exclamations, and her blood began to course with subtle quickness. She affected unconsciousness, she assumed an air of indifference that peered her mother's. They reached the platform reserved for the other rose and watched intently, and began to whisper concerning their identity.

It was not until they were seated that Mrs. Campion observed Marion's blue ribbons. She did not pause to deliberate, but bent towards her and murmured in her ear:

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