

## CHAPTER VIII

Andrew had set apart July 31 for killing Lord Randolph Churchill.

As his term of probation was up in the second week of August, this would leave him nearly a fortnight to finish his thesis in.

On the 30th he bought a knife in Holborn suitable for his purpose. It had been his original intention to use an electric rifle, but those he was shown were too cumbersome for use in the streets.

The eminent statesman was residing at this time at the Grand Hotel, and Andrew thought to get him somewhere between Trafalgar Square and the House. Taking up his position in a window of Morley's Hotel at an early hour, he set himself to watch the windows opposite. The plan of the Grand was well known to him, for he had frequently made use of it as overlooking the National Liberal Club, whose membership he had already slightly reduced.

Turning his eyes to the private sitting-rooms, he soon discovered Lord Randolph busily writing in one of them.

Andrew had lunch at Morley's, so that he might be prepared for any emergency. Lord Randolph wrote on doggedly through the forenoon, and Andrew hoped he would finish what he was at in case this might be his last chance.

It rained all through the afternoon. The thick drizzle seemed to double the width of the street, and even to Andrew's strained eyes the shadow in the room opposite was obscured.

His eyes wandered from the window to the hotel entrance, and as cab after cab rattled from it he became uneasy.

In ordinary circumstances he could have picked his man out anywhere, but in rain all men look alike. He could have dashed across the street and rushed from room to room of the Grand Hotel.

His self-restraint was rewarded.

Late in the afternoon Lord Randolph came to the window. The flashing waterproofs and scurrying umbrellas were a surprise to him, and he knitted his brows in annoyance.

By-and-by his face was convulsed with laughter.

He drew a chair to the window and stood on it, that he might have a better view of the pavement beneath.

For some twenty minutes he remained there smacking his thighs, his shoulders heaving with glee.

Andrew could not see what it was, but he formulated a theory.

Heavy blobs of rain that had gathered on the window-sill slowly released their hold from time to time and fell with a plump on the hats of passers-by. Lord Randolph was watching them.

Just as they were letting go he shook the window to make the wayfarers look up. They got the rain-drops full in the face, and then he screamed.

About six o'clock Andrew paid his bill hurriedly and ran downstairs. Lord Randolph had come to the window in his greatcoat. His follower waited for him outside. It was possible that he would take a hansom and drive straight to the House, but Andrew had reasons for thinking this unlikely. The rain had somewhat abated. Lord Randolph came out, put up his umbrella, and, glancing at the sky for a moment, set off briskly up St. Martin's Lane.

Andrew knew that he would not linger here, for they had done St. Martin's Lane already.

Lord Randolph's movements these last days had excited the Scotchman's curiosity. He had been doing the London streets systematically during his unoccupied afternoons. But it was difficult to discover what he was after.

It was the tobacconists' shops that attracted him.

He did not enter, only stood at the windows counting something.

He jotted down the result on a piece of paper and then sped on to the next shop.

In this way, with Andrew at his heels, he had done the whole of the W. C. district, St. James's, Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Bond Street, and the Burlington Arcade.

On this occasion he took the small thoroughfares lying between upper Regent Street and Tottenham Court Road. Beginning in Great Titchfield Street he went from tobacconist's to tobacconist's, sometimes smiling to himself, at other times frowning. Andrew scrutinised the windows as he left them, but could make nothing of it.

Not for the first time he felt that there could be no murder to-night unless he saw the paper first.

Lord Randolph devoted an hour to this work. Then he hailed a cab.

Andrew expected this. But the statesman still held the paper loosely in his hand.

It was a temptation.

Andrew bounded forward as if to open the cab door, pounced upon the paper and disappeared with it up an alley. After five minutes' dread lest he might be pursued, he struck a match and read:

"Great Titchfield Street--Branscombe 15, Churchill 11, Langtry 8, Gladstone 4.

"Mortimer Street--Langtry 11, Branscombe 9, Gladstone 6, Mary Anderson 6, Churchill 3.

"Margaret Street--Churchill 7, Anderson 6, Branscombe 5, Gladstone 4, Chamberlain 4.

"Smaller streets--Churchill 14, Branscombe 13, Gladstone 9, Langtry 9. Totals for to-day: Churchill 35, Langtry 28, Gladstone 23, Branscombe 42, Anderson 12, Chamberlain nowhere." Then followed, as if in a burst of passion, "Branscombe still leading--confound her."

Andrew saw that Lord Randolph had been calculating fame from vesta boxes.

For a moment this discovery sent Andrew's mind wandering. Miss Branscombe's photographs obstructed the traffic. Should not this be put a stop to? Ah, but she was a woman!

This recalled him to himself. Lord Randolph had departed, probably for St. Stephen's.

Andrew jumped into a hansom. He felt like an exotic in a glass frame.

"The House," he said.

What a pity his mother could not have seen him then!

Perhaps Andrew was prejudiced. Undoubtedly he was in a mood to be easily pleased.

In his opinion at any rate. Lord Randolph's speech that night on the Irish question was the best he ever delivered.

It came on late in the evening, and he stuck to his text like a clergyman. He quoted from Hansard to prove that Mr. Gladstone did not know what he was talking about; he blazed out against the Parnellites till they were called to order. The ironical members who cried "Hear, hear," regretted it.

He had never been wittier, never more convincing, never so magnificently vituperative.

Andrew was lifted out of himself. He jumped in ecstasy to his feet. It was he who led the applause.

He felt that this was a worthy close to a brilliant career.

We oldsters looking on more coolly could have seen where the speech was lacking, so far as Andrew was concerned. It is well known that when a great man, of whom there will be biographers, is to die a violent death, his last utterances are strangely significant, as if he foresaw his end.

There was nothing of this in Lord Randolph's speech.

The House was thinning when the noble lord rose to go. Andrew joined him at the gate.

The Scotchman's nervous elation had all gone. A momentary thrill passed through his veins as he remembered that in all probability they would never be together again. After that he was quite calm.

The night was black.

The rain had ceased, but for an occasional drop shaken out of a shivering star.

But for a few cabs rolling off with politicians, Whitehall was deserted.

The very tax-collectors seemed to have got to bed.

Lord Randolph shook hands with two or three other members homeward bound, walked a short distance with one of them, and then set off towards his hotel alone.

His pace was leisurely, as that of a man in profound thought.

There was no time to be lost; but Andrew dallied.

Once he crept up and could have done it. He thought he would give him another minute. There was a footstep behind, and he fell back. It was Sir William Harcourt. Lord Randolph heard him, and, seeing who it was, increased his pace.

The illustrious Liberal slackened at the same moment.

Andrew bit his lip and hurried on.

Some time was lost in getting round Sir William.

He was advancing in strides now.

Lord Randolph saw that he was pursued.

When Andrew began to run, he ran too.

There were not ten yards between them at Whitehall Place.

A large man turning the corner of Great Scotland Yard fell against Andrew. He was wheeled aside, but Mr. Chaplin had saved a colleague's life.

With a cry Andrew bounded on, his knife glistening.

Trafalgar Square was a black mass.

Lord Randolph took Northumberland Avenue in four steps, Andrew almost on the top of him.

As he burst through the door of the Grand Hotel, his pursuer made one tremendous leap, and his knife catching Lord Randolph in the heel, carried away his shoe.

Andrew's face had struck the steps.

He heard the word "Fenian."

There was a rushing to and fro of lights.

Springing to his feet, he thrust the shoe into his pocket and went home.