

## CHAPTER XVI.

ON our way back I received from the runner some explanation of his apparently unaccountable proceedings in reference to myself.

To begin at the beginning, it turned out that the first act of the officers, on their release from the workroom in the red-brick house, was to institute a careful search for papers in the doctor's study and bedroom. Among the other documents that he had not had time to destroy, was a letter to him from Alicia, which they took from one of the pockets of his dressing-gown. Finding, from the report of the men who had followed the gig, that he had distanced all pursuit, and having therefore no direct clew to his whereabouts, they had been obliged to hunt after him in various directions, on pure speculation. Alicia's letter to her father gave the address of the house at Crickgelly; and to this the runner repaired, on the chance of intercepting or discovering any communications which the doctor might make to his daughter, Screw being taken with the officer to identify the young lady. After leaving the last coach, they posted to within a mile of Crickgelly, and then walked into the village, in order to excite no special attention, should the doctor be lurking in the neighborhood. The runner had tried ineffectually to gain admission as a visitor at Zion Place. After having the door shut on him, he and Screw had watched the house and village, and had seen me approach Number Two. Their suspicions were directly excited.

Thus far, Screw had not recognized, nor even observed me; but he immediately identified me by my voice, while I was parleying with the stupid servant at the door. The runner, hearing who I was, reasonably enough concluded that I must be the recognized medium of communication between the doctor and his daughter, especially when he found that I was admitted, instantly after calling, past the servant, to some one inside the house.

Leaving Screw on the watch, he went to the inn, discovered himself privately to the landlord, and made sure (in more ways than one, as I conjectured) of knowing when, and in what direction, I should leave Crickgelly. On finding that I was to leave it the next morning, with Alicia and Mrs. Baggs, he immediately suspected that I was charged with the duty of taking the daughter to, or near, the place chosen for the father's retreat; and had therefore abstained from interfering prematurely with my movements. Knowing whither we were bound in the cart, he had ridden after us, well out of sight, with his countryman's disguise ready for use in the saddle-bags--Screw, in case of any mistakes or mystifications, being left behind on the watch at Crickgelly.

The possibility that I might be running away with Alicia had suggested itself to him; but he dismissed it as improbable, first when he saw that Mrs. Baggs accompanied us, and again, when, on nearing Scotland, he found that we did not take the road to Gretna Green. He acknowledged, in conclusion, that he should have followed us to Edinburgh, or even to

the Continent itself, on the chance of our leading him to the doctor's retreat, but for the servant girl at the inn, who had listened outside the door while our brief marriage ceremony was proceeding, and from whom, with great trouble and delay, he had extracted all the information he required. A further loss of half an hour's time had occurred while he was getting the necessary help to assist him, in the event of my resisting, or trying to give him the slip, in making me a prisoner. These small facts accounted for the hour's respite we had enjoyed at the inn, and terminated the runner's narrative of his own proceedings.

On arriving at our destination I was, of course, immediately taken to the jail.

Alicia, by my advice, engaged a modest lodging in a suburb of Barkingham. In the days of the red-brick house, she had seldom been seen in the town, and she was not at all known by sight in the suburb. We arranged that she was to visit me as often as the authorities would let her. She had no companion, and wanted none. Mrs. Baggs, who had never forgiven the rebuke administered to her at the starting-point of our journey, left us at the close of it. Her leave-taking was dignified and pathetic. She kindly informed Alicia that she wished her well, though she could not conscientiously look upon her as a lawful married woman; and she begged me (in case I got off), the next time I met with a respectable person who was kind to me, to profit by remembering my past errors, and to treat my next benefactress with more confidence than I had treated her.

My first business in the prison was to write to Mr. Batterbury.

I had a magnificent ease to present to him, this time. Although I believed myself, and had succeeded in persuading Alicia, that I was sure of being recommended to mercy, it was not the less the fact that I was charged with an offense still punishable by death, in the then barbarous state of the law. I delicately stated just enough of my case to make one thing clear to the mind of Mr. Batterbury. My affectionate sister's interest in the contingent reversion was now ( unless Lady Malkinshaw perversely and suddenly expired) actually threatened by the Gallows!

While calmly awaiting the answer, I was by no means without subjects to occupy my attention when Alicia was not at the prison. There was my fellow-workman--Mill--(the first member of our society betrayed by Screw) to compare notes with; and there was a certain prisoner who had been transported, and who had some very important and interesting particulars to communicate, relative to life and its chances in our felon-settlements at the Antipodes. I talked a great deal with this man; for I felt that his experience might be of the greatest possible benefit to me.

Mr. Batterbury's answer was speedy, short, and punctual. I had shattered his nervous system forever, he wrote, but had only stimulated his devotion to my family, and his Christian readiness to look pityingly on my transgressions. He had engaged the leader of the circuit to defend

me; and he would have come to see me, but for Mrs. Batterbury; who had implored him not to expose himself to agitation. Of Lady Malkinshaw the letter said nothing; but I afterward discovered that she was then at Cheltenham, drinking the waters and playing whist in the rudest health and spirits.

It is a bold thing to say, but nothing will ever persuade me that Society has not a sneaking kindness for a Rogue.

For example, my father never had half the attention shown to him in his own house, which was shown to me in my prison. I have seen High Sheriffs in the great world, whom my father went to see, give him two fingers--the High Sheriff of Barkinghamshire came to see me, and shook hands cordially. Nobody ever wanted my father's autograph--dozens of people asked for mine. Nobody ever put my father's portrait in the frontispiece of a magazine, or described his personal appearance and manners with anxious elaboration, in the large type of a great newspaper--I enjoyed both those honors. Three official individuals politely begged me to be sure and make complaints if my position was not perfectly comfortable. No official individual ever troubled his head whether my father was comfortable or not. When the day of my trial came, the court was thronged by my lovely countrywomen, who stood up panting in the crowd and crushing their beautiful dresses, rather than miss the pleasure of seeing the dear Rogue in the dock. When my father once stood on the lecturer's rostrum, and delivered his excellent discourse, called "Medical Hints to Maids and Mothers on Tight Lacing and Teething," the

benches were left empty by the ungrateful women of England, who were not in the slightest degree anxious to feast their eyes on the sight of a learned adviser and respectable man. If these facts led to one inevitable conclusion, it is not my fault. We Rogues are the spoiled children of Society. We may not be openly acknowledged as Pets, but we all know, by pleasant experience, that we are treated like them.

The trial was deeply affecting. My defense--or rather my barrister's--was the simple truth. It was impossible to overthrow the facts against us; so we honestly owned that I got into the scrape through love for Alicia. My counsel turned this to the best possible sentimental account. He cried; the ladies cried; the jury cried; the judge cried; and Mr. Batterbury, who had desperately come to see the trial, and know the worst, sobbed with such prominent vehemence, that I believe him, to this day, to have greatly influenced the verdict. I was strongly recommended to mercy and got off with fourteen years' transportation. The unfortunate Mill, who was tried after me, with a mere dry-eyed barrister to defend him, was hanged.

POSTSCRIPT.

WITH the record of my sentence of transportation, my life as a Rogue ends, and my existence as a respectable man begins. I am sorry to say anything which may disturb popular delusions on the subject of poetical justice, but this is strictly the truth.

My first anxiety was about my wife's future.

Mr. Batterbury gave me no chance of asking his advice after the trial.

The moment sentence had been pronounced, he allowed himself to be helped

out of court in a melancholy state of prostration, and the next morning he left for London. I suspect he was afraid to face me, and nervously impatient, besides, to tell Annabella that he had saved the legacy again by another alarming sacrifice. My father and mother, to whom I had written on the subject of Alicia, were no more to be depended on than Mr. Batterbury. My father, in answering my letter, told me that he conscientiously believed he had done enough in forgiving me for throwing away an excellent education, and disgracing a respectable name. He added that he had not allowed my letter for my mother to reach her, out of pitying regard for her broken health and spirits; and he ended by telling me (what was perhaps very true) that the wife of such a son as I had been, had no claim upon her father-in-law's protection and help. There was an end, then, of any hope of finding resources for Alicia among the members of my own family.

The next thing was to discover a means of providing for her without assistance. I had formed a project for this, after meditating over my conversations with the returned transport in Barkingham jail, and I had taken a reliable opinion on the chances of successfully executing my design from the solicitor who had prepared my defense.

Alicia herself was so earnestly in favor of assisting in my experiment, that she declared she would prefer death to its abandonment. Accordingly, the necessary preliminaries were arranged; and, when we parted, it was some mitigation of our grief to know that there was a time appointed for meeting again. Alicia was to lodge with a distant relative of her mother's in a suburb of London; was to concert measures with this relative on the best method of turning her jewels into money; and was to follow her convict husband to the Antipodes, under a feigned name, in six months' time.

If my family had not abandoned me, I need not have thus left her to help herself. As it was, I had no choice. One consolation supported me at parting--she was in no danger of persecution from her father. A second letter from him had arrived at Crickgelly, and had been forwarded to the address I had left for it. It was dated Hamburg, and briefly told her to remain at Crickgelly, and expect fresh instructions, explanations, and a supply of money, as soon as he had settled the important business matters which had taken him abroad. His daughter answered the letter, telling him of her marriage, and giving him an address at a post-office to write to, if he chose to reply to her communication. There the matter rested.

What was I to do on my side? Nothing but establish a reputation for mild behavior. I began to manufacture a character for myself for the first days of our voyage out in the convict-ship; and I landed at the penal settlement with the reputation of being the meekest and most biddable of



felonious mankind.

After a short probationary experience of such low convict employments as lime-burning and road-mending, I was advanced to occupations more in harmony with my education. Whatever I did, I never neglected the first great obligation of making myself agreeable and amusing to everybody. My social reputation as a good fellow began to stand as high at one end of the world as ever it stood at the other. The months passed more quickly than I had dared to hope. The expiration of my first year of transportation was approaching, and already pleasant hints of my being soon assigned to private service began to reach my ears. This was the first of the many ends I was now working for; and the next pleasant realization of my hopes that I had to expect, was the arrival of Alicia.

She came, a month later than I had anticipated; safe and blooming, with five hundred pounds as the produce of her jewels, and with the old Crickgelly alias (changed from Miss to Mrs. Giles), to prevent any suspicions of the connection between us.

Her story (concocted by me before I left England) was, that she was a widow lady, who had come to settle in Australia, and make the most of her little property in the New World. One of the first things Mrs. Giles wanted was necessarily a trustworthy servant, and she had to make her choice of one among the convicts of good character, to be assigned to private service. Being one of that honorable body myself at the time, it is needless to say that I was the fortunate man on whom Mrs. Giles's

choice fell. The first situation I got in Australia was as servant to my own wife.

Alicia made a very indulgent mistress.

If she had been mischievously inclined, she might, by application to a magistrate, have had me flogged or set to work in chains on the roads, whenever I became idle or insubordinate, which happened occasionally. But instead of complaining, the kind creature kissed and made much of her footman by stealth, after his day's work. She allowed him no female followers, and only employed one woman-servant occasionally, who was both old and ugly. The name of the footman was Dear in private, and Francis in company; and when the widowed mistress, upstairs, refused eligible offers of marriage (which was pretty often), the favored domestic in the kitchen was always informed of it, and asked, with the sweetest humility, if he approved of the proceeding.

Not to dwell on this anomalous period of my existence, let me say briefly that my new position with my wife was of the greatest advantage in enabling me to direct in secret the profitable uses to which her little fortune was put.

We began in this way with an excellent speculation in cattle--buying them for shillings and selling them for pounds. With the profits thus obtained, we next tried our hands at houses--first buying in a small way, then boldly building, and letting again and selling to great

advantage. While these speculations were in progress, my behavior in my wife's service was so exemplary, and she gave me so excellent a character when the usual official inquiries were instituted, that I soon got the next privilege accorded to persons in my situation--a ticket-of-leave. By the time this had been again exchanged for a conditional pardon (which allowed me to go about where I pleased in Australia, and to trade in my own name like any unconvicted merchant) our house-property had increased enormously, our land had been sold for public buildings, and we had shares in the famous Emancipist's Bank, which produced quite a little income of themselves.

There was now no need to keep the mask on any longer.

I went through the superfluous ceremony of a second marriage with Alicia; took stores in the city; built a villa in the country; and here I am at this present moment of writing, a convict aristocrat--a prosperous, wealthy, highly respectable mercantile man, with two years of my sentence of transportation still to expire. I have a barouche and two bay horses, a coachman and page in neat liveries, three charming children, and a French governess, a boudoir and lady's-maid for my wife. She is as handsome as ever, but getting a little fat. So am I, as a worthy friend remarked when I recently appeared holding the plate, at our last charity sermon.

What would my surviving relatives and associates in England say, if they could see me now? I have heard of them at different times and through

various channels. Lady Malkinshaw, after living to the verge of a hundred, and surviving all sorts of accidents, died quietly one afternoon, in her chair, with an empty dish before her, and without giving the slightest notice to anybody. Mr. Batterbury, having sacrificed so much to his wife's reversion, profited nothing by its falling in at last. His quarrels with my amiable sister--which took their rise from his interested charities toward me--ended in producing a separation. And, far from saving anything by Annabella's inheritance of her pin-money, he had a positive loss to put up with, in the shape of some hundreds extracted yearly from his income, as alimony to his uncongenial wife. He is said to make use of shocking language whenever my name is mentioned, and to wish that he had been carried off by the yellow fever before he ever set eyes on the Softly family.

My father has retired from practice. He and my mother have gone to live in the country, near the mansion of the only marquis with whom my father was actually and personally acquainted in his professional days. The marquis asks him to dinner once a year, and leaves a card for my mother before he returns to town for the season. A portrait of Lady Malkinshaw hangs in the dining-room. In this way, my parents are ending their days contentedly. I can honestly say that I am glad to hear it.

Doctor Dulcifer, when I last heard of him, was editing a newspaper in America. Old File, who shared his flight, still shares his fortunes, being publisher of his newspaper. Young File resumed coining operations in London; and, having braved his fate a second time, threaded his way,

in due course, up to the steps of the scaffold. Screw carries on the profitable trade of informer, in London. The dismal disappearance of Mill I have already recorded.

So much on the subject of my relatives and associates. On the subject of myself, I might still write on at considerable length. But while the libelous title of "A ROGUE'S LIFE" stares me in the face at the top of the page, how can I, as a rich and reputable man, be expected to communicate any further autobiographical particulars, in this place, to a discerning public of readers? No, no, my friends! I am no longer interesting--I am only respectable like yourselves. It is time to say "Good-by."