

**BOOK THE SEVENTH--THE CLINK.**

**CHAPTER LVIII. A COUNCIL OF TWO.**

Early in the last century one of the picturesque race of robbers and murderers, practicing the vices of humanity on the borderlands watered by the river Tweed, built a tower of stone on the coast of Northumberland. He lived joyously in the perpetration of atrocities; and he died penitent, under the direction of his priest. Since that event, he has figured in poems and pictures; and has been greatly admired by modern ladies and gentlemen, whom he would have outraged and robbed if he had been lucky enough to meet with them in the good old times.

His son succeeded him, and failed to profit by the paternal example: that is to say, he made the fatal mistake of fighting for other people instead of fighting for himself.

In the rebellion of Forty-Five, this northern squire sided to serious purpose with Prince Charles and the Highlanders. He lost his head; and his children lost their inheritance. In the lapse of years, the confiscated property fell into the hands of strangers; the last of whom (having a taste for the turf) discovered, in course of time, that he was in want of money. A retired merchant, named Delvin (originally of French extraction), took a liking to the wild situation, and purchased the tower. His wife--already in failing health--had been ordered by the doctors to live a quiet life by the sea. Her husband's death left her a rich and lonely widow; by day and night alike, a prisoner in her room; wasted by disease, and having but two interests which reconciled her to life--writing poetry in the intervals of pain, and paying the debts of a reverend brother who succeeded in the pulpit, and prospered nowhere else.

In the later days of its life, the tower had been greatly improved as a place of residence. The contrast was remarkable between the dreary gray outer walls, and the luxuriously furnished rooms inside, rising by two at a time to the lofty eighth story of the building. Among the scattered populace of the country round, the tower was still known by the odd name given to it in the bygone time--"The Clink." It had been so called (as was supposed) in allusion to the noise made by loose stones, washed backward and forward at certain times of the tide, in hollows of the rock on which the building stood.

On the evening of her arrival at Mrs. Delvin's retreat, Emily retired at an early hour, fatigued by her long journey. Mirabel had an opportunity of speaking with his sister privately in her own room.

"Send me away, Agatha, if I disturb you," he said, "and let me know when I can see you in the morning."

"My dear Miles, have you forgotten that I am never able to sleep in calm weather? My lullaby, for years past, has been the moaning of the great North Sea, under my window. Listen! There is not a sound outside on this peaceful night. It is the right time of the tide, just now--and yet, 'the clink' is not to be heard. Is the moon up?"

Mirabel opened the curtains. "The whole sky is one great abyss of black," he answered. "If I was superstitious, I should think that horrid darkness a bad omen for the future. Are you suffering, Agatha?"

"Not just now. I suppose I look sadly changed for the worse since you saw me last?"

But for the feverish brightness of her eyes, she would have looked like a corpse. Her wrinkled forehead, her hollow cheeks, her white lips told their terrible tale of the suffering of years. The ghastly appearance of her face was heightened by the furnishing of the room. This doomed woman, dying slowly day by day, delighted in bright colors and sumptuous materials. The paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpet presented the hues of the rainbow. She lay on a couch covered with purple silk, under draperies of green velvet to keep her warm. Rich lace hid her scanty hair, turning prematurely gray; brilliant rings glittered on her bony fingers. The room was in a blaze of light from lamps and candles. Even the wine at her side that kept her alive had been decanted into a bottle of lustrous Venetian glass. "My grave is open," she used to say; "and I want all these beautiful things to keep me from looking at it. I should die at once, if I was left in the dark."

Her brother sat by the couch, thinking "Shall I tell you what is in your mind?" she asked.

Mirabel humored the caprice of the moment. "Tell me!" he said.

"You want to know what I think of Emily," she answered. "Your letter told me you were in love; but I didn't believe your letter. I have always doubted whether you were capable of feeling true love--until I saw Emily. The

moment she entered the room, I knew that I had never properly appreciated my brother. You are in love with her, Miles; and you are a better man than I thought you. Does that express my opinion?"

Mirabel took her wasted hand, and kissed it gratefully.

"What a position I am in!" he said. "To love her as I love her; and, if she knew the truth, to be the object of her horror--to be the man whom she would hunt to the scaffold, as an act of duty to the memory of her father!"

"You have left out the worst part of it," Mrs. Delvin reminded him. "You have bound yourself to help her to find the man. Your one hope of persuading her to become your wife rests on your success in finding him. And you are the man. There is your situation! You can't submit to it. How can you escape from it?"

"You are trying to frighten me, Agatha."

"I am trying to encourage you to face your position boldly."

"I am doing my best," Mirabel said, with sullen resignation. "Fortune has favored me so far. I have, really and truly, been unable to satisfy Emily by discovering Miss Jethro. She has left the place at which I saw her last--there is no trace to be found of her--and Emily knows it."

"Don't forget," Mrs. Delvin replied, "that there is a trace to be found of Mrs. Rook, and that Emily expects you to follow it."

Mirabel shuddered. "I am surrounded by dangers, whichever way I look," he said. "Do what I may, it turns out to be wrong. I was wrong, perhaps, when I brought Emily here."

"No!"

"I could easily make an excuse," Mirabel persisted "and take her back to London."

"And for all you know to the contrary," his wiser sister replied, "Mrs. Rook may go to London; and you may take Emily back in time to receive her at the cottage. In every way you are safer in my old tower. And--don't forget--you have got my money to help you, if you want it. In my belief, Miles, you will want it."

"You are the dearest and best of sisters! What do you recommend me to do?"

"What you would have been obliged to do," Mrs. Delvin answered, "if you had remained in London. You must go to Redwood Hall tomorrow, as Emily has arranged it. If Mrs. Rook is not there, you must ask for her address in Scotland. If nobody knows the address, you must still bestir yourself in trying to find it. And, when you do fall in with Mrs. Rook--"

"Well?"

"Take care, wherever it may be, that you see her privately."

Mirabel was alarmed. "Don't keep me in suspense," he burst out. "Tell me what you propose."

"Never mind what I propose, to-night. Before I can tell you what I have in my mind, I must know whether Mrs. Rook is in England or Scotland. Bring me that information to-morrow, and I shall have something to say to you. Hark! The wind is rising, the rain is falling. There is a chance of sleep for me--I shall soon hear the sea. Good-night."

"Good-night, dearest--and thank you again, and again!"