

A TERRIBLE

The Curse of the Morelands.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"You'll excuse me, I am sure, Mr. Moreland," resumed the host, as he filled the glass of his guest a second time, "for asking you to my table without having had the honor of a previous acquaintance."

"No excuses are necessary, my dear sir," returned Radd, beginning to feel a little more at his ease, although a tremor still shook him every time his gaze encountered the sleek Hindoo hovering behind the master's chair. "I—I am delighted to make your acquaintance, sir."

"Then permit me to ring at once for our supper," said the host, touching a silver-toned bell placed near him. "For my part, I am impatient to do it justice, Tipoo!"

The Hindoo hastened to open the kitchen door, at a nod from his master, when a tall and robust Bengalese woman came into the dining-room, bearing a large tray which contained all the essentials of a feast of several covers, including the fine loin of roast beef whose appetizing odors had previously fired Radd's attention.

To describe the wild stare of the startled plotter is no easy matter. The huge, massive circlets of gold on the fingers and in the ears of the East Indian woman, the flaming bandana towering upon her head, her tawny complexion; the deep, liquid blackness of her eyes; and the weird blending of colors displayed by the folds of her ample robe—all gave Radd a sense of mingled wonder and terror.

He could only continue to stare as Tipoo gave his assistance to the newcomer, and the couple proceeded, with a clerical as wonderful as their silence, to arrange upon the table a repast that would have tempted the most indifferent Sybarite.

"Of course you will try the roast beef, Mr. Moreland?" remarked the host, as he seized a carving-knife and fork and proceeded to carve the loin. "What is your preference?"

"I am not at all particular, sir," replied Radd, pinching his hands as they met under the edge of the table, to be sure that he was not dreaming. "A little of the fat with an outside piece, if it's just as handy."

"Ah, well done, then?" returned the host as he helped his guest. "Our tastes agree perfectly. Rattle, the vegetables!"

Host and guest were quickly helped to everything they desired, and the manner of the former continued so kind and attentive that Radd readily assented to the demands of his appetite, as sharpened by the glass of wine he had taken, and began giving adequate attention to the tempting repast which had been so strangely placed before him.

Little more was said, in fact, until the appetite of the host and guest had been in a great measure appeased, but not once did Radd find the Hindoo and the Bengalese woman near him, in the attentive service they gave him, without a profound nervous tremor, so deeply was he impressed by their appearance and manner.

As the meal progressed, however, the generous East India wine Radd continued to imbibe did not fall of its due effects, and gradually he grew calmer and less apprehensive, at length going so far as to laugh heartily at some of the pleasant observations of his host.

"I am glad to see you feeling more at home with me," remarked the latter, after one of these laughs. "You seemed at first quite startled at my presence at The Elms!"

"So I was, sir," returned Radd, "and I am likely to remain so if you do not do me the honor of telling me who you are!"

"What! are you ignorant of my identity?"

"As much so, I confess, as if my eyes never had the pleasure of resting upon you."

"Why, I am the very man of whom you were speaking not long ago to Vance Wyeville."

"What—what man?"

"Ah! I have it," cried the uncle, with a flush of jubilation. "It's Egg Island; and the nearest postoffice—the one at which we must address the ladies—is Port Norris."

Vance drew a sigh of relief. "Then we're all right," he said. "You can do no less, uncle, than write to Mrs. Moreland, and ask her what are her wishes concerning this intruder. You had better write to-night, so that the letter will go in the morning."

"All right, Vance; I will do so. And now to come back to my discoveries. There's light on the horizon at last, my dear nephew."

"I'm glad to hear it, uncle. Let's have a few beams of it."

Mr. Wyeville picked up a large octavo he had been poring over in his nephew's absence, and held it up triumphantly in such a way that the title on its back fell under the latter's gaze.

"Did you know you were the fortunate owner of this book?" he demanded.

Vance read the title, as follows: "Dr. Geo. Robnett, on Defective and Redundant Limbs and Other Malformations." Mr. Wyeville breathlessly awaited his answer.

"Yes, uncle, I was aware the work is in the library, but that is about all," was the nephew's response. "It is one of the many volumes bequeathed to me by Dr. Rathby, and also one of many that I have never found time to open."

"Then I have a great surprise for you," exclaimed Mr. Wyeville, as he drew up a chair and sat down near his nephew, turning the leaves of the volume almost affectionately. "But first a word about the book and its author. It was published in London three years ago. Its author, as you are probably aware by the name, is one of the most distinguished doctors now living in the British Empire."

"It ought to be good," declared Vance, taking the volume and running its pages inquiringly under his thumb. "Dr. Robnett's name is familiar to me as that of a prominent specialist, but I was not aware until now that he is renowned in this particular field."

"Ah, he is evidently," ejaculated Mr. Wyeville, after listening to the astounding news of the carriage and the opening of the gate. "Some stranger from a distance, in all probability, who has come by the A. O. S. train."

A succession of heavy footsteps resounded upon the walk, and soon came to a halt at the door, where the newcomer rang for admittance.

Vance and his uncle both hastened to receive him, the farmer's boy having been dismissed for the night, and such was his commanding and pleasing manner that they did not hesitate a single instant about inviting him in.

"I hope I have made no mistake, gentlemen," said the distinguished-looking stranger, as he released the hand of Mr. Wyeville after a hearty shake, and fixed an eagle-like glance upon Vance. "You are Doctor Wyeville?"

The young physician inclined himself profoundly, while Mr. Wyeville hastened to place a chair at the newcomer's disposal.

"Then I shall have the pleasure of finishing here a journey of some twelve thousand miles," announced the stranger, as his rugged but kindly face lighted up eloquently with a vivid sense of satisfaction. "I have cards somewhere on my person, but I seldom enter upon a search for them, it is so much easier to tell you in so many words that I am Doctor George Robnett, of India."

"Robnett!" cried the uncle and nephew in chorus, with as much excitement as if they had found a long-lost brother.

"Yes, that's my name. But what's the matter? Why are you so excited about it?"

"Simply because we were discussing you and one of your works at the very moment of your arrival, Doctor," explained Vance, as he seized the hand of his famous colleague and shook it heartily.

"Indeed? Well, I am pleased to find that I am not unknown in America, and that I am among friends," declared Dr. Robnett, as he seated himself. "The driver told me as I came from the station that this is the property which belonged to my correspondent of other days, Dr. Rathby!"

"It is just now called upon to perform a mission in his life, or he is miserable. Allusion has been made already to Mrs. Moreland and her daughter. Well, my nephew has fallen in love with this girl, but she has refused him because of a morbid sensitiveness about some personal defect or blemish, and—"

"Bravo!" interrupted Dr. Robnett, with a vivid flush of delight. "It seems I've dropped down here square-footed, like a cat tossed in a blanket! Just in time, in fact, to set all to rights!"

"What do you mean, Doctor?" cried Vance.

"Simply that I have been sent here by Colonel Ridley with special instructions to give my best professional attention to Mrs. Moreland and her daughter! It is owing to the Colonel's anxieties and hopes on this very point, gentlemen, that I am standing in your presence at this moment!"

"[TO BE CONTINUED.]

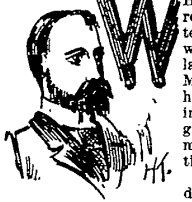
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Sprinkles of Spice. THE sky, unlike man, is most cheerful when bluest.—Texas Siftings.

SAMPSON brought down the house, but nobody called for an encore.—Siftings.

ELsie—Oh, uncle, I am so fond of you! Uncle—And why? Elsie—We always have jam when you take lunch with us.—Fleegende Blaetter.



CHAPTER VII. DR. ROBINETT.

WHEN Vance reached home after his interview with Radd Moreland, he found Mr. Wyeville in his office awaiting him with the greatest excitement and impatience.

"Come in, my dear boy," was the uncle's greeting, in his usual cheerful voice. "I was never in such a hurry to see you!"

"Indeed?" returned Vance, as he dropped wearily into a chair. "What's up?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Wyeville bestowed a very earnest scrutiny upon the countenance before him, as if he had suddenly remarked that there was something wrong about it.

"It looks to me as if a word from you might be just in order," he said. "Where have you been, who have you seen, and what has left you such a state? Are you ill?"

"No, uncle—simply disgusted," answered the young doctor. "I have been having an interview with Radd Moreland."

"Ah, he's turned up, then? Where?"

"You could never guess where, and so I shall have to tell you. He is quartered at The Elms!"

"What! in the absence of Mrs. Moreland and Jessie?"

"It is because of that absence that he is in possession," explained Vance. "In other terms he is an intruder. He effected an entrance by breaking a glass, so that he could be made to suffer for his lawlessness if his relatives cared to arrest him."

"But of course they don't!"

"Not for worlds would they touch him," declared Vance. "And the discovery of this man at The Elms throws a flood of light upon the sudden departure of Mrs. Moreland and Jessie in their sleep last evening. They have gone away to get rid of him, uncle, rather than because they had any apprehensions of our visit."

"And so you have talked with the rascal? Give me an idea of the interview."

"The young physician proceeded to do so, while Mr. Wyeville lighted a cigar with his usual air of getting ready for business."

"Yes, Radd is at The Elms without the knowledge of the ladies," was the conclusion to which the uncle instantly came. "There is danger, of course, that he will burn the place in one of his drunken bouts, but we are not authorized to expel him, and if we were we could not execute the task without creating an uproar that is more to be dreaded than death. You did quite right to leave him in possession, without a hint of the attentions we are in duty bound to give him. He didn't tell you, after all, where Mrs. Moreland and Jessie are?"

"No, uncle. After I got track of the game he was playing, I concluded to depend upon my own exertions in this respect. I have no hesitation in saying, however, that the ladies are at no great distance. I remember hearing them speak of their summer visits to an island down the lake, a rude, rustic spot enough, which was selected because it responded to their desire for solitude, and I think it more than likely that they are paying this retreat a visit."

"What a pity that we do not know where they are!" exclaimed Mr. Wyeville. "I would like to see them at this moment."