WEIRD MYSTERY

—OR—

Tracing a Dark Crime.

BY ALEXANDER ROBINSON, M. D.

CHAPTER X.

Availing myself of the first opportunity, I took it out of my pocket.

The inclosure was speedily in my hands.

I was surprised at what I found.

Theodore Parker:

Positively and for the last time refuse to grant you the interview you so impudently demand. The past has not been omitted from my mind. I am inexorable—the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. Never dare address me again in any shape. I look upon you as one dead.

ABRAHAM SEABURY.

That was all.

The two policemen had seen fit to weave a romance about this young man, believing that he was in love with Leonore and disliked by the old Doctor.

In all but one particular the letter bore out this view of the case.

This exception was in the last sentence: "I look upon you as one dead."

This, coupled with the picture turned with its face to the wall, gave me an idea which, however, I could not as yet fully seize upon.

Ah, a thought came to me!

Why not see Leonore again? She might be able to tell me who Theodore was, and even where he was to be found.

Of course I would not breathe a whisper of the reason I desired to learn this lest she take the alarm and close her mouth to all utterances with respect to him.

Again I made for the manse set in the old park.

It was well on to 10 o'clock when I reached the place.

The policemen still stood at the gate, and by this time quite a crowd had collected around the outside.

Crime of all kinds has a fascination for the morbidly curious, and always "draws" much better than a gospel meeting.

I knew this as a fact, much as I deprecated it.

The officer at the gate regarded my magic mention of Mr. Ketcham's name just as his comrade had done, and allowed me to pass by without trouble.

An old woman answered the summons. Her eyes were red with weeping, and I knew this was Ursula.

I mentioned that I had been in the house before that morning with the gentleman, who had told her the sad news, and that I wished to see Miss Leonore.

"Please give her my card. I will wait in the library," I said.

"Miss Leonore is in there herself."

"Ah! then never mind the card. I will enter unannounced."

I stood for a moment before the partly opened door of the library.

Looking through I saw a sight that would not soon leave my mind.

Leonore sat beside the table, upon which both her elbows rested. Her hands clasped her throbbing temples. Upon that beautiful face was an expression of misery such as I never hope to look upon again. It was the stony stare of one who looks upon a cold world for the first time, or peering back sees a terrible something that must haunt her forever more.

Such an expression on a face, young or old, was indeed terrible.

I knocked upon the door.

Leonore stood up and turned her eyes upon me.

"May I come in?"

She caught her breath.

"Ah! it is you, Dr. Burton? Enter."

From her manner it seemed as though she were relieved to see me.

I did not know whether to take it as a compliment or not to have my company preferred to ghosts.

Without waiting for a further invitation, however, I went in.

Again I was in the presence of the young girl against whom circumstances had arisen to accuse her of a hideous crime.

Again I felt within myself that she was innocent beyond all doubt, and I resolved to prove her so to the satisfaction of the old detective who seemed determined upon running down his quarry regardless of sex or condition.

To him justice was above all.

He could even fail to be human when engaged upon a duty.

I had come here with a distinct purpose in view. This was to find out, or at least endeavor to do so, who Theodore was, and what connection he bore to both Leonore and the dead poison Doctor.

I meant to approach the subject gently, striving to read what her face might betray while I spoke.

So I began speaking of the novel situation in which she now found herself, and inquired of whom she should seek protection, now that her guardian was dead.

She shook her head sadly.

"Alas! I hardly know what to do, Doctor. I might get a companion and live on here. It all depends upon guardy's will."

Ah! I had never thought of the will. It must be in the hands of some lawyer, and very possibly would explain things to a considerable extent.

I made up my mind to appeal to Mr. Ketcham about it at the first opportunity.

He would know what to do.

In the meantime, I realized that the opportunity for which I had waited was now at hand.

Assuming a careless manner, I said in calm tones:

"Can you not look to Theodore now?"

I had not imagined one-half the result that followed my words.

She turned upon me like a flash. Into her eyes there leaped a quick gleam that was instantly followed by a wondering look.

I could see her hands open and shut in her great emotion.

Of one thing I had already been assured—she knew who Theodore was. Though her lips might refuse to speak of him, her face had betrayed this secret.

"Oh, no, no! A thousand times no! Do not mention him, please. I cannot bear to hear his name!"

"Is it, then, so hateful to you?"

"The connection it bears with the past is far from pleasant to me. Besides, he, my guardian, would be displeased. It may seem strange to you, but even though he is dead, I seem to feel his spirit near me, to guard and protect. It is a pleasant thought, Doctor, though you may laugh at it as the silly conceit of a poor girl."

I was determined not to get off the track which had been started.

"Did you know, Miss Leonore, that Theodore has been hovering around this house for the last week or two?"

She hid her eyes with her hand.

"Yes; I knew it," faintly.

"What did he seek?"

"An interview."

"With whom?"

"With me."

Ah! now we were getting closer to the rock-bottom facts.

Why should he seek an interview with her unless he had a right to, either as a lover or something nearer—her husband.

This latter was a thought that had not come to me before.

It gave me something of a shock. Hesitating no longer, I put the question.

"Miss Leonore, who is Theodore?"

She raised her great black eyes to mine in a half-dazed way, and I fancied I could see something of pain there.

"Don't you know? I cannot tell you—I dare not tell you, Doctor. It would be displeasing to him."

I came very near uttering something disrespectful to the dead physician, but caught myself in time.

"Leonore, in solving a mystery it is essential that I should know this thing. Believe me, for your own sake tell me what relation this man Theodore bears toward you and Dr. Seabury."

"I cannot tell you," she said, sadly.

"For the same reason you spoke of before?"

"Yes. I know his wishes in this matter. Some day you will know all. It is not for me to reveal it. Doctor, you have been kind to me. Forgive me, but my lips are sealed by a promise—a vow."

That ended it, but I was just as fully determined to discover the truth as when I had started upon this tack.

There were more ways than one of accomplishing a thing. Her words had made me believe more firmly than ever that Theodore must be her husband. Perhaps he had done something in the past and had been kicked out by her angry guardian.

This would account for many things; yes, even the writing on the back of the photograph, for if Seabury had grown to fear for his life at the hands of this man he could well ascribe it all to Leonore.

I was beginning to build up quite a pretty theory that would soon rival that of the old detective.

Then we should see whose castle fell first.

Having reason to know how set a woman could be in her way, I did not attempt to change Leonore's mind.

She believed she was right. I could find other ways of learning the truth.

So I talked with her on different subjects for a short time, until I made her forget her late fears.

All the time I was reading her. It was a pleasure to me to watch the light come and go in her eyes, and note the blush upon her cheeks.

I was not so practical as Mr. Ketcham, who let nothing influence him.

After spending quite a pleasant half hour, I arose to withdraw.

In passing through the hall, I felt sure that I saw the form of Mr. Ketcham at the head of the stairs, but I did not pay any attention to the fact.

Possibly he had come back to the house for more evidence. While he was winding the spool, I was just as industriously slipping it loose, and between us it seemed simply a question of time or endurance when something must happen.

When I left Leonore, my mind was made up. My next endeavor would be to find Theodore himself.

From him perhaps I might learn the truth.

There seemed to be no clue to his place of residence, as he had received his letter through the general delivery at the postoffice.

I took it out again to look at it.

Then my eye was attracted by something that seemed to have escaped it on my previous examination.

CHAPTER XI.

There was something written in pencil across the back of the envelope.

The rain which had beaten down upon the paper had almost obliterated the writing, but it was still faintly visible.

I turned my eyes upon it and proceeded to decipher the almost faded characters.

The task was difficult, but presently I saw that the writing was an address, and the name of the street was Dudley.

When I had become satisfied with this, I turned all my powers upon the number.

At first I made it out to be 95.

Then I saw there had been another figure in front, whether two or three I could not say.

It was plain, however, that I had come exceedingly close to the truth.

Delighted with my success thus far, I now set out to find the street. It was not one of much importance, but I soon came upon it, and in a short time passed in front of No. 295.

Although not appearing to do so, I surveyed the building.

It was a modest-looking house, and I could see nothing in its external appearance to indicate that there was any connection between its inmates and men of a burglarious stamp.

Indeed, so quiet did it seem that I even experienced a feeling of disappointment concerning the probable outcome of my quest.

I remembered, however, that very often the most daring of thieves were the most cunning. They did not associate with men of their class, but were select.

Perhaps this man Theodore, having once been a gentleman, persisted in carrying his old surroundings into his new business. He must live after a certain style, and have at least the comforts of civilization around him, even if his trade was now that of a common housebreaker.

Somehow this thought gave me confidence once more.

I began to feel that looks were not everything in this world, and when I had gone some little distance down the street I turned to look back.

Ah! A man was coming out of the very house which I had been watching. He came toward me at quite a rapid pace.

To my intense surprise and delight I saw the object of my search before me.

There could be no mistake—I was looking upon Theodore Parker—the man who had climbed the vines leading up to the window, and who was in the chamber of Dr. Seabury on the night of the murder.

Knowing that I now had need of all the coolness I could command, I resolved to act my part with discretion.

As I walked on the man rapidly overtook me. I waited until he had come up alongside; then I turned.

"How do you do, Theodore?" I said.

He came to a sudden halt, and seemed very much astonished, yet I could see that my shot had gone home.

"You have the advantage of me, sir," he replied, coldly, ignoring my hand.

"You admit that you are Theodore Parker?"

"Why should I deny it?"

"Then I wish to have a private conversation with you."

"I do not know why I should grant it, sir. You are a stranger to me."

"That is true. Allow me to introduce myself," and I handed him my card.

"Dr. Burton," he read.

"At your service."

"Well, sir, will you be so good as to inform me why I should grant you an interview? I am no wiser than before."

"I come from Leonore."

The shot told. I could see the color go and come. His white teeth became tightly clenched, as though he were determined not to give way to any emotion, yet the mention of that name had knocked his reserve away, and left the past open to assault.

I knew that my name had been my passport into his favor. He looked at me again, for I had assumed new importance in his eyes.

"You have seen Leonore?" he asked, huskily.

"Yes."

"And she sent you to me?"

I could hardly say that, and yet he must be led to believe something this way.

"You see I am here."

"For what?"

"As I said before, I seek to have an interview with you. Will you go with me to some quiet restaurant where we can talk without being overheard?"

"Why not go back to my room?"

"That would do, only I do not know who else you have in the house."

His lip curled as though he believed I was actually afraid, when my inquiry was directed merely through a desire for secrecy.

"There is only an old widow lady in the house. I have a room there. She is deaf as an adder and can hear nothing."

"We could not find a better place. I will go back with you, Mr. Parker."

As I turned and walked away with him my heart beat high. At last I could see a fair prospect of reaching the end I had in view.

Theodore Parker would be obliged to confess what he knew of the murder, for I meant to pin him down with questions that he could not evade.

He opened the door with a night-key and led the way along a hall; at the end was a door which he opened.

I now found myself in a cozy room, comfortably furnished.

Theodore motioned toward a chair.

"Make yourself comfortable, sir."

When I sat down, I managed it so that the light from the window should be upon the face of my vis-a-vis, while my own was in shadow.

His hand was trembling, and I could see that he awaited my speaking with a great deal of subdued excitement.

A great question was before me. I looked at his left hand, and saw that the upper half of his forefinger was gone.

This was positive proof in one way.

To all appearances the crime now lay between Leonore and Theodore. Which could I believe the guilty party?

Already in my mind I had acquitted the girl; hence, this man must be the one whose frenzied hate had buried the blade in the heart of the old Doctor.

To beard a murderer in his den is no play. It must not be supposed that I had come here unprepared for an emergency.

Safely hidden in my pocket was a reliable revolver. I knew how to use it, too, and more than once in my researches in the Holy Land and in the old countries of Europe I had found it a faithful and efficient friend.

I could reach it with one quick movement should the occasion demand such action on my part.

Theodore waited for me to speak. Of course I did not mean to jump at the question in the start. I believed in leading a refractory horse gently.

"Mr. Parker, of course you have heard the news?"

"News, sir! what news?"

"Dr. Seabury is dead!"

"What!"

The word burst from him like a pistol shot.

His face became white as chalk, and I thought the man was about to faint; but he recovered himself with an effort, and even controlled his voice.

"Will you repeat that, sir?"

"Dr. Seabury is dead."

"When did this terrible event happen?"

"Early this morning, at ten minutes after 2."

"You are precise. Ah! I recollect—you are a physician—you were called in. Did she—Leonore send you for me?"

This was spoken naturally enough, but it did not deceive me. I knew that the man who could commit such a fearful crime could act his part in covering it up.

At the same time, I meant to keep him on the rack, giving him no rest until the final charge was sent home.

"Leonore did not send me, though it was partly for her sake I came here. Dr. Seabury did not die under my charge. When he breathed his last, so far as we know, he was alone."

I was surprised to hear the young man groan aloud.

Surely he was acting his part to perfection.

"Tell me about it, Doctor."

"You appear deeply interested."

His eyes flamed up.

"I have a right to be."

"That is so," I said, meaningly; but he did not appear to see the undertone.

"If no one was with him when he passed away, how can you affirm that he died at ten minutes past two, Doctor?"

"I shall have to tell you something of the story, sir. As I said before, I am a doctor, and, like the deceased, made a specialty of the science of toxicology.

"About half-past two this morning I was aroused from a nap which I had been enjoying upon my sofa by a knock at the door.

"Opening it, I found there Abner Ketcham, one of the best of New York detectives.

"He said he required my services, and as we were friends I entered a carriage and rode with him to Dr. Seabury's house.

"There I found the old Doctor lying dead, and at the request of my friend I examined a small phial which the dead man held in his hand.

"It contained a terrible poison, found in a tomb in the Egyptian pyramids."

"He committed suicide, then?"

There was an air of relief in the voice of the other, as he put this question, which I could not fail to catch.

It was as though he suddenly saw an avenue of escape looming up.

"So I thought when I saw that phial, and discovered that a part of the contents had passed his lips, for it was deadly poison, and would bring a collapse within ten minutes after being taken."

"How came your friend the detective on hand, Doctor?"

"That concerns another part of it. The old Doctor feared sudden death from some source, and his room was connected with the office of the detective by telegraph.

"My friend heard the alarm bell, and was in the house before a quarter of an hour had elapsed, yet he found the old gentleman stone dead."

"Terrible, terrible, to think he died alone. I feel now that all was not done that might have been on my part. Doctor, do you think he suffered?"

"I fear he did, but more from mental than bodily anguish. I am not yet done, young sir. My friend Mr. Ketcham asked me to examine his breast, to see if there were marks of the poison having caused the blood to gather about the heart.

"Judge of my amazement when I discovered a small puncture directly over his heart and a drop of blood upon his clothes."

Parker uttered a low, gurgling cry.

He was surveying me with a fixed stare, and there was something set and stony in it that made me think of the dead.

Was he trying to read my mind—to learn what I suspected?

I went on:

"My friend now told me why he had brought me to see a dead man: it was not to save but to avenge.

"He wished me to learn, positively and without the faintest shadow of doubt, whether the terrible stroke at the heart had been the cause of death or the poison."

"And what did you decide?" huskily asked the young man.

I was becoming more cool and collected as I proceeded, while he showed all the symptoms of intense excitement.

Nor could I blame him. If he was guilty of this terrible crime, then it must seem to him as though the day of judgment had surely arrived.

"My examination convinced me of certain things which could be readily proved should the occasion ever arise.

"I knew that the Doctor had taken the poison before receiving the stab-wound, but that it had been given immediately after, and that the last spark of life had left his body before the poison had had half a chance to work, so that Dr. Seabury did not die by his own hand, but was murdered."

I said this in a cold, ringing voice. It was my intention to send the charge home to his guilty soul like a cannon shot.

He betrayed all the symptoms of one who was in mortal fear.

His hands worked convulsively, and his eyes sought mine again with much the same expression in them as I have seen in a dog as he cowers before the master from whom he expects a whipping.

I believed I had cornered my game right here, and that presently I would extort a confession that must not only raise my prowess in the mind of the great detective, Mr. Ketcham, but at the same time save Leonore.

It only needed a little more skillful manipulation and the thing was done.

"This is a terrible thing, Doctor," at last fell from his lips.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Parker. It was bad enough to believe the old man had taken his own life, but is much worse when we find that some cowardly assassin crept up behind him and slew him."

He hid his face in his hands, as his emotion became too powerful. In my eyes this was a strong sign of guilt.

I was about ready to send the final bolt home. Leaning forward so that I could watch him closely, while at the same time my hand slipped around to where my revolver was hidden, I said:

"Theodore Parker, what business brought you to that room on the night of the murder—that caused you to climb the vines to the window above? Speak!"

"Great heavens! Do you believe it was I who did this terrible deed?" he suddenly asked, showing his face.

"I have reason to think so."

"But you do not seem to know my connection there."

"I can guess it—you are Leonore's lover."

He groaned dismally.

"Worse still, I am Abraham Seabury's son."

It was my turn to be amazed.

[To be continued.]

LIFE IN HONDURAS.

Glimpse of a Country Where the Wheels of Progress Have Not Moved.

There are few countries in the world in which the march of progress has been felt in less degree than in Honduras. Nothing could be more primitive than country life in the land, upon which nature has bestowed her choicest blessings, that need but the aid of skillful human hands to convert into a veritable paradise. Many persons there are who assert in all seriousness that Honduras was the Garden of Eden. "Never were there more fertile valleys, more genial suns, softer breezes, fairer skies by day or lovelier by night," says a writer. The houses are of adobe, with roofs of red, funnel-shaped tiles and floors of wide, flat bricks. The rooms are usually very large, but few in number. There are no cellars, closets, pantries or other conveniences in which the true housekeeper glories. There are no outbuildings, stables or other places necessary to country life. There is a wide porch or corridor at the front and rear of each house into which the horses are ridden, and frequently other less agreeable domestic animals

A RESIDENCE IN HONDURAS.

have the freedom of the corridor. Water is carried from the nearest stream, which may be a quarter of a mile, while a little digging at the very door, perhaps, would be rewarded with good water.

The Japanese are noted for the "civilized emptiness" of their homes, but the residents of Honduras can surely rival them in this regard. Of furniture there is next to nothing. Two or three plain, unvarnished tables, some rude benches, with a few chairs made by the carpenter of the nearest village, and some cruel beds, comprise the interior furnishings of some of the best country houses. Beds deserve special mention. Nothing on earth is as hard as a Central American bed. It is made by stretching an untanned cowhide, as tight as a drumhead, over an iron or wooden frame. On this couch, destitute of mattress, with a sheet below and a blanket above, one is expected to "lie down to pleasant dreams."

The platano and the hammock are largely responsible for the backward condition of Honduras. The platano grows almost without care and furnishes food on which a native can comfortably subsist year in and year out, should he have nothing else. With his bread thus ready made to his hand, as it were, he sees no reason for exerting himself, particularly, when his hammock invites him to repose. The hammock is much used in that country, where it is wide, long and luxurious.

A Boy's Essay on Breathing.

We breathe with our lungs, our lights, our kidneys and our livers. If it wasn't for our breath we would die when we slept. Our breath keeps the life a-going through the nose when we are asleep. Boys who stay in a room all day should not breathe. They should wait until they get out in the fresh air. Boys in a room make bad air called carbonicide. Carbonicide is as poison as mad dogs. A lot of soldiers were once in a black hole in Calcutta and carbonicide got in there and killed them. Girls sometimes ruin the breath with corsets that squeeze the diagram. A big diagram is best for the right kind of breathing.—*Old Homestead.*

A Reward of Merit.

"I bought four dozen eggs of you the other day," he began, as he entered the grocery, "and I found——"

"Two dozen bad ones, of course. Well, I'm not responsible. I can't see through an egg shell."

"I was going to say that——"

"I know it, but I shan't make up the loss."

"Won't you let me say they were all good, every one of them?"

"Oh!"

"Not a bad one in the lot."

"James, put him up another dozen as a reward for lying!"—*Detroit Free Press.*

ONCE let us deal with virtue and we are moving in a spiritual world; a world as different from materialism as is wine from the cup that holds it. By moral greatness we are put in rapport with better things.—*Mallock, in "Dogma, Reason and Morality."*

"THAT man made money just by his sand." "What? That understood, miserable little specimen?" "Yes; he's a brick maker."

THE public suffer, but how often has the hand-organ man heard his own tunes?