



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE LAST OF THE DATCHET DIAMONDS.

They found him, with the half-sheet of note-paper all crushed in his hand. At the police-station, acting on the hints dropped by Mr Cooper, Mr Ireland had enlisted the aid of a dozen constables. He had chartered a large waggonette, and with Mr Cooper and a sergeant beside him on the box-seat had started off for an evening drive across the Downs. Miss Strong had, perforce, to content herself with a seat with Miss Wentworth and Mr Franklyn in a fly behind.

The weather had cleared. By the time they reached the open country the stars were shining, and when they found themselves following the winding road among the hills it was as fine a night as one could wish. Suddenly the occupants of the fly became conscious that the waggonette in front had stopped. A constable, hurrying back, checked the flyman. Miss Strong leant over the side of the vehicle to address him.

"What is the matter?"  
"We don't know yet, Miss. Only there's something coming along the road, and we want to see what they look like. They seem to be in a bit of a hurry."

As the man said, whoever it was who was approaching did seem to be in a bit of a hurry. Evidently the horse in the advancing vehicle was being urged to a breakneck gallop. Where the waggonette had stopped the ground rose abruptly on either side. The road turned sharply just in front. The constables, alighting, formed a double line across it. Suddenly the people who were hastening Brightonwards found themselves quite unexpectedly surrounded by the officers of the law. There was the liveliest five minutes Miss Strong had ever known. At the end of it the police found themselves in possession of three prisoners, who had fought as well as, under the circumstances, they knew how, and also of a fly with two men lying apparently dead inside it.

When Miss Strong learnt this, she came hurrying up.

"Is Cyril there?"  
Mr Ireland shook his head.  
"You are telling me the truth?"  
"If you doubt it, Miss Strong, you may look for yourself."

Just then a constable who, for the purposes of observation, had climbed the sloping ground on one side of the road, gave a great shout.

"Fire! There's a house on fire on the hills!"

Mr Cooper, who, while his former friends were being captured, had, much against his will, been handcuffed to a policeman, called to Mr Ireland.

"I reckon it's the crib. They been and set it afire, and left the bloke as they calls Paxton to burn inside of it. See if they ain't!"

It was Miss Strong who found him. Running round the burning building, she came to a little open window through which a man's hand was stretched. The window was too high above the ground to enable her to see into it. Only the hand was visible. She thought it belonged to some one who was seeking to escape.

"Who are you?" she cried.  
None answered. She touched the hand, supposing its owner did not hear. As she did so a piece of crumpled paper fell out of it. She caught at it as it fluttered through the air; looked at it—there was a sufficiency of artificial light to enable her to see—saw her own name—my dear love, Daisy Strong—staring her in the face; perceived that it was in the writing which she knew so well.

"Cyril, Cyril!"

She snatched at the hand which had held that paper—testimony of a

love which was resolute to live even beyond the grave—sprang up at the window, through which the smoke was streaming, with the flames beginning to follow after—broke into shrieks. They brought tools, and, having by their aid removed the sashes, they dragged him by main force through the window, through which he himself had vainly endeavoured to escape. And slowly, enduring as he went not a little agony, he went through the Valley of the Shadow, branching out of it after all through a pass which led, not unto Death, but back again to the Plain of Life.

When, weeks after, he opened his eyes to consciousness, the first thing he saw was, leaning over him, the face of the woman he loved.

"Daisy!"  
In an attenuated whisper the name came from his lips. And, forgetting herself, she fell on his breast and kissed him, and in the tumult of her joy cried as if her heart would break. While still his life was in the balance, never once had she lost her self-control, fearing that if she did she might be banished from his presence. Now that the event seemed clear, the cisterns of her heart were opened, and she wept as one distraught.

As the days went by Mr Paxton understood not only that he was in a bedroom in Miss Wentworth's house, but also that in the adjacent apartment there was something, or someone, whose presence Miss Strong, at any rate, was desirous should be concealed from him. The thing becoming more and more conspicuous, Mr Paxton insisted at last on having the mystery explained to him. With flashing eyes and faltering lips Miss Strong explained.

In the room adjoining that in which he lay was a policeman. He had been there all the time. He intended to remain, at least, as long as Mr Paxton stayed. Mr Paxton was, in fact, a prisoner—a prisoner in Miss Wentworth's house. Since it had seemed likely that he would die, he authorities had suffered him to be committed to the hands of friends, in order that, if they could, they might nurse him back to health and strength. But not for an instant had he been out of official supervision. Egress from the sick chamber was only possible by passing through the adjoining room; in that adjoining room a policeman had been stationed night and day. Now that he was mending, at any moment rough, unfeeling hands might drag him off to gaol.

Miss Strong's manner, as she made the situation clear to Mr Paxton, was reminiscent of the Tragic Muse. Her rage against Mr Ireland was particularly fierce. When she spoke of him it was with clenched fists and knitted brows and eyes like flaming coals.

"He actually dares to pretend to think that you had something to do with the stealing of the Datchet diamonds."

Mr Paxton seemed to hesitate; then took her breath away with his answer.

"He is right in thinking so; I had. He was standing at his bedside. When he said that, she looked down at him as if she felt either that her ears must be playing her false or that he must be still delirious. Yet he seemed to speak rationally, and although pale and wan and but the shadow of his old self, he did not look as if he were insane.

"Cyril! You don't understand me. I say that he thinks that you had something to do with the stealing of the Datchet diamonds—some improper connection with the crime, I mean."

"I understand you perfectly well, my dear. I repeat, I had."

She sat down on a chair and gasped.

"You had! Goodness gracious! What?"

"After they had been stolen. The diamonds came into my possession owing to an accident."

"Cyril! Whatever did you do with them?"

"They are in my possession now."

"The Datchet diamonds! In your possession! Where?"

Her eyes, opened at their widest, were round as saucers. She was a living note of exclamation. Obviously, though he did not seem as though he were, she felt that he must be still delirious. He quickly made it plain to her, however, that he was nothing of the kind. He told her, clearly and succinctly, the whole strange history—nothing extenuating attempting in no whit to whitewash the blackness of his own offending—precisely as it all occurred. And when his tale was at an end, instead of reproaching him by so much as a look, she kissed him, and, pillowing her lovely head upon his deserving breast, anointed him with her tears, as if by what his criminality had cost him he had earned for himself a niche in hagiology. Later, he repeated the story to Mr Franklyn and to Mr Ireland. Neither of them were moved to show signs of sympathy. Plainly his friend was of opinion that, at the very least, he had played the fool; while the detective, whose moral sensibilities he perhaps had offended by his constant contact with crime, seemed to be struck rather by his impudence than by anything else.

Mr Paxton having voluntarily furnished Mr Ireland with sufficient authority to enable him to gain access to the safe which he rented in that stronghold in Chancery Lane, the diamonds were found reposing securely in its fastnesses, exactly as he had described. Her Grace of Datchet's heart was gladdened by the knowledge that her priceless treasures would be returned to her in the same condition in which they left her. And the thing, being noised abroad, became a nine days' wonder.

The law is very beautiful in its tender mercies. The honest man, being sick, may die in a ditch, and no one cares. On the ailing criminal are lavished all the resources of medical science. Mr Lawrence and his friend the Baron were far too precious in the eyes of the law to be allowed to die. It was absolutely indispensable that such unmitigated scoundrels should be kept alive. And they were. Although, had not the nicest skill been continually at their disposal they had been dead a dozen times. Not only had Mr Paxton broken both their skulls—well broken them too—with a breaking that required not a little mending; but, as if that were not enough, they had been nearly incinerated on top of it. However, the unremitting attention with which the law provided them, because they were such rogues, sufficed to pull them through. And at last there came a day on which they were sufficiently recovered to permit of their taking their places in the dock in order that they might be charged with their offences.

The prisoners who stood before the magistrates, charged with various degrees of complicity in the robbery of the Duchess of Datchet's diamonds were, to begin with, six in number. First and foremost was Reginald Hargraves, alias Arthur Lawrence, alias "The Toff," alias, in all probability, twenty other names. From the beginning to the end he bore himself with perfect self-possession, never leading any one to suppose, either by look or gesture, that he looked any particular amount of interest in what was going on. A second was Isaac Goldstein, alias "The Baron." His behaviour, especially when the chief and most damning testimony was being given against him, was certainly not marked by the repose which, if we are to believe the poet, is a characteristic of the caste of Vere de Vere. Cyril Paxton was a third; while the tail consisted of the three gentlemen who had fallen into the hands of the Philistines on the road to Brighton.

Before the case was opened the counsel for the prosecution intimated that he proposed to offer no evidence against the defendant, Cyril Paxton, but, with the permission of the Bench, would call him as a witness for the Crown. The Bench making no objection, Mr Paxton stepped from the dock to the box, his whilom fellow-prisoners following him on his passage with what were very far from being looks of love.

Mr William Cooper and Mr Paxton were the chief witnesses for the prosecution. It was they who made the fate of the accused a certainty. Mr Cooper, in particular, had had with them such long and such an intimate acquaintance that the light which he was enabled to cast on their proceedings was a lurid one. At the same time, beyond all sort of doubt, Mr Paxton's evidence was the sensation of the case. Scidom has a more curious story than that which he unfolded been told, even in that place in which all the strangest stories have been told, a court of justice. He had more than one bad quarter of an hour, especially at the hands of cross-examining counsel. But, when he was finally allowed to leave the box, it was universally felt that, so far as hope of escape for the prisoners was concerned, already the case was over. Their defenders would have to work something like a miracle if Mr Paxton's evidence was to be adequately rebutted.

That miracle was never worked. When the matter came before the judge at the assizes, his lordship's summing-up was brief and trenchant, and, without leaving their places, the jury returned a verdict of guilty against the whole of the accused. Mr Hargraves and Mr Goldstein—who have figured in these pages under other names—were each sent to penal servitude for twenty years; their colleagues being sentenced to various shorter periods of punishment. Mr Hargraves—or Mr Lawrence, whichever you please—bowed to the judge with quiet courtesy as he received his sentence. Mr Goldstein, or the Baron, however, looked as if he felt disposed to signify his sentiments in an altogether different fashion.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## A WOMAN'S LOGIC.

The boom in the shares of the Trumpit Gold Mine continued long enough to enable Mr Paxton to realise his holding, if not at the top price—that had been touched while he had been fighting for his life in bed—still for a sum which was large enough to ensure his complete comfort, so far as pecuniary troubles were concerned, for the rest of his life. It was his final speculation. The ready money which he obtained he invested in consols. He lives on the interest, and protests that nothing will ever again induce him to gamble in stocks and shares. Since a lady who is largely interested in his movements has endorsed his promise, it is probable that he will keep his word.

Immediately after the trial Mr Cyril Paxton and Miss Daisy Strong were married quietly at a certain church in Brighton; if you find their names upon its register of marriages you will know which church it was. In the first flush of his remorse and self-reproach—one should always remember that "when the devil was ill, the devil a saint would be"—Mr Paxton declared that his conduct in connection with the Datchet diamonds had made him unworthy of an alliance with a decent woman. When he said this, urged thereto by his new-born humility and sense of shame, Miss Strong's conduct really was outrageous. She abused him for calling himself unworthy, asserted that all along she had known that, when it came to the marrying-point, he meant to jilt her; and that, since her expectations on that subject were now so fully realised, to her most desperate undoing, all that there remained for her to do was to throw herself into the sea from the end of the pier. She vowed that everything had been her fault, exclaiming that if she had never fallen away from the high estate which is woman's proper appanage so far as to accept of the shelter of Mr Lawrence's umbrella in that storm upon the Dyke, but suffered herself to be drowned and blown to shreds instead, nothing would have happened which had happened; and that, therefore, all the evil had been wrought by her. Though she had never thought—never for an instant—that he would, or could, have been so unforgetting! When she broke into tears, affirming that, in the face of his hardheartedness, nothing was left to her but death, he succumbed to this latest example of the beautiful simplicity of feminine logic, and admitted that he might after all be a more desirable parti than he had himself supposed.

"You have passed through the cleansing fires," she murmured, when,