

The Roupell Mystery

By Austyn Granville

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

The prefect approached the bed and gazed with much earnestness upon the body. Around the neck, a pearl necklace of considerable value yet depended, and on her fingers rich gems still sparkled in their golden settings.

"Come here, Monsieur Revell," he said, quietly to the mayor, in that hushed voice which even men accustomed to such scenes involuntarily adopt in the presence of the dead. The mayor of Villeneuve approached the bedside, and gazed for some moments on the features of the murdered woman.

"Do you notice the direction of the bullet?" inquired the prefect, pointing with his finger.

"I do. It appears to have entered the front of the head, considerably above the temple."

"Just so; but you will notice that its course is downward."

"What does that indicate to you?" inquired the magistrate.

"Come with me, and I will show you," replied the officer. He led the way across the room, and stood before the escreteiro. "You say nothing has been disturbed here."

"Positively nothing."

"Then notice how this chair has been tipped over. Now let me place another chair in the position it occupied. So! Now sit down in it. You are taller than Madame Roupell, but you may have noticed that women as a general thing sit higher than men."

"I have noticed that."

"Therefore when you were both seated there would not be so very much difference between the height of your head from the ground and that of Madame Roupell."

"No! It would be approximately the same."

"Exactly so. Now I am going to point my pistol at your head."

The prefect pressed the muzzle of his weapon against the magistrate's temple in the spot corresponding to the wound on the head of Mme. Roupell. M. Revell changed color slightly as he felt the cold rim of the pistol against his forehead, but he sat still.

"You may make this experiment as short as you please, monsieur le prefect," he exclaimed, with a feeble attempt at pleasantry.

"It is concluded," replied the officer, putting up his pistol. "If I had fired then my bullet would have described precisely the same course as the bullet of the assassin has done."

"Through my brain," replied the magistrate, not without a momentary shudder. "Which convinces you—"

"That Madame Roupell was at the escreteiro when she was killed. She must have been seated; or how could the course of the bullet have been downward?"

The mayor's admiration for M. Lablanche increased every moment. Though they were alone in the room, the prefect dropped his voice to a whisper, and took M. Revell on one side close to the window when he asked the next few questions:

"You are well acquainted, I suppose, with the Roupell family?"

"Yes, I may say I am. We exchange visits. My wife and daughters frequently walked and rode with the young ladies here. In fact, I may say that we have been quite friendly."

M. Lablanche put the next question in an apparently careless manner.

"And the young ladies? There was nothing between either of them and this young man?"

"Nothing that I know of. He was simply a friend of the family."

"Has he not been particularly attentive to one of the young ladies?"

"I do not think so, and especially not of late. People here seem to think rather that he has been entirely eclipsed by Monsieur Chabot, who, it appears, stood very well with them. I know the gentleman was quite attentive."

"And to whom were those attentions directed, Mademoiselle Harriet or Mademoiselle Emily?"

"I could not really say. There was little to choose between them. Both, as you have seen, are charming, and both, as I have told you, are the acknowledged heiresses of Madame Roupell."

It was M. Lablanche's turn to be astonished.

"Her acknowledged heiresses!" he exclaimed. "Why, you never told me that."

"Did I not?" answered the mayor. "Well, it is the fact, all the same. But you were about to say something."

"Not at all," replies M. Lablanche. "I was only thinking," and he suffered his features to relax into their accustomed expression of immobility. "Thank you; that is all I wish to know, monsieur le maire. If you will now go downstairs and prepare your report for the tribunal, I will join you in a few minutes, when I have concluded my investigations."

The mayor bowed to the prefect and left the apartment.

CHAPTER IV.

Victor Lablanche owed his unprecedented success largely to the fact that he never permitted anybody to share his discoveries in the field of crime. If ever he found out anything remarkable, he never suffered the slightest hint of it to cross his lips. He reserved it for a grand coup when the crisis of the case should be reached. And these surprises, which invariably enhanced his reputation as a shrewd officer, were generally effected through the exercise of the most

searching investigations of the locality where a crime had been committed. No sooner had the door closed than the whole demeanor of the prefect underwent an entire change. From the staid, unconcerned official, quietly engaged in the perfunctory discharge of a duty, he became immediately transformed into an eager enthusiast.

But whatever success might have attended his efforts in previous cases, in this one the worthy officer was doomed to meet with nothing but disappointment. But one single ray illumined his darkened horizon of hope. In making a careful survey of all the rooms on that floor of the chateau, he discovered that two beds had not been slept in. Evidently Miss Harriet Weldon and M. Chabot had not retired, and they were the only two persons in the chateau except Mme. Roupell herself who had not done so.

"I will assume for the purpose of argument that M. Jules Chabot is guilty," he began, quietly talking to himself, as if he were some second party. "Let me first see whether there is a sufficient motive for him to have committed this crime which young Van Lith so strenuously denies. In the first place, who knows anything about Monsieur Chabot? I do not, and the mayor does not, for I have asked him. Assume him to be a fortune hunter simply, and the motive grows stronger. But why? Is it because he is paying attention to the Mademoiselles Weldon? Not entirely; but because as long as Madame Roupell is alive, the Mademoiselles Weldon do not succeed to her fortune? Monsieur Chabot may have killed Madame Roupell in order to secure to himself the fortune he was after. And he may have contrived to throw suspicion upon Monsieur Van Lith, not only for the purpose of diverting suspicion from himself, but in order to rid himself of a very dangerous rival. But why a dangerous rival, when there are two young ladies, and Monsieur Van Lith cannot marry both? Because there must be some provision in Madame Roupell's will by which the first of her nieces marrying will have the larger share of the estate. And if such provision exists, it is not unlikely that a sharp, shrewd fellow like this Chabot would have made himself master of its contents, for he is an intimate friend of the family; and his relations must be almost confidential. This is a mere theory, of course," concluded the prefect to himself; "but in pursuance of it, let us see how Monsieur Chabot spent the hour which elapsed between his retiring and the time of the murder."

He again entered the chamber which had been occupied by Chabot, and with his new theory thus in his mind looked around him. He now sought to make each trifling incident reflect some suspicion against the late occupant of the chamber. He examined the bed clothes with greater care this time. It was evident that Chabot had not even lain down outside of them. He looked under the bedstead even, but spying nothing but a bootjack, directed his attention next to the toilette table. He was about to despair, when his eye fell upon a small black object, not over a quarter of an inch in length. He picked it up, and found it was the broken point of a lead pencil. M. Chabot had evidently passed the time in writing. The question was, how much of the time?

According to the mayor's written notes of his examination of the inmates of the chateau, an hour had certainly elapsed between the time of Mme. Roupell's retiring and the sound of the pistol shot. At what precise period of that interval had the pencil point been broken? The accident to the pencil had not occurred at the time of the firing of the shot, for if it had been caused by reason of the writer's starting with surprise, he would not, naturally have taken time to put away his writing materials before going to ascertain the cause of the noise. He must therefore have been thus employed for only a portion of the interval. The question now uppermost in Victor Lablanche's mind was: How did Jules Chabot consume the rest of his time? If he should fail to properly account for the whole hour, there would be strong reasons for holding him in custody.

Having revolved these matters in his mind, the prefect of police arose from the easy chair into which he had thrown himself and approached the door leading from Jules Chabot's room to the chamber of Mme. Roupell. Of course it was fastened, as by again referring to the mayor's notes it transpired that Jules Chabot had entered the chamber by another way. Almost mechanically he seized the handle and turned it. The door was unlocked. When he had made these discoveries he descended with a lighter heart than he would otherwise have done. Much would depend upon the evidence to be elicited by himself and the testimony to be taken before the judge of instruction.

He strolled out on the terrace to complete his official inspection of the premises. He commenced his examination at the back of the chateau. He went into all the outhouses; he visited the servants' offices—even the cellars and dairy. Then he emerged again into the open air and inspected the windows and searched among the flower beds beneath them for the prints of feet. Nothing, however, rewarded this careful scrutiny, until crossing the lawn he went through an ancient ivy-covered archway and gained the front of the building. Then his quick eye detected that a shrub had been brushed aside, and stooping on the gravelled walk, he discovered that a weed had been crushed beneath a heavy foot. A little further

on he found further signs, and a little later stood looking down upon a footprint in the soft mold.

Following these footprints, he found they led directly beneath the window of the chamber occupied by Harriet Weldon. This puzzled him. He was nonplussed for the moment, when he noticed that the vines on the lattice seemed lately to have been disturbed. There was another window below Miss Weldon's within easy reach. He put up his hand, and it swung open. Looking in he saw that it afforded access to a small pantry, and the door of the room was ajar. He took a rule from his pocket, and carefully measured the footprints. Then, after ruminating for a few moments, he quickly re-entered the house.

"That is an American boot heel, if ever I saw one in my life," muttered the prefect. "The open door and the footprint! I wonder which of those men did it, for it lies between the two. And just at present the odds are against the American. Yet, still, something tells me Monsieur Jules Chabot will bear watching."

CHAPTER V.

The village of Villeneuve was within the jurisdiction of the tribunal of the department of the Seine. The judge of instruction of this department was a man of unusual ability. In addition to possessing a profound knowledge of the law, M. Joseph Bertrand was a deep and interested student of human nature. Of all the cases which during his term of office had come before him, none, perhaps, had excited such widespread attention as this mysterious murder of the unfortunate Mme. Roupell. The horrible nature of the crime, the heartlessness of the assassin, and the age and rank of his victim, all tended to invest the case with unusual interest.

At ten o'clock precisely M. Bertrand took his seat. The diagram which Lablanche, the prefect of police, had prepared, the notes of the mayor's examination and those of the justice of the peace, lay on the desk before him. There, too, lay the pistol found on the floor of Mme. Roupell's chamber. In an adjoining chamber were gathered the witnesses who were prepared to testify in the case.

"You may bring in the prisoner," said M. Bertrand, when all was in readiness; and Charles Van Lith was led in.

The judge of instruction eyed him keenly. His face was of a deathly pallor; his eyes were hollow and sunken. Altogether, he appeared to disadvantage, and he was conscious that he did so. His youth, however, and the fearless manner in which he glanced around him, did not fail to impress M. Bertrand favorably. Notwithstanding his official habit of sternness, the judge of instruction was possessed of many humane qualities. It was with a voice, therefore, rather mild and encouraging than harsh, that he addressed the young man before him.

"I wish, monsieur," he said, "to afford you every opportunity of clearing yourself. Now state, as briefly as possible, for there are many witnesses to be examined, how you came to be in the chateau Villeneuve last night. I see by the report of the prefect that you have refused to explain that point. Perhaps you had good reasons for your silence then; but you can have none now, here before me. How did you happen to be in the chateau, I repeat, at the time this crime was committed, and even in Madame Roupell's chamber?"

A fearful struggle was taking place in the breast of the American. To state the true reason of his presence in the chamber would be to forever compromise Harriet Weldon, and yet it was the only course which could possibly clear him. The same sense of honor, however, which had bound him to silence when interrogated by the prefect of police, operated to close his lips before the judge of instruction. So, instead of flatly refusing to give the desired information, he sought to modify the bad effect of his refusal by saying:

"I cannot answer the question—as yet, monsieur. It may appear an easy one to which to reply; but I ask you to believe that at present there is an insurmountable obstacle to my doing so."

An expression of vexation seemed to pass over the face of the judge. He had been favorably predisposed toward the prisoner, and would have liked to see him go free.

"I warn you that your persistent refusal to answer is liable to be construed as evidence of guilt. Would the explanation you decline to give involve the party guilty of the crime—perhaps some friend of yours whom you desire to screen?"

Van Lith hesitated but a moment, and then, to the evident surprise of M. Bertrand, replied:

"It would not."

"Would the explanation you refuse to give clear you?"

Again, to M. Bertrand's growing astonishment, the young American replied:

"I don't think it would."

(To be continued.)

The Village Pest.

"Well, so long, old man. I must sneak. Here comes Tompkins, and he always persists in telling me his troubles."

"That leaves me up against it."

"In what way?"

"He always tells me his jokes."

—Milwaukee Sentinel.

The Countersn.

Time, 11 p. m.: Private Brown (on bridge guard for first time)—Ha!alt! 'Oo-goes-thur?

Country woman (returning late from market)—There, there, my dear, don't be afraid, 'tis only me.—Ally Sloper's Half Holiday.

So There.

A little fellow of 3 years was asked by a gentleman how old he was.

"I'm not old!" he exclaimed indignantly; "I'm almost new."



An amusing instance of ignorance of the properties of carbide of calcium occurred recently on a quay at Algiers. Five tons of carbide had been placed near a quantity of inflammable material, which suddenly caught fire. The firemen, instead of removing the boxes of carbide with hooks, smashed them, and then turned water upon the contents. The result was a great development of acetylene gas and a destructive fire which might have been prevented by a little practical knowledge of chemistry.

Notwithstanding the success of the efforts recently made to obtain nitrogen direct from the air for fertilizing purposes, the discovery of new nitrate beds continues to be a matter of the greatest importance to agriculture. The Geological Survey is now investigating nitrate deposits in San Bernardino County, California, which are said to resemble those of Chile. They cover about 37,000 acres, and it is estimated that they contain as much as 22,000,000 tons of fertilizers.

A section of steel pavement has recently been laid in the Rue St. Martin, Paris, to test its usefulness. The steel blocks are nearly seven inches long and an inch and a third thick, and are ridged on both sides. They are laid in cement so that the tops of the ridges just reach the surface. The ridges are so close together that a horse's shoe covers at least three ranges of them. It is believed that such a pavement will prove superior to asphalt in being less slippery, and more durable than a pavement of wooden blocks.

An investigation of the maximum glaciation of the Soerra Nevada is being made by Willard D. Johnson, geologist of the United States Geological Survey, who will this year complete a study along the full length of the east flank of the range, including a bordering zone of the Basin ranges, and will also make a reconnaissance in Carson Valley at the extreme northern end of the High Sierras. The problems involved are of great scientific interest, and considerable field work in addition to that of the present season will be required for their complete solution.

Of the common European languages English is the most widely spoken at the present time, and seems to be increasing in popularity more rapidly than any of the others. In 1880 about 21,000,000 people spoke English, and in 1900 about 120,000,000, says McCall's Magazine. In the same interval of time the number speaking Russian increased from 31,000,000 to 80,000,000, French from 31,450,000 to 55,000,000, German from 30,000,000 to 80,000,000, Italian from 15,000,000 to 33,000,000, Spanish from 23,000,000 to 45,000,000, and Portuguese from 7,480,000 to 13,900,000.

The weight of the air has often been tested by compressing it in receptacles by the air pumps, says Ideal Power. That it really has weight when so compressed is shown by the fact that the weight of the vessels is increased slightly by filling them with compressed air, and that such vessels become specifically "lighter" as soon as the air contained in them is exhausted. Many elaborate experiments on the weight of air have proved that the cubic foot weighs 536 grains, or something less than 1 1/4 ounces. The above experiment on the weight of air is supposed to be made at the surface of the earth, with the temperature at 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Heated air or air at high elevations is much lighter.

Tepee Etiquette.

"If you should ever go into an Indian tepee," said John H. Seger, "remember they have rules of etiquette that are more rigidly adhered to than in our parlors."

"Do not think they are not sensitive, for they are more so than the Japs, if you make fun of his layout the whole family will remember the insult for a lifetime."

"The seat of honor is just opposite the door, across the fire pit. Wait until you are invited before you take that seat."

"If you go bolting into an Indian's tepee and rush over and take this vacant seat he may not take you by the nape of the neck and throw you out, but he would like to if he thought it could be done without cutting off his rations."

"In leaving the tepee never pass between any one and the fire. An old chivalric warrior will crawl around the side of the tent and kick a hole in the wall on the north side in a blizzard before he would violate this rule of etiquette and pass between his guests and the smoking embers."—Arapahoe Bee.

A woman can never understand why callers invariably drop in when she isn't dressed to receive them.

EARLY DAY PLANK ROAD.

When the Railroads Came This Missouri Highway Was Abandoned

"This talk about a highway across the State recalls to mind a similar enterprise prosecuted in the interior of the State in the steamboat days," says the Kansas City Star. "It was a twenty-five-mile plank highway between Glasgow and Huntsville," recently remarked Milton C. Tracy of Macon, Mo., whose father was interested in the road and who used to live in Huntsville.

"The road between Huntsville and Glasgow was a succession of clay hills the greater part of the way and in muddy weather the Christian religion made scant headway in those parts. We didn't know it then, but we do now, that those anathematized red hills were a blessing to Missouri, for they served to develop the largest and strongest mules in the world and their big-boned descendants are now moving more merchandise than the steam cars."

"Glasgow was the distributing point for up-the-country merchandise. A dozen hack lines run out from there, the main one of which journeyed to Huntsville. The traffic over those molasses candy hills became so great and was attended by so many difficulties that something had to be done. Various kinds of road material were discussed and timber decided upon because it was plentiful and most of the pioneers were skilled in its use. The hills were cut through and the bottoms raised so the roadway was fairly level. Oak plank, twenty feet long, two inches thick and eighteen inches wide were nailed on heavy stringers, laid close together. There were five tollgates, with a tariff rate of a cent a head for stock, 5 cents for a man on horseback and 10 cents if he traveled in a vehicle. A footman paid the same as other animals—1 cent."

"There was a keeper at each tollgate, and his job with the road company, together with a cottage and garden donated for his use, made him a fair living. His rake-off on the tolls was 20 per cent."

"Work on the plank road was begun in April, 1853, and the last spike was driven in October, 1854. It was a gigantic enterprise for that day and the people thought it solved the transportation problem for all time. They didn't dream that within four or five years steam engines would be carting around in these parts and that the bulk of business would sweep by regardless of the river."

"At Huntsville the arrival of the first coach on the new road was made a general holiday by official proclamation. The schools were dismissed and but little of anything was done until the mail coach got in. I was among the crowd of youngsters that gathered around in admiration too deep for words."

"The Glasgow and Huntsville Road Company was a duly incorporated concern and had its officers just like a railroad company. William Smith, who is yet living at Moberly, ran the stage line. A coach left Glasgow and Huntsville about the same time each morning, furnishing daily mail each way. Anell Bros. operated large freight vans and did a healthy business. The late W. R. (Bob) Samuel of Huntsville was secretary for the road, an important position which paid quite well during the days of the road's activity."

Roanoke, in Howard county, was the biggest town between the terminals. It grew up into quite a place during the plank road's prosperity and many stores were operated there. But by and by the railroads came, the old road was torn up for firewood and Roanoke was marooned far back in the country, swelling a long list of once good towns that have become lost or forgotten."

The Only Thing Left.

A Kansas City man recently wrote to a lawyer in another town of the State asking for information touching the standing of a person there who had owed the Kansas City individual a considerable sum of money for a long time.

"What property has he that I could attach?" was one of the questions asked.

The lawyer's reply was to the point. "The person to whom you refer," he wrote, "died a year ago. He has left nothing subject to attachment except a widow."

What Did He See?

The professor of English in one of our Western colleges was noted for being very absent-minded. It was his custom to call the roll each morning before the lecture. One morning, after calling a name to which there was no response, he looked up, and, peering over his spectacles, he asked, sharply: "Who is the absent boy in the vacant chair I see before me?"

The Old-Fashioned Kind.

"Are there any talking machines in this flat?"

"Six of them. Four married and two single."—Detroit Free Press.

You are apt to get a stinging reproof if you interfere with the busy little bee.