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## A RE-ENACTED TRAGEDY.

Story of a Mysterious Happening to an Automobiler.

By F. A. MITCHEL.

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That year the first snowstorm came early, and it was an infant blizzard. It caught me in my automobile making a trip near Edinburgh. I had robes with me. It is true, but not the supply I usually carried for winter weather. The snow fell lightly at first, growing thicker and finally coming with blinding force, the wind rising and hooping it in drifts.

It was these drifts that balked me. I plowed through them at first, but as they grew deeper I found this method of getting on more difficult, and unfortunately there was no other.

The snow was getting deeper, the cold more intense, and I was becoming drowsy when I saw a light flickering to my left a short distance ahead. Being at the foot of a rise, the ascent of which involved a cut and a drift, I left my machine beside the road that it might not be in the way of passing vehicles and walked toward the light. Gradually a big brick house loomed up before me, and as I advanced lights appeared at every window of a large and imposing structure. By the time I reached the front door the place was brilliantly illuminated.

I rapped with the brass knocker, the door was immediately thrown open by a butler, and I found myself in a house where a social function was in progress.

"I am a belated traveler caught in the storm. Will you kindly ask your master if he will give me shelter for the night?"

While I was speaking a gentleman advanced, heard my story and invited me in. A masquerade ball was in progress. There were people dressed as ancient Romans, Greeks and Asiatics. Pirates, priests, kings and barlequins mingled indiscriminately. The gentleman who received me was the host and was dressed to represent a judge with wig and gown. He insisted on my taking part in the festivities, and since I was young and devoted to pleasure I consented, though I at first demurred on the ground that I was not in costume.

I entered the main room, where dancing was going on, feeling out of place in ordinary clothes among so many



KNELT BEFORE THE BLOCK.

striking costumes. My embarrassment was by no means disturbed by the attention I attracted for the plainness of my costume. One would suppose by the way these people stared at me that my ordinary sack coat, vest and trousers were more curious than those worn by themselves. It seemed to me that true politeness would have led them to pass my deficiency without notice just as a person of feeling will refrain from staring at any physical defect such as a birthmark.

I soon found myself dancing with the rest, choosing my partners at random, for, though I was acquainted with none of the ladies, they were all gracious to me. One of them, dressed as Mary, queen of Scots, seemed not averse to having me for a partner, and as she was a very beautiful woman I was not averse to dancing with her. The company had revived old fashioned dances, among others the minuet. I was leading Queen Mary to a position for this dance when she stopped short and turned pale. Following the direction of her eyes, I saw a woman dressed as Queen Elizabeth glancing at her.

"Upon my word," I said to my partner, "you people are carrying out your characters to perfection. That old jester is looking at you with all the malice there was in the virgin queen, and you are trembling as if you were aware of her purpose to murder you."

"Take me away," she moaned. Wondering at this show of feeling, it did not seem to be assumed—I took the lady to a place where a set was forming for the minuet and there was a place vacant. We occupied it. The music started up, and we began to dance. What surprised me was that I, who had no knowledge of the dance, was able to get through the figures without making any serious mistakes. We had just finished when my partner gave a shriek and fell swooning in my arms. I saw the guests looking from her to some one else and, glancing in that direction for an explanation, saw a figure in a skin fitting black costume, masked, bearing an ax

on his shoulder, just disappearing through a door into another room.

"This is enacting characters with a vengeance," I said to myself. "Not only does Mary tremble at the sight of Elizabeth, but she faints at the sight of the executioner." I was obliged to carry her to a lounge, where I placed her, fanning her until she came back to consciousness. I was surprised that none of the ladies came forward to assist her. Looking about for some of them, I saw them all dancing attendance on the old painted hag, with her enormous ruffled collar and bedizened with jewels. She cast a glance occasionally toward me and my charge, and a more malignant scowl I never observed on the face of any human being. It seemed intended to warn those fawning upon her that the slightest sympathy with the Scottish queen would be visited with a frightful re-venge.

Mary opened her eyes and, seeing me looking down at her with intense solicitude, gave me a responsive glance that went straight to my heart. I could not but contrast her beauty—she was the very image of the portraits I had seen of her prototype—with that of the thin faced, skinny, wrinkled old woman who was personating Elizabeth. When Mary had sufficiently recovered to speak she begged me to go for wine, that she might be strengthened by it. I told her that I would do so if she would promise that my place beside her should not be filled with another cavalier.

"No fear of that," she replied gloomily. "No cavalier could be devoted to me and live."

I went to the supper room and returned with a cup of wine. What was my astonishment to find everything changed. Mary, whom I had left a few minutes before on a sofa, was being tried for treason, having aspired to the crown of her cousin, Queen Elizabeth. That the trial was a mock one I did not doubt. It was certainly a mockery, for nothing was proved. Nevertheless the judge—the host—pronounced a sentence of death against the accused. Then the court broke up and the spectators scattered.

"If this were not so gawdame," I said to one of the guests, "if the actors were not so intense in their parts, the enactment of a historical occurrence at a masquerade would be a capital idea. I shall suggest it for the next masquerade ball to which I am invited."

The man to whom I made the remark looked at me as if he did not quite understand my meaning, then walked away.

I strolled into another room. A group occupied it, consisting of Queen Elizabeth and courtiers. The queen sat at a table, before her a parchment. Scanning the document, she signed it and handed it to one of the men present, and he carried it out of the room.

These scenes were becoming so realistic as to be positively painful. I almost wished myself back in my automobile, facing the driving storm. But the worst was yet to come. We were all dancing a wild figure when suddenly the stroke of a bell brought every one to a standstill. It was followed by others. Then from out one of the rear rooms came a little procession, at the head of which walked Mary. For the first time glancing toward the other end of the room, I saw a block similar to the one shown today in the Tower of London on which state prisoners were beheaded, and I shuddered at the executioner standing beside it, leaning on the handle of his ax.

"For heaven's sake," I groaned, "they're not going to enact that frightful scene, I hope! This is altogether too realistic. If I recommend any such representation for a masquerade I'll choose a more pleasing one."

As I glanced about me and saw seriousness depicted on every face, some of Queen Mary's attendants weeping, the queen herself pale as death, Mary advanced to the block and divested herself of whatever of her clothing would interfere with the death stroke. Then she turned her eyes full upon me with one last beseeching look. I started forward to put a stop to this frightful impersonation, but was seized by two men standing behind me and held in a firm grip. Mary, seeing my intention and its thwarting, gave me a last look of mingled gratitude and despair. Then she knelt before the block, the executioner swung the ax aloft, it descended, and amid a spurring of blood the head of the victim rolled to the floor.

I fainted. When I came to my senses several people in ordinary costume were standing about me, looking very anxious. I was in the room where I had seen the tragedy enacted, but not one of the masqueraders was there. I was lying on the couch on which I had placed Queen Mary, in view of the spot where I had seen her executed. I looked for the block, for blood stains on the floor. They had vanished.

"Where the deuce am I?" I exclaimed.

"Luckily not frozen," was the reply.

They told me that I had been found asleep in my automobile, had been carried to the house in which I was and revived with the greatest difficulty.

Now, I am not going to suggest that there was anything remarkable in one's seeing the sights I did when unconscious. Nevertheless there is a curious coincidence connected with the matter. I learned that the house to which I was carried and where I witnessed the tragedy was several hundred years old and had once been occupied by Mary, queen of Scots. Tradition gives more than this. It says that Mary and Elizabeth once met there at a ball. But of this there is no historical record. At the same time Elizabeth might have been in Scotland incognito and been entertained at this very house.

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