

XIII.

BLACK-MAILING AS AN ART.

METHODS OF RAISING MONEY. — A WIDOWER BLACK-MAILED. — A MINISTER FALLS AMONG THIEVES. — BLACK-MAILERS AT A WEDDING. — A BRIDE CALLED ON. — ANOTHER MODE. — BLACK-MAILER FOILED. — HOTEL REGISTERS AND BLACK-MAIL.

METHODS OF RAISING MONEY.

NEW YORK is full of adroit rogues. Men and women abound here who live by their wits. Hiding themselves in the multitude of our people, watching their chances and their victims, they are seldom detected. Black-mailing is reduced to a system. It is carried on by street-walkers, stragglers on the pavement, loungers about hotels, keepers of dance-cellars, panel-thieves, and criminals of all grades. In cases of black-mailing, where relief is at once sought, the detective force are often able to restore the money. Usually the victim criminalizes himself so far that he is unwilling to appear before the courts; so that if the money is restored, which is seldom the case, the rogue escapes. Men come to New York to see "the elephant." They are not fond of exhibiting their wounds if they are struck by his trunk. Rural gentlemen, who, from the steps of their hotel, follow a bland stranger who offers to show them the

sights of the city, are not willing to tell how they lost their watches or purses. They had rather lose their property than have their names get into the paper. The black-mailers understand this; and when they rob a man, they so commit the victim, that he can make no complaint to the authorities without dishonoring himself.

A WIDOWER BLACK-MAILED.

A man about fifty-five years old came from the rural districts to spend a little time in the city. He was wealthy, respectable, and the father of two children. He selected his quarters up town. Among the boarders was an attractive California widow. The widow and widower soon became quite intimate. Both seemed captivated. By mutual consent a suite of rooms was taken, handsomely furnished, and occupied by the parties. A few days after the removal, the gentleman was greeted with an unpleasant surprise on entering his room. A stranger sat in his chair, who announced himself as the husband of the woman, and demanded heavy damages for dishonor done to his name. The old man was frightened nearly out of his wits. Had he gone to the police force, and put himself in their hands, all would have been well. But he did as most men do under such circumstances — he offered a large sum of money to hush the matter up, keep it out of the papers, and be allowed to depart. He paid the money, settled the bills, left the elegant furniture, packed his trunks, and departed.

He was not lost sight of, however, for a moment. The parties knew their man, and his means; knew his standing, and the value he put on his good name. He

was dogged constantly; he was drawn upon for large sums of money; he was threatened with exposure, till, driven to desperation and almost beggary, he did what he should have done at first—went to the police headquarters and made a clean breast of it. The chief of the detectives took the case into his own hands. On a new demand for money being made, the chief opened a negotiation, through a friend, to see if a settlement could not be made, so that the victim, by paying a certain sum, might be free from further annoyance. The chief worked up the husband. He turned up too conveniently not to be a rogue. He was tracked to Boston, where he had a wife and children living. The Boston marriage was established. The black-mailers were met at the appointed hour. The sum demanded was agreed upon, and the chief was ready to pay the money as soon as the parties signed a receipt. The adroit rogues declined to put pen to paper, and the detective declined to pay the money which he held in his hand. Blustering and threatening seemed to have no effect on the resolute friend. The handle of a pistol conveniently peeping out from the detective's bosom, and the cool manner of the negotiator, indicating that he knew how to use it, admonished the black-mailers that an attempt to get the money by force would not succeed. The receipt was signed. The chief coolly put it into his pocket, with the money which he held in his hand. The rogues knew at once he was a detective. The principal one claimed the woman as his wife, and said he had a lawful right to settle the case as he pleased. "If that woman is your wife," said the detective, "then I'll try you for bigamy, and send you to

Sing Sing." Amid much blustering and many threats he was taken to the Tombs. He was found to be an old offender. Graver crimes rose up against him. He was tried, and sent to Sing Sing. The victim was relieved from further extortion. His money, gone, could not be regained. He returned to his rural home satisfied with his New York experience.

A MINISTER FALLS AMONG THIEVES.

On Broadway, below Fourteenth Street, stood a church that at one time was one of the most fashionable in the city. The congregation was wealthy and large, the minister eloquent and popular. The belles of the city, with the young and the fashionable, crowded the church when the pastor filled the pulpit. In the full flush of his popularity, when a pew could not be hired at any price, when any salary would have been paid to him that he demanded, the minister disappeared. Quite late on Saturday night the vestry received a letter from the rector, dated off Sandy Hook. The letter tendered the rector's resignation, and announced that he had sailed that day at noon in one of the Cunard steamers for Europe. The parish were surprised and alarmed. The whole affair was a painful mystery. Here was a minister, settled over a flourishing and liberal charge, with a fine church and parsonage, a church crowded with the élite of the city, with a salary equal to any demands he might make, with the best singing in the city, and all the popular appliances, who had suddenly resigned, and privately left the country, to go no one knew where.

The story is a romance. The explanation came after

the minister had completed his European tour. At midnight the door-bell of his parsonage was violently rung. Going to the window, the minister saw a man standing on his door-stone, and he demanded his business. He came with a message, he said, from a dying woman. Hastily dressing himself, the good man came to the door and received the message. Just around the block was a poor woman, and she was dying. Her only treasure was a babe. She could not die in peace unless her babe was baptized. If his reverence would come to her dying pillow, and administer that sacrament, the blessing of a poor dying woman would be his reward. It was much to ask, and at midnight too, but his great Master, who loved the poor, would not have denied such a request as this.

His humane and religious sympathies were aroused, and the minister followed the messenger. Common prudence would have said, "Take a policeman with you. Call up a friend, and get him to bear part in the ceremony." But, dreaming of no peril, he went on his way to do, as he thought, his Master's will. He was soon in a dissolute region, in a street notorious for its uncleanness. The messenger knocked at a heavy gate, that closed up a narrow, dark alley. It opened immediately, and slammed behind the parties like a prison door. Through a long, narrow, and unwholesome entry, that seemed to be an alley-way covered, the parties took their way. They passed up a narrow staircase, broken and rickety. Lewd women were passed on the stairs. Dark-featured and villanous-looking men seemed to crowd the place. With his sacred vestments on his arm, and his book of service in his

hand, the minister was ushered into a dark and unwholesome-looking room. The door was closed behind him, and locked. A dim candle on the table revealed the outline of a dozen persons, male and female, of the most abandoned and desperate class. His inquiry for the sick woman, and the child to be baptized, was greeted by shouts of laughter. He knew he was a victim. He demanded the reason for this outrage. He was informed that his friends who had invited him there wanted money. His standing and character were well known. He was in one of the most notorious houses in New York; his midnight visit to that place was well known, and could easily be proved. If he paid one thousand dollars, all would be well. If not, his ruin was certain. Instead of defying the villains, calling on the police, or confiding in his congregation, he thought he could hush the matter up. He might have known that it would all come out, and that every dollar he paid would be used as evidence against him, or as means to extort more. But he was thoroughly frightened; would not have the thing known for the world; his hand was in the lion's mouth, and he must draw it out as easily as he could; so he gave his obligation to pay the money promptly at noon the next day, which he did. Of course new demands were made from time to time. He was dogged in the streets. Suspicious-looking men stopped to speak with him on the corners. Notorious men rang his door-bell. Mysterious notes, from ignorant, low-bred, and vicious persons, — as the spelling and language showed, — came to his hands, and into the hands of his family. The poor man was nearly distracted. He paid away his own money, and

borrowed till his reputation suffered. The threat of exposure hung over him like an ominous sword held by a hair. In a moment of desperation he decided to leave the country, which he did, to the astonishment and regret of his friends.

On his return from Europe, the rector settled in Massachusetts, over a small rural parish. He was soon tracked to his country home. Black-mailing was renewed. His old terror came upon him. Again he acceded to the extortion. The police of New York at length came to his relief. In searching for other game, they came upon proof that this minister was in the hands of black-mailers. Letters were found containing information of his whereabouts, how to terrify him, what sums to demand, and at what time his salary was due. He was relieved from his pursuers. The large sums he had paid were not refunded. His spirits were broken, and he has never recovered his position. I saw him not long since in Canada. He holds a subordinate position, and is preaching to a small parish. He will die a victim of black-mailing.

BLACK-MAILERS AT A WEDDING.

A fashionable wedding is a harvest season for black-mailers, especially if the bridegroom has been known as a fast young man. No bank keeps a better account of the whereabouts and standing of its depositors, than do black-mailers of the whereabouts, standing, and movements of their victims. A wedding among New York high life is talked about. Invitations are greedily seized. The élite are all agog. On the morning of the day previous to the wedding, a lady comes to the

store, and asks for the young man. Her business is announced as *important*. She *must* see the young gentleman. The "must" is emphatic. At such a time, when all are so sensitive, and when, as is often the case, a fortune hangs on the bridal wreath, it is important to have no scenes. A thrill through the frame of the young gentleman called for, the hurrying back of his blood from the face to the heart, tells that his time has come. He goes to the interview as the ox goes to the slaughter. Be the claim real or bogus, hush-money is generally paid.

A BRIDE CALLED ON.

A call is not unfrequently made at the home of the young lady to be married. It is a woman that calls, in a shabby-genteel array, to excite sympathy. The call is made a week or ten days before the wedding. Every step is consummately taken, and tells in the right direction. The young lady is called for by the woman, who seems to possess a wounded spirit. Her appearance, the tone of her voice, the expression of her face, bespeak one who has been greatly wronged, or who has some great sorrow at heart. The acting is consummate. Of course the young lady is not at home to strangers. She then asks if the young man is in; if it is true that he is going to be married; if any one can tell her where he can be found—questions intended to create anxious inquiry at the breakfast table: "Who can that woman be? What can she want of Charlie? Why did she ask so particularly about his being married?" The frightened maiden runs to her lover, and says, "O, Charlie, there was a woman here this morn-

ing for you! She seemed so poor and sad! She wanted to know where you could be found. She wanted to know if you were to be married soon. Who is she? What can she want of you?" A nice preparation this for the visit of the black-mailer on Charlie at the store.

A bolder step is not unfrequently taken. As the bridal company are enjoying themselves in an up-town first-class residence, an emphatic ring announces an impatient comer. The bridegroom is asked for, and the footman bade to say that a lady wants to see him. The imperious air of the woman plainly tells the footman, "If he refuses to see me there'll be trouble." The footman, well acquainted with high life in New York, knows well what the visit of the woman means. He has the honor of the family in his charge. He whispers the request of the woman to the startled bridegroom. But what can be done? The woman is notorious, and well known. She understands her business, and is unscrupulous. Threats and entreaty will be alike unavailing. Ten men could not put her off of that step-stone. She would cling to that iron railing with the strength of a maniac. She would rouse the whole neighborhood by her screeches, accusations, and blasphemies. The party would break up in excitement. The scandal would run through all New York; the papers would be full of it; the police might take her away, but she would rend the air with her tears and strong crying. All these considerations are taken into the account by the black-mailers. A private settlement is usually made, and the unseasonable visitor departs.

ANOTHER MODE.

The announcement in the papers of marriage in high life, at the residence of the bride's father, does more than give information to the curious. It is a bugle-call to black-mailers. A young husband, just admitted a partner with the father-in-law, whose reputation is without a stain, whose success in life depends upon an unblemished character, is overwhelmed with the threat that unless a sum of money is paid at a given time, an infamous charge shall be made against him. An unmanly fear, a cowardly dread of being accused of a crime never committed, a wish to shield from sorrow the young being he has just led to the altar, often lead a young man to yield to the demands of black-mailers if they will take themselves off. They depart for a time, only to return to renew the demand, making the one payment a reason for asking more.

BLACK-MAILER FOILED.

I know a young man of marked business ability. He was superintendent of a Sunday school and a young partner in an important house. His marriage gave him a fine social position. About three months after his return from his wedding trip, a woman called upon him at his store. She seemed to be quite well acquainted with him, and told her errand in a business-like style. She wanted five hundred dollars, and must have it. He could give it to her. If he did, all would be well. If he did not, she would make trouble in his store, and trouble in his family. People would believe her, suspicion would attach to him, and

he could never shake it off. She gave him a limited time to make up his mind; placed her card in his hand, and departed. The young man had sense and pluck. He went to a detective, and placed the matter in his hands. The detective force is an institution in New York. Its members are shrewd, cool, talented and efficient. They are everywhere, and in all disguises. They represent all professions. They are unknown to rogues, and are therefore successful in their efforts to detect criminals and to relieve their victims. Assuming the rôle of a friend, the detective called upon the woman. She was young, intelligent, well-dressed, seemingly modest. She professed to be adverse to a dissolute life, and charged that she had stepped aside under the solemn promise of marriage. She gave times and places when she met the young man, and her candor and modesty would have deceived any one but a detective. She had rooms in a reputable house, and gave the name of her employer. With this statement the conspiracy was revealed. One of the times mentioned, the young man was in Europe during the whole year on business for the house. The second time specified, he was absent from the city the whole month on his wedding tour, with the family of his senior partner. The room where the interview was held was borrowed for the occasion of a casual acquaintance, who knew nothing of the disreputable character of the woman. The plot was blown into the air. The woman confessed her conspiracy, gave the names of her associates, and was marched off to the Tombs.

HOTEL REGISTERS AND BLACK-MAIL.

Some of the newspapers print the arrivals at the principal hotels daily. These arrivals are used for black-mailing purposes. Letters are written to strangers in the city, and placed in their hotel box. These letters pretend to be on business, or to revive old acquaintance, or the writers profess to know the family. A friend of mine, a stranger in the city, found in his box at the hotel a letter, of which this is a copy:—

“SIR: Seeing your arrival in the paper to-day, and thinking, perhaps, you were a stranger in the city, and might want genial company, I have ventured to send you my card.

“Yours, respectfully,

“——— ———.”

Exposures, warnings, fines, imprisonments, do little towards breaking up black-mailing. Victims from the country are too numerous, the reward is too dazzling, the chances of escape too certain, to turn the adroit and bold rogues from a trade that yields so rich a revenue.