LUKE HAMMOND, THE MISER.

By Prof. Wm. Henry Peck,
Author of the "The Stone-Cutter of Lisbon," Etc.

CHAPTER XI.

Continued.

"Twenty years have passed since we met," muttered Hammond, leaning back in his chair, "and he is twenty-four years of age. A magnificent man now, no doubt. I've educated him in Europe, given him every advantage. He will be in my arms before midnight. He can push his suit with Catharine Elgin at once. He is a chip of the old block, too, I imagine."

Six o'clock came, and found him still musing of his past, present and future.

Then he dined as innocently as if he was not to commit murder that night, visited his prisoners, and awaited 9 o'clock in his library.

Nine o'clock came with a dark and stormy night at its back, and found him drinking brandy. A sure sign that he was excited, and that his nerves wanted bracing.

At 9.30 old Fan entered and placed a note in his hand.

"The gent is in the rear parlor," said Fan. "He is disguised, but I know him."

"You know him?" exclaimed Hammond, looking up sharply from the note, the decoy note he had written that morning.

"Yes. It's Mr. James Greene," said Fan.

"Where did you ever see him?" asked Hammond.

"Saw him when he repaired that desk," said Fan, grinning. "Wanted hot water for his glue, and came to me in the kitchen. He said the work suited a cabinet maker better than a carpenter. I pretended I was deaf."

"Yes," said Hammond. "Miss Elgin recommended him, however. How did you know him in disguise?"

"He took it off as soon as he came in," said Fan.

"Ah! very well. You must forget him. There's a half-eagle to make you forget that you ever saw him," said Hammond, tossing a coin to her. "Did you speak to him?"

"No. Mrs. Harker told me I was to be very deaf, stupid and half blind a year ago, to everybody that don't live in this house."

"Right; so did I order you," said Hammond. "Now listen. You will go to him and give him this note."

He wrote as follows, forging, of course:

"Dear James—Follow Fan. She will lead you to me. I dare not meet you in the parlor, as Mrs. Harker is suspicious of your coming, and will interrupt or listen to us. Follow Fan—she knows what to do. Your Katy."

"Give him that," said Hammond. "He will read it, and you will lead him through the dining room, through the hall, down to the basement, and so on into the old storeroom near the eastern wing."

"The old storeroom is heaped with empty boxes, barrels and the like," said Fan.

"I made a passage," said Hammond, "straight as a dart on this side through to the door on the other. The barrels and boxes are heaped on either side, five feet high. The passage between is four feet wide, the distance from door to door twenty of your longest paces. Lead him into the passage ten paces—count them as you step—then halt and say, 'Wait, I must get a key.' You will then leave him and go on to the other door. Do you understand?"

Old Fan grew livid and trembled violently.

"Mr. Hammond," said she, "there is a trap door in the middle of that storeroom."

"Well, what of that?"

"You mean to——"

"Never mind what I mean to do," said Luke, fiercely. "Do what I tell you. I shall keep you in sight from the moment I leave this room, and if I suspect treachery I will blow a ball through your old back—right between the shoulders, Fan—with this, Fan."

He drew a revolver from his bosom and cocked it.

"I'm wicked, I know I am wicked," said Fan, trembling at the fierceness of his look, as he glared at her over the leveled weapon, "but I have never had a hand in taking a human life! I've been tempted to do it in my anger often, but I never did. I can't do it in cold blood—no, I dare not, Mr. Hammond."

"For every step you will count with James Greene by your side after you enter the storeroom," said Luke, "I will give you $10. Ten steps make $100. You do not know what I mean to do."

She did know, but she was afraid to tell of it.

"See! I've gold!" said Luke, counting it down upon the table.

Her eyes glistened as she gazed.

"Pay me half in advance," said Fan.

"Take half," said Hammond, dividing the heap. "The other shall be yours in half an hour."

"Be his blood on your head, not mine," said Fan, clutching the gold. "I told a friend of mine, the woman we buy milk of, that if ever old Fan was missing to look for me in the well under the old storeroom."

Hammond turned pale. The old woman's cunning had foiled half of his purpose. He meant to slay victim and accomplice at the same instant.

"You are an idiot!" he exclaimed, concealing his emotion. "You are too useful to me, Fan. I cannot afford to lose you. Now away—James Greene must be growing impatient."

"Don't think I'm joking," said Fan, as she took the second decoy note. "I did tell my friend to look for me there, Mr. Hammond. For among wolves look out for their fangs."

"She has saved her life this time," muttered Hammond, as the cunning old woman departed, and as he stole after her. "She lives to be a witness against me. She must die in her bed, and her friends shall find her there, and not in the well."

Creeping after Fan, and unseen by her, Hammond saw her give the note to James Greene, who, all unsuspecting of assassination, read it with a smile.

"Poor little Katy," murmured James Greene, as he kissed the beloved name, "how she must suffer here. But I will soon make an end of her little anxieties. Lead on, Fan."

Fan seemed half asleep. He shook her and made a gesture toward the door. He thought she was deaf.

Poor James Greene!

Fan clasped his warm and honest hand in her cold, dry claws and led him from the parlor into the pitchy darkness of the dining room. She knew that somewhere in the gloom a fierce and desperate assassin held eye and ear ready to detect the slightest sign of treachery, and a sudden, gnawing pain seemed growing between her shoulders as she remembered Hammond's threat. She remembered, too, the reward she was to get—she felt half of that reward in her pocket.

When in the basement, where burned a dim light, filling the place with gloom, she paused in terror. She had never had a hand in murder, and she was sixty-seven years old. A very late age to commit so dreadful a crime.

As she paused, trembling, as James Greene imagined, with the palsy of old age, she heard the clicking of a pistol, clear and sharp, in the dense darkness behind her. James Greene heard it, too, and he started.

"What was that?" he said, close to Fan's ear, and grasping her arm hard. "Something snapped."

"A rat trap," said Fan. "We've caught a rat, I guess. Come on."

She spoke loudly that some one else might hear.

An explanation so simple at once disarmed the slight suspicion of unfair play in James Greene's mind, and smiling at his fears as he felt his strong muscles subside from their sudden swell of alarm, he said to himself:

"I am as nervous as poor Katy was last night."

They reached the entrance of the storeroom and here old Fan paused to still the beatings of her heart.

Click! click! in the gloom again.

"Come on!" said Fan, and pushed open the door. "There's old lumber piled up in here," she said. "I must step slow and careful, too, sir. This way leads to a flight of stairs that goes up into a hall where Miss Elgin practices music."

"Lead on, Fan," said James, smiling at his strange situation, and wondering what Hammond would say to find him there.

Old Fan began to count her steps, long and slow, feeling the floor with her feet before she rested her full weight upon the floor. She was not sure that Hammond believed her story about a woman friend.

Ten steps! all taken with an icy sweat deluging her face, neck and bosom. Ten steps! She knew she stood upon a trap door over a dark and noisome pit fully thirty feet deep!

She halted.

"Wait! I must get a key!" said she, and letting fall her victim's hand hurried straight on until she reached the other door.

That instant Luke Hammond, who had crept after them, turned on a jet of gas, till then burning a dim, almost unseen spark near the ceiling, and pistol in hand, appeared at the door through which James Greene had passed.

"Move a single step and I fire!" said Hammond, aiming his weapon at the head of the lover. "Young man, you are caught!"

James Greene was pale and motionless, and his eyes were fixed in surprise, not fear, upon Hammond.

Luke Hammond held a pistol in his right hand, while his left grasped a rope which passed through a hole in the floor at his feet. That rope was made fast at the other end to a bolt, which was all that divided Greene from the well below.

"If I shoot you, James Greene, you would die the death of a burglar caught in the act," said Hammond.

A gleam in the calm, brave eyes of James Greene warned the assassin that his pistol was about to be dared by a rapid spring.

"You'll see your Katy no more!" exclaimed Hammond, jerking the cord with all his strength.

A clash, a sudden cry of despair, and then a dark, yawning chasm remained where the young man stood!

The trap had fallen! James Greene had disappeared!

"The rat is caught!" said Hammond, with a bitter, exulting laugh, so fiend-like that old Fan almost screamed with horror.

"Pull at that rope near you," said Hammond. "It lifts the trap back to its place."

He dared not, with all his hardihood, gaze down into the well. In his brain was a fearful picture of what was there. Fan heaved at the rope to which he pointed, and the trap door rose slowly to its level. Stepping briskly to it, then, Luke Hammond thrust his hand through a hole in the floor near the edge of the trap and shot the sustaining bolt into its socket.

"It is set now, for another, perhaps," he said. "Now, Fan, follow me and pocket your reward."

Trembling and pale Fan obeyed and in the library received her gold.

As she placed it that night in her hoarding sack she said:

"They are speckled—speckled red! But they are mine, and the deed is Luke Hammond's. There should have been a splash when James Greene fell. There was none. He may not have died—he may have caught on the way down—he'll get out! And I'll lose my golden birds—lose my life."

The idea so preyed upon her mind that she watched her chance, and creeping down to the storeroom heaped heavy boxes upon the trap, got nails and nailed it fast and strong.

The murder begun, she feared it half done. But bruised, stunned, not dead, James Greene hung by his clothing only ten feet from the trap, caught by a broken oar that once crossed the well.

For a time we must leave him there.

CHAPTER XII.

NANCY HARKER SPEAKS.

Luke Hammond, having paid and dismissed Fan, sat down to review what he had done. His face was pale and fierce, for the deed was too freshly done to bring remorse, if ever indeed that feeling found a place in his evil heart.

"'Tis done, and well done, and quickly, too," he muttered through his teeth. "James Greene has now been removed, and no man saw him enter this house. He was a brave and dangerous obstacle in my path. Thank heaven! all's well so far."

Blasphemous villain! to thank heaven for the murderous deed!

He set thinking of the work when Nancy Harker entered cautiously:

She was pale and excited and whispered:

"Is it all over?"

"All. James Greene will trouble us no more," said Luke.

"I met old Fan on the stairs," said Nancy, sitting down, "and she looked like a ghost. Did she see it done?"

"Unfortunately, she did," replied Luke, smiting the table with his palms. "'Twas my purpose to have her go down with Greene, but she has guarded against such a death."

"She may betray you," said Nancy.

"Betray me!" cried Luke. "Why should she? She does nothing unless she is paid for doing it. Who is to give her gold for telling of what she must appear as an accomplice in?"

"The disappearance of James Greene," said Nancy, "will cause much conjecture and suspicion among his friends. They or the authorities may offer a reward for the discovery of his body; Fan may hear of it and betray you."

"I can pay higher than any reward that his friends can offer," said Luke. "And if I ever suspect her fidelity she shall find that Luke Hammond's life is certain death to all who shall attack it."

"Luke," said Nancy, drawing very near to him, and speaking very low, "has old Fan's face—a tone in her voice, a something, I know not what—never reminded you of some one we once knew, years ago?"

"Yes," said Luke, in a deep and husky whisper; "and I have tried in vain to think who that somebody was."

"For months it has puzzled me," said Nancy. "But when I met her just now, so white, so tottering, the evil of her face all gone, crushed down by terror, I remembered whom she looked like."

"Well, let me hear, and then I may be as wise as Nancy Harker," sneered Hammond, as she seemed to hesitate.

"She reminded me," said Nancy, in a whisper so low that Hammond bent forward to catch the words—"she reminded me of our grandmother just before the old woman died."

They rose at once and stared at each other in horror.

"Nancy," said Luke, going to the door and locking it, and then coming back, "perhaps she is our mother!"

"It cannot be, it must not be!" said Nancy, sinking into her chair and hiding her face.

"If it should be so," said Luke, swallowing a great draught of brandy and trembling so as to let the glass fall at his feet, "would you suffer her to know it?"

"Never!" cried Nancy, "never! But this suspicion is horrible."

"We must take measures to learn her history, whoever she is."

"How?" asked Nancy. "I have tried time and time again to extract information from her of her past life. She is suspicious. She has not so much as told me that she was ever married."

"Daniel hired her. I will summon him for questioning."

To be continued.

A Quick-Growing Plant.

The bamboo holds the record among plants for quick growth. It has been seen to grow two feet in twenty-four hours.

The Island of Sakhalin, the great penal colony of Russia, has splendid forests of fir and pine.

RICHEST BOY IN THE WORLD.

WILLIAM ZIEGLER.
Fourteen years old and worth $30,000,000.

BOY WORTH $30,000,000.

A fourteen-year-old boy struggling to maintain his hold to the claim of the "richest boy in the world," and three women fighting equally hard for a portion of the wealth that gave him the title, is the situation disclosed in dispatches from Los Angeles, Cal., where Mrs. Henry K. Shields, a sister; Mrs. Arthur Little and Mrs. Russel Price, nieces of the late William Ziegler, began a suit to contest the will of the multi-millionaire, who bequeathed the bulk of his immense fortune to his adopted son and namesake.

They declare that they, closest of kin with the exception of Mrs. Ziegler, the widow, were completely cut off by the baking powder magnate and patron of Arctic expeditions, and ask that the law give them a share of the $30,000,000, which represents the value of the Ziegler estate that young Willie Ziegler inherited.

Coming so soon after the death of Mr. Ziegler this suit renews the wide interest in the lad who, though only fourteen years of age, is considered the wealthiest boy in the world, and one with a great future before him.

For it was an unwritten legacy left to him by his foster father that he must find the North Pole should the Fiala expedition sent out months before Mr. Ziegler's death fail in its attempt.

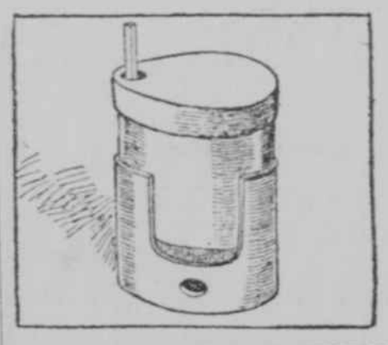
Mr. Ziegler died late last May after a long illness. Before his death it was known that he would make little William, his adopted son, his principal heir.

The story of young Ziegler's life, what it has been and what it holds for the future, is an extremely interesting one. The son of his foster father's brother, he was taken into the millionaire's household at a very early age.

Childless themselves, Mr. and Mrs. Ziegler determined to give him all the love and attention of parents and to this end they decided to legally adopt him.

AUTOMATIC MATCH-BOX.

In a recently patented match-box delivering one piece at a time, the match,



SHOWING THE END OF THE MATCH READY FOR WITHDRAWAL.

instead of being forced out of the box head-first, is simply ejected a short distance and is then in position to be withdrawn by the hand. In the illustration here shown a portion of the box has been cut away to show the telescoping action of the two sections, and a match is seen projecting from the discharge opening ready to be withdrawn. To place the match in the position here seen it is only necessary to contract the telescoping sections in the hand, when the ejector engages the head of the match lying in the bottom of the V-shaped compartment inside the box and exposes the end of the stick a short distance without, however, igniting the head. The ignition is accomplished by the passage of the match head between two roughened surfaces located just inside the opening.

The Carthage (Mo.) Press says that a Joplin boy asked his Sunday-school teacher last Sunday if the James boys wrote the Book of James.

The Horrors of War.

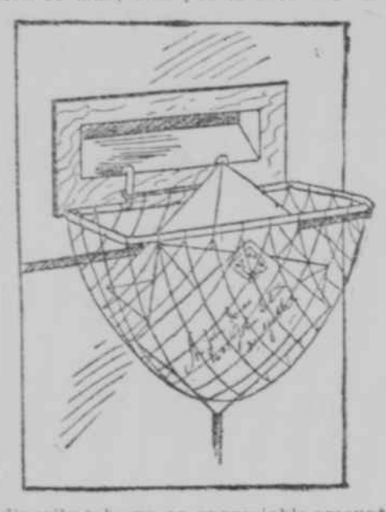
The old gentleman in the smoking-car was declaring vehemently that, in his opinion, war was a disgrace to civilization. "War," he exclaimed, "is an abomination, a blot on the universe!" Upon which he rose and left the car.

"The old man seems to feel pretty strongly on the subject," said one of the passengers. "Has he lost some near relative through war?"

"Yes," answered a friend, "his wife's first husband."—Harper's Weekly.

TO CATCH THE MAIL.

A hammock mail receptacle is a veritable novelty, which also deserves attention because of its many merits. In the first place, it is readily attached to or detached from the usual letter-drop opening, the advantages of which are obvious. In the second place, it shows at a glance whether there is any mail to be removed, and its character. In the third place, its ample proportions allow it to accommodate a large number of magazines or similar bulky articles of mail, and yet it does not ordinarily take up an appreciable amount of space. The common rigid box has to be made large enough for maximum requirements, while, as a matter of fact, these are only called into use semi-occasionally. The distension is accomplished by means of a wire framework from which the netting depends. The modern particular housewife, if appealed to, would probably lay some stress on the fact that a receptacle of this kind does not form a lurking place for an accumulation of dust.—Brooklyn Eagle.



Mooning.

A man by the name of Moon got married, and that was a change in the moon; in due time his wife presented him with a daughter, and that was a new moon; then he went to town and got busy for joy, and that was a full moon; when he started home he had twenty-five cents in his pocket, and that was the last quarter; his mother-in-law met him at the door, and that was a total eclipse—he saw stars.—Concord Times.

IMPROVED DUST-PAN.

The following is an improvement on the dust-pan which has been in general use for a great many years. This heel

DUST-PAN WITH A HEEL.

answers a dual purpose, that, in the first place, of elevating the rear part of the utensil so as to facilitate the operation of sweeping the accumulations of the floor into it and also forming a convenient receptacle for the said sweepings, preventing them from being spilled or otherwise scattered after they have been once gathered. On one side of the heel there is a door through which the sweepings may be readily emptied.

An American heiress has married Prince Henry Goland de Bearn at Chalais de Paris.

Korea's Future.

The constant growth of the trade of Korea is somewhat remarkable in view of the unfavorable condition of the country, and it is explained only by a consideration of the comparatively large and but partially developed resources of the country. It is safe to assume that at the conclusion of the present hostilities greater development awaits her, and further expansion of her foreign trade.—Journal of the Society of Arts.

Tomfoolery

SUGAR.

An urchin one day stuck his tongue
Through a hole in a bar'l called the bongue,
But a bee lit on it,
And the boy had a fit,
And loud was the song that he songue.
—Houston Post.

THE OLD STORY.

"I," announced Pa Twaddles yesterday, "am going to get a new set of false teeth."

"I wish you wouldn't," sighed Tommy T., wearily. "Ma'll be cutting down your old ones now an' makin' me wear 'em!"—Cleveland Leader.

A STARTLING STATEMENT.

"Yes, I believe that brevity is the soul of wit."

"Don't be hasty. Look at little Codling—four-feet-one in his socks. He's the briefest thing we have about here, and he doesn't know wit from a watermelon!"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

HEROIC TREATMENT.

"A Connecticut man fell down stairs and cured himself of rheumatism by breaking both his legs."

"Next thing we know some other man will fall down stairs and cure himself of tonsilitis by breaking his neck."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

FEMININE INTUITION.

"A woman should know without asking whether her husband is happy," said the modest wife.

"I can tell," answered young Mrs. Torkins. "When Charley comes home late to dinner and can't speak above a whisper I know the home team has won another game."—Washington Star.

HARD TO PLEASE.

He—"Then I am to understand that you have given me the mitten, as it were?"

She—"You have said it."

He—"And is this all?"

She—"Of course it is. What more do you want—a pair of socks?"—Columbus Dispatch.

A GUARANTEE.

"I don't believe in valentines," said Miss Cayenne.

"Why not?"

"If a man really loves a girl he will be willing to take a chance on making his avowal in his own handwriting and over his own signature."—Washington Star.

"He tried to keep a straight face."—Life.

DREAMS OF SUMMER.

"Really now," remarked the observer of events and things, "when you are shivering with the cold at night, with your head partly covered and your feet not at all, wouldn't you just love to hear the music of a summer mosquito as he approached and kissed your frozen nose?"—Yonkers Statesman.

HA! HA! HA!

"I'm undecided," said the dressy man, "whether to get white flannel or linen trousers this summer."

"Well," remarked Jokely, "there's two things I'd never have for trousers."

"What? Flannel and linen?"

"No, a coat and vest."—Philadelphia Press.

COMING TO HIM.

"She is very rich, but she has a violent temper. Why, she throws anything she can lay her finger on at her husband."

"Why doesn't he leave her?"

"Because he's hoping that some day she'll forget herself and throw her money at him, too."—Detroit Free Press.

GOOD SIGN.

"There's only one good thing about that young puppy that came to see you last night," said the irascible father, "and that is he's healthy."

"I'm surprised to hear you admit that much," replied the dutiful daughter.

"I wouldn't except for the fact that when you met him in the hall last night I heard you say, 'Oh, George, how cold your nose is!'"—London Tit-Bits.

NOT THE SAME.

"Oh, yes, he's tender-hearted. I really believe if a beggar approached him and he had no money about him he'd actually take off his coat and give it to him."

"Well, I'm not tender-hearted, but some of these nervy beggars make me feel like taking off my coat and giving it to them—good and proper."—Philadelphia Press.