

# The RED BAND

... or ...  
The Mysteries of the Mint.

BY DOUGLAS STEWART.

Revelations  
of Life in  
London  
Seventy Years  
Ago.

CHAPTER XVII.—continued.

The moon entirely shrouded now, it was so dark that she could scarce see her own hands as they clung on the keel of the little vessel.

In vain the poor girl strove to pierce the inky darkness that hung over the deep—but, black as Erebus, nothing was to be seen.

The strange noise that had fallen upon her ears above the rush of the waters, still continued to be heard. Gradually now her stiffened fingers released their grasp of the boat.

Slowly, but surely, she felt her hold was giving way; her strength and courage were alike deserting her. Higher now, the green and hissing waves seem lapping round her, the angry seas appearing as if eager to enwrap her small form in their cold embrace.

With a last wistful look at the bright stars, Laura was slipping into the liquid depths, when an arm presently encircled her waist and dragged her up from the yawning deep—presently placing her almost astride the upturned boat.

"Hold on, Miss Laura! The longboat is a-drifting about somewhere near—stop a little, and we'll get alongside her."

Loud and clear, the voice of the dwarf rang in the ears of the startled girl, who a moment before had given herself up for lost.

With a wild stare, Laura, as the moon now burst forth from the clouds, beheld beside her the ungainly stunted figure of her preserver, and some quarter of a mile away, drifting slowly towards them, the longboat of the lost ship.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PERILOUS NIGHT.—SAVED FROM THE DEEP.

Though the tempest shortly after almost died away, a heavy, rolling sea rendered the task of the shipwrecked couple a dangerous and a difficult one, every heave of the waters and rushing waves that washed over the upturned boat threatening to wrench away their hold upon the keel of the little vessel, the frail timbers that rested between them and death.

It was then, with a wild shout of joy, that the dwarf, as the longboat presently surged forwards and dashed against the jolly, at once leapt into her and, seizing the sculls that lay at the bottom, kept her steady while Laura scrambled in, her first action being to sink on her knees and offer up a prayer to the Divine Power that had rescued them both from a grave in the deep.

"We are saved, Miss Laura! But sailor-men! Ah, Ah! They've all gone to their master, the Devil!" said the dwarf, in a tone of voice that had a something of satisfaction in it.

"You think the entire crew of that ill-fated vessel have perished, Tiny Tit?" said Laura, with a shiver.

"I know it! I saw the ship heel over to starboard, and down she went like lead, she did! I knowed wot was coming, so I jumps overboard, cos as I didn't care about being sucked under with the boat. I were getting pretty well played out, though, and was finking about it a bit when I caught sight first of the longboat and then the jolly, with you a-holding on to it like winkin'. Hurrah! says I. Hurrah! Miss Anson's saved! and aren't we done along of 'em demons, and we've gone 'em at last!"

"God be praised, my poor fellow! yes! and I shudder to think of what would have been your fate, and mine, had those miserable men succeeded in carrying their vessel far away, and but for your timely aid just now, I, too, should have joined them in the ocean."

"But you have escaped! And oh, oh! I now have a mission to fulfil!"

"How, Tiny? What do you mean?"  
"Why, sailor-men, and that devil Frenchman—they've all gone! They'll trouble us no more. But one remains, and for him, oh, oh! the gallows waits!"

"You mean that arch-bend, Miles Belton, who entrapped us? You are right, for of all those now lying beneath the waves, not one is a more desperate, cruel, and unscrupulous ruffian than he! Yes! Yes! Justice must be meted out to that monster, Tiny Tit, and my sister, who perished through his vile misdeeds, must be avenged!" cried Laura, excitedly, forgetful of her own immediate danger, as she thought of the poor girl who had perished in the Seine a couple of years before. A mass of black crowds having again obscured the moon's rays, a thick darkness hung over the waters, and the boat, the wind rising presently, proved unmanageable in the hands of the dwarf.

Her thoughts now brought back to their still perilous position, Laura, cowering in the boat, watched with fear the white-

welcome hail sounded from the deck of the ship.

"Boat ahoy! There!"  
At this moment, as though guided by Providence, the longboat shot directly beneath the ship's lee quarters, and rounded to under shelter of her hull, when a rope, thrown from the deck, enabled the two occupants by the help of several sturdy sailors to get on board the vessel, which, fortunately for Laura and her companion, proved to be homeward-bound for the West India Docks!

Stepping forward, a ship's lantern swinging in his hand, an officer flashed the light upon the two shivering forms snatched from the sea.

Loud cries of pity and commiseration rose from the seamen who presently gathered round the rescued couple to whom every kindness and attention was shown.

The good ship *The Jutesend*, the next morning lying-to at Grassensend for a pilot, Laura and the brave dwarf, Tiny Tit, took the opportunity of going ashore, and were soon after on their way to London!

A happy meeting was it when the excited pair, having made their way to Maude's house, discovered there, Bill Bond, the burly smith, Nat Whiffles, the butcher, and Frank Belton, the three men having just determined to acquaint the authorities forthwith with the mysterious disappearance of Laura and the dwarf, their united efforts for days having failed to find what had become of them.

Not an instant was lost by the victims of Miles Belton's audacity and villainy, and before the expiration of twenty-four hours a warrant for his arrest for the dual crimes of abduction and murder was in the hands of the police.



THERE WAS A SHIP SURE ENOUGH.

crested billows that rushed and raged around them.

In less than half an hour now the wind began again to blow with such force that it would have brought the most gallant ship that floated to double-reefed topsails steering by, and to reasonably short canvas running free.

There was a time when the boat was only kept head to sea by means of the wash of the waves that drove past!

Occasionally one of these, chasing along, would come after the boat at racer's speed, at such instants breaking and half filling her.

It was during one of these dangerous moments of peril that Laura cried out that she saw a ship, the lights of which glimmered like pale stars in the darkness.

In wild excitement the little dwarf, as her cry echoed over the waters, started up and glared across the waste.

There was a ship, sure enough, with her head to the northward and eastward struggling along through the raging ocean under her fore and main topsails and reefed courses, all this fully revealed, as the moon with a faint, pale, sickly lustre shone from a rift of cloud.

The ship was not a cable's length from them when first discovered by Laura, but unfortunately was dead to leeward, and drawing ahead so fast as to lead to the probability she would forereach upon them.

Three several times the water lapped in upon the two unfortunates, rendering their boat more and more heavy, and now a

CHAPTER XIX.

NEMESIS!

A thick mist falling from a leaden sky, and a high wind sighing, moaning, howling, and screaming by turns, drear, sombre, and wretched looked the lonely villa abutting on the Common, at the corner of Nightingale Lane, Wandsworth.

Although mid-day, a darkness as of night hung over the houses, the outer door of which is presently opened by the bent, slouching figure of a man, who, emerging from the lane a few moments before, had approached the dwelling like a thief meditating some audacious robbery.

The ease with which an entry was effected, and the loud banging to of the door as he closed it after him, however, would have disarmed any suspicion of ill intent from the minds of any passer-by.

Bounding up the stairs, the visitor to Rose Villa, making his way straight to the room in which, some months before, had died its former owner, Sir Arthur Belton, he threw himself into a chair and gazed with blood-shot eyes and distracted mien around the darkened room, an apartment that was grim, weird, and repelling in its intense quietude, a silence rendered more gruesome by the screeching, moaning tempest outside.

In a husky kind of half-whisper the solitary tenant of the room communed with himself as he sat there, with pale face and a haunting fear in his eyes.

"I cannot realise the hideous truth! It is all like a wild dream! . . . ."

Gaspard Laroche escaping the wreck and a prisoner in the hands of the police! The vindictive sister of Bella on my track! The dwarf, with a confession written by the woman, Spinks! . . . . All, indeed, appears at an end, and my master, Satan, has deserted me! There's no hope, none! I'm cornered at every turn. How dark this room is! Pshaw! it is fancy, of course, but I could swear I saw the figure of an old man there!—there, by the door!"

With livid features—his eyes staring wildly into vacancy, the wretched villain, Miles Belton, for it was he, now started up and made for the window, a stifled kind of howl escaping him as he discerned some half-a-dozen figures in the grounds below.

"So soon? . . . I did not think they were so close upon my heels! That beautiful demon, Bella's sister, is leading them on! Ah, Bella! whose white face as she rose up from the waters of the Seine, now hovers up before me! That mass of leaden cloud, too, shaped so strangely, like a huge black hand, it is directly over the house now. Ha! they are forcing the door!"

With wild impetuosity and fury the miserable man here, as a crash sounded from below, threw open the window, and leaning forward, first giving vent to an awful maniacal laugh, then in a hoarse voice cried out:

"I'm ready for you—all! And I wait your coming!" Then shaking his fist at the mass of black cloud overhead, he banged down the casement with a crash that splintered every pane of glass in its frame.

For a moment there was a grim death-like silence, and then followed a roar of voices, and the tramp of feet, and in a couple of minutes a little crowd of police and others burst into the room.

He . . . of whom they were in search—whom they purposed to arrest for the heinous crime of murder, had kept his word! He had waited their coming.

Already rigid, his face a livid blue, his eyes bulging out from their sockets, and his tongue, swollen and purple, one hand with a death-grip holding a tiny bottle, Miles Belton lay a corpse in that very room in which his unfortunate uncle had died some months before by the hands of an assassin!

Our romance of real life is at an end, and we have little more to add, but may mention that Gaspard Laroche, who had indeed escaped the wreck of the *Santa Maria*, did not escape the gallows. Two deeds of vile murder being proved against him, he was duly hanged, and died with blasphemy and oaths upon his lips.

The Jacobites, Colonel Montfort, and the young baronet, Sir Harry Tempest, went abroad, and died in Florence.

Bill Bond and his friend, Nat Whiffles, left London for Yorkshire, and threw well—one as a butcher, and the other in a village smithy upon the estate of Frank Belton, who, with his pretty wife (née Maude Mainwaring) resides at a fine old Manor House near by.

Tiny Tit, the dwarf, became the landlord of an inn not far from the smithy of Bill Bond his two best customers, being the giant inseparables.

Laura Anson went to the States, and, as an actress and singer, made money, giving her hand, however, eventually to a rich planter, with whom, we believe, she lived happily.

At times her joys were shadowed by a remembrance of the past, then she called to mind how, aided by a beneficent Providence she had avenged her sister's wrongs, and brought to judgment her vicious destroyer.

With the deaths of those children of the night and blood-stained criminals of the Mint, murder and atrocities in the neighbourhood became less frequent, and in time almost forgotten were these evil days of the Red Band.

[THE END.]

At Hertford Assizes, before the Lord Chief Justice, Arthur George Thruswell, aged 22, a labourer, was found guilty of the murder of his sweetheart, Gertrude Allen, by cutting her throat at London Colney, near St. Albans, on June 2. The jury, however, took the view that he was insane at the time, and he was ordered to be confined in a criminal lunatic asylum during His Majesty's pleasure.

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