

## Hilda Wade.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

### IV.—THE EPISODE OF THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT COMMIT SUICIDE.



AFTER my poor friend Le Geyt had murdered his wife, in a sudden access of uncontrollable anger, under the deepest provocation, the police naturally began to inquire for him. It is a way they have: the police are no respecters of persons; neither do they pry into the question of motives. They are but poor casuists. A murder is for them a murder, and a murderer a murderer: it is not their habit to divide and distinguish between case and case with Hilda Wade's analytical accuracy.

As soon as my duties at St. Nathaniel's permitted me, on the evening of the discovery, I rushed round to Mrs. Mallet's, Le Geyt's sister. I had been detained at the hospital for some hours, however, watching a critical case: and by the time I reached Great Stanhope Street I found Hilda Wade, in her nurse's dress, there before me. Sebastian, it seemed, had given her leave out for the evening: she was a supernumerary nurse, attached to his own observation-cots as special attendant for scientific purposes, and she could generally get an hour or so whenever she required it.

Mrs. Mallet had been in the breakfast-room with Hilda before I arrived: but as I reached the house she rushed upstairs to wash her red eyes and compose herself a

little before the strain of meeting me: so I had the opportunity for a few words alone first with my prophetic companion.

"You said just now at Nathaniel's," I burst out, "that Le Geyt would not be hanged: he would commit suicide. What did you mean by that? What reason had you for thinking so?"

Hilda Wade sank into a chair by the open window, pulled a flower abstractedly from the vase at her side, and began picking it to pieces, floret after floret, with twitching fingers. She was deeply moved. "Well, consider his family history," she burst out at last, looking up at me with her large brown eyes as she reached the last petal. "Heredity counts. . . . And after such a disaster!"

She said "disaster," not "crime": I noted mentally the reservation implied in the word.

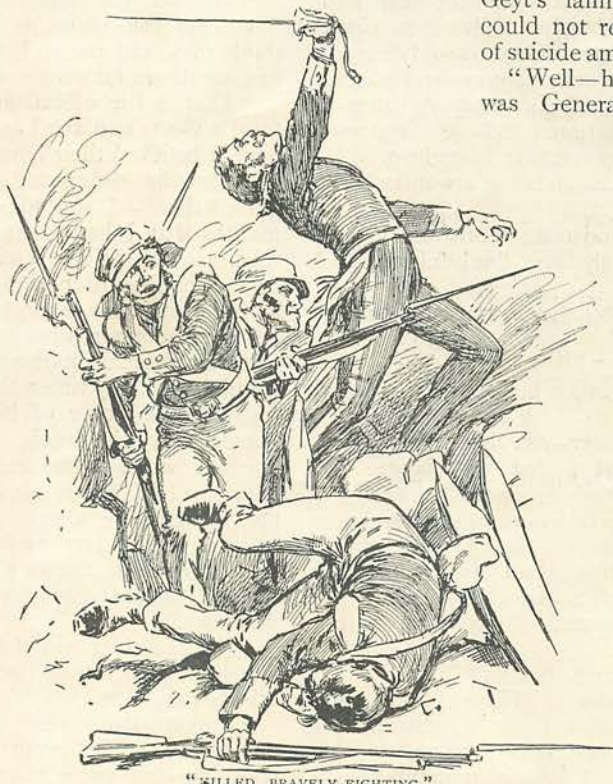
"Heredity counts," I answered. "Oh, yes. It counts much. But what about Le Geyt's family history?" I could not recall any instance of suicide among his forebears.

"Well—his mother's father was General Faskally, you know," she replied, after a pause, in her strange, oblique manner. "Mr. Le Geyt is General Faskally's eldest grandson."

"Exactly," I broke in, with a man's desire for solid fact in place of vague intuition. "But I fail to see quite what that has to do with it."

"The General was killed in India during the Mutiny."

"I remember, of course—killed, bravely fighting."



"KILLED, BRAVELY FIGHTING."



"Yes; but it was on a forlorn hope, for which he volunteered, and in the course of which he is said to have walked straight into an almost obvious ambushade of the enemy's."

"Now, my dear Miss Wade"—I always dropped the title of "Nurse" by request, when once we were well clear of Nathaniel's—"I have every confidence, you are aware, in your memory and your insight; but I do confess I fail to see what bearing this incident can have on poor Hugo's chances of being hanged or committing suicide."

She picked a second flower, and once more pulled out petal after petal. As she reached the last again, she answered, slowly, "You must have forgotten the circumstances. It was no mere accident. General Faskally had made a serious strategical blunder at Jhansi. He had sacrificed the lives of his subordinates needlessly. He could not bear to face the survivors. In the course of the retreat, he volunteered to go on this forlorn hope, which might equally well have been led by an officer of lower rank: and he was permitted to do so by Sir Colin in command, as a means of retrieving his lost military character. He carried his point: but he carried it recklessly: taking care to be shot through the heart himself in the first onslaught. That was virtual suicide—honourable suicide to avoid disgrace, at a moment of supreme remorse and horror."

"You are right," I admitted, after a minute's consideration. "I see it now—though I should never have thought of it."

"That is the use of being a woman," she answered.

I waited a second once more, and mused. "Still, that is only one doubtful case," I objected.

"There was another, you must remember: his uncle Alfred."

"Alfred Le Geyt?"

"No; *he* died in his bed, quietly. Alfred Faskally."

"What a memory you have!" I cried, astonished. "Why, that was before our time—in the days of the Chartist riots!"

She smiled a certain curious sibylline smile of hers. Her earnest face looked prettier than ever. "I told you I could remember many things that happened before I was born," she answered. "*This* is one of them."

"You remember it directly?"

"How impossible! Have I not often explained to you that I am no diviner? I read no book of fate: I call no spirits from the vasty deep. I simply remember with

exceptional clearness what I read and hear. And I have many times heard the story about Alfred Faskally."

"So have I—but, I forget it."

"Unfortunately, I *can't* forget. That is a sort of disease with me. . . . He was a special constable in the Chartist riots: and being a very strong and powerful man, like his nephew Hugo, he used his truncheon—his special constable's *bâton* or whatever you call it—with excessive force upon a starveling London tailor in the mob near Charing Cross. The man was hit on the forehead—badly hit, so that he died almost immediately of concussion of the brain. A woman rushed out of the crowd, at once, seized the dying man, laid his head on her lap, and shrieked out in a wildly despairing voice that he was her husband and the father of thirteen children. Alfred Faskally, who never meant to kill the man, or even to hurt him, but who was laying about him roundly without realizing the terrific force of his blows, was so horrified at what he had done when he heard the woman's cry, that he rushed off straight to Waterloo Bridge in an agony of remorse and—flung himself over. He was drowned instantly."

"I recall the story now," I answered: "but, do you know, as it was told me, I think they said the mob *threw* Faskally over in their desire for vengeance."

"That is the official account, as told by the Le Geys and the Faskallys: they like to have it believed their kinsman was murdered, not that he committed suicide. But my grandfather"—I started: during the twelve months that I had been brought into daily relations with Hilda Wade that was the first time I had heard her mention any member of her own family, except once her mother—"my grandfather, who knew him well, and who was present in the crowd at the time, assured me many times that Alfred Faskally really jumped over of his own accord, *not* pursued by the mob, and that his last horrified words as he leaped were, 'I never meant it! I never meant it!' However, the family have always had luck in their suicides. The jury believed the throwing-over story, and found a verdict of 'wilful murder' against some person or persons unknown."

"Luck in their suicides! What a curious phrase! And you say, *always*. Were there other cases, then?"

"Constructively, yes: one of the Le Geys, you must recollect, went down with his ship (just like his uncle, the General, in India)



when he might have quitted her: it is believed he had given a mistaken order. You remember, of course, he was navigating lieutenant. Another, Marcus, was *said* to have shot himself by accident while cleaning his gun—after a quarrel with his wife. But you have heard all about it. ‘The wrong was on my side,’ he moaned, you know, when they picked him up, dying, in the gun-room. And one of the Faskally girls, his cousins, of whom his wife was jealous—that beautiful Linda—became a Catholic and went into a convent at once on Marcus’s death: which, after all, in such cases, is merely a religious and moral way of committing suicide—I mean, for a woman who takes the veil just to cut herself off from the world, and who has no vocation, as I hear she had not.”

She filled me with amazement. “That is true,” I exclaimed, “when one comes to think of it. It shows the same temperament in fibre . . . . But, I should never have thought of it.”

“No? Well, I believe it is true for all that. In every case, one sees they choose much the same way of meeting a reverse, a blunder, an unpremeditated crime. The brave way is, to go through with it, and face the music, letting what will come: the cowardly way is, to hide one’s head incontinently in a river, a noose, or a convent cell.”

“Le Geyt is not a coward,” I interposed, with warmth.

“No, not a coward—a manly-spirited, great-hearted gentleman—but still, not quite of the bravest type. He lacks one element.

The Le Geys have physical courage—enough and to spare—but their moral courage fails them at a pinch. They rush into suicide or its equivalent at critical moments, out of pure boyish impulsiveness.”

A few minutes later Mrs. Mallet came in. She was not broken down—on the contrary, she was calm—stoically, tragically, pitiably calm, with that ghastly

calmness which is more terrible by far than the most demonstrative grief. Her face, though deadly white, did not move a muscle. Not a tear was in her eyes. Even her bloodless hands hardly twitched at the folds of her hastily-assumed black gown. She clenched them after a minute, when she had grasped mine silently: I could see that the nails dug deep into the palms in her painful resolve to keep herself from collapsing.

Hilda Wade, with infinite sisterly tenderness, led her over to a chair by the window in the summer twilight, and took one quivering hand in hers. “I have been telling Dr. Cumberledge, Lina, about what I most fear for your dear brother, darling: and . . . . I think

. . . . he agrees with me.”

Mrs. Mallet turned to me, with hollow eyes, still preserving her tragic calm. “I am afraid of it too,” she said, her drawn lips tremulous. “Dr. Cumberledge, we must get him back! We must induce him to face it!”

“And yet,” I answered, slowly, turning it over in my own mind, “he has run away at first. Why should he do that if he means—



“FLUNG HIMSELF OVER.”



to commit suicide?" I hated to utter the words before that broken soul; but there was no way out of it.

Hilda interrupted me with a quiet suggestion. "How do you know he has run away?" she asked. "Are you not taking it for granted that, if he meant suicide, he would blow his brains out in his own house? But surely that would not be the Le Geyt way. They are gentle-natured folk: they would never blow their brains out or cut their throats. For all we know, he may have made straight for Waterloo Bridge," she framed her lips to the unspoken words, unseen by Mrs. Mallet, "like his uncle Alfred."

"That is true," I answered, lip-reading. "I never thought of that either."

"Still, I do not attach importance to this idea," she went on. "I have some reason for thinking he has run away . . . elsewhere; and if so, our first task must be to entice him back again."

"What are your reasons?" I asked, humbly. Whatever they might be, I knew enough of Hilda Wade by this time to know that she had probably good grounds for accepting them.

"Oh, they may wait for the present," she answered. "Other things are more pressing. First, let Lina tell you what she thinks of most moment."

Mrs. Mallet braced herself up visibly to a distressing effort. "You have seen the body, Dr. Cumberledge?" she faltered.

"No, dear Mrs. Mallet, I have not. I came straight from Nathaniel's. I have had no time to see it."

"Dr. Sebastian has viewed it by my wish—he has been so kind—and he will be present as representing the family at the post-mortem. He notes that the wound was inflicted with a dagger—a small ornamental Norwegian dagger, which always lay, as I know, on the little what-not by the blue sofa."

I nodded assent. "Exactly, I have seen it there."

"It was blunt and rusty—a mere toy knife—not at all the sort of weapon a man would make use of who designed to commit a deliberate murder. The crime, if there was a crime (which we do not admit), must therefore have been wholly unpremeditated."

I bowed my head. "For us who knew Hugo, that goes without saying."

She lent forward eagerly. "Dr. Sebastian has pointed out to me a line of defence which would probably succeed—if we could only induce poor Hugo to adopt it. He has ex-

amined the blade and scabbard, and finds that the dagger fits its sheath very tight, so that it can only be withdrawn with considerable violence. The blade sticks." (I nodded again.) "It needs a hard pull to wrench it out . . . . He has also inspected the wound, and assures me its character is such that it *might* have been self-inflicted." She paused now and again, and brought out her words with difficulty. "Self-inflicted, he suggests: therefore, that *this* may have happened. It is admitted—*will* be admitted—the servants overheard it—we can make no reservation there—a difference of opinion, an altercation even, took place between Hugo and Clara that evening"—she started suddenly—"why, it was only last night—it seems like ages—an altercation about the children's schooling. Clara held strong views on the subject of the children"—her eyes blinked hard—"which Hugo did not share. We throw out the hint, then, that Clara, during the course of the dispute—we must call it a dispute—accidentally took up this dagger and toyed with it. You know her habit of toying, when she had no knitting or needle-work. In the course of playing with it (we suggest) she tried to pull the knife out of its sheath: failed: held it up, so, point upward: pulled again: pulled harder—with a jerk, at last, the sheath came off: the dagger sprang up: it wounded Clara fatally. Hugo, knowing that they had disagreed, knowing that the servants had heard, and seeing her fall suddenly dead before him, was seized with horror—the Le Geyt impulsiveness!—lost his head: rushed out: fancied the accident would be mistaken for murder. But why? A Q.C., don't you know! Recently married! Most attached to his wife. It is plausible, isn't it?"

"So plausible," I answered, looking it straight in the face, "that . . . it has but one weak point. We might make a coroner's jury or even a common jury accept it, on Sebastian's expert evidence: Sebastian can work wonders; but we could never make—"

Hilda Wade finished the sentence for me as I paused: "Hugo Le Geyt consent to advance it."

I lowered my head. "You have said it," I answered.

"Not for the children's sake?" Mrs. Mallet cried, with clasped hands.

"Not for the children's sake even," I answered. "Consider for a moment, Mrs. Mallet: *is* it true? Do you yourself *believe* it?"



She threw herself back in her chair with a dejected face. "Oh, as for that," she cried, wearily, crossing her hands, "before you and Hilda, who know all, what need to prevaricate? How *can* I believe it? We understand how it came about. That woman! That woman!"

"The real wonder is," Hilda murmured, soothing her white hand, "that he contained himself so long!"

"Well, we all know Hugo," I went on, as quietly as I was able; "and, knowing Hugo, we know that he might be urged to commit this wild act in a fierce moment of indignation—righteous indignation on behalf of his motherless girls, under tremendous provocation. But we also know that, having once committed it, he would never stoop to disown it by a subterfuge."

The heart-broken sister let her head drop faintly. "So Hilda told me," she murmured, "and what Hilda says in these matters is almost always final."

We debated the question for some minutes more: then Mrs. Mallet cried at last, "At any rate, he has fled for the moment, and his flight alone brings the worst suspicion upon him. That is our chief point. We must find out where he is, and if he has gone right away, we must bring him back to London."

"Where do you think he has taken refuge?"

"The police, Dr. Sebastian has ascertained, are watching the railway stations, and the ports for the Continent."

"Very like the police!" Hilda exclaimed, with more than a touch of contempt in her voice. "As if a clever man-of-the-world like Hugo Le Geyt would run away by rail, or start off to the Continent! Every Englishman is noticeable on the Continent. It would be sheer madness."

"You think he has not gone there, then?" I cried, deeply interested.

"Of course not. That is the point I hinted at just now. He has defended many persons accused of murder, and he often spoke to me of their incredible folly, when trying to escape, in going by rail, or in setting out from England for Paris. An Englishman, he used to say, is least observed in his own country. In this case, I think I *know* where he has gone, and how he went there."

"Where, then?"

"Where comes last: *how* first. It is a question of inference."

"Explain. We know your powers."

"Well, I take it for granted that he killed

her—we must not mince matters—about twelve o'clock: for after that hour, the servants told Lina, there was quiet in the drawing-room. Next, I conjecture, he went upstairs to change his clothes; he could not go forth on the world in an evening suit: and the housemaid says his black coat and trousers were lying as usual on a chair in his dressing-room: which shows at least that he was not unduly flurried. After that, he put on another suit, no doubt—*what* suit I hope the police will not discover too soon: for I suppose you must just accept the situation that we are conspiring to defeat the ends of justice."

"No, no," Mrs. Mallet cried. "To bring him back voluntarily, that he may face his trial like a man!"

"Yes, dear. That is quite right. However, the next thing, of course, would be that he would shave in whole or in part. His big black beard was so very conspicuous: he would certainly get rid of that before attempting to escape. The servants being in bed, he was not pressed for time: he had the whole night before him. So, of course, he shaved. On the other hand, the police, you



"HE WOULD CERTAINLY GET RID OF THAT."



may be sure, will circulate his photograph—we must not shirk these points”—for Mrs. Mallet winced again—“will circulate his photograph, *beard and all*; and that will really be one of our great safeguards: for the bushy beard so masks the face that, without it, Hugo would be scarcely recognisable. I conclude, therefore, that he must have shorn himself *before* leaving home, though naturally I did not make the police a present of the hint by getting Lina to ask any questions in that direction of the housemaid.”

“You are probably right,” I answered. “But, would he have a razor?”

“I was coming to that: no: certainly he would not. He had not shaved for years. And they kept no men-servants: which makes it difficult for him to borrow one from a sleeping man. So what he would do would doubtless be to cut off his beard, or part of it, quite close, with a pair of scissors, and then get himself properly shaved next morning in the first country town he came to.”

“The first country town?”

“Certainly. That leads up to the next point. We must try to be cool and collected.” She was quivering with suppressed emotion herself as she said it, but her soothing hand still lay on Mrs. Mallet’s. “The next thing is—he would leave London.”

“But not by rail, you say?”

“He is an intelligent man, and in the course of defending others has thought about this matter. Why expose himself to the needless risk and observation of a railway station? No: I saw at once what he would do: beyond doubt, he would cycle. He always wondered it was not done oftener under similar circumstances.”

“But has his bicycle gone?”

“Lina looked. It has not. I should have expected as much. I told her to note that point very unobtrusively, so as to avoid giving the police the clue. She saw the machine in the outer hall as usual.”

“He is too good a criminal lawyer to have dreamt of taking his own,” Mrs. Mallet interposed, with another effort.

“But where could he have hired or bought one at that time of night?” I exclaimed.

“Nowhere—without exciting the gravest

suspicion. Therefore, I conclude, he stopped in London for the night, sleeping at an hotel, without luggage, and paying for his room in advance: it is frequently done, and if he arrived late, very little notice would be taken of him. Big hotels about the Strand, I am told, have always a dozen such casual bachelor guests every evening.”

“And then?”

“And then, this morning, he would buy a new bicycle—a different make from his own, at the nearest shop; would rig himself out, at some ready-made tailor’s, with a fresh tourist suit—probably an ostentatiously tweedy bicycling suit; and with that in his luggage carrier, would make straight on his machine for the country. He could change in some copse, and bury his own clothes, avoiding the blunders he has seen in others. Perhaps he might ride for the first twenty



“HE COULD CHANGE IN SOME COPSE.”

or thirty miles out of London to some minor side-station, and then go on by train towards his destination, quitting the rail again at some unimportant point where the main west road crosses the Great Western or the South-Western line.”



"Great Western or South-Western? Why those two in particular? Then you have settled in your own mind which direction he has taken?"

"Pretty well. I judge by analogy. Lina, your brother was brought up in the West Country, was he not?"

Mrs. Mallet gave a weary nod. "In North Devon," she answered: "on the wild stretch of moor about Hartland and Clovelly."

Hilda Wade seemed to collect herself. "Now, Mr. Le Geyt is essentially a Celt—a Celt in temperament," she went on: "he comes by origin and ancestry from a rough, heather-clad country: he belongs to the moorland. In other words, his type is the mountaineer's. But a mountaineer's instinct in similar circumstances is—what? Why, to fly straight to his native mountains. In an agony of terror, in an access of despair, when all else fails, he strikes a bee-line for the hills he loves: rationally or irrationally, he seems to think he can hide there. Hugo Le Geyt, with his frank boyish nature, his great Devonian frame, is sure to have done so. I know his mood. He has made for the West Country!"

"You are right, Hilda," Mrs. Mallet exclaimed, with conviction. "I'm quite sure from what I know of Hugo that to go to the west would be his first impulse."

"And the Le Geys are always governed by first impulses," my character-reader added.

She was quite correct. From the time we two were at Oxford together—I as an undergraduate, he as a don—I had always noticed that marked trait in my dear old friend's temperament.

After a short pause, Hilda broke the silence again. "The sea, again; the sea! The Le Geys love the water. Was there any place on the sea where he went much as a boy—any lonely place, I mean, in that North Devon district?"

Mrs. Mallet reflected a moment. "Yes, there was a little bay—a mere gap in high cliffs, with some fishermen's huts and a few yards of beach—where he used to spend much of his holidays. It was a weird-looking break in a grim sea-wall of dark-red rocks, where the tide rose high, rolling in from the Atlantic."

"The very thing! Has he visited it since he grew up?"

"To my knowledge, never."

Hilda's voice had a ring of certainty. "Then *that* is where we shall find him, dear! We must look there first. He is

sure to revisit just such a solitary spot by the sea when trouble overtakes him."

Later in the evening, as we were walking home towards Nathaniel's together, I asked Hilda why she had spoken throughout with such unwavering confidence. "Oh, it was simple enough," she answered. "There were two things that helped me through, which I didn't like to mention in detail before Lina. One was this: the Le Geys have all of them an instinctive horror of the sight of blood: therefore, they almost never commit suicide by shooting themselves or cutting their throats. Marcus, who shot himself in the gun-room, was an exception to both rules: he never minded blood: he could cut up a deer. But Hugo refused to be a doctor, because he could not stand the sight of an operation: and even, as a sportsman, he never liked to pick up or handle the game he had shot himself: he said it sickened him. He rushed from that room last night, I feel sure, in a physical horror at the deed he had done: and by now he is as far as he can get from London. The sight of his act drove him away, not craven fear of an arrest. If the Le Geys kill themselves—a seafaring race on the whole—their impulse is—to trust to water."

"And the other thing?"

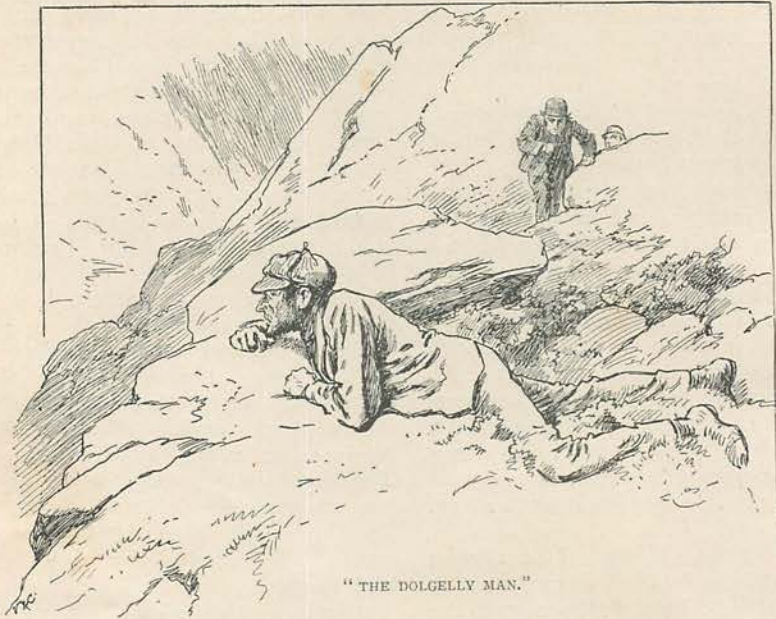
"Well, that was about the mountaineer's homing instinct. I have often noticed it. I could give you fifty instances, only I didn't like to speak of them before Lina. There was Williams, for example, the Dolgelly man who killed a gamekeeper at Petworth in a poaching affray: he was taken on Cader Idris, skulking among rocks, a week later. Then there was that unhappy young fellow Mackinnon, who shot his sweetheart at Leicester: he made, straight as the crow flies, for his home in the Isle of Skye, and there drowned himself in familiar waters. Lindner, the Tyrolese, again, who stabbed the American swindler at Monte Carlo, was tracked after a few days to his native place, St. Valentin in the Zillenthal. It is always so. Mountaineers in distress fly to their mountains. It is a part of their nostalgia. I know it from within, too: if I were in poor Hugo Le Geyt's place, what do you think I would do?—why, hide myself at once in the greenest recesses of our Carnarvonshire mountains."

"What an extraordinary insight into character you have!" I cried. "You seem to divine what everybody's action will be under given circumstances."



She paused and held her parasol half poised in her hand. "Character determines action," she said, slowly at last. "That is the secret of the great novelists. They put themselves behind and within their

She herself proposed to set out quietly for Bideford, where she would be within easy reach of me, in order to hear of my success or failure; while Hilda Wade, whose summer vacation was to have begun in two days'



"THE DOLGELLY MAN."

characters, and so make us feel that every act of their personages is not only natural but even, given the conditions, inevitable. We recognise that their story is the sole logical outcome of the interaction of their *dramatis personæ*. Now, I am not a great novelist: I cannot create and imagine characters and situations. But I have something of the novelist's gift: I apply the same method to the real life of the people around me. I try to throw myself into the person of others, and to feel how their character will compel them to act in each set of circumstances to which they may expose themselves."

"In one word," I said, "you are a psychologist."

"A psychologist," she assented: "I suppose so: and the police—well, the police are not: they are at best but bungling materialists. They require a *clue*. What need of a *clue* if you can interpret character?"

So certain was Hilda Wade of her conclusions, indeed, that Mrs. Mallet begged me next day to take my holiday at once—which I could easily do—and go down to the little bay in the Hartland district of which she had spoken, in search of Hugo. I consented.

time, offered to ask for an extra day's leave so as to accompany her. The broken-hearted sister accepted the offer: and, secrecy being above all things necessary, we set off by different routes: the two women by Waterloo, myself by Paddington.

We stopped that night at different hotels in Bideford; but next morning, Hilda rode out on her bicycle, and accompanied me on mine for a mile or two along the tortuous way towards Hartland. "Take nothing for granted," she said, as we parted; "and be prepared to find poor Hugo Le Geyt's appearance greatly changed. He has eluded the police and their 'clues' so far; therefore, I imagine he must have largely altered his dress and exterior."

"I will find him," I answered, "if he is anywhere within twenty miles of Hartland."

She waved her hand to me in farewell. I rode on after she left me towards the high promontory in front, the wildest and least-visited part of North Devon. Torrents of rain had fallen during the night: the slimy cart-ruts and cattle-tracks on the moor were brimming with water. It was a lowering day. The clouds drifted low. Black peat-



bogs filled the hollows: grey stone homesteads, lonely and forbidding, stood out here and there against the curved sky-line. Even the high road was uneven, and in places flooded. For an hour I passed hardly a soul: at last, near a cross-road, with a defaced finger-post, I descended from my machine and consulted my ordnance map,



"I CONSULTED MY ORDNANCE MAP."

on which Mrs. Mallet had marked ominously, with a cross of red ink, the exact position of the little fishing hamlet where Hugo used to spend his holidays. I took the turning which seemed to me most likely to lead to it: but the tracks were so confused and the run of the lanes so uncertain—let alone the map being some years out of date—that I soon felt I had lost my bearings. By a little wayside inn, half hidden in a deep combe, with bog on every side, I descended and asked for a bottle of ginger-beer; for the day was hot and close, in spite of the packed clouds. As they were opening the bottle, I inquired casually the way to the Red Gap bathing-place.

The landlord gave me directions which

confused me worse than ever, ending at last with the concise remark, "An' then, zur, two or dree more turns to the right an' to the left 'ull bring 'ee right up alongside o' ut."

I despaired of finding the way by these unintelligible sailing-orders: but just at that moment, as luck would have it, another cyclist flew past—the first soul I had seen on the road that morning. He was a man with the loose-knit air of a shop-assistant, badly got up in a rather loud and obtrusive tourist suit of brown homespun, with baggy knickerbockers and thin thread stockings. I judged him a gentleman on the cheap at sight: "Very Stylish; this Suit Complete, only thirty-seven and sixpence!" The landlady glanced out at him with a friendly nod. He turned and smiled at her, but did not see me: for I stood in the shade behind the half-open door. He had a short, black moustache, and a not unpleasing, careless face. His features, I thought, were better than his garments.

However, the stranger did not interest me just then: I was far too full of more important matters. "Why don't 'ee taäke an' vollow thik ther gen'leman, zur?" the landlady said, pointing one large red hand after him. "Ur do go down to Urd Gap to zwim every marnin'. Mr. Jan Smith, o' Oxford, they do call un. 'Ee can't go wrong if 'ee do vollow un to the Gap. Ur's lodgin' up to wold Varmer Moore's, an' ur's that vond o' the zay, the vishermen do tell me, as wasn't never any gen'leman like un."

I tossed off my ginger-beer, jumped on to my machine, and followed the retreating brown back of Mr. John Smith, of Oxford—surely a most non-committing name—round sharp corners and over ruddy lanes, tyre-deep in mud, across the rusty-red moor, till, all at once at a turn, a gap of stormy sea appeared wedge-shape between two shelving rock-walls.

It was a lonely spot. Rocks hemmed it in: big breakers walled it. The sou'wester roared through the gap. I rode down among loose stones and water-worn channels in the solid grit very carefully. But the man in brown had torn over the wild path with reckless haste, zig-zagging madly, and was now on the little three-cornered patch of



beach, undressing himself with a sort of careless glee, and flinging his clothes down anyhow on the shingle beside him. Something about the action caught my eye. That movement of the arm! It was not—it could not be—no, no, not Hugo!

A very ordinary person: and Le Geyt bore the stamp of a born gentleman.

He stood up bare at last. He flung out his arms as if to welcome the boisterous wind to his naked bosom. Then, with a sudden burst of recognition, the man stood revealed. We had bathed together a hundred times in London and elsewhere. The face, the clad figure, the dress, all were

cork: but like a cork he rose again. He was swimming now, arm over arm, straight out seaward. I saw the lifted hands between the crest and the trough. For a moment I hesitated whether I ought to strip and follow him. Was he doing as so many other of his house had done—courting death from the water?

But some strange hand restrained me. Who was I that I should stand between Hugo Le Geyt and the ways of Providence?



"HE FLUNG OUT HIS ARMS."

different. But the body—the actual frame and make of the man—the well-knit limbs, the splendid trunk—no disguise could alter. It was Le Geyt himself—big, powerful, vigorous.

That ill-made suit, those baggy knickerbockers, the slouched cap, the thin thread stockings, had only distorted and hidden his figure: now that I saw him as he was, he came out the same bold and manly form as ever.

He did not notice me. He rushed down with a certain wild joy into the turbulent water, and plunging in with a loud cry, buffeted the huge waves with those strong curving arms of his. The sou'-wester was rising. Each breaker as it reared caught him on its crest and tumbled him over like a

The Le Geys loved ever the ordeal by water.

Presently, he turned again. Before he turned, I had taken the opportunity to look hastily at his clothes. Hilda Wade had surmised aright once more. The outer suit was a cheap affair from a big ready-made tailor's in St. Martin's Lane—turned out by the thousand: the underclothing, on the other hand, was new and unmarked, but fine in quality—bought, no doubt, at Bideford. An eerie sense of doom stole over me. I felt the end was near. I withdrew behind a big rock, and waited there unseen till Hugo had landed. He began to dress again, without troubling to dry himself. I drew a deep breath of relief. Then this was not suicide!



By the time he had pulled on his vest and drawers, I came out suddenly from my ambush and faced him. A fresh shock awaited me. I could hardly believe my

defence—the plausibility of the explanation—the whole long story. He gazed at me moodily. Yet it was not Hugo!

“No, no,” he said, shortly; and as he



“THE MAN ROSE WITH A LITTLE CRY AND ADVANCED.”

eyes. It was *not* Le Geyt—no, nor anything like him!

Nevertheless, the man rose with a little cry and advanced, half crouching, towards me. “*You* are not hunting me down—with the police?” he exclaimed, his neck held low and his forehead wrinkling.

The voice—the voice was Le Geyt’s. It was an unspeakable mystery. “Hugo,” I cried, “dear Hugo—hunting you down?—*could* you imagine it?”

He raised his head, strode forward, and grasped my hand. “Forgive me, Cumberlandge,” he cried. “But a proscribed and hounded man! If you knew what a relief it is to me to get out on the water!”

“You forget all there?”

“I forget IT—the red horror!”

“You meant just now to drown yourself?”

“No! If I had meant it I would have done it. . . . Hubert, for my children’s sake, I *will* not commit suicide!”

“Then listen!” I cried. I told him in a few words his sister’s scheme—Sebastian’s

spoke it was *he*. “I have done it; I have killed her; I will not owe my life to a falsehood.”

“Not for the children’s sake?”

He dashed his hand down impatiently. “I have a better way for the children. I will save them still. . . . Hubert, you are not afraid to speak to a murderer?”

“Dear Hugo—I know all: and to know all is to forgive all.”

He grasped my hand once more. “Know *all!*” he cried, with a despairing gesture. “Oh, no: no one knows *all* but myself: not even the children. But the children know much: *they* will forgive me. Lina knows something: *she* will forgive me. You know a little: *you* forgive me. The world can never know. It will brand my darlings as a murderer’s children.”

“It was the act of a minute,” I interposed. “And—though she is dead, poor lady, and one must speak no ill of her—we can at least gather dimly, for your children’s sake, how deep was the provocation.”



He gazed at me fixedly. His voice was like lead. "For the children's sake—yes," he answered, as in a dream. "It was all for the children! I have killed her—murdered her—she has paid her penalty; and, poor dead soul, I will utter no word against her—the woman I have murdered! But one thing I will say: If omniscient justice sends me for this to eternal punishment, I can endure it gladly, like a man, knowing that so I have redeemed my Marian's motherless girls from a deadly tyranny."

It was the only sentence in which he ever alluded to her.

I sat down by his side and watched him close. Mechanically, methodically, he went on with his dressing. The more he dressed, the less could I believe it was Hugo. I had expected to find him close-shaven: so did the police, by their printed notices. Instead of that, he had shaved his beard and whiskers, but only trimmed his moustache, trimmed it quite short, so as to reveal the boyish corners of the mouth—a trick which entirely altered his rugged expression. But that was not all: what puzzled me most was the eyes—they were not Hugo's. At first I could not imagine why: by degrees, the truth dawned upon me. His eyebrows were naturally thick and shaggy—great overhanging growth, interspersed with many of those stiff long hairs to which Darwin called attention in certain men as surviving traits from a monkey-like ancestor. In order to disguise himself, Hugo had pulled out all these coarser hairs, leaving nothing on his brows but the soft and closely-pressed coat of down which underlies the longer bristles in all such cases. This had wholly altered the expression of the eyes, which no longer looked out keenly from their cavernous penthouse, but being deprived of their relief, had acquired a much more ordinary and less individual aspect. From a good-natured but shaggy giant my old friend was transformed by his shaving and his costume into a well-fed and well-grown, but not very colossal, commercial gentleman. Hugo was scarcely six feet high, indeed, though by his broad shoulders and bushy beard he had always impressed one with such a sense of size: and now that the hirsuteness had been got rid of, and the dress altered, he hardly struck one as taller or bigger than the average of his fellows.

We sat for some minutes and talked. Le Geyt would not speak of Clara: and when I asked him his intentions, he shook his head moodily. "I shall act for the best," he said—"what of best is left—to guard the

dear children. It was a terrible price to pay for their redemption; but it was the only one possible: and, in a moment of wrath, I paid it. Now, I have to pay, in turn, myself. I do not shirk it."

"You will come back to London, then, and stand your trial?" I asked, eagerly.

"Come back to London?" he cried, with a face of white panic. Hitherto he had seemed to me rather relieved in expression than otherwise: his countenance had lost its worn and anxious look: he was no longer watching each moment over his children's safety. "Come back . . . to London . . . and face my trial! Why, did you think, Hubert, 'twas the court or the hanging I was shirking? No, no, not that; but IT—the red horror! I must get away from it to the sea—to the water—to wash away the stain—as far from it—that red pool—as possible!"

I answered nothing. I left him to face his own remorse in silence.

At last he rose to go, and held one foot undecided on his bicycle.

"I leave myself in Heaven's hands," he said, as he lingered. "It will requite . . . The ordeal is by water."

"So I judged," I answered.

"Tell Lina this from me," he went on, still loitering: "that if she will trust me, I will strive to do the best that remains for my darlings. I will do it, Heaven helping. She will know *what*, to-morrow."

He mounted his machine and sailed off. My eyes followed him up the path with sad forebodings.

All day long I loitered about the Gap. It consisted of two bays—the one I had already seen, and another, divided from it by a saw-edge of rock. In the further cove crouched a few low, stone cottages. A broad-bottomed sailing-boat lay there, pulled up high on the beach. About three o'clock, as I sat and watched, two men began to launch it. The sea ran high: tide coming in: the sou'-wester still increasing in force to a gale: at the signal-staff on the cliff, the danger-cone hoisted. White spray danced in air. Big black clouds rolled up seething from windward: low thunder rumbling: a storm threatened.

One of the men was Le Geyt: the other, a fisherman.

He jumped in and put off through the surf with an air of triumph. He was a splendid sailor. His boat leapt through the breakers and flew before the wind with a mere rag of canvas. "Dangerous weather to be out!" I exclaimed to the fisherman,



who stood with hands buried in his pockets, watching him.

"Ay, that ur be, zur!" the man answered. "Doan't like the look o' ut. But thik there gen'elman, 'e's one o' Oxford, 'e do tell me: and they 'm a main venturesome lot, they college volk. 'E's off by 'isself droo the starm, all so var as Lundy!"

"Will he reach it?" I asked, anxiously, having my own idea on the subject.

"Doan't seem like ut, zur, do ut? Ur must, an' ur mustn't, an' yit again ur must. Powerful 'ard place ur be to maäke in a starm, to be zure, Lundy. Zaid the Lord 'ould dezide. But ur 'ouldn't be warned, ur 'ouldn't; an' voohardy volk, as the zayin' is, must go their own voohardy waäy to perdition!"

It was the last I saw of Le Geyt alive. Next morning the lifeless body of "the man who was wanted for the Campden Hill mystery" was cast up by the waves on the shore of Lundy. The Lord had decided.

missive verdict of "Death by misadventure." The coroner thought it a most proper finding. Mrs. Mallet had made the most of the innate Le Geyt horror of blood: the newspapers charitably surmised that the unhappy husband, crazed by the instantaneous unexpectedness of his loss, had wandered away like a madman to the scenes of his childhood, and had there been drowned by accident while trying to cross a stormy sea to Lundy, under some wild impression that he would find his dead wife alive on the island. Nobody whispered *murder*. Everybody dwelt on the utter absence of motive—a model husband!—such a charming young wife and such a devoted stepmother. We three alone knew—we three, and the children.

On the day when the jury brought in their verdict at the adjourned inquest on Mrs. Le Geyt, Hilda Wade stood in the room trembling and white-faced, awaiting their decision. When the foreman uttered the words, "Death by misadventure," she burst



"THE LORD HAD DECIDED."

Hugo had not miscalculated. "Luck in their suicides," Hilda Wade said: and, strange to say, the luck of the Le Geys stood him in good stead still. By a miracle of fate, his children were not branded as a murderer's daughters. Sebastian gave evidence at the inquest on the wife's body: "self-inflicted—a recoil—accidental—I am sure of it." His specialist knowledge—his assertive certainty, combined with that arrogant, masterful manner of his, and his keen, eagle eye, overbore the jury. Awed by the great man's look, they brought in a sub-

into tears of relief. "He did well!" she cried to me, passionately. "He did well, that poor father! He placed his life in the hands of his Maker, asking only for mercy to his innocent children. And mercy has been shown to him, and to them. He was taken gently in the way he wished. It would have broken my heart for those two poor girls if the verdict had gone otherwise. He knew how terrible a lot it is to be called a murderer's daughter."

I did not realize at the time with what profound depth of personal feeling she said it.