

STINGAREE STORIES.

By E. W. HORNUNG.

VIII.—THE MOTH AND THE STAR.

I.



ARLINGHURST GAOL had never immured a more interesting prisoner than the back-block bandit who was tried and convicted under the strange style and title which he had made his own. Not even in prison was his real name ever known, and the wild speculations of some imaginative officials were nothing else up to the end. There was enough colour in their wildness, however, to crown the convict with a certain halo of romance, which his behaviour in gaol did nothing to dispel. That, of course, was exemplary, since Stingaree had never been a fool, but it was something more and rarer. Not content simply to follow the line of least resistance, he exhibited from the first a spirit and a philosophy unique indeed beneath the broad arrow. And so far from decreasing with the years of his captivity, these attractive qualities won him friend after friend among the officials, and privilege upon privilege at their hands, while amply justifying the romantic interest in his case.

At last there came to Sydney a person more capable of an acute appreciation of the heroic villain than his most ardent admirer on the spot. Lucius Brady was a long-haired Irishman of letters, bard and bookworm, rebel and reviewer; in his ample leisure he was also the most enthusiastic criminologist in London. And as president of an exceedingly esoteric Society for the Cultivation of Criminals, even from London did he come for a pre-arranged series of interviews with the last and the most distinguished of all the bushrangers.

It was to Lucius Brady, his biographer to be, that Stingaree confided the data of all the misdeeds recounted in these columns; but of his life during the quiet intervals, of his relations with confederates, and his more honest dealings with honest folk (of which many a pretty tale was rife), he was not to be persuaded to speak without an irritating reserve.

"Keep to my points of contact with the world, about which something is known already, and you shall have the whole truth of each matter," said the convict. "But I don't intend to give away the altogether unknown, and I doubt if it would interest you

if I did. The most interesting thing to me has been the different types with whom I have had what it pleases you to term professional relations, and the very different ways in which they have taken me. You read character by flashlight along the barrel of your revolver. What you should do is to hunt up my various victims and get at their point of view; you really mustn't press me to hark back to mine. As it is you bring a whiff of the outer world which makes me bruise my wings against the bars."

The criminologist gloated over such speeches from such lips. It would have touched another to note what an irresistible fascination the bars had for the wings, despite all pain; but Lucius Brady's interest in Stingaree was exclusively intellectual. His heart never ached for a roving spirit in confinement; it did not occur to him to suppress a detail of his own days in Sydney, the attractions of an Italian restaurant he had discovered near the gaol, the flavour of the Chianti, and so forth. On the contrary, it was most interesting to note the play of features in the tortured man, who after all brought his torture on himself by asking so many questions. Soon, when his visitor left him, the bondman could follow the free in all but the flesh, through every corridor of the prison and every street outside, to the hotel where you read the English papers on the veranda, or to the little restaurant where the Chianti was corked with oil which the waiter removed with a wisp of tow.

One day, late in the afternoon, while Lucius Brady was beaming on him through his spectacles, and expatiating on the champagne at Government House, Stingaree quietly garrotted him. A gag was in all readiness, likewise strips of coarse sheeting torn up for the purpose in the night. Black in the face, but with breath still in his body, the criminologist was carefully gagged and tied down to the bedstead, while his living image (at a casual glance) strolled with bent head, black sombrero, spectacles and frock-coat, first through the cold corridors and presently along the streets.

The heat of the pavement striking to his soles was the first of a hundred exquisite sensations; but Stingaree did not permit

himself to savour one of them. Indeed, he had his work cut out to check the pace his heart dictated; and it was by an admirable exercise of the will that he wandered along, deep to all appearance in a Camelot of the Classic which he had found in the criminologist's pocket; in reality blinded by the glasses, but all the more vigilant out of the corners of his eyes.

A suburb was the scene of these perambulations; had he but dared to lift his face, Stingaree might have caught a glimpse of the bluest of blue water; and his prison eyes hungered for the sight, but he would not raise his eyes so long as footsteps sounded on the same pavement. By taking judicious turnings, however, he drifted into a quiet road, with grey suburban bungalows on one side and building lots on the other. No step approached. He could look up at last. And the very bungalow that he was passing was shut up, yet furnished; the people had merely gone away, servants and all; he saw it at a glance from the newspapers plastering the windows which caught the sun. In an instant he was in the garden, and in another he had forced a side gate leading by an alley to back-yard and kitchen door; but for many minutes he went no farther than this gate, behind which he cowered, prepared with excuses in case he had already been observed.

It was in this interval that Stingaree recalled the season with a thrill; for it was Christmas week, and without a doubt the house would be empty till the New Year. Here was one port for the storm that must

follow his escape. And a very pleasant port he found it on entering, after due precautionary delay.

Clearly the abode of young married people, the bungalow was fitted and furnished with a taste which appealed almost painfully to

Stingaree; the drawing-room was draped in sheets, but the walls carried a few good engravings, some of which he

remembered with a stab. It was the dressing-room, however, that he wanted, and the dressing-room made him rub his hands. The dainty establishment had no more luxurious corner, what with the fitted bath, circular shaving-glass, packed trouser-press, a row of boots on trees, and a fine old wardrobe full of hanging coats. Stingaree began by selecting his suit; and it may have been his vanity, or a

strange longing to look for once what he once had been, but he could not resist the young man's excellent evening clothes.

"This fellow comes from home," said he. "And they are spending their Christmas pretty far back, or he would have taken these with him."

He had wallowed in the highly enamelled bath, and was looking for a towel when he saw his head in the shaving-glass; he was dry enough before he could think of anything else. There was a dilemma, obvious yet unforeseen. That shaven head! Purple and fine linen could not disguise the convict's crop; a wig was the only hope; but to wear a wig one must first try it on—and let the perruquier call the police! The knot was Gordian. And yet, desperately as Stingaree sought unravelment, he was at the same time subconsciously as deep in a study of a face so



"STINGAREE QUIETLY GARROTTED HIM."

unfamiliar that at first he had scarcely known it for his own. It was far leaner than of old; it was no longer richly tanned; and the mouth called louder than ever for a moustache. The hair, what there was of it, seemed iron-grey. It had certainly receded at the temples. What a pity, while it was about it—

Stingaree clapped his hands; his hunt for the razor was feverish, tremulous. Such a young man must have many razors; he had, he had—here they were. Oh, young man blessed among young men!

It was quite dark when a gentleman in evening clothes, light overcoat, and opera hat, sallied forth into the quiet road. Quiet as it was, however, a whistle blew as he trod the pavement, and his hour or two of liberty seemed at an end. His long term in prison had mixed Stingaree's ideas of the old country and the new; he had forgotten that it is the postmen who blow the whistles in Australia. Yet this postman stopped him on the spot.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but if it's quite convenient may I ask you for the Christmas-box you was kind enough to promise me?"

"I think you are mistaking me for someone else," said Stingaree.

"Why, so I am, sir! I thought you came out of Mr. Brinton's house."

"Sorry to disappoint you," said the convict. "If I only had change you should have some of it, in spite of your mistake; but, unfortunately, I have none."

He had, however, a handsome pair of opera-glasses, which he converted into change (on the

gratuitous plea that he had forgotten his purse) at the first pawnbroker's on the confines of the city. The pawnbroker talked Greek to him at once.

"It's a pity you won't be able to see 'er, sir, as well as 'ear 'er," said he.

"Perhaps they have them on hire in the theatre," replied Stingaree at a venture. The pawnbroker's face instantly advised him that his observation was wide of the obscure mark.

"The theatre! You won't 'ear 'er at any theatre in Sydney, nor yet in the Southern 'Emisphere. Town 'Alls is the only lay for 'Ilda Bouverie out 'ere!"

At first the name conveyed nothing to Stingaree. Yet it was not wholly unfamiliar.

"Of course," said he. "The Town Hall I meant."

The pawnbroker leered as he put down a sovereign and a shilling.

"What a season she's 'aving, sir!"

"Ah! What a season!"

And Stingaree wagged his opera-hatted head.

"'Undreds of pounds' worth of flowers flung on to every platform, and not a dry eye in the place!"

"I know," said the feeling Stingaree.

"It's wonderful to think of this 'ere colony prodoocin' the world's best primer donner!"

"It is, indeed."

"When you think of 'er start."

"That's true."

The pawnbroker leant across his counter and leered more than ever in his customer's face.

"They say she ain't no better than she ought to be!"

"Really?"

"It's right, too; but what can you expect of a primer donner whose fortune was made by a blood-thirsty bushranger like that there Stingaree?"



"'UNDREDS OF POUNDS' WORTH OF FLOWERS FLUNG ON TO EVERY PLATFORM, AND NOT A DRY EYE IN THE PLACE!"

"You little scurrilous wretch!" cried the bushranger, and flung out of the shop that second.

It was a miracle. He remembered everything now. Then he had done the world a service as well as the woman! He thanked Heaven for the guinea in his pocket, and asked his way to the Town Hall. And as he marched down the middle of the lighted streets the first flock of newsboys came flying in his face.

"*Escape of Stingaree! Escape of Stingaree! Cowardly Outrage on Famous Author! Escape of Stingaree!!*"

The damp pink papers were in the hands of the overflow crowd outside the hall; his own name was already in every mouth, continually coupled with that of the world-renowned Hilda Bouverie. It did not deter the convict from elbowing his way through the mass that gloated over his deed exactly as they would have gloated over his destruction on the gallows. "I have my ticket; I have been detained," he told the police; and at the last line of defence he whispered, "A guinea for standing-room!" And the guinea got it.

It was the interval between parts one and two. He thought of that other interval, when he had made such a different entry at the same juncture; the other concert-room would have gone some fifty times into this. All at once fell a hush, and then a rising thunder of applause, and someone requested Stingaree to remove his hat; he did so, and a cold creeping of the shaven flesh reminded him of his general position and of this particular peril. But no one took any notice of him or of his head. And it was not Hilda Bouverie this time; it was a pianiste in violent magenta and elaborate lace, whose performance also was loud and embroidered. Followed a beautiful young baritone whom Miss Bouverie had brought from London in her pocket for the tour. He sang three little songs very charmingly indeed; but there was no encore. The gods were burning for their own; perfunctory plaudits died to a dramatic pause.

And then, and then, amid deafening salvos, a dazzling vision appeared upon the platform, came forward with the carriage of a conscious queen, stood bowing and beaming in the gloss and glitter of fabric and of gem that were yet less radiant than herself. Stingaree stood inanimate between stamping feet and clapping hands. No; he would never have connected this magnificent woman with the simple bush-girl in the unpretentious frocks that he recalled as clearly as her former

self. He had looked for less finery, less physical development, less, indeed, of the grand operatic manner. But acting ended with her smile, and much of the old innocent simplicity came back as the lips parted in song. And her song had not been spoilt by riches and adulation; her song had not sacrificed sweetness to artifice; there was even more than the old magic in her song.

Is this a dream?

Then waking would be pain!

Oh! do not wake me;

Let me dream again.

It was no new number even then; even Stingaree had often heard it, and heard great singers go the least degree flat upon the first "dream." He listened critically. Hilda Bouverie was not one of the delinquents. Her intonation was as perfect as that of the great violinists, her high notes had the rarefied quality of the E string finely touched. It was a flawless, if a purely popular, performance; and the musical heart of one listener in that crowded room was too full for mere applause. But he waited with patient curiosity for the encore, waited while curtsy after curtsy was given in vain. She had to yield; she yielded with a winning grace. And the first bars of the new song set one full heart beating, so that the earlier words were lost upon his brain.

She ran before me in the meads;
And down this world-worn track
She leads me on; but while she leads
She never gazes back.

And yet her voice is in my dreams,
To witch me more and more;
That wooing voice! Ah me; it seems
Less near me than of yore.

Lightly I sped when hope was high,
And youth beguiled the chase;
I follow—follow still; but I
Shall never see her Face.

So the song ended; and in the ultimate quiet the need of speech came over Stingaree.

"The Unrealized Ideal," he informed a neighbour.

"Rather!" rejoined the man, treating the stale news as a mere remark. "We never let her off without that."

"I suppose not," said Stingaree.

"It's the song the bushranger forced her to sing at the back-block concert, and it made her fortune. Good old Stingaree! By the way, I heard somebody behind me say he had escaped. That can't be true?"

"The newsboys were yelling it as I came along late."

"Well," said Stingaree's neighbour, "if he

has escaped, and I for one don't hope he hasn't, this is where he ought to be. Just the sort of thing he'd do, too. Good old sportsman, Stingaree!"

It was an embarrassing compliment, eye to eye and foot to foot, wedged in a crowd. The bushranger did not fish for any more; neither did he wait to hear Hilda Bouverie sing again, though this cost him much. But he had one more word with his neighbour before he went.

"You don't happen to know where she's staying, I suppose? I've met her once or twice, and I might call."

The other smiled as on some suicidal moth.

"There's only one place good enough for a star like her in Sydney."

"And that is?"

"Government House."

II.

HIS EXCELLENCY of the moment was a young nobleman of sporting proclivities and your true sportsman's breadth of mind. He was immensely popular with all sects and sections but the aggressively puritanical and the narrowly austere. He graced the theatre with his constant presence, the Turf with his own horses. His entertainment was lavish, and in quality far above the gubernatorial average. Late life and soul of an exalted circle, he was hide-bound by few of the conventional trammels that distinguished the older type of peer to which the Colonies had been accustomed. It was the obvious course for such a Governor and his kindred lady to insist upon making the great Miss Bouverie their guest for the period of her professional sojourn in the capital; and a semi-Bohemian supper at Government House was but a characteristic *finale* to her first great concert.

The *prima donna* sat on the Governor's right, and at the proper point his Excellency sang her praises in a charmingly informal speech, which delighted and amused the pressmen, actors, and actresses whom he had collected for the occasion. Only the guest of honour looked a little weary and condescending; she had a sufficient experience of such entertainments in London, where the actors were all London actors, the authors and journalists men whose names one knew. Mere peers were no great treat either; in a word, Hilda Bouverie was not a little spoilt. She had lost the girl's glad outlook on the world, which some women keep until old age. There were stories about her which would have accounted for a deeper deterioration. Yet she was the Governor's guest, and her behaviour not unworthy of the honour. On him at least she smiled, and her real smile, less expansive than the platform counterfeit, had still its genuine sweetness, its winning flashes; and, at its worst, it was more sad than bitter.

To-night the woman was an exhausted artist—unnerved, unstrung, unfitted for the world, yet only showing it in a languid appreciation which her host and hostess were the first to understand. Indeed, it was the great lady who carried her off, bowing with her platform bow, and smiling that smile, before the banquet was at an end.

A charming suite of rooms had been



"WHO BROUGHT THIS?" SHE ASKED, PREVIOUSLY.

placed at the disposal of the *prima donna*; the boudoir was like a hot-house with the floral offerings of the evening, already tastefully arranged by madame's own Swiss maid. But the weary lady walked straight through to her bedroom, and sank with a sigh into the arm-chair before the glass.

"Who brought this?" she asked, peevishly, picking a twisted note from amid the golden furniture of her toilet-table.

"I never saw it until this minute, madame!" the Swiss maid answered, in dismay. "It was not there ten minutes ago, I am sure, madame!"

"Where have you been since?"

"Down to the servants' hall, for one minute, madame."

Miss Bouverie read the note, and was an animated being in three seconds. She looked in the glass, the flush became her, and even as she looked all horror died in her dark-blue eyes. Instead there came a glitter that warned the maid.

"I am tired of you, Lea," cried madame. "You let people bring notes into my room and you say you were only out of it a minute. Be good enough to leave me for the night. I can attend to myself for once!"

The maid protested, wept, but was expelled, and a key turned between them; then Hilda Bouverie read her note again:—

Escaped this afternoon. Came to your concert. Hiding in boudoir. Give me five minutes, or raise alarm, which you please.—STINGAREE.

So ran his words in pencil on her own paper, and they were true; she had heard at supper of the escape. Once more she looked in the glass. And to her own eyes in these minutes she looked years younger—there was a new sensation left in life!

A touch to her hair—a glance in the pier-glass—and all for a notorious convict broken prison! So into the boudoir with her grandest air; but again she locked the door behind her, and, sweeping round, beheld a bald man bowing to her in faultless evening dress.

"Are you the writer of a note found on my dressing-table?" she demanded, every syllable off the ice.

"I am."

"Then who are you, besides being an impudent forger?"

"You name the one crime I never committed," said he. "I am Stingaree."

And they gazed in each other's eyes; but not yet were hers to be believed.

"He only escaped this afternoon!"

"I am he."

"With a bald head?"

"Thanks to a razor."

"And in those clothes?"

"I found them where I found the razor. Look; they don't fit me as well as they might."

And he drew nearer, flinging out an abbreviated sleeve; but she looked all the harder in his face.

"Yes. I begin to remember your face; but it has changed."

"It has gazed on prison walls for many years."

"I heard . . . I was grieved . . . but it was bound to come."

"It may come again. I care very little, after this!"

And his dark eyes shone, his deep voice vibrated; then he glanced over a shrugged shoulder towards the outer door, and Hilda darted as if to turn that key too, but there was none to turn.

"It ought to happen at once," she said, "and through me."

"But it will not."

His assurance annoyed her; she preferred his homage.

"I know what you mean," she cried. "You did me a service years ago. I am not to forget it!"

"It is not I who have kept it before your mind."

"Perhaps not; but that's why you come to me to-night."

Stingaree looked upon the spirited, spoilt beauty in her satin and diamonds and pearls; villain as he was, he held himself at her mercy, but he was not going to kneel to her for that. He saw a woman who had heard the truth from very few men, a nature grown in mastery as his own had inevitably shrunk: it was worth being at large to pit the old Adam still remaining to him against the old Eve in this spoilt darling of the world. But false protestations were no counters in his game.

"Miss Bouverie," said Stingaree, "you may well suppose that I have borne you in mind all these years. As a matter of honest fact, when I first heard your name this evening, I was slow to connect it with any human being. You look angry. I intend no insult. If you have not forgotten the life I was leading before, you would very readily understand that I have never heard your name from those days to this. That is my misfortune, if also my own fault. It should suffice that, when I did remember, I came at my peril to hear you sing, and that before I dreamt of

coming an inch farther. But I heard them say, both in the hall and outside, that you owed your start to me; now one thinks of it, it must have been a rather striking advertisement; and I reflected that not another soul in Sydney can possibly owe me anything at all. So I came straight to you, without thinking twice about it. Criminal as I have been, and am, my one thought was and is that I deserve some little consideration at your hands."

"You mean money?"

"I have not a penny. It would make all the difference to me. And I give you my word, if that is any satisfaction to you, I would be an honest man from this time forth!"

"You actually ask me to assist a criminal and escaped convict—me, Hilda Bouverie, at my own absolute risk!"

"I took a risk for you nine years ago, Miss Bouverie; it was all I did take," said Stingaree, "at the concert that made your name."

"And you rub it in," she told him. "You rub it in!"

"I am running for my life!" he exclaimed, in answer. "It wouldn't have been necessary—that would have been enough for the Miss Bouverie I knew then. But you are different; you are another being, you are a woman of the world; your heart, your heart is dead and gone!"

He cut her to it, none the less; he could not have inflicted a deeper wound. The blood leapt to her face and neck; she cried out at the insult, the indignity, the outrage of it all; and crying she darted to the door.



"MISS BOUVERIE," SAID STINGAREE, "YOU MAY WELL SUPPOSE THAT I HAVE BORNE YOU IN MIND ALL THESE YEARS."

It was locked.

She turned on Stingaree.

"You dared to lock the door—you dared! Give me the key this instant."

"I refuse."

"Very well! You have heard my voice; you shall hear it again!"

Her pale lips made the perfect round, her grand teeth gleamed in the electric light. He arrested her, not with violence, but a shrug.

"I shall jump out of the window and break my neck. They do not take me twice—alive."

She glared at him in anger and contempt. He meant it. Then let him do it. Her eyes told him all that; but as they flashed,

stabbing him, their expression altered, and in a trice her ear was to the keyhole.

"Something has happened," she whispered, turning a scared face up to him. "I hear your name. They have traced you here. They are coming! Oh! what are we to do?"

He strode over to the door.

"If you fear a scandal I can give myself up this moment and explain all."

He spoke eagerly. The thought was sudden. She rose up, looking in his eyes.

"No, you shall not," she said. Her hand flew out behind her, and in two seconds the room had click-clicked into a velvet darkness.

"Stand like a mouse," she whispered, and he heard her reach the inner door, where she stood like another.

Steps and voices came along the landing at a quick crescendo.

"Miss Bouverie! Miss Bouverie! Miss Bouverie!"

It was his Excellency's own gay voice. And it continued until with much noise Miss Bouverie flung her bedroom door wide open, put on the light within, ran across the boudoir, put on the boudoir light, and stooped to parley through the keyhole.

"The bushranger Stingaree has been traced to Government House."

"Good heavens!"

"One of your windows was seen open."

"He had not come in through it."

"Then you were heard raising your voice."

"That was to my maid. This is all through her. I don't know how to tell you, but she leaves me in the morning. Yes, yes, there

was a man, but it was not Stingaree. I saw him myself through coming up early, but I let him go as he had come, to save a fuss."

"Through the window?"

"I am so ashamed!"

"Not a bit, Miss Bouverie. I am ashamed of bothering you. Confound the police!"

When the voices and the steps had died away Hilda Bouverie turned to Stingaree, her whole face shining, her deep blue eyes alight.

"There!" said she. "Could you have done that better yourself?"

"Not half so well."

"And you thought I could forget!"

"I thought nothing. I only came to you in my scrape."

After years of imprisonment he could speak of this life-and-death episode as a scrape! She

looked at him with admiring eyes; her personal triumph had put an end to her indignation.

"My poor Lea! I wonder how much she has heard? I shall have to tell her nearly all; she can wait for me at Melbourne or Adelaide, and I can pick her up on my voyage home. It will be no joke without her until then. I give her up for your sake!"

Stingaree hung his head. He was a changed man.

"And I," he said, grimly—not pathetically—"and I am a convict who escaped by violence this afternoon."

Hilda smiled.

"I met Mr. Brady the other day," she said, "and I heard of him to-night. He is not going to die!"



"IN A TRICE HER EAR WAS TO THE KEYHOLE."

He stared at her unscrupulous radiance.

"Do you wonder at me?" she said. "Did you never hear that musical people had no morals?"

And her smile bewitched him more and more.

"It explains us both," said Miss Bouverie. "But do you know what I have kept all these years?" she went on. "Do you know what has been my mascot, what I have had about me whenever I have sung in public, since and including that time at Yallarook? Can't you guess?"

He could not. She turned her back, he heard some gussets give, and the next moment she was holding a strange trophy in both hands.

It was a tiny silken bandolier, containing six revolver cartridges, with bullet and cap intact.

"Can't you guess now?" she gloried.

"No! I never missed them; they are not like any I ever had."

"Don't you remember the man who chased you out and miss-fired at you six times? He was the overseer on the station; his name may come back to me, but his face I shall never forget. He had a revolver in his pocket, but he dared not lower a hand. I took it out of his pocket and was to hand it up to him when I got the chance. Until then I was to keep it under my shawl. That was when I managed to unload every chamber. These

are the cartridges I took out, and they have been my mascot ever since."

She looked years younger than she had seemed even singing in the Town Hall; but the lines deepened on the bushranger's face, and he stepped back from her a pace.

"So you saved my life," he said. "You had saved my life all the time. And yet I came to ask you to do as much for me as I had done for you!"

He turned away; his hands were clenched behind his back.

"I will do more," she cried, "if more

could be done by one person for another. Here are jewels." She stripped her neck of its rope of pearls. "And here are notes." She dived into a bureau and thrust a handful upon him. "With these alone you should be able to get to England or America; and if you want more when you get there, write to Hilda Bouverie! As long as she has any there will be some for you!"

Tears filled her eyes. The simplicity of her girlhood had come back to the seasoned woman of the world, at once spoiled and satiated with success. This was the other side of the artistic temperament which had enslaved her soul. She would swing from one extreme of wounded and vindictive vanity to this length of lawless nobility;

now she could think of none but self, and now not of herself at all. Stingaree glanced towards the window.



"IT WAS A TINY SILKEN BANDOLIER."

Original from

"I can't go yet, I'm afraid."

"You shall not! Why should you?"

"But I still fear they may not be satisfied downstairs. I am ashamed to ask it—but will you do one little thing more for me?"

"Name it!"

"It is only to make assurance doubly sure. Go downstairs and let them see you; tell them more details if you like. Go down as you are, and say that without your maid you could not find anything else to put on. I promise not to vanish with everything in your absence."

"You do promise?"

"On my—liberty!"

She looked in his face with a very wistful sweetness.

"If they were to find me out," she said, "I wonder how many years they would give *me*? I neither know nor care; it would be worth a few. I thought I had lived since I saw you last . . . but this is the best fun I have *ever* had since Vallarook!"

She stood for a moment before opening the door that he unlocked for her, stood before him in all her flushed and brilliant radiance, and blew a kiss to him before she went.

The Governor was easily found. He was grieved at her troubling to descend at such an hour, and did not detain her five minutes in all. He thought she was in a fever, but that the fever became her beyond belief. Re-assured on every point, she was back in her room but a very few minutes after she had left it.

It was empty. She searched all over, first behind the curtains, then between the pedestals

of the bureau, but Stingaree was nowhere in the room, and the bedroom door was still locked. It was a second look behind the curtains that revealed an open window and the scratch of a boot upon the white enamel. It was no breakneck drop into the shrubs.

So he had gone without a word, but also without breaking his word; for, with wet eyes and a white face between anger and admiration, Hilda Bouverie had already discovered her bundle of notes and her rope of pearls.

There are no more Adventures of Stingaree; tongue never answered to the name again, nor was face ever recognised as his. He may have died that night; it is not very likely, since the young married man in the well-appointed bungalow, which had been broken into earlier in the day, missed a suit of clothes indeed, but not his evening clothes, which were found hung up neatly where he had left them; and it is regrettable to add that his opera-glasses were not the only article of a marketable character which could never be found on his return. There is none the less reason to believe that this was the last professional incident in one of the most remarkable criminal careers of which there is any record in Australia. Whether he be dead or alive, back in the old country or still in the new, or, what is less likely, in prison under some other name, the gratifying

fact remains that neither in Australia nor elsewhere has there been a second series of crimes bearing the stamp of Stingaree.



"THE LAST PROFESSIONAL INCIDENT."