EASTON GAZETTE.

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THE HAZARD TABLE.

NO FICTION.

I well remember the night when, at the request of his mother, I set out to look in one of the private gambling houses of New York for the dearest friend of my college days. Henry Villiers, in mind as well as person, was eminently calculated to conciliate the affections of all around him; and I thought he must be changed indeed, if I could not win him back from the fatal pursuit to which he had addicted himself, to the bosom of a family by whom he was almost idolized. He had not been at home for some days, and his absence had created the most serious apprehensions. I had undertaken to remove them.

It was at the end of the severe January of the present year; for two days previous a snow storm had raged with unwonted violence; the streets were every where covered to a depth of from three to four feet, and when a projecting corner or accidental winding had produced a particular current of air, the drift had risen to a height even dangerous to the incautious walker. It had just commenced to thaw, and the cold had been much more intense than it had been during the frost. With an involuntary shudder, I wrapt my cloak more closely round me, & with unsteady steps waded through the masses of melting snow, in which at each moment, I sank above the ankle. I might perhaps have been inclined to turn, for the chill of the night seemed but to second the internal shuddering with which I committed myself to the dens of infamy and vice: but that image of the aged mother, as she wept in all the agony of hopeless solitude over the blighted prospects of her son, rose freshly before me—I heard the heart thrilling tones with which she called on the absent Villiers—'My lost, my ruined child'—still rung in my ears; and I hurried on, with the determination that no effort of mine should be wanting to restore that child to her arms. If I needed any additional inducement, I had but to recall the silent anguish of Miss Villiers, and I felt armed for any conflict of mind or body to which I could possibly be exposed. I pursued my way therefore down R— street with renewed energy. The heavy damps on the lamps completely obscured their brilliancy, and left scarcely light sufficient to show the pallid faces and shivering forms of the wretched victims of vice, whom the cravings of want had driven out even on such a night as this to earn a miserable subsistence. I shuddered at the solicitations, in which the utmost efforts could not conceal the hollow tones of hunger and disease; and turning from the costly avenue of fashionable commerce, I passed into the first of a succession of streets which were to lead me to the object of my search.

A series of involved turnings led me, after a walk of some five or ten minutes, to a retired street, which I had no difficulty in recognising as the place I was in quest of. I gazed anxiously around to discover the house to which I was directed, but the uniformity of all those near me, presented almost insuperable difficulties. The lower part of the house seemed, from the closed outside shutters, to partake of the nature of a shop, whilst the windows of the upper stories gave promise of a comfort very inviting to those whom the label of 'Furnished or unfurnished apartments' might tempt to look towards them.

I pressed my hand on my bosom to ascertain that the pistols with which I had armed myself were still there, firmly grasped my stick, and crossed to examine more accurately the house opposite.—There was no appearance of a door, yet I was convinced it was the place I sought; and I moved a few steps aside to search for an entrance, when a tall figure, wrapped like myself, in a cloak, crossed the street, approached me closely, and a voice in rather gentlemanly tones, though marked by a slight Irish accent, said, 'This is the house, I think, sir.

The question tallied so completely with what was passing in my own mind, that I answered involuntarily, 'I believe so.'

My new acquaintance, however, seemed notwithstanding his remarks, to entertain no doubts on the subject; for turning short into a very narrow passage, which the darkness had hitherto prevented me from observing, he approached a small door, or rather panel in the side wall, and knocked three times, gently. I kept close by his side. We heard the grating of iron, as a chain was thrown aside across the entrance. The door was then opened so far as to admit a strong glare of light to fall upon us, and a face was protruded through the opening, which accurately reconnoitered the person of my companion, who stood foremost. The scrutiny seemed satisfactory, so far as he was concerned; but a short whisper ensued, in which the phrases, 'new face,' 'fresh stranger,' were barely audible.—The door was then opened to its full width, scarcely sufficient indeed to admit us singly, and I found that we were in a small hall, between the outside entrance, and inner door completely covered with cloth, and surmounted by a brilliant lamp. The attendant turned a spring key in the lock, and ushered us on a very steep and narrow staircase, which my companion and myself ascended with equal steps.

In a room on the first floor, I distinguished a strong light, and a number of eager voices. Thither, then, I was in the act of turning, when the voice of my new acquaintance interrupted me, as he said:

'That is the billiard-room; you go up stairs, don't you?'

'Why yes, I believe I shall,' said I, endeavoring to assume an air of as much sang-froid as possible, and believing that, up stairs, if there was the hazard table, Villiers was more likely to be found.

We proceeded accordingly to the second floor, and my conductor, for I had fallen in the rear, pushing a door immediately opposite the staircase, motioned to me to enter a longand low room, crowded with figures, all of whom appeared deeply interested in their various occupations. I did not at first see Villiers.—Close on my right lay the remnants of a supper, to which full justice appeared to have been done, for but a few fragments remained to satisfy the appetite of one or two, who, having been too late for its first glories, were now voraciously swallowing whatever remained that was eatable.

'They sup early, sir. We are almost too late," said my companion, and throwing aside his cloak, he instantly attacked the remaining vians with great zeal.

"I thank you, I am not hungry," I replied, gazing at the same moment on the form and features of the speaker. Succeeding events imprinted his appearance on memory with but too fearful distinctness. He was one of the most powerful looking men I ever met. About six feet high, and made in proportion, his frame was remarkable rather for strength & weight than activity. The face, as his eyes were bent on the supper table, had nothing in it peculiar, except that the projection of one or two front teeth broke the regularity of the features.

He looked upwards, however, as he addressed me a second time, with "You don't eat sir;" and I almost shrank from the expression of his eyes, as they met my view. Small, and deep set, of a light grey colour, but appearing at first view darker, from the overhanging and closely knit brows which shaded them, they seemed to combine in them all of ferocity and cunning that imagination could picture. I moved hastily from beside him, and walked towards the further end of the room.

On one side was the fire-place, around which were grouped, busily engaged in conversation, half-a-dozen persons, whose countenance too plainly showed that they had nothing left to risk. Opposite was placed a large table, the most conspicuous portion of which was a circular revolving centre-piece. It was divided into small compartments colored read and black, and the game seemed to be regulated by the color into which might chance to fall a small ivory ball, which an attendant rolled round the edge of the circular part. Behind this person where pasted the regulations of the roulette-table; and I gazed for a minute or two at a game, of which I had often heard as the most ruinous among the varieties of play. Few, however, appeared on this evening to be its votaries; and I turned to a round table, occupying the whole end of the room, about which were thronged all who seemed really engaged in the occupation of the place.

My first glance fell upon Villiers.—He was sitting directly opposite to me, leaning his face on his left hand, whilst with nervous anxiety he watched the person who was throwing the dice. A small pile of counters lay immmediately before him, and his right hand rested carelessly on them; but his attention was completely riveted on the progress of the game.

The muscles of Villiers' face worked for a moment with convulsive energy: but steadying himself by an effort—apparent to me, at least—he pushed across the table about one-half of the counters before him.

'You are fortunate to-night, Mr. Varney.'

It turned, and saw, receiving the counters, with an air of cool satisfaction, the man with whom I had entered. I barely noticed him, however, for my feelings were too much interested in watching the proceeding of Villiers to allow me to dwell upon any thing else.

Alas! how changed he was from the Villiers of my college days! He was pale almost ghastly: but a hectic flesh of unnatural red flitted occasionally across his cheek, and showed more plainly the ravages of dissipation. His elegant form, always slight, and now greatly attenuated, seemed unfit to associate with the reckless countenances of those who surrounded him.

His dark hair, which I had so often admired, at present extremely long and disordered, was thrown back from his brow, as if its weight was too much for him to endure.

He was not now betting, but seemed to have reserved himself until it should come to his turn to take the dice-box.

I sighed involuntarily, and, I suppose audibly, for Villiers glanced quickly, round and his eye met mine. For one moment a burning blush crimsoned his cheek, and a spasmodic affection seemed to flit across his brow. It was but for a moment. He looked, rather than nodded a recognition, and turned to watch the game.

'You don't play, sir,' said the voice of Varney, at my elbow. 'Come, just by way of a flyer, to put in your humor, I'll bet you a twenty he throws this time, either a duce or an ace.'

'Very well,' said I, mechanically, and not sorry to throw away a trifle to avoid observation.

The throw was four and one, and I was in the act of handing over to Varney the amount which I presumed I had lost, when the voice of Villiers prevented me.'

'You need not trouble yourself to pay that bet, sir.' said he coolly.

'Who says so?' cried Varney, with a loudness which instantly commanded the attention of all present.

'I do,' answered Villiers, quietly. 'The odds were in your favor; you made only an even bet. By the rules of this table, it cannot stand.—Banker does that gentleman lose his money.'

The man looked for an instant at Varney, and evidently hesitated; but the tone and manner of Villiers prevailed, backed, as it now was, by that of a number of young men round the table, and with manifest reluctance he decided that the bet was off.

Varney said nothing aloud, but my blood curdled, as I caught the scowl of demoniac malignity with which he glared across the table, and as he ground his teeth, I could hear him muttering. 'D—n him, I'll be revenged!'

It now came the turn of Villiers to take the box. He pushed into the centre of the table all of his counters that remained, and scarcely waiting until an equal number were risked against them, he threw the dice without naming any number.

'A main, sir,' said the banker.

'I had forgotten,' said Villiers; seven's the main.'

The dice rolled out, and the next moment I heard the announcement, 'Duce-ace:—caster loses!'

'Nicked out by Jove!' said one near me. 'He's smashed now; he has lost a devilish deal to-night.'

My ear caught the words, but my gaze was still upon Villiers, and I started at the wildness visible in his demeanor. His eye was expanded in a glassy stare, whilst his hand passed rapidly over his pockets, as if to see whether there yet remained in them any thing to stake.

'Shall I pass the box, or will you take a back, sir!' said the banker.

'Pass on. But no! no! Who will set this watch? cried he, as he pushed forward a large gold repeater, which had been given him by his mother, and which I knew he therefore highly valued.

The stake was unusual, and no one replied.

'It's worth two hundred,' said Villiers, 'Who will risk one hundred against it?'—he paused. 'Or fifty?' he added.

A note was thrust from behind me into the ring, while I was myself pushing forward the money in place of the watch, which I was determined to save.

Villars raised his hand, as if to throw; and I feared I was too late, when suddenly pausing he said, 'Whose money is that, banker?'

'A gentleman's opposite,' said the man, looking to Varney.

'I do not bet with that person,' said Villers, deliberately. 'Will any one else set me?'

Every eye was turned on Varney and his huge form appeared literally to dilate with rage, as he exclaimed furiously,

'Beggar! what mean you? Dare you insinuate that I play unfairly?'

Villers did not answer, but eyed him with cool contempt.

The question was again put, and in a still more ferocious tone.

Villiers looked full in his face, and, taking up his watch, said slowly—'Do I *insinuate*? The matter is now beyond insinuation. It amounts to certainty.'

There was one moment of silience. A rush succeeded, and my eye caught the form of Villers, as it fell senseless on the floor, while the fierce eyes of his opponent gleemed brightly above him.

'Aye, give it to him!' shouted several voices. 'Teach these beggarly fops what it is to meet with a gentleman of science!'

I pushed hastily forward, and taking a pistol from my breast, cocked it, and exclaimed. 'The first who touches him dies!'

Varney drew back in terror; I slowly raised my friend from the ground, and with the assistance of one or two of the more gentlemanly looking persons round me, endeavored to recall animation.

His forehead had struck in his fall against one of the legs of the table, and the blood was flowing profusely from the wound. In a few moments he revived. His eye glared widely round, when suddenly springing from our grasp, and shouting,

Defend yourself, coward!'—he precipitated himself on the huge form of Varney, who stood gazing on the scene, in evident triumph.

The movement was so unexpected as to throw us into momentary confusion, and rapid blows were exchanged between the combattants, before any one could interfere to separate them.

The conflict was, apparently, most unequal; for Varney was taller, and nearly double the weight of his opponent. But excitement seemed to have lent to Villiers unnatural strength. Still, Varney watched him with a coolness which showed he knew such efforts could not last, when suddenly, in making an effort, which was evidently intended to end the contest, his foot slipped, and his own weight, joined to a blow from Villiers, prostrated him before us.

'Raise the ruffian, said Villiers. 'Let him come on again.'

The group round the fallen man hastened to obey the direction, surprised that he showed but little sign of animation, and utterly astonished at the casualty of the contest.

Chance, however, had accomplished more than any one believed. One or two deep groans issued from Varney as they raised him; a strong convulsion shook his body; and then the sinking head and nerveless arms showed, but too plainly, that the spirit had passed into the presence of Him who created it.

The consternation occasioned by the discovery gave an interval for action. I seized Villiers by the arm, and, thrusting a pistol into his hand whilst I held forth another myself, dragged him towards the door, and whispered—'Fly for your life! They will be upon you in a moment.'

I spoke, however, to one who heard me not, but, mechanically obeying the impulse, he had descended about half way down the stairs, when a burst of execrations from the room above, followed by a rush towards the door, warned me that we had not a moment to loose.

I gave Villiers a violent push forward. The muffled door below gave way to an impetuosity that defied all barriers. The astonished watchman yielded to the summons of an armed and apparently desperate man. The outer door opened.

'Thank God!' I shouted involuntarily, (though along with us rushed into the air several of those who had been above,) when a firm grasp was laid on my collar, and I found that we were in the hands of a strong body of watchmen, whom the noise above had summoned to the spot.

Some of them made their way up stairs, the others guarded their prisoners. The former soon returned, bringing with them the lifeless body of Varney, and several of the men I had seen in the hazard room. The rest, in the confusion, had managed to escape. We were all marched to watch the house.

Since the discovery of Varney's death, Villiers had not spoken; but, as I got closer to him in the narrow entrance of the police office, I could hear him muttering to himself, 'Ruined! aye, ruined! And now a murderer! Oh! God, a murderer!'

The tone was so hallow that I could scarcely recognise it, but I had little time for thought. An examination into the circumstances was immediately proceeded with, which ended in my liberation, and the detention of Villiers. The private room was allotted to him, and we entered together.

He threw himself on a chair in the apartment; pressed his hands convulsively on his forehead, and shrieked, in tones of bitter desolation, 'My God!—my mother!—Ellen!'

I drew near to him, and placing my hand on his, said, 'Villiers, dear Villiers, recall your senses—be yourself—and all will yet be well.'

He started at my touch, sprang from the seat, and with all the violence of a maniac, screamed, 'Off, touch me not—it's a lie! I did not do it. Who says so? No! no! no!'

The excitement had exhausted him, and again he sank back on the chair; but a minute had scarcely elapsed, when he leaped on the floor, and, while his whole frame shook with horror, and his eyes glared at the door, as if he saw there the sceptre of the murdered man, shouted, 'Look! look! there he is. See the blue flames! He beckons—he seizes me! Oh, save—save—save me!'

* * * * *

But why should I recall the hours of that long night? Fit after fit followed of frantic despair, succeed by the weakness of exhaustion. At times, it was with difficulty that I, with the aid of my servant (whom I had sent for,) could restrain him from some act of desperate violence; whilst at ot other periods, he sank to a state of so great weakness as to lie in utter insensibility in my arms.

During the few intervals of collectedness which he enjoyed, I gathered that he had been introduced to the hazard table, several months before, by a mutual college acquaintance of ours; that he had gradually grown more and more fascinated by the demon of gambling; and finally, that, for the last five days he had been continually engaged at play, and had never rested during the whole of that time, having been wound up, by repeated losses, to such a height of desperation, as to be insensible to the progress of time.

Varney had been the principal winner and Villers had, more than once, reason to suspect him of unfair play. His attempt to swindle me had convinced him that those suspicions were well founded. I had witnessed the closing scene.

"I am now," said he, "utterly ruined; and," he slowly added, "a murderer!"

His mother and sister he dared not, could not meet. Indeed, it was evident to me that at present he was unable to do so; for the very idea was so distracting to him, that convulsion after convulsion succeeded, until completely exhausted, he sank into a broken slumber, interrupted every five or ten minutes, by the agonies of remorse and despair, as the image of the deceased Varney seemed to flit before his view.

Fever and delirium succeeded. Mind and body gave way together, and, at the end of a week, I followed to the grave the remains of him for whom all who knew him had anticipated a long career of happiness and honor.

My friend, my friend, how bright was thy rising,—how dark the close of thy life.

The following tale published in the N. Y. Constellation a few years ago, illustrates the absurdity of the practice of *starving jurors*; to make them agree on a verdict:

A HUNGRY JURY;

OR THE DOUBTFUL CASE OF DAVID DUBIOUS.

Rogues must hang that jurymen may dine
Pope.

The public have doubtless heard of the fate of poor David Dubious, whose case was decided by a hungry Jury.—But it may not be uninteresting to some of our readers to state a few of the particular circumstances attending that decision.

It was a case of life and death; but one doubtful and difficult to decide.—The evidence was entirely circumstantial, and in many respects, contradictory. The prisoner, unfortunately bore a very bad character; and many people did not hesitate to say, that, if he had not committed murder he was none too good to do it. But what made his condition still more unfortunate was the condition of the stomacks of the Jury. They had been kept out all night; and it was now near the hour of dining!

Consider then the perilous condition of the poor prisoner, his life depending on such untoward circumstances—presumptive evidence, a doubtful character, a hungry jury! He might have got over the two first; but wo to him whose life depends on the last. A comfortably filled stomach is one of the best guarantees for acts of justice, kindness and charity. Trust a hungry Jury with ones life! Never. Hunger renders a man savage; and he who has a stomach to let, has seldom any bowels of compassion.

In the case of David Dubious, seven of the Jury were for hanging, and five for acquittal.—Thus they had continued for some time, without any prospect of ever thinking alike. Both sides were conscientious; both felt bound in honesty and by their oath to adhere to what they conceived to be the true state of the case. Said those in favor of hanging—

'The man is very evidently guilty, and we could answer neither to God nor our country, should we consent to his acquittal.'

While those on the other side said—'We have serious doubts of his guilt; the evidence is circumstantial, and exceedingly contradictory; and we could not answer it either to God or our consciences to take the poor fellow's life,'

'Gentlemen,' said the constable for the fifteenth time, 'have you agreed upon your verdict.'

'No,' said the foreman, 'and what is worse, we are not likely to agree—wherefore we beg once more that you will conduct us into Court.'

'There's no use in it,' said he of the tall staff—'the Judge will send you back.'

'At all events,' said one of the Jury, 'let us have something to eat, and not keep us shut up here starving.'

'The more you starve, the sooner you will be likely to agree,' returned the constable. 'Besides; you know, it is strictly against the law to allow you anything to eat until your verdict is made up.'

The Jury again took up the subject, and endeavored with all their might to agree; but with no better result than before. The case was a stubborn one and would not yield to the unanimous desire for agreement.

The Jury were at length permitted to return into Court, where, on stating to the Judge, that it was utterly impossible for them to make up a verdict, his Honor gave them a severe reprimand for their inability to think alike, and peremptorily sent them out again—declaring, with an awful shake of his wig, that they should neither eat nor drink until the case of the prisoner was decided.

'Alas!' said one, 'we must either agree on a verdict or agree to starve.'

'The latter we can never agree to,' said another—'self-preservation is the first law of nature. What time of day is it, neighbor?'

'It wants half an hour to dinner time.'

'Only a half an hour. We have but little time to spare. We must agree before dinner time by some means or other. Its almost twenty four hours since we have eaten a morsel, and to miss another meal would be absolute suicide.'

'Heigho! that's a fact,' said another, 'and suicide is an unpardonable sin. If a man commits murder he may have time to repent; but if he commits suicide, he must go to purgatory at once without benefit of clergy.'

'Those who are in favor of hanging are usually more fixed in their opinions than those on the other side—thus exactly reversing the only charitable maxim of criminal jurisprudence—viz. that 'It is better twenty guilty persons should escape, than that one innocent one should suffer. This was most unfortunately true in the case of poor David Dubious.

'It would be a thousand pities, (said one of his friends) to hang an innocent man.'

'That is very true,' replied one of the opposite side; 'but then you know it is better that twenty innocent persons should be hung than one guilty one should escape—so the *maxum* says.'

'Why, as to the maxum,' said Jonathan Standout, 'there may be something in that. But still I have been hitherto in favor of the acquittal of poor David, because I had my doubts about his being guilty. Howsomever, all manner of doubts must yield to circumstances. So far as I can see, the evidence is by no means clear as to the fellow's guilt. But then, on the other hand who is he, that twelve respectable men should starve for his life? A fellow at best of doubtful reputation—a man, who, if he is not guilty of this, or some other murder, may very well be spared from the world.'

'There is much truth in what you say,' said Ichabod Avery, 'but then consider! how shall we answer to God and our consciences for the verdict?'

'True,' said Joseph Judgment, 'there's the rub. I acknowledge the prisoner to be of little or no value to the community, and as likely to be guilty of murder as the best of us. But then we are bound to decide according to evidence.'

'And what,' said Obadiah Lankley, 'is to become of our stomachs in the meantime. I'm as conscientious as any other man, I don't care who he is—and I think I've proved it well too, in standing out as long as I have. But all things must yield to circumstances, as neighbor Standout says—and self preservation is the first law of nature, as another gentleman observed; wherefore, for one, I'm for having some dinner.'

'And I too,' said Christopher Comeabout. 'I pity the poor wretch of a prisoner, and you all know, have fought hard for his acquittal. But to go the length of starving on his account—I could'nt possibly think of it.'

'But have you no mercy, no bowels of compassion?' said Ichabod Avery.

'Bowels of compassion!' exclaimed Obadiah Lankley, pressing his hands sadly upon the gastric region—'how can a man have bowels of compassion when there is'nt a morsel of any thing in his stomach? The idea is preposterous.'

'You are exactly of my mind,' said Jonathan Standout. 'Charity begins at home, and it is our bounden duty to take care of ourselves, whatever may become of other people. For my part, the evidence of David's guilt begins to look much more clearer than it did a short time ago. At any rate, considering all things, I think we can't do better than to hang him.'

'I can't agree with you there,' said Joseph Judgment; 'I must still adhere to the poor fellow, though I am starving.—I can't get over my oath, my conscience, and all that.'

'Your conscience!' exclaimed Christopher Comeabout, what sort of a conscience is that, which prefers the life of a poor wretch of doubtful reputation, to the comforts of a good dinner which no one among us is disposed to doubt. As to the prisoner, I'd stick to him till all was blue, if I was'nt so infernal hungry. But I am not bound to commit murder on my own stomach. Wherefore gentlemen, much as I regret the taking of any innocent man's life, I must in this place agree to a verdict of guilty.'

'Well, well,' said Joseph Judgment, looking at his watch—'it's a hard case—a monstrous hard case. It wants but a quarter of an hour of dinner time—and our landlord informed me, he should cook those fine canvass-backs. The prisoner, as far as I can understand the evidence, is as likely to be innocent as guilty, I dont know what to think, indeed. One thing is certain however—I must have some dinner—I can't think of starving—my consience wont let me. Gentlemen, I'll agree to any thing that's reasonable.'

'I'm very glad, sir,' said one of the original seven, who were in favor of hanging—'I'm very glad you have finally concluded to listen to reason. We are all agreed now except one, and I think he'll come in time to dine. What say you, friend Avery? shall we hang the prisoner and go to dinner, or no?'

'Why indeed, gentlemen, I dont know what to say. I see no satisfactory proof of the man's being guilty.—It's a hard case,—a confounded hard case. Our dinner must nearly be ready and some-

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