

VOLUME III

CHAPTER 8

MESSRS. STIER AND BRUEN, and their friend and colleague Mr. Saltasche, were very busy for a while. After the collapse and disappearance of Captain Poignarde from Dublin, the creditors of that gentleman, whom he had so cleverly eluded, threatened and blustered, but ended by doing nothing. Military swindlers are very common; and unfortunate tradesmen have only to grin and bear their losses, for any attempt to obtain redress only entails loss of custom; and they have always the resource of making their honest customers pay for the dishonest ones. So, after a few days, the not uncommon episode of an absconding military defaulter was forgotten.

Mr. Saltasche, by some strange coincidence, was in London now almost constantly. His friends in Cole Alley were quite astonished to see so much of him. They marvelled, too, at his anxiety to push on the new company so fast. He seemed to want funds, for he insisted on selling out a quantity of railway stock, which, according to the brokers' advice, would have been worth more money if he chose to wait some weeks longer.

"He must have been losing money in something we know nothing about. Ah!" said Stier, shaking his yellow locks.

His partner rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I do not think that," he replied. "I saw yesterday a superb statue he ordered from Rome for his sister; it cost a great deal. He is always buying things. Yesterday he was at Christie Wood's and bought more china: his lodgings are full of packages directed to Dublin."

"Ha! he was always like that—spending fast always. He has some great *coup* preparing, and is realizing for some big thing."

"Humph!" returned Mr. Bruen. "He is getting all his money together—that is clear; and he is not to be depended on. This Lord Brayhead and he are together now a good deal. What sums of money he

is spending on that scheme! He has an engineer and staff at work. He will begin everything before he gets the Bill. How many of those shares does Hogan hold now?"

"Ah! he is well into the boat," grinned Stier: "everything. Leadmines (very soon we must sell that venture); Honduras Bonds; Transcontinental. He is clever—that young man. I do wish I knew Saltasche's scheme; he has one, I know." And Mr. Stier went off to the Stock Exchange.

Mr. Saltasche, we may be sure, did not take his good friends into his counsels altogether. It would have been highly prejudicial to his interests to do so just now; for he meditated nothing less than carrying off the funds of a couple of the companies which they had started with his co-operation. He was head and chief in reality; and having purchased an immense number of shares, and induced a great many people of his acquaintance to do the same, he found no hindrance offered to his lodging the money in Bank in his own name. There was nothing out of the common in that. Stier and Bruen might look dubious; but he knew very well their anxiety was to surprise his plan and try to share the profits. They would be very clever if they surprised *this* plan.

Poignarde and his wife were in lodgings for a few days. They had selected a dingy street in Soho. Saltasche lent the Captain some money, and the exchange was in process of being effected. In ten days at the furthest he was to sail from Falmouth. Mrs. Poignarde was to accompany him thither, and then betake her-self to Southampton and the Isle of Wight, where a widow lady had offered her a situation as companion. Such was the plan arranged for the ill-starred pair. Mrs. Bursford, who had it at first hand from Saltasche, wrote about it to his sister and Mrs. Grey. People asked but few questions indeed about the Poignardes. Mrs. Grey was in her heart rather relieved that they had sunk below her horizon. Few people knew them, and fewer still cared for them. So the meagre account of their final arrangements was allowed to pass unnoticed. Miss Stroude was angry and offended at their having neglected to inform her of their intended departure. She, too, felt relieved to think they had disappeared for good, and was disinclined to give herself any trouble about them. Her feelings altogether resolved themselves into an indistinct sensation of thanksgiving, and hope that the ne'er-do-well couple might never turn up again.