The Fourth Gentleman

BY E. DUVALL

THE hotel lay peacefully somnolent in its post-dinner nap; it was the breathing-time of day with the proprietor, old Peter Shurick.

His father and grandfather before him were keepers of the old Villenoy Inn, known as the "Heron and Dove." When Peter, on the death of his father, took the inn, he built the hotel, scarcely more than a stone's-throw from the inn, and there lived and ended his days. The inn itself he used as an annex, and assigned to it the unmarried men.

It was against the shady side of this old inn, just clear of the fern-bed, that we four were sitting on that August afternoon: the Rector, a tall, ascetic man, mighty in the Fathers, but correspondingly weak in human nature; the Doctor, a celebrated member of that fine profession whose esoteric view it is that Providence would have done better to consult *it* in the making of man; old Peter; and myself.

Peter settled his chair at a more comfortable angle on its back legs, skilfully worked it along the wall into deeper shade, and said: "It's a mighty good thing we all haven't the same likings; for if we had, we shouldn't get the tenth of the good out of life—no, nor the knowledge either." He wriggled his chair still nearer to the Rector. "Now, say, if we all took to telescopes and star-gazing, where would be farming? or if all had a liking for doctoring, where would be preaching? No, sir; it's the diversities of men that give life its go and flavor."

The Rector looked at him wistfully; the Doctor put down his newspaper, and said, briskly, "What did you do with your young man?"

"Drove him to the 1.50 train," was the slow answer. "I gave him his choice between that and the summit, and he took the train."

"You made him go, then?" said the Rector, half reproachfully.

"Well, sir, I didn't exactly *make* him go, not just to say *make* him; but I put it to him that I wouldn't be responsible for his stayin'," said Peter, blandly.

The Doctor grinned, and the Rector sighed.

"There's a heap o' boys here this summer, little tags runnin' round loose, and maybe you don't know how takin' a swishy-swashy young man like that is to a boy. The little fellows hear his big talk, and think *him* big. But I know his breed—he was raised right over there in the town—knew his father and grandfather before him. They all had the loose-hung, swearing tongue, and he's inherited it. But I won't have it. It's one of the few things I won't put up with."

Peter hitched his chair along a little nearer, tilted his shoestring hat more comfortably back, adjusted his suspenders by several rapid shoulder-shakes, and swept us into a little convenient heap by a comprehensive look from under the bushy brows.

The old man seemed to be slowly gathering up his thoughts, and, after a short silence, said:

"There are things that run in families—like the color of hair and eyes, and cast of feature—which, any more than the outward likeness, we can't explain. All our family have, and have had, a horror of swearing; I had it naturally, and was brought up to have it. My grandfather's grandfather was a French silk-weaver, named Suricas, who, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, came, by way of the Channel Islands, to England, and from thence here. He was an austere, silent man, not like the common idea of a Frenchman, and about all we know of him in the family is that he had a mortal dread of oaths. It's said that every generation of us has a queer experience. I don't know how that may be,—it's never come to me,—but my fa-

"I WILL PLAY WITH YOU, GENTLEMEN"

ther had it, something I partly remember; and late in his life he told me the whole of it.

"It happened right here, too, in the inn," he continued, throwing up his hand to touch the old stone wall, "in or about the fall of '36. The surveyors for the railroad were going through these parts then; but there was still only the old pike for travelling. The mountains were full of good game—partridges, grouse, and wild turkeys—and people used to come up from Baltimore and Washington, and from farther south too, with darkies, horses, dogs, and guns, and stay for a while in the season. They were gentlemen mostly, or what passes for such, though some of 'em could show more noise than wit or manners, and could drink more liquor than was good for them or convenient for father.

"It was getting rather late for the city people when one day there came three young men, with more servants, dogs, guns, and rig-out generally than father had ever seen before. And they just took possession. Father said they hadn't more than opened their lips before he saw they were the kind which expects the earth to give way before 'em. Oh, they were mighty polite—that kind generally is—but father could see that they'd never been crossed, and didn't know the sound of a 'no.'"

"However, all went well with the three young men; they were out all day, and were so tired at night as to sleep like a babe in arms. They had such luck, too, the first few days, that they decided to stay the week out, possibly the fortnight. And that was the trouble."

Peter sat ruminating in a silence which we forbore to break. Rousing himself, he continued:

"Father said that the fourth evening of their stay was as fine as any he'd ever seen; the sky was soft and blue, the stars low and liquid, and not a breath of wind to shake even a loosened leaf. The young men congratulated themselves, and at supper father heard them planning great things. The next morning the rain was dashing against the windows, and the wind was blowing almost a hurricane from the southeast.

"Well, the young men were disappointed, of course, but they bore it as best they might,—kept in their rooms and amused themselves with cards and a guitar, for one had a good voice and sang handsomely. That did pretty well for the first day, not so well for the second, and not at all for the third. Then the mischief began.

"They'd brought plenty of liquor with them, and of the best, too.

"Each of the young men had his own body-servant, and on this night those poor fellows were kept busy fetching and carrying glasses up and down, bottles here and bottles there, getting well sworn at for doing this and for not doing that, till at last one came down with a cut head, his master having flung a glass at him and told him to get out for a fool and a blockhead. But mother hadn't more than got the fellow's head patched up with lily vinegar and a bandage when his master whistled for him, and he had to go. The young men were deep at it with cards, the darky said, and his master was losing heavily. I, a little chap, was playing about with my sisters, and I remember that father looked worried and mother frightened, while old grandfather sat in the chimney-corner nodding his head, and saying, like the ticking of the clock, 'No good, no good, no good; turn 'em out, Matt, before it's too late, too late, too late.'

"But to turn anything out in such weather was impossible; father wouldn't have done it even if he could.

"Presently there was a great stamping overhead, the door was flung open, and a voice called, 'Here — you — Shurick, come up, quick!'

"Mother wanted to keep father back; but he went at once; he thought it was better. And such a room! Tobacco smoke thick as mist; cards strewn everywhere; one of those green bottles upset, and the sweet sticky stuff trickling over the carpet and filling the air with a hot, fine odor. Two of the young men were on their feet, bawling; and the third sat, with his elbows on the table. He was the one who had lost, and was in a furious temper. As soon as he saw father he said:

"'Shurick, you'll have to take a hand at this. We're sick of playing three, and my luck's been damnable. Sit down,

man, and, to put heart in you, take some Maraschino. Here, Ted'—to his darky—'give him a glass, and set these things straight.'"

The Doctor had started, but Peter, not noticing, continued:

"Father refused flatly. The young men begged, bullied, threatened, but father stood firm. Then one, with the sudden veering of the drunken, cried, 'Then if he won't drink, Linwood, he sha'n't play.' And another burst out: 'But play with three again I won't. Here, Ted, you know how to play, you've watched us long enough—you take a hand.' 'Play with a nigger! No, I'll be hanged if I will,' screamed out Ted's master. And this being an easy cause for quarrel, the hubbub began again, and went fast and furious.

"At last Ted's master bawled, 'I'll have a fourth player and play this out if I have to play with the devil. The young man's comrades seemed, for a second, startled. Then they burst into wild laughter, jeering and cheering, clapping and calling, 'That's a good one; give us another!'

"The scene made father sick, and he was trying to slip out, when a voice at the door said, 'I will play with you, gentlemen, with pleasure.'

"And there just inside the door, which he must have entered unseen during the noise and quarrel, stood a fourth gentleman. His voice was very sweet, like the dying notes of the guitar, and his words were as low almost as a whisper, yet words and voice filled the room. There fell a dead silence, in which the words and soft voice seemed to echo, 'I will play with you, gentlemen, with pleasure.'

"His sudden appearance so surprised everybody that no one could utter a word. Finally Ted's master fumbled out, 'How—how—the deuce did you get in?'

"'Where did you come from?' asked another.

"'Who are you?' demanded the third. And during these questions the stranger slowly approached the card table.

"He was a young, well-dressed, handsome man, without hat or coat, with no sign of travel or wet about him, and might apparently have just stepped out of some one's parlor.

"Father was so dumfounded he could neither think nor speak; and the young men themselves looked doubtful and as if inclined to shy off.

"But the stranger's manner was so polite and easy, he seemed to take the whole thing as such a matter of course, that it would have been hard to ask him any serious question. But Ted's face was green with terror, and the other two darkies cowered like frightened dogs in a corner.

"As the strange young man drew near the table he picked up and began to arrange the cards. He held all eyes like a magnet. The two who were standing did not advance, and Ted's master would have risen, but, fixing his eyes on him, the stranger said, 'Surely a man who is gallant enough to play at a pinch with the devil is gallant enough to play with an accidental substitute.'

"That speech was enough for Ted's master. 'I don't go back from my word,' he said, rather more steadily. 'Ted, pour the fourth gentleman a glass of wine.'

"Then the fourth gentleman, looking steadily at the young men, put his hand into his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a handful of gold, and put it—a glittering pile—on the table. Over the pile he held his hand a minute, then took it slowly off, but kept his eyes the while fixed on the fascinated men. That sight, of course, whetted their appetite for play, and there was no more sign of hesitating.

"'Gentlemen,' said the stranger, softly, 'if *you* win, this gold is yours; if *I* win, I ask but one favor—not your money, I have more than enough of that—but your promise, or oath, rather, that you will meet me at the time and the place I shall choose.'

"The three friends stared in wonder.

"'Do you promise?' asked the stranger.

"'I promise,' said Ted's master, quickly.

"The two others paused, looked at the gold, and nodded.

"'You may go now, Shurick,' said one of them; and father, more dead than alive, got out of the room.

"Once downstairs, though, in the clean, quiet, bright bar-room, father felt better. He gave a long look all round, as if expecting to see some one or something, and said,

"'When did he come, Neely?'

"Mother didn't understand, so he repeated the question in a louder tone.

"'He—who?' said mother, staring.

"'The man — gentleman — upstairs,' said father, sharp like.

"'Why, there's been nobody,' we all cried.

"'You surely don't look for travellers on a night like this, Matt,' said grandfather.

"I can see father now, shaking, and holding to a chair as if his legs were water.

"'There's some one upstairs—a fourth gentleman—playing with those young fellows,' he whispered. His look and tone made us run, like frightened chickens, to mother, who stared back at him in terror, while grandfather slowly rose and said:

"'There hasn't foot of living thing crossed the door-sill to-night. We've been right in these rooms, and the outer doors are locked.'

"'Not a footstep's stirred, nor a knock sounded,' added mother.

"'Then *who's* upstairs?' gasped father, falling into the chair, while the sweat came out on his face in drops.

"No one spoke. He looked at grandfather; grandfather looked at him; and we hid our faces, for it's dreadful to children to see their parents' terror.

"But father got up and lighted every light—candle and lard-oil lamp—in the house. Then he, grandfather, and mother sat down and waited, or walked softly to and fro and listened.

"We children were not put to bed; they kept us with them, as if afraid to let us go. My little sisters fell asleep, one on the floor, the other on the settle, and mother held the year-old baby in her arms. I slept and woke, old enough to be frightened, and to know something was wrong, though not near old enough to understand,—woke to find the lights blazing, the fires kept up, and father waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"At last it was nigh on to dawn. With the first cock-crow there came a noise overhead. Father went up. The game was over. The young men, their faces like the dead, still sat at the table, but the fourth gentleman had risen. He was gazing at the three with a look so strange and triumphant that father held his breath. Each was gloating over his pile of gold, which was put jealously before each winner. And they all seemed more sober.

"'It's most unusual,' Ted's master was saying, 'but if you insist—' And his eyes seemed fairly to lick his heap of glittering winnings.

"'I insist,' said the stranger, gently; 'for though I have won, yet, as we played for different stakes, the result should be different. You keep what you have won from me; I will keep what I have won from you—your oath to meet me when and where I choose.' He bowed to them in leave-taking, and turned to the door. Father stepped forward, but, meeting the stranger's eyes, questions died in his throat. He could no more have spoken to him than he could have stepped on his own shadow.

"A sudden cry from the table startled him. 'Linwood, where's my gold? You've taken it.'

"'You're a—'

"But before Linwood could get the word out, Ted's master struck at him. Father and the darkies rushed between the two, who began to rage at each other like beasts.

"'Where's *my* gold?' suddenly cried the third. 'Who's taken that?' And then there was worse trouble and tumult.

"They had surely had the gold. It had been upon the table, and in their very hands; but now, in a second, it was gone, clean gone. All turned to the door. The stranger was gone too. Unseen, as he had entered, he had left the room.

"Father, darkies—all rushed out into the hall. We children were wakened by the noise as the men pitched down stairs.

"But the lights, the fires, the wakeful look of grandfather's old still face, the sense of emptiness where they had expected to find a man — all completely sobered the young men.

"'Gentlemen,' said grandfather, solemnly, 'look and see for yourselves that there is, and has been, no one here.'"

"Is that all?" asked the Doctor, breaking at last upon Peter's deep silence.

"No," returned the old man, slowly, "but the rest came later.

"That very day the young men packed

up bag and baggage, and, notwithstanding the weather, departed. Nothing would induce them to stay. And that, we thought, was the last of them. But one evening in the following spring, as father was coming from the barn, he heard some one whistle like a partridge. He waited a minute, and then whistled in return. Then out from an old straw-stack crept a man, and when father turned the lantern on him, he proved to be the mulatto, Ted. He was starved and miserable-looking, and his clothes were nearly gone to rags. Brought into the kitchen and fed, he told his tale. The three young men were dead—they had died before the end of the year. Linwood was drowned by falling from a sail-boat in Charleston Harbor. Cartenelle was found dead—no one could tell how or why—in a little out-house on his father's place. They said it was from shock. Boyce, Ted's master, died last. He never recovered from the dread of that night. He fell into a moody, melancholy way, drinking continually, starting at his own shadow, in terror of every one and every thing. Finally delirium came on, and in this state he died, crying to the last, 'Keep him off! keep him off!' begging Ted to hold him and run for Shurick. Ted, who had been fond of his master, could hardly tell this part of his story. The whole thing had so worked on the poor fellow's mind that he was almost crazy, and nothing would satisfy him but to go North. Father kept him in the barn—he couldn't be induced to stay in the house—until he got better, and then drove him across the line."

Peter brought his chair down on all its legs, and looked again eastward along the beautiful gap.

The Doctor folded up his paper. The Rector kept his eyes fixed steadily on Peter, who was again lost in his own thoughts.

The Doctor's face wore a troubled, thoughtful expression, and he said presently: "Well, perhaps you were right, Shurick, in sending the young man away. Even I sometimes think that life is too strange to be a matter of mere coincidence. My mother was a Miss Boyce. In the family it has always been spoken of as a very singular coincidence—the death of those three friends. And until this moment none of us ever knew what had become of my cousin's invaluable body-servant, that mulatto, Ted."

Silence

BY CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WELLS

SILENCE divine! within whose magic deep
The perfect soul of sound has fallen asleep;
Wake not unless thou tell in words of fire
The heart's supremest wish, the soul's desire.

Silence divine! enfold thy petals yet.
In fields of mystery thy bloom is set.
Thy secret and thy fragrance guard awhile;
Fold deep life's hope; despair and death beguile.

Silence divine! keep if thou wilt the years.
Safe in thy bosom are our loves and fears.
In stillness wrap our souls, our hearts' unrest.
Sound mocks our longing. Silence, thou art best.