

THE COMPLETE DR. THORNDYKE STORIES

Vol. 3

R. Austin Freeman



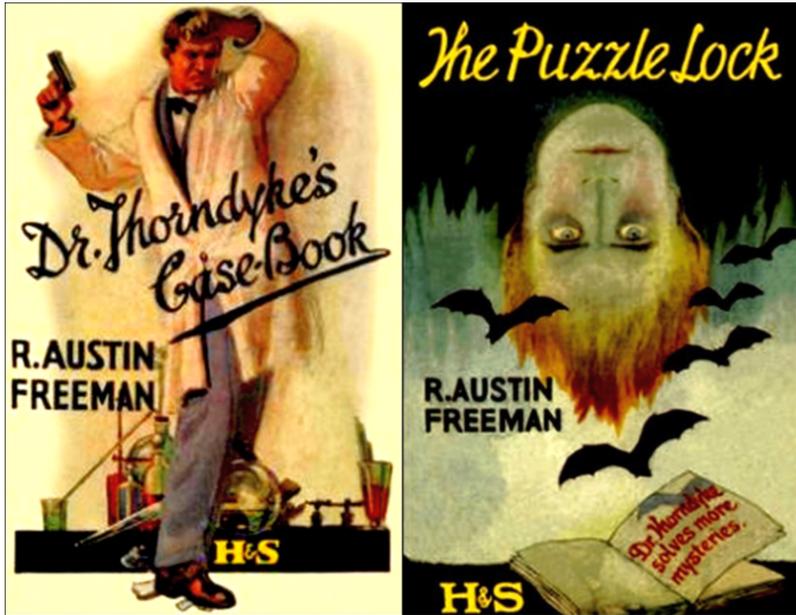
Richard Austin Freeman

Richard Austin Freeman (1862–1943) war der jüngste Sohn von fünf Kindern des Schneiders Richard Freeman und seiner Ehefrau Ann Maria Dunn. 1880 machte R. Austin Freeman eine Ausbildung zum Apotheker und begann anschließend ein Medizinstudium im Middlesex Hospital in London, das er 1886 mit dem Erwerb des Master of the Royal College of Surgeons abschloss. Als frisch promovierter Arzt heiratete er 1887 Annie Elizabeth, mit der er zwei Söhne hatte. Anschließend ging er in die westafrikanische Gold-Coast-Kolonie (dem heutigen Ghana) nach Accra. Dort begleitete er 1888 bis 1889 im Auftrag der britischen Regierung als Arzt und Navigator eine Expedition in die Ashanti Region und in das Stammesgebiet der Bontuku. Über diese Expedition schrieb er das Buch »Travels and Life in Ashanti and Jaman«, das 1898 veröffentlicht wurde. Während dieser Expedition wurde er mit dem Blackwater Fieber infiziert. Sein Gesundheitszustand verbot den weiteren Aufenthalt in Afrika. Als Invalide kehrte Freeman 1891 nach London zurück. Er siedelte sich mit seiner Familie in Gravesend, Grafschaft Kent, an und praktizierte dort als Arzt.

Als Mediziner fand er nur mühsam ein Auskommen. Zunehmend widmete er sich deshalb der Schriftstellerei. Unter dem Pseudonym Clifford Ashdown und in Zusammenarbeit mit einem Freund, dem Gefängnisarzt und Anwalt John James Pitcairn (1860–1936), erschien 1902 seine erste Kurzgeschichtensammlung »The Adventures of Romney Pringle«. 1907 veröffentlichte Freeman seinen ersten, ohne Zusammenarbeit entstandenen Kriminalroman »The Red Thumb Mark«. Dieser Roman war der erfolgreiche Start der Dr.-Thorndyke-Reihe. Mit seinem Protagonisten, dem Gerichtsmediziner Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke, ließ Freeman seine naturwissenschaftliche Bildung einfließen, die er geschickt mit dem zeitgenössischen kriminalistischen Wissen verknüpfte. Sachliche Schlussfolgerungen kann seine Romanfigur Thorndyke stets mit soliden Beweisen untermauern, die er sich in langwieriger und komplizierter Laborarbeit, über die er sein Publikum ausgiebig informiert, verschafft hat. Pearson's Magazine veröffentlichte einige von Freeman's Kurzgeschichten, einschließlich "The Case of Oscar Brodski" (1912), ein klassisches Beispiel einer "inverted detective story", in der zu Beginn das Verbrechen und die Bemühungen des Täters, es zu

vertuschen, und danach, wie es dem Detektiv trotzdem gelingt, es aufzuklären, geschildert werden. R. Austin Freeman starb am 28. September 1943 in seinem Haus in Gravesend. Bis kurz vor seinem Tod schrieb R. Freeman etliche weitere Romane und Kurzgeschichten.

Sir Hugh Greene, der ältere Bruder des Schriftstellers Graham Greene, bezeichnet Freeman im Vorwort zu seiner bekannten Anthologie »Die Rivalen des Sherlock Holmes« als einen der besten Kriminalschriftsteller aller Zeiten. Vor allem Millionen von Columbo-Fans werden ihm für die Erfindung der inverted detective story auf ewig dankbar sein.



Links das Cover der englischen Erstausgabe von DR. THORNDYKE'S CASE-BOOK von 1923, rechts das der von THE PUZZLE LOCK von 1925.

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DR. THORNDYKE'S CASE BOOK*

* First UK edition by Hodder & Stoughton, London 1923.

The Case of the White Footprints

“Well,” said my friend Foxtan, pursuing a familiar and apparently inexhaustible topic, “I’d sooner have your job than my own.”

“I’ve no doubt you would,” was my unsympathetic reply. “I never met a man who wouldn’t. We all tend to consider other men’s jobs in terms of their advantages and our own in terms of their drawbacks. It is human nature.”

“Oh, it’s all very well for you to be so beastly philosophical,” retorted Foxtan. “You wouldn’t be if you were in my place. Here, in Margate, it’s measles, chicken-pox and scarlatina all the summer, and bronchitis, colds and rheumatism in the winter. A deadly monotony. Whereas you and Thorndyke sit there in your chambers and let your clients feed you up with the raw material of romance. Why, your life is a sort of everlasting Adelphi drama.”

“You exaggerate, Foxtan,” said I. “We, like you, have our routine work, only it is never heard of outside the Law Courts; and you, like every other doctor, must run up against mystery and romance from time to time.”

Foxtan shook his head as he held out his hand for my cup. “I don’t,” said he. “My practice yields nothing but an endless round of dull routine.”

And then, as if in commentary on this last statement, the housemaid burst into the room and, with hardly dissembled agitation, exclaimed: “If you please, sir, the page from Beddingfield’s Boarding-house says that a lady has been found dead in her bed and would you go round there immediately.”

“Very well, Jane,” said Foxtan, and as the maid retired, he deliberately helped himself to another fried egg and, looking across the table at me, exclaimed: “Isn’t that always the way? Come immediately—now—this

very instant, although the patient may have been considering for a day or two whether he'll send for you or not. But directly he decides you must spring out of bed, or jump up from your breakfast, and run."

"That's quite true," I agreed; "but this really does seem to be an urgent case."

"What's the urgency?" demanded Foxton. "The woman is already dead. Anyone would think she was in imminent danger of coming to life again and that my instant arrival the only thing that could prevent such a catastrophe."

"You've only a third-hand statement that she is dead," said I. "It is just possible that she isn't; and even if she is, as you will have to give evidence at the inquest, you do want the police to get there first and turn out the room before you've made your inspection."

"Gad!" exclaimed Foxton. "I hadn't thought of that. Yes. You're right. I'll hop round at once."

He swallowed the remainder of the egg at a single gulp rose from the table. Then he paused and stood for a few moments looking down at me irresolutely.

"I wonder, Jervis," he said, "if you would mind coming round with me. You know all the medico-legal ropes, and I don't. What do you say?"

I agreed instantly, having, in fact, been restrained only by delicacy from making the suggestion myself; and when I had fetched from my room my pocket camera and telescopic tripod, we set forth together without further delay.

Beddingfield's Boarding-house was but a few minutes walk from Foxton's residence being situated near the middle of Ethelred Road, Cliftonville, a quiet, suburban street which abounded in similar establishments, many of which, I noticed, were undergoing a spring-cleaning and renovation to prepare them for the approaching season.

"That's the house," said Foxton, "where that woman is standing at the front door. Look at the boarders, collected at the dining-room window. There's a rare commotion in that house, I'll warrant."

Here, arriving at the house, he ran up the steps and accosted in sympathetic tones the elderly woman who stood by the open street door.

"What a dreadful thing this is, Mrs. Beddingfield! Terrible! Most distressing for you!"

"Ah, you're right, Dr. Foxton," she replied. "It's an awful affair. Shocking. So bad for business, too. I do hope, and trust there won't be any scandal."

"I'm sure I hope not," said Foxton. "There shan't be I can help it. And as my friend Dr. Jervis, who is staying with me for a few days, is a lawyer as well as a doctor, we shall have the best advice. When was the affair discovered?"

"Just before I sent for you, Dr. Foxton. The maid, noticed that Mrs. Toussaint—that is the poor creature's name—had not taken in her hot water, so she knocked at the door. As she couldn't get any answer, she tried the door and found it bolted on the inside, and then she came and told me. I went up and knocked loudly, and then, as I couldn't get any reply, I told our boy, James, to force the door open with a case-opener, which he did quite easily as the bolt was only a small one. Then I went in, all of a tremble, for I had a presentiment that there was something wrong; and there she was lying stone dead, with a most 'orrible stare on her face and an empty bottle in her hand."

"A bottle, eh!" said Foxton.

"Yes. She'd made away with herself, poor thing; and all on account of some silly love affair—and it was hardly even that."

"Ah," said Foxton. "The usual thing. You must tell us about that later. Now we'd better go up and see the patient—at least the—er—perhaps you'll show us the room, Mrs. Beddingfield."

The landlady turned and preceded us up the stairs to the first-floor back, where she paused, and softly opening a door, peered nervously into the room. As we stepped past her and entered, she seemed inclined to follow, but, at a significant glance from me, Foxton persuasively ejected her and closed the door. Then we stood silent for a while and looked about us.

In the aspect of the room there was something strangely incongruous with the tragedy that had been enacted within its walls; a mingling of the commonplace and the terrible that almost amounted to anticlimax. Through the wide-open window the bright spring sunshine streamed in on the garish wallpaper and cheap furniture; from the street below, the periodic shouts of a man selling "sole and mack-ro!" broke into the brisk staccato of a barrel-organ and both sounds mingled with a raucous voice close at hand, cheerfully trolling a popular song, and accounted for by a linen-clad elbow that bobbed in front of the window and evidently appertained to a house-painter on an adjacent ladder.

It was all very commonplace and familiar and discordantly out of character with the stark figure that lay on the bed like a waxen effigy symbolic of tragedy. Here was none of that gracious somnolence in which

death often presents itself with a suggestion of eternal repose. This woman was dead; horribly, aggressively dead. The thin, sallow face was rigid as stone, the dark eyes stared into infinite space with a horrid fixity that was quite disturbing to look on. And yet the posture of the corpse was not uneasy, being, in fact, rather curiously symmetrical, with both arms outside the bedclothes and both hands closed, the right grasping, as Mrs. Beddingfield had said, an empty bottle.

"Well," said Foxton, as he stood looking down on the dead woman, "it seems a pretty clear case. She appears to have laid herself out and kept hold of the bottle so that there should be no mistake. How long do you suppose this woman has been dead, Jervis?"

I felt the rigid limbs and tested the temperature of the body surface.

"Not less than six hours," I replied. "Probably more. I should say that she died about two o'clock this morning."

"And that is about all we can say," said Foxton, "until the *post-mortem* has been made. Everything looks quite straightforward. No signs of a struggle or marks of violence. That blood on the mouth is probably due to her biting her lip when she drank from the bottle. Yes; here's a little cut on the inside of the lip, corresponding to the upper incisors. By the way, I wonder if there is anything left in the bottle."

As he spoke, he drew the small, unlabelled, green glass phial from the closed hand—out of which it slipped quite easily—and held it up to the light.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "there's more than a drachm left; quite enough for an analysis. But I don't recognize the smell. Do you?"

I sniffed at the bottle and was aware of a faint unfamiliar vegetable odour.

"No," I answered. "It appears to be a watery solution of some kind, but I can't give it a name. Where is the cork?"

"I haven't seen it," he replied. "Probably it is on the floor somewhere."

We both stooped to look for the missing cork and presently found it in the shadow, under the little bedside table. But, in the course of that brief search, I found something else, which had indeed been lying in full view all the time—a wax match. Now a wax match is a perfectly innocent and very commonplace object, but yet the presence of this one gave me pause. In the first place, women do not, as a rule, use wax matches, though there was not much in that. What was more to the point was that the candlestick by the bedside contained a box of safety matches, and that, as the burnt remains of one lay in the tray, it appeared to have been used to light the candle. Then why the wax match?

While I was turning over this problem Foxton had corked the bottle, wrapped it carefully in a piece of paper which he took from the dressing-table and bestowed it in his pocket.

“Well, Jervis,” said he, “I think we’ve seen everything. The analysis and the *post-mortem* will complete the case. Shall we go down and hear what Mrs. Beddingfield has to say?”

But that wax match, slight as was its significance, taken alone, had presented itself to me as the last of a succession of phenomena each of which was susceptible of a sinister interpretation; and the cumulative effect of these slight suggestions began to impress me somewhat strongly.

“One moment, Foxton,” said I. “Don’t let us take anything for granted. We are here to collect evidence, and we must go warily. There is such a thing as homicidal poisoning, you know.”

“Yes, of course,” he replied, “but there is nothing to suggest it in this case; at least, I see nothing. Do you?”

“Nothing very positive,” said I; “but there are some facts that seem to call for consideration. Let us go over what we have seen. In the first place, there is a distinct discrepancy in the appearance of the body. The general easy, symmetrical posture, like that of a figure on a tomb, suggests the effect of a slow, painless poison. But look at the face. There is nothing reposeful about that. It is very strongly suggestive of pain or terror or both.”

“Yes,” said Foxton, “that is so. But you can’t draw any satisfactory conclusions from the facial expression of dead bodies. Why, men who have been hanged, or even, stabbed, often look as peaceful as babes.”

“Still,” I urged “it is a fact to be noted. Then there is that cut on the lip. It may have been produced in the way you suggest; but it may equally well be the result of pressure on the mouth.”

Foxton made no comment on this beyond a slight shrug of the shoulders, and I continued: “Then there is the state of the hand. It was closed, but, it did not really grasp the object it contained. You drew the bottle out without any resistance. It simply lay in the closed hand. But that is not a normal state of affairs. As you know, when a person dies grasping any object, either the hand relaxes and lets it drop, or the muscular action passes into cadaveric spasm and grasps the object firmly. And lastly, there is this wax match. Where did it come from? The dead woman apparently lit her candle with a safety match from the box. It is a small matter, but it wants explaining.”

Foxton raised his eyebrows protestingly. "You're like all specialists, Jervis," said he. "You see your speciality in everything. And while you are straining these flimsy suggestions to turn a simple suicide into murder, you ignore the really conclusive fact that the door was bolted and had to be broken open before anyone could get in."

"You are not forgetting, I suppose," said I, "that the window was wide open and that there were house-painters about and possibly a ladder left standing against the house."

"As to the ladder," said Foxton, "that is a pure assumption; but we can easily settle the question by asking that fellow out there if it was or was not left standing last night."

Simultaneously we moved towards the window; but halfway we both stopped short. For the question of the ladder had in a moment become negligible. Staring up at us from the dull red linoleum which covered the floor were the impressions of a pair of bare feet, imprinted in white paint with the distinctness of a woodcut. There was no need to ask if they had been made by the dead woman: they were unmistakably the feet of a man, and large feet at that. Nor could there be any doubt as to whence those feet had come. Beginning with startling distinctness under the window, the tracks shed rapidly in intensity until they reached the carpeted portion of the room, where they vanished abruptly; and only by the closest scrutiny was it possible to detect the faint traces of the retiring tracks.

Foxton and I stood for some moments gazing in, silence at the sinister white shapes; then we looked at one another.

"You've saved me from a most horrible blunder, Jervis," said Foxton. "Ladder or no ladder, that fellow came in at the window; and he came in last night, for I saw them painting these window-sills yesterday afternoon. Which side did he come from, I wonder?"

We moved to the window and looked out on the sill. A set of distinct, though smeared impressions on the new paint gave unneeded confirmation and showed that the intruder had approached from the left side, close to which was a cast-iron stack-pipe, now covered with fresh green paint.

"So," said Foxton, "the presence or absence of the ladder is of no significance. The man got into the window somehow, and that's all that matters."

"On the contrary," said I, "the point may be of considerable importance in identification. It isn't everyone who could climb up a stack-pipe, whereas most people could make shift to climb a ladder, even if it were

guarded by a plank. But the fact that the man took off his boots and socks suggests that he came up by the pipe. If he had merely aimed at silencing his footfalls, he would probably have removed his boots only." From the window we turned to examine more closely the footprints on the floor, and while I took a series of measurements with my spring tape Foxtton entered them in my notebook.

"Doesn't it strike you as rather odd, Jervis," said he, "that neither of the little toes has made any mark?"

"It does indeed," I replied. "The appearances suggest that the little toes were absent, but I have never met with such a condition. Have you?"

"Never. Of course one is acquainted with the supernumerary toe deformity, but I have never heard of congenitally deficient little toes."

Once more we scrutinized the footprints, and even examined those on the window-sill, obscurely marked on the fresh paint; but, exquisitely distinct as were those on the linoleum, showing every wrinkle and minute skin-marking, not the faintest hint of a little toe was to be seen on either foot.

"It's very extraordinary," said Foxtton. "He has certainly lost his little toes, if he ever had any. They couldn't have failed to make some mark. But it's a queer affair. Quite a windfall for the police, by the way; I mean for purposes of identification."

"Yes," I agreed, "and having regard to the importance of the footprints, I think it would be wise to get a photograph of them."

"Oh, the police will see to that," said Foxtton. "Besides, we haven't got a camera, unless you thought of using that little toy snapshotter of yours."

As Foxtton was no photographer I did not trouble to explain that my camera, though small, had been specially made for scientific purposes.

"Any photograph is better than none," I said, and with this I opened the tripod and set it over one of the most distinct of the footprints, screwed the camera to the goose-neck, carefully framed the footprint in the finder and adjusted the focus, finally making the exposure by means of an Antinous release. This process I repeated four times, twice on a right footprint and twice on a left.

"Well," Foxtton remarked, "with all those photographs the police ought to be able to pick up the scent."

"Yes, they've got something to go on; but they'll have to catch their hare before they can cook him. He won't be walking about barefooted, you know."

"No. It's a poor clue in that respect. And now we may as well be off as we've seen all there is to see. I think we won't have much to say to

Mrs. Beddingfield. This is a police case, and the less I'm mixed up in it the better it will be for my practice."

I was faintly amused at Foxton's caution when considered by the light of his utterances at the breakfast-table. Apparently his appetite for mystery and romance was easily satisfied. But that was no affair of mine. I waited on the doorstep while he said a few—probably evasive—words to the landlady and then, as we started off together in the direction of the police station, I began to turn over in my mind the salient features of the case. For some time we walked on in silence, and must have been pursuing a parallel train of thought for, when he at length spoke, he almost put my reflections into words.

"You know, Jervis," said he, "there ought to be a clue in those footprints. I realize that you can't tell how many toes a man has by looking at his booted feet. But those unusual footprints ought to give an expert a hint as to what sort of man to look for. Don't they convey any hint to you?"

I felt that Foxton was right; that if my brilliant colleague, Thorndyke, had been in my place he would have extracted from those footprints some leading fact that would have given the police a start along some definite line of inquiry; and that belief, coupled with Foxton's challenge, put me on my mettle.

"They offer no particular suggestions to me at this moment," said I, "but I think that, if we consider them systematically, we may be able to draw some useful deductions."

"Very well," said Foxton, "then let us consider them systematically. Fire away. I should like to hear how you work these things out."

Foxton's frankly spectatorial attitude was a little disconcerting, especially as it seemed to commit me to a result that I was by no means confident of attaining. I therefore began a little diffidently.

"We are assuming that both the feet that made those prints were from some cause devoid of little toes. That assumption—which is almost certainly correct—we treat as a fact, and, taking it as our starting point, the first step in the inquiry is to find some explanation of it. Now there are three possibilities, and only three: deformity, injury, and disease. The toes may have been absent from birth, they may have been lost as a result of mechanical injury, or they may have been lost by disease. Let us take those possibilities in order.

"Deformity we exclude since such a malformation is unknown to us.

"Mechanical injury seems to be excluded by the fact that the two little toes are on opposite sides of the body and could not conceivably be affected by any violence which left the intervening feet uninjured. This

seems to narrow the possibilities down to disease; and the question that arises is, What diseases are there which might result in the loss of both little toes?"

I looked inquiringly at Foxton, but he merely nodded encouragingly. His rôle was that of listener.

"Well," I pursued, "the loss of both toes seems to exclude local disease, just as it excluded local injury; and as to general diseases, I can think only of three which might produce this condition—Raynaud's disease, ergotism, and frost-bite."

"You don't call frost-bite a general disease, do you?" objected Foxton.

"For our present purpose, I do. The effects are local, but the cause—low external temperature—affects the whole body and is a general cause. Well, now, taking the diseases in order. I think we can exclude Raynaud's disease. It does, it is true, occasionally cause the fingers or toes to die and drop off, and the little toes would be especially liable to be affected as being most remote from the heart. But in such a severe case the other toes would be affected. They would be shrivelled and tapered, whereas, if you remember, the toes of these feet were quite plump and full, to judge by the large impressions they made. So I think we may safely reject Raynaud's disease. There remain ergotism and frost-bite; and the choice between them is just a question of relative frequency. Frost-bite is more common; therefore frost-bite is more probable."

"Do they tend equally to affect the little toes?" asked Foxton.

"As a matter of probability, yes. The poison of ergot acting from within, and intense cold acting from without, contract the small blood-vessels and arrest, the circulation. The feet, being the most distant parts of the body from the heart, are the first to feel the effects; and the little toes, which are the most distant parts of the feet, are the most susceptible of all."

Foxton reflected awhile, and then remarked: "This is all very well, Jervis, but I don't see that you are much forrarder. This man has lost both his little toes and on your showing, the probabilities are that the loss was due either to chronic ergot poisoning or to frost-bite, with a balance of probability in favour of frost-bite. That's all. No proof, no verification, just the law of probability applied to a particular case, which is always unsatisfactory. He may have lost his toes in some totally different way. But even if the probabilities work out correctly, I don't see what use your conclusions would be to the police. They wouldn't tell them what sort of man to look for."

There was a good deal of truth in Foxton's objection. A man who has suffered from ergotism or frost-bite is not externally different from any other man. Still, we had not exhausted the case, as I ventured to point out.

"Don't be premature, Foxton," said I. "Let us pursue our argument a little farther. We have established a probability that this unknown man has suffered either from ergotism or frost-bite. That, as you say, is of no use by itself; but supposing we can show that these conditions tend to affect a particular class of persons, we shall have established a fact that will indicate a line of investigation. And I think we can. Let us take the case of ergotism first.

"Now how is chronic ergot poisoning caused? Not by the medicinal use of the drug, but, by the consumption of the diseased rye in which ergot occurs. It is therefore peculiar to countries in which rye is used extensively as food. Those countries, broadly speaking, are the countries of North-Eastern Europe, and especially Russia and Poland.

"Then take the case of frost-bite. Obviously, the most likely person to get frost-bitten is the inhabitant of a country with a cold climate. The most rigorous climates inhabited by white people are North America and North-Eastern Europe, especially Russia and Poland. So you see, the areas associated with ergotism and frost-bite overlap to some extent. In fact they do more than overlap; for a person even slightly affected by ergot would be specially liable to frost-bite, owing to the impaired circulation. The conclusion is that, racially, in both ergotism and frost-bite, the balance of probability is in favour of a Russian, a Pole, or a Scandinavian.

"Then in the case of frost-bite there is the occupation factor. What class of men tend most to become frost-bitten? Well, beyond all doubt, the greatest sufferers from frost-bite are sailors, especially those on sailing ships, and, naturally, on ships trading to Arctic and sub-Arctic countries. But the bulk of such sailing ships are those engaged in the Baltic and Archangel trade; and the crews of those ships are almost exclusively Scandinavians, Finns, Russians and Poles. So that, again, the probabilities point to a native of North-Eastern Europe, and, taken as a whole, by the over-lapping of factors, to a Russian, a Pole, or a Scandinavian."

Foxton smiled sardonically. "Very ingenious, Jervis," said he. "Most ingenious. As an academic statement of probabilities, quite excellent. But for practical purposes absolutely useless. However, here we are at the police-station. I'll just run in and give them the facts and then go on to the coroner's office."

"I suppose I'd better not come in with you?" I said.

"Well, no," he replied. "You see, you have no official connection with the case, and they mightn't like it. You'd better go and amuse yourself while I get the morning's visits done. We can talk things over at lunch."

With this he disappeared into the police-station, and I turned away with a smile of grim amusement. Experience is apt to make us a trifle uncharitable, and experience had taught me that those who are the most scornful of academic reasoning are often not above retailing it with some reticence as to its original authorship. I had a shrewd suspicion that Foxton was at this very moment disgorging my despised "academic statement of probabilities" to an admiring police-inspector.

My way towards the sea lay through Ethelred Road, and I had traversed about half its length and was approaching the house of the tragedy when I observed Mrs. Beddingfield at the bay window. Evidently she recognized me, for a few moments later she appeared in outdoor clothes on the doorstep and advanced to meet me.

"Have you seen the police?" she asked, as we met.

I replied that Dr. Foxton was even now at the police-station.

"Ah!" she said, "it's a dreadful affair; most unfortunate, too, just at the beginning of the season. A scandal is absolute ruin to a boarding-house. What do you think of the case? Will it be possible to hush it up? Dr. Foxton said you were a lawyer, I think, Dr. Jervis?"

"Yes, I am a lawyer, but really I know nothing of the circumstances of this case. Did I understand that there had been something in the nature of a love affair?"

"Yes—at least—well, perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But hadn't I better tell you the whole story?—that is, if I am not taking up too much of your time."

"I should be interested to hear what led to the disaster," said I.

"Then," she said, "I will tell you all about it. Will you come indoors, or shall I walk a little way with you?"

As I suspected that the police were at that moment on their way to the house, I chose the latter alternative and led her away seawards at a pretty brisk pace.

"Was this poor lady a widow?" I asked, as we started up the street.

"No, she wasn't," replied Mrs. Beddingfield, "and that was the trouble. Her husband was abroad—at least, he had been, and he was just coming home. A pretty home-coming it will be for him, poor man. He is an officer in the Civil Police at Sierra Leone, but he hasn't been there long. He went there for his health."

"What! To Sierra Leone!" I exclaimed, for the "White Man's Grave" seemed a queer health resort.

"Yes. You see, Mr. Toussaint is a French Canadian, and it seems that he has always been somewhat of a rolling stone. For some time he was in the Klondyke, but he suffered so much from the cold that he had to come away. It injured his health very severely; I don't quite know in what way, but I do know that he was quite a cripple for a time. When he got better he looked out for a post in a warm climate and eventually obtained the appointment of Inspector of Civil Police at Sierra Leone. That was about ten months ago, and when he sailed for Africa his wife came to stay with me, and has been here ever since."

"And this love affair that you spoke of?"

"Yes, but I oughtn't to have called it that. Let me explain what happened. About three months ago a Swedish gentleman—a Mr. Bergson—came to stay here, and he seemed to be very much smitten with Mrs. Toussaint."

"And she?"

"Oh, she liked him well enough. He is a tall, good-looking man—though for that matter he is no taller than her husband, nor any better-looking. Both men are over six feet. But there was no harm so far as she was concerned, excepting that she didn't see the position quite soon enough. She wasn't very discreet, in fact I thought it necessary to give her a little advice. However, Mr. Bergson left here and went to live at Ramsgate to superintend the unloading of the iceships (he came from Sweden in one), and I thought the trouble was at an end. But it wasn't, for he took to coming over to see Mrs. Toussaint, and of course I couldn't have that. So at last I had to tell him that he mustn't come to the house again. It was very unfortunate, for on that occasion I think he had been "tasting", as they say in Scotland. He wasn't drunk, but he was excitable and noisy, and when I told him he mustn't come again he made such a disturbance that two of the gentlemen boarders—Mr. Wardale and Mr. Macauley—had to interfere. And then he was most insulting to them, especially to Mr. Macauley, who is a coloured gentleman; called him a 'buck nigger' and all sorts of offensive names."

"And how did the coloured gentleman take it?"

"Not very well, I am sorry to say, considering that he is a gentleman—a law student with chambers in the Temple. In fact, his language was so objectionable that Mr. Wardale insisted on my giving him notice on the spot. But I managed to get him taken in next door but one; you see, Mr. Wardale had been a Commissioner at, Sierra Leone—it was through

him that Mr. Toussaint got his appointment—so I suppose he was rather on his dignity with coloured people.”

“And was that the last you heard of Mr. Bergson?”

“He never came here again, but he wrote several times to Mrs. Toussaint, asking her to meet him. At last, only a few days ago, she wrote to him and told him that the acquaintance must cease.”

“And has it ceased?”

“As far as I know, it has.”

“Then, Mrs. Beddingfield,” said I, “what makes you connect the affair with—with what has happened?”

“Well, you see,” she explained, “there is the husband. He was coming home, and is probably in England already.”

“Indeed!” said I.

“Yes,” she continued. “He went up into the bush to arrest some natives belonging to one of these gangs of murderers—Leopard Societies, I think they are called—and he got seriously wounded. He wrote to his wife from hospital saying that he would be sent home as soon as he was fit to travel, and about ten days ago she got a letter from him saying that he was coming by the next ship.

“I noticed that she seemed very nervous and upset when she got the letters from hospital, and still more so when the last letter came. Of course, I don’t know what he said to her in those letters. It may be that he had heard something about Mr. Bergson, and threatened to take some action. Of course, I can’t say. I only know that she was very nervous and restless, and when we saw in the paper four days ago that the ship he would be coming by had arrived in Liverpool she seemed dreadfully upset. And she got worse and worse until—well, until last night.”

“Has anything been heard of the husband since the ship arrived?” I asked.

“Nothing whatever,” replied Mrs. Beddingfield, with a meaning look at me which I had no difficulty in interpreting. “No letter, no telegram, not a word. And you see, if he hadn’t come by that ship he would almost certainly have sent a letter to her. He must have arrived in England, but why hasn’t he turned up, or at least sent a wire? What is he doing? Why is he staying away? Can he have heard something? And what does he mean to do? That’s what kept the poor thing on wires, and that, I feel certain, is what drove her to make away with herself.”

It was not my business to contest Mrs. Beddingfield’s erroneous deductions. I was seeking information—it seemed that I had nearly exhausted the present source. But one point required amplifying.

"To return to Mr. Bergson, Mrs. Beddingfield," said I "Do I understand that he is a seafaring man?"

"He was," she replied. "At present he is settled at Ramsgate as manager of a company in the ice trade, but formerly he was a sailor. I have heard him say that he was one, of the crew of an exploring ship that went in search of the North Pole and that he was locked up in the ice for months and months. I should have thought he would have had enough of ice after that."

With this view I expressed warm agreement, and having now obtained all the information that appeared to be available I proceeded to bring the interview to an end.

"Well, Mrs. Beddingfield," I said, "it is a rather mysterious affair. Perhaps more light may be thrown on it at the inquest. Meanwhile, I should think that it will be wise of you to keep your own counsel as far as outsiders are concerned."

The remainder of the morning I spent pacing the smooth stretch of sand that lies to the east of the jetty, and reflecting on the evidence that I had acquired in respect of this singular crime. Evidently there was no lack of clues in this case. On the contrary, there were two quite obvious lines of inquiry, for both the Swede and the missing husband presented the characters of the hypothetical murderer. Both had been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce frost-bite; one of them had probably been a consumer of rye meal, and both might be said to have a motive—though, to be sure, it was a very insufficient one—for committing the crime. Still in both cases the evidence was merely speculative; it suggested a line of investigation but it did nothing more.

When I met Foxton at lunch I was sensible of a curious change in his manner. His previous expansiveness had given place to marked reticence and a certain official secretiveness.

"I don't think, you know, Jervis," he said, when I opened the subject "that we had better discuss this affair. You see, I am the principal witness, and while the case is *sub judice*—well, in fact the police don't want the case talked about."

"But surely I am a witness, too, and in expert witness, moreover—"

"That isn't the view of the police. They look on you as more or less of an amateur, and as you have no official connection with the case, I don't think they propose to subpoena you. Superintendent Platt, who is in charge of the case, wasn't very pleased at my having taken you to the house. Said it was quite irregular. Oh, and by the way, he says you must hand over those photographs."

“But isn’t Platt going to have the footprints photographed on his own account?” I objected.

“Of course he is. He is going to have a set of proper photographs taken by an expert photographer—he was mightily amused when he heard about your little snapshot affair. Oh, you can trust Platt. He is a great man. He has had a course of instruction at the Fingerprint Department in London.”

“I don’t see how that is going to help him, as there aren’t any fingerprints in this case.”

This was a mere fly-cast on my part, but Foxtton rose at once at the rather clumsy bait.

“Oh, aren’t there?” he exclaimed. “You didn’t happen to spot them, but they were there. Platt has got the prints of a complete right hand. This is in strict confidence, you know,” he added, with somewhat belated caution.

Foxtton’s sudden reticence restrained me from uttering the obvious comment on the superintendent’s achievement. I returned to the subject of the photographs.

“Supposing I decline to hand over my film?” said I.

“But I hope you won’t—and in fact you mustn’t. I am officially connected with the case, and I’ve got to live with these people. As the police-surgeon, I am responsible for the medical evidence, and Platt expects me to get those photographs from you. Obviously you can’t keep them. It would be most irregular.”

It was useless to argue. Evidently the police did not want me to be introduced into the case, and after all the superintendent was within his rights, if he chose to regard me, as a private individual and to demand the surrender of the film.

Nevertheless I was loath to give up the photographs, at least until I had carefully studied them. The case was within my own speciality of practice, and was a strange and interesting one. Moreover, it appeared to be in unskilful hands, judging from the fingerprint episode, and then experience had taught me to treasure up small scraps of chance evidence, since one never knew when one might be drawn into a case in a professional capacity. In effect, I decided not to give up the photographs, though that decision committed me to a ruse that I was not very willing to adopt. I would rather have acted quite straightforwardly.

“Well if you insist, Foxtton,” I said, “I will hand over the film or, if you like, I will destroy it in your presence.”

"I think Platt would rather have the film uninjured," said Foxton. "Then he'll know, you know," he added, with a sly grin.

In my heart, I thanked Foxton for that grin. It made my own guileful proceedings so much easier; for a suspicious man invites you to get the better of him if you can.

After lunch I went up to my room, locked the door and took the little camera from my pocket. Having fully wound up the film, I extracted it, wrapped it up carefully and bestowed it in my inside breast-pocket. Then I inserted a fresh film, and going to the open window, took four successive snapshots of the sky. This done, I closed the camera, slipped it into my pocket and went downstairs. Foxton was in the hall, brushing his hat, as I descended, and at once renewed his demand.

"About those photographs, Jervis," said he; "I shall be looking in at the police-station presently, so if you wouldn't mind—"

"To be sure," said I. "I will give you the film now if you like."

Taking the camera from my pocket, I solemnly wound up the remainder of the film, extracted it, stuck down the loose end with ostentatious care, and handed it to him.

"Better not expose it to the light," I said, going the whole hog of deception, "or you may fog the exposures."

Foxton took the spool from me as if it were hot—he was not a photographer—and thrust it into his handbag. He was still thanking me the quite profusely when the front-door bell rang.

The visitor who stood revealed when Foxton opened the door was a small, spare gentleman with a complexion of peculiar brown-papery quality that suggests long residence the tropics. He stepped in briskly and introduced himself and his business without preamble.

"My name is Wardale—boarder at Beddingfield's. I called with reference to the tragic event which—"

Here Foxton interposed in his frostiest official tone. "I am afraid, Mr. Wardale, I can't give you any information about the case at present."

"I saw you two gentlemen at the house this morning—" Mr. Wardale continued, but Foxton again cut him short.

"You did. We were there—or at least, I was—as representative of the Law, and while the case is *sub judice*—"

"It isn't yet," interrupted Wardale.

"Well, I can't enter into any discussion of it—"

"I am not asking you to," said Wardale a little impatiently. "But I understand that one of you is Dr. Jervis."

"I am," said I.

"I must really warn you—" Foxton began again; but Mr. Wardale interrupted testily: "My dear sir, I am a lawyer and a magistrate and understand perfectly well what is and what is not permissible. I have come simply to make a professional engagement with Dr. Jervis."

"In what way can I be of service to you?" I asked.

"I will tell you," said Mr. Wardale. "This poor lady, whose death has occurred in so mysterious a manner, was the wife of a man who was, like myself a servant of the Government of Sierra Leone. I was the friend of both of them, and in the absence of the husband I should like to have the inquiry into the circumstances of this lady's death watched by a competent lawyer with the necessary special knowledge of medical evidence. Will you or your colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, undertake to watch the case for me?"

Of course I was willing to undertake the case and said so.

"Then," said Mr. Wardale, "I will instruct my solicitor to write to you and formally retain you in the case. Here is my card. You will find my name in the Colonial Office List, and you know my address here."

He handed me his card, wished us both good afternoon, and then, with a stiff little bow, turned and took his departure.

"I think I had better run up to town and confer with Thorndyke," said I. "How do the trains run?"

"There is a good train in about three-quarters of an hour," replied Foxton.

"Then I will go by it, but I shall come down again to-morrow or the next day, and probably Thorndyke will come down with me."

"Very well," said Foxton. "Bring him in to lunch or dinner, but I can't put him up, I am afraid."

"It would be better not," said I. "Your friend Platt wouldn't like it. He won't want Thorndyke—or me either for that matter. And what about those photographs? Thorndyke will want them, you know."

"He can't have them," said Foxton doggedly, "unless Platt is willing to hand them back; which I don't suppose he will be."

I had private reasons for thinking otherwise, but I kept them to myself; and as Foxton went forth on his afternoon round, I returned upstairs to pack my suitcase and write the telegram to Thorndyke informing him of my movements.

It was only a quarter past five when I let myself into our chambers in King's Bench Walk. To my relief I found my colleague at home and our laboratory assistant, Polton, in the act of laying tea, for two.

"I gather," said Thorndyke, as we shook hands, "that my learned brother brings grist to the mill?"

"Yes," I replied. "Nominally a watching brief, but I think you will agree with me that it is a case for independent investigation."

"Will there be anything in my line, sir?" inquired Polton, who was always agog at the word 'investigation'.

"There is a film to be developed. Four exposures of white footprints on a dark ground."

"Ah!" said Polton, "you'll want good strong negatives, and they ought to be enlarged if they are, from the little camera. Can you give me the dimensions?"

I wrote out the measurements from my notebook and handed him the paper together with the spool of film, with which he retired gleefully to the laboratory.

"And now, Jervis," said Thorndyke, "while Polton is operating on the film and we are discussing our tea, let us have a sketch of the case."

I gave him more than a sketch, for the events were recent and I had carefully sorted out the facts during my journey to town, making rough notes, which I now consulted. To my rather lengthy recital he listened in his usual attentive manner, without any comment, excepting in regard to my manoeuvre to retain possession of the exposed film.

"It's almost a pity you didn't refuse," said he. "They could hardly have enforced their demand, and my feeling is that it is more convenient as well as more dignified to avoid direct deception unless one is driven to it. But perhaps you considered that you were."

As a matter of fact I had at the time, but I had since come to Thorndyke's opinion. My little manoeuvre was going to be a source of inconvenience presently.

"Well," said Thorndyke, when I had finished my recital, "I think we may take it that the police theory is, in the main, your own theory derived from Foxton."

"I think so, excepting that I learned from Foxton that Superintendent Platt has obtained the complete fingerprints of a right hand."

Thorndyke raised his eyebrows. "Fingerprints!" he exclaimed. "Why, the fellow must be a mere simpleton. But there," he added, "everybody—police, lawyers, judges, even Galton himself—seems to lose every vestige of common sense as soon as the subject of fingerprints is raised. But it would be interesting to know how he got them and what they are like. We must try to find that out. However, to return to your case,

since your theory and the police theory are probably the same, we may as well consider the value of your inferences.

“At present we are dealing with the case in the abstract. Our data are largely assumptions, and our inferences are largely derived from an application of the mathematical laws of probability. Thus we assume that a murder has been committed, whereas it may turn out to have been suicide. We assume the murder to have been committed by the person, who made the footprints, and we assume that that person has no little toes, whereas he may have retracted little toes which do not touch the ground and so leave no impression. Assuming the little toes to be absent, we account for their absence by considering known causes in the order of their probability. Excluding—quite properly, I think—Raynaud’s disease, we arrive at frost-bite and ergotism.

“But two persons, both of whom are of a stature corresponding to the size of the footprints, may have had a motive—though a very inadequate one—for committing the crime, and both have been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce frost-bite, while one of them has, probably, been exposed to the conditions which tend to produce ergotism. The laws of probability point to both of these two men; and the chances in favour of the Swede being the murderer rather than the Canadian would be represented by the common factor—frost-bite—multiplied by the additional factor, ergotism. But this is purely speculative at present. There is no evidence that either man has ever been frost-bitten or has ever eaten spurred rye. Nevertheless, it is a perfectly sound method at this stage. It indicates a line of investigation. If it should transpire that either man has suffered from frost-bite or ergotism, a definite advance would have been made. But here is Polton with a couple of finished prints. How on earth did you manage it in the time, Polton?”

“Why, you see, sir, I just dried the film with spirit,” replied Polton. “It saved a lot of time. I will let you have a pair of enlargements in about a quarter of an hour.”

Handing us the two wet prints, each stuck on a glass plate, he retired to the laboratory, and Thorndyke and I proceeded to scrutinize the photographs with the aid of our pocket lenses. The promised enlargements were really hardly necessary excepting for the purpose of comparative measurements, for the image of the white footprint, fully two inches long, was so microscopically sharp that, with the assistance of the lens, the minutest detail could be clearly seen.

“There is certainly not a vestige of little toe,” remarked Thorndyke, “and the plump appearance of the other toes supports your rejection of Ray-

naud's disease. Does the character of the footprint convey any other suggestion to you, Jervis?"

"It gives me the impression that the man had been accustomed to go bare-footed in early life and had only taken to boots comparatively recently. The position of the great toe suggests this, and the presence of a number of small scars on the toes and ball of the foot seems to confirm it. A person walking bare-foot would sustain innumerable small wounds from treading on small, sharp objects."

Thorndyke looked dissatisfied. "I agree with you," he said, "as to the suggestion offered by the undeformed state of the great toes; but those little pits do not convey to me the impression of scars produced as you suggest. Still, you may be right."

Here our conversation was interrupted by a knock on the outer oak. Thorndyke stepped out through the lobby and I heard him open the door. A moment or two later he re-entered, accompanied by a short, brown-faced gentleman whom I instantly recognized as Mr. Wardale.

"I must have come up by the same train as you," he remarked, as we shook hands, "and to a certain extent, I suspect, on the same errand. I thought I would like to put our arrangement on a business footing, as I am a stranger to both of you."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Thorndyke.

"I want you to watch the case, and, if necessary, to look into the facts independently."

"Can you give us any information that may help us?"

Mr. Wardale reflected. "I don't think I can," he said at length. "I have no facts that you have not, and any surmises of mine might be misleading. I had rather you kept an open mind. But perhaps we might go into the question of costs."

This, of course, was somewhat difficult, but Thorndyke contrived to indicate the probable liabilities involved, to Mr. Wardale's satisfaction.

"There is one other little matter," said Wardale, as he rose to depart. "I have got a suitcase here which Mrs. Beddingfield lent me to bring some things up to town. It is one that Mr. Macauley left behind when he went away from the boarding-house. Mrs. Beddingfield suggested that I might leave it at his chambers when I had finished with it; but I don't know his address, excepting that it is somewhere in the Temple, and I don't want to meet the fellow if he should happen to have come up to town."

"Is it empty?" asked Thorndyke.

“Excepting for a suit of pyjamas and a pair of shocking old slippers.” He opened the suitcase as he spoke and exhibited its contents with a grin. “Characteristic of a negro, isn’t it? Pink silk pyjamas and slippers about three sizes too small.”

“Very well,” said Thorndyke. “I will get my man to find out the address and leave it there.”

As Mr. Wardale went out, Polton entered with the enlarged photographs, which showed the footprints the natural size. Thorndyke handed them to me, and as I sat down to examine them he followed his assistant to the laboratory. He returned in a few minutes, and after a brief inspection of the photographs, remarked: “They show us nothing more than we have seen, though they may be useful later. So your stock of facts is all we have to go on at present. Are you going home to-night?”

“Yes, I shall go back to Margate to-morrow.”

“Then, as I have to call at Scotland Yard, we may as well walk to Charing Cross together.”

As we walked down the Strand we gossiped on general topics, but before we separated at Charing Cross, Thorndyke reverted to the case.

“Let me know the date of the inquest,” said he, “and try to find out what the poison was—if it was really a poison.”

“The liquid that was left in the bottle seemed to be a watery solution of some kind,” said I, “as I think I mentioned.”

“Yes,” said Thorndyke. “Possibly a watery infusion of *strophanthus*.”

“Why *strophanthus*?” I asked.

“Why not?” demanded Thorndyke. And with this and an inscrutable smile, he turned and walked down Whitehall.

Three days later I found myself at Margate—sitting beside Thorndyke in a room adjoining the Town Hall, in which the inquest on the death of Mrs. Toussaint was to be held. Already the coroner was in his chair, the jury were in their seats and the witnesses assembled in a group of chairs apart. These included Foxton, a stranger who sat by him—presumably the other medical witness—, Mrs. Beddingfield, Mr. Wardale, the police superintendent and a well-dressed coloured man, whom I correctly assumed to be Mr. Macauley.

As I sat by my-rather sphinx-like colleague my mind recurred for the hundredth time to his extraordinary powers of mental synthesis. That parting remark of his as to the possible nature of the poison had brought home to me in a flash the fact that he already had a definite theory of this crime, and that his theory was not mine nor that of the police. True, the poison might not be *strophanthus*, after all, but that would not alter

the position. He had a theory of the crime, but yet he was in possession of no facts excepting those with which I had supplied him. Therefore those facts contained the material for a theory, whereas I had deduced from them nothing but the bald, ambiguous mathematical probabilities. The first witness called was naturally Dr. Foxton, who described the circumstances already known to me. He further stated that he had been present at the autopsy, that he had found on the throat and limbs of the deceased bruises that suggested a struggle and violent restraint. The immediate cause of death was heart failure, but whether that failure was due to shock, terror, or the action of a poison he could not positively say.

The next witness was a Dr. Prescott, an expert pathologist and toxicologist. He had made the autopsy and agreed with Dr. Foxton as to the cause of death. He had examined the liquid contained in the bottle taken from the hand of the deceased and found it to be a watery infusion or decoction of *strophanthus* seeds. He had analysed the fluid contained in the stomach and found it to consist largely of the same infusion.

"Is infusion of *strophanthus* seeds used in medicine?" the coroner asked.

"No," was the reply. "The tincture is the form in which *strophanthus* is administered unless it is given in the form of strophanthine."

"Do you consider that the *strophanthus* caused or contributed to death?"

"It is difficult to say," replied Dr. Prescott. "*Strophanthus* is a heart poison, and there was a very large poisonous dose. But very little had been absorbed, and the appearances were not inconsistent with death from shock."

"Could death have been self-produced by the voluntary taking of the poison?" asked the coroner.

"I should say, decidedly not. Dr. Foxton's evidence shows that the bottle was almost certainly placed in the hands of the deceased after death, and this is in complete agreement with the enormous dose and small absorption."

"Would you say that appearances point to suicidal or homicidal poisoning?"

"I should say that they point to homicidal poisoning, but that death was probably due mainly to shock."

This concluded the expert's evidence. It was followed by that of Mrs. Beddingfield, which brought out nothing new to me but the fact that a trunk had been broken open and a small attaché-case belonging to the deceased abstracted and taken away.

"Do you know what the deceased kept in that case?" the coroner asked.

"I have seen her put her husband's letters into it. She had quite a number of them. I don't know what else she kept in it except, of course, her cheque-book."

"Had she any considerable balance at the bank?"

"I believe she had. Her husband used to send most of his pay home and she used to pay it in and leave it with the bank. She might have two or three hundred pounds to her credit."

As Mrs. Beddingfield concluded Mr. Wardale was called, and he was followed by Mr. Macauley. The evidence of both was quite brief and concerned entirely with the disturbance made by Bergson, whose absence from the court I had already noted.

The last witness was the police superintendent, and he, as I had expected, was decidedly reticent. He did refer to the footprints, but, like Foxton—who presumably had his instructions—he abstained from describing their peculiarities. Nor did he say anything about fingerprints. As to the identity of the criminal, that had to be further inquired into. Suspicion had at first fastened upon Bergson, but it had since transpired that the Swede sailed from Ramsgate on an ice-ship two days before the occurrence of the tragedy. Then suspicion had pointed to the husband, who was known to have landed at Liverpool four days before the death of his wife and who had mysteriously disappeared. But he (the superintendent) had only that morning received a telegram from the Liverpool police informing him that the body of Toussaint had been found floating in the Mersey, and that it bore a number of wounds of an apparently homicidal character. Apparently he had been murdered and his corpse thrown into the river.

"This is very terrible," said the coroner. "Does this second murder throw any light on the case which we are investigating?"

"I think it does," replied the officer, without any great conviction, however; "but it is not advisable to go into details."

"Quite so," agreed the coroner. "Most inexpedient. But are we to understand that you have a clue to the perpetrator of this crime—assuming a crime to have been committed?"

"Yes," replied Platt. "We have several important clues."

"And do they point to any particular individual?"

The superintendent hesitated. "Well ..." he began with some embarrassment, but the coroner interrupted him: "Perhaps the question is indiscreet. We mustn't hamper the police, gentlemen, and the point is not really material to our inquiry. You would rather we waived that question, Superintendent?"

"If you please, sir," was the emphatic reply.

"Have any cheques from the deceased woman's cheque book been presented at the bank?"

"Not since her death. I inquired at the bank only this morning."

This concluded the evidence, and after a brief but capable summing-up by the coroner, the jury returned a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person unknown".

As the proceedings terminated, Thorndyke rose and turned round, and then to my surprise I perceived Superintendent Miller, of the Criminal Investigation Department, who had come in unperceived by me and was sitting immediately behind us.

"I have followed your instructions, sir," said he, addressing Thorndyke, "but before we take any definite action I should like to have a few words with you."

He led the way to an adjoining room and, as we entered we were followed by Superintendent Platt and Dr. Foxton.

"Now, Doctor," said Miller, carefully closing the door, "I have carried out your suggestions. Mr. Macauley is being detained, but before we commit ourselves to an arrest we must have something to go upon. I shall want you to make out a *prima facie* case."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, laying upon the table the small green suitcase that was his almost invariable companion.

"I've seen that *prima facie* case before," Miller remarked with a grin, as Thorndyke unlocked it and drew out a large envelope. "Now, what have you got there?"

As Thorndyke extracted from the envelope Polton's enlargements of my small photographs, Platt's eyes appeared to bulge, while Foxton gave me a quick glance of reproach.

"These," said Thorndyke "are the full-sized photographs of the footprints of the suspected murderer. Superintendent Platt can probably verify them."

Rather reluctantly Platt produced from his pocket a pair of whole-plate photographs, which he laid beside the enlargements.

"Yes," said Miller, after comparing them, "they are the same footprints. But you say, Doctor, that they are Macauley's footprints. Now, what evidence have you?"

Thorndyke again had recourse to the green case, from which he produced two copper plates mounted on wood and coated with printing ink.

"I propose," said he, lifting the plates out of their protecting frame, "that we take prints of Macauley's feet and compare them with the photographs."

"Yes," said Platt. "And then there are the fingerprints that we've got. We can test those, too."

"You don't want fingerprints if you've got a set of toeprints," objected Miller.

"With regard to those fingerprints," said Thorndyke. "May I ask if they were obtained from the bottle?"

"They were," Platt admitted.

"And were there any other fingerprints?"

"No," replied Platt. "These were the only ones."

As he spoke he laid on the table a photograph showing the prints of the thumb and fingers of a right hand.

Thorndyke glanced at the photograph and, turning to Miller, said: "I suggest that those are Dr. Foxton's fingerprints."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Platt, and then suddenly fell silent.

"We can soon see," said Thorndyke, producing from the case a pad of white paper. "If Dr. Foxton will lay the finger-tips of his right hand first on this inked plate and then on the paper, we can compare the prints with the photograph."

Foxton placed his fingers on the blackened plate and then pressed them on the paper pad, leaving on the latter four beautifully clear, black fingerprints. These Superintendent Platt scrutinized eagerly, and as his glance travelled from the prints to the photographs he broke into a sheepish grin.

"Sold again!" he muttered. "They are the same prints."

"Well," said Miller, in a tone of disgust, "you must have been a mug not to have thought of that when you knew that Dr. Foxton had handled the bottle."

"The fact, however, is important," said Thorndyke. "The absence of any fingerprints but Dr. Foxton's not only suggests that the murderer took the precaution to wear gloves, but especially it proves that the bottle was not handled by the deceased during life. A suicide's hands will usually be pretty moist and would leave conspicuous, if not very clear, impressions."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "that is quite true. But with regard to these footprints. We can't compel this man to let us examine his feet without

arresting him. Don't think, Dr. Thorndyke, that I suspect you of guessing. I've known you too long for that. You've got your facts all right, I don't doubt, but you must let us have enough to justify our arrest."

Thorndyke's answer was to plunge once more into the inexhaustible green case, from which he now produced two objects wrapped in tissue-paper. The paper being removed, there was revealed what looked like a model of an excessively shabby pair of brown shoes.

"These," said Thorndyke, exhibiting the "models" to Superintendent Miller—who viewed them with an undisguised grin—"are plaster casts of the interiors of a pair of slippers—very old and much too tight—belonging to Mr. Macauley. His name was written inside them. The casts have been waxed and painted with raw umber, which has been lightly rubbed off, thus accentuating the prominences and depressions. You will notice that the impressions of the toes on the soles and of the "knuckles" on the uppers appear as prominences; in fact we have in these casts a sketchy reproduction of the actual feet.

"Now, first as to dimensions. Dr. Jervis's measurements of the footprints give us ten inches and three-quarters as the extreme length and four inches and five-eighths as the extreme width at the heads of the metatarsus. On these casts, as you see, the extreme length is ten inches and five-eighths—the loss of one-eighth being accounted for by the curve of the sole—and the extreme width is four inches and a quarter—three-eighths being accounted for by the lateral compression of a tight slipper. The agreement of the dimensions is remarkable, considering the unusual size. And now as to the peculiarities of the feet.

"You notice that each toe has made a perfectly distinct impression on the sole, excepting the little toe; of which there is no trace in either cast. And, turning to the uppers, you notice that the knuckles of the toes appear quite distinct and prominent—again excepting the little toes, which have made no impression at all. Thus it is not a case of retracted little toes, for they would appear as an extra prominence. Then, looking at the feet as a whole, it is evident that the little toes are absent; there is a distinct hollow, where there should be a prominence."

"M'yes," said Miller dubiously, "it's all very neat. But isn't it just a bit speculative?"

"Oh, come, Miller," protested Thorndyke; "just consider the facts. Here is a suspected murderer known to have feet of an unusual size and presenting a very rare deformity; and they are the feet of a man who had actually lived in the same house as the murdered woman and who, at the date of the crime, was living only two doors away. What more

would you have?"

"Well, there is the question of motive," objected Miller.

"That hardly belongs to a *prima facie* case," said Thorndyke, "But even if it did, is there not ample matter for suspicion? Remember who the murdered woman was, what her husband was, and who this Sierra Leone gentleman is."

"Yes, yes; that's true," said Miller somewhat hastily, either perceiving the drift of Thorndyke's argument (which I did not), or being unwilling to admit that he was still in the dark. "Yes, we'll have the fellow in and get his actual footprints."

He went to the door and, putting his head out, made some sign, which was almost immediately followed by a trampling of feet, and Macauley entered the room, followed by two large plain-clothes policemen. The negro was evidently alarmed, for he looked about him with the wild expression of a hunted animal. But his manner was aggressive and truculent.

"Why am I being interfered with in this impertinent manner?" he demanded in the deep buzzing voice characteristic of the male negro.

"We want to have a look at your feet, Mr. Macauley," said Miller. "Will you kindly take off your shoes and socks?"

"No," roared Macauley. "I'll see you damned first!"

"Then," said Miller, "I arrest you on a charge of having murdered—"

The rest of the sentence was drowned in a sudden uproar. The tall, powerful negro, bellowing like an angry bull, had whipped out a large, strangely-shaped knife and charged furiously at the Superintendent. But the two plain-clothes men had been watching him from behind and now sprang upon him, each seizing an arm. Two sharp, metallic clicks in quick succession, a thunderous crash and an ear-splitting yell, and the formidable barbarian lay prostrate on the floor with one massive constable sitting astride his chest and the other seated on his knees.

"Now's your chance, Doctor," said Miller. "I'll get his shoes and socks off."

As Thorndyke re-inked his plates, Miller and the local superintendent expertly removed the smart patent shoes and the green silk socks from the feet of the writhing, bellowing negro. Then Thorndyke rapidly and skilfully applied the inked plates to the soles of the feet—which I steadied for the purpose—and followed up with a dexterous pressure of the paper pad, first to one foot and then—having torn off the printed sheet—to the other. In spite of the difficulties occasioned by Macauley's struggles, each sheet presented a perfectly clear and sharp print of the

sole of the foot, even the ridge-patterns of the toes and ball of the foot being quite distinct. Thorndyke laid each of the new prints on the table beside the corresponding large photograph, and invited the two superintendents to compare them.

"Yes," said Miller—and Superintendent Platt nodded his acquiescence—"there can't be a shadow of a doubt. The ink-prints and the photographs are identical, to every line and skin-marking. You've made out your case, Doctor, as you always do."

"So you see," said Thorndyke, as we smoked our evening pipes on the old stone pier, "your method was a perfectly sound one, only you didn't apply it properly. Like too many mathematicians, you started on your calculations before you had secured your data. If you had applied the simple laws of probability to the real data, they would have pointed straight to Macauley."

"How do you suppose he lost his little toes?" I asked.

"I don't suppose at all. Obviously it was a clear case of double ainhum¹."

"Ainhum!" I exclaimed with a sudden flash of recollection.

"Yes; that was what you overlooked, you compared the probabilities of three diseases either of which only very rarely causes the loss of even one little toe and infinitely rarely causes the loss of both, and none of which conditions is confined to any definite class of persons; and you ignored ainhum, a disease which attacks almost exclusively the little toe, causing it to drop off, and quite commonly destroys both little toes—a disease, moreover, which is confined to the black-skinned races. In European practice ainhum is unknown, but in Africa, and to a less extent in India, it is quite common.

"If you were to assemble all the men in the world who have lost both little toes more than nine-tenths of them would be suffering from ainhum; so that, by the laws of probability, your footprints were, by nine chances to one, those of a man who had suffered from ainhum, and therefore a black-skinned man. But as soon as you had established a black man as the probable criminal, you opened up a new field of corroborative evidence. There was a black man on the spot. That man was a native of Sierra Leone and almost certainly a man of importance there. But the victim's husband had deadly enemies in the native

¹ Ainhum (*dactylosis spontanea*) ist eine schmerzhafte Einschnürung des kleinen Zehs, die nach einigen Jahren zur Selbstamputation führt. Diese Krankheit kommt vorwiegend bei in tropischen Regionen lebenden Menschen vor, v. a. bei Afrikanern mittleren Alters. B. L.

secret societies of Sierra Leone. The letters of the husband to the wife probably contained matter incriminating certain natives of Sierra Leone. The evidence became cumulative, you see. Taken as a whole, it pointed plainly to Macauley, apart from the new fact of the murder of Toussaint in Liverpool, a city with a considerable floating population of West Africans.”

“And I gather from your reference to the African poison, *strophanthus*, that you fixed on Macauley at once when I gave you my sketch of the case?”

“Yes; especially when I saw your photographs of the footprints with the absent little toes and those characteristic chigger-scars on the toes that remained. But it was sheer luck that enabled me to fit the keystone into its place and turn mere probability into virtual certainty. I could have embraced the magician Wardale when he brought us the magic slippers. Still, it isn’t an absolute certainty, even now, though I expect it will be by to-morrow.”

And Thorndyke was right. That very evening the police entered Macauley’s chambers in Tanfield Court, where they discovered the dead woman’s attaché-case. It still contained Toussaint’s letters to his wife, and one of those letters mentioned by name, as members of a dangerous secret society, several prominent Sierra Leone men, including the accused, David Macauley.

The Blue Scarab

Medico-legal practice is largely concerned with crimes against the person, the details of which are often sordid, gruesome and unpleasant. Hence the curious and romantic case of the Blue Scarab (though really outside our speciality) came as somewhat of a relief. But to me it is of interest principally as illustrating two of the remarkable gifts which made my friend, Thorn unique as an investigator: his uncanny power of picking out the one essential fact at a glance, and his capacity to produce, when required, inexhaustible stores of unexpected knowledge of the most out-of-the-way subjects.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. James Blowgrave arrived, by appointment, at our chambers, accompanied by his daughter, a rather strikingly pretty girl of about twenty-two; and when we had mutually introduced ourselves, the consultation began without preamble.

“I didn’t give any details in my letter to you,” said Mr. Blowgrave. “I thought it better not to, for fear you might decline the case. It is really a matter of a robbery, but not quite an ordinary robbery. There are some unusual and rather mysterious features in the case. And as the police hold out very little hope, I have come to ask if you will give me your opinion on the case and perhaps look into it for me. But first I had better tell you how the affair happened.

“The robbery occurred just a fortnight ago, about half-past nine o’clock in the evening. I was sitting in my study with my daughter, looking over some things that I had taken from a small deed-box, when a servant rushed in to tell us that one of the outbuildings was on fire. Now, my study opens by a French window on the garden at the back, and, as the outbuilding was in a meadow at the side of the garden, I went out that way, leaving the French window open; but before going I hastily put the things back in the deed-box and locked it.

“The building—which I used partly as a lumber store and partly as a workshop—was well alight and the whole household was already on the

spot, the boy working the pump and the two maids carrying the buckets and throwing water on the fire. My daughter and I joined the party and helped to carry the buckets and take out what goods we could reach from the burning building. But it was nearly half an hour before we got the fire completely extinguished, and then my daughter and I went to our rooms to wash and tidy ourselves up. We returned to the study together, and when I had shut the French window my daughter proposed that we should resume our interrupted occupation. Thereupon I took out of my pocket the key of the deed-box and turned to the cabinet on which the box always stood.

“But there was no deed-box there.

“For a moment I thought I must have moved it, and cast my eyes round the room in search of it. But it was nowhere to be seen, and a moment’s reflection reminded me that I had left it in its usual place. The only possible conclusion was that during our absence at the fire, somebody must have come in by the window and taken it. And it looked as if that somebody had deliberately set fire to the outbuilding for the express purpose of luring us all out of the house.”

“That is what the appearances suggest,” Thorndyke agreed. “Is the study window furnished with a blind, or curtains?”

“Curtains,” replied Mr. Blowgrave. “But they were not drawn. Anyone in the garden could have seen into the room; and the garden is easily accessible to an active person who could climb over a low wall.”

“So far, then,” said Thorndyke, “the robbery might be the work of a casual prowler who had got into the garden and watched you through the window, and assuming that the things you had taken from the box were of value, seized an easy opportunity to make off with them. Were the things of any considerable value?”

“To a thief they were of no value at all. There were a number of share certificates, a lease, one or two agreements, some family photographs and a small box containing an old letter and a scarab. Nothing worth stealing, you see, for the certificates were made out in my name and were therefore unnegotiable.”

“And the scarab?”

“That may have been lapis lazuli, but more probably it was a blue glass imitation. In any case it was of no considerable value. It was about an inch and a half long. But before you come to any conclusion, I had better finish the story. The robbery was on Tuesday, the 7th of June. I gave information to the police, with a description of the missing property, but nothing happened until Wednesday, the 15th, when I received

a registered parcel bearing, the Southampton postmark. On opening it I found, to my astonishment, the entire contents of the deed-box, with the exception of the scarab, and this rather mysterious communication."

He took from his pocket and handed to Thorndyke an ordinary envelope addressed in typewritten characters, and sealed with a large, elliptical seal, the face of which was covered with minute hieroglyphics.

"This," said Thorndyke, "I take to be an impression of the scarab; and an excellent impression it is."

"Yes," replied Mr. Blowgrave, "I have no doubt that it is the scarab. It is about the same size."

Thorndyke looked quickly at our client with an expression of surprise.

"But," he asked, "don't you recognise the hieroglyphics on it?"

Mr. Blowgrave smiled deprecatingly. "The fact is," said he, "I don't know anything about hieroglyphics, but I should say, as far as I can judge, these look the same. What do you think, Nellie?"

Miss Blowgrave looked at the seal vaguely and replied, "I am in the same position. Hieroglyphics are to me just funny things that don't mean anything. But these look the same to me as those on our scarab, though I expect any other hieroglyphics would, for that matter."

Thorndyke made no comment on this statement, but examined the seal attentively through his lens. Then he drew out the contents of the envelope, consisting of two letters, one typewritten and the other in a faded brown handwriting. The former he read through and then inspected the paper closely, holding it up to the light to observe the watermark.

"The paper appears to be of Belgian manufacture," he remarked, passing it to me. I confirmed this observation and then read the letter, which was headed "Southampton" and ran thus:

DEAR OLD PAL,

I am sending you back some trifles removed in error. The ancient document is enclosed with this, but the curio is at present in the custody of my respected uncle. Hope its temporary loss will not inconvenience you, and that I may be able to return it to you later. Meanwhile, believe me,

*Your ever affectionate,
RUDOLPHO.*

"Who is Rudolpho?" I asked.

“The Lord knows,” replied Mr. Blowgrave. “A pseudonym of our absent friend, I presume. He seems to be a facetious sort of person.”

“He does,” agreed Thorndyke. “This letter and the seal appear to be what the schoolboys would call a leg-pull. But still, this is all quite normal. He has returned you the worthless things and has kept the one thing that has any sort of negotiable value. Are you quite clear that the scarab is not more valuable than you have assumed?”

“Well,” said Mr. Blowgrave, “I have had an expert’s opinion on it. I showed it to M. Fouquet, the Egyptologist, when he was over here from Brussels a few months ago, and his opinion was that it was a worthless imitation. Not only was it not a genuine scarab, but the inscription was a sham, too; just a collection of hieroglyphic characters jumbled together without sense or meaning.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, taking another look at the seal through his lens, “it would seem that Rudolpho, or Rudolpho’s uncle, has got a bad bargain. Which doesn’t throw much light on the affair.”

At this point Miss Blowgrave intervened. “I think, father,” said she, “you have not given Dr. Thorndyke quite all the facts about the scarab. He ought to be told about its connection with Uncle Reuben.”

As the girl spoke Thorndyke looked at her with curious expression of suddenly awakened interest. Later I understood the meaning of that look, but at the time there seemed to me nothing particularly arresting in her words.

“It is just a family tradition,” Mr. Blowgrave said deprecatingly. “probably it is all nonsense.”

“Well, let us have it, at any rate,” said Thorndyke. “We may get some light from it.”

Thus urged, Mr. Blowgrave hemmed a little shyly and began: “The story concerns my great-grandfather Silas Blowgrave, and his doings during the war with France. It seems that he commanded a privateer of which he and his brother Reuben were the joint owners, and that in the course of their last cruise they acquired a very remarkable and valuable collection of jewels. Goodness knows how they got them; not very honestly, I suspect, for they appear to have been a pair of precious rascals. Something has been said about the loot from a South American church or cathedral, but there is really nothing known about the affair. There are no documents. It is mere oral tradition and very vague and sketchy. The story goes that when they had sold off the ship, they came down to live at Shawstead in Hertfordshire, Silas occupying the manor house—in which I live at present—and Reuben a farm adjoining. The bulk of

the loot they shared out at the end of the cruise, but the jewels were kept apart to be dealt with later—perhaps when the circumstances under which they had been acquired had been forgotten. However, both men were inveterate gamblers and it seems—according to the testimony of a servant of Reuben's who overheard them—that on a certain night when they had been playing heavily, they decided to finish up by playing for the whole collection of jewels as a single stake. Silas, who had the jewels in his custody, was seen to go to the manor house and return to Reuben's house carrying a small, iron chest.

“Apparently they played late into the night, after everyone else but the servant had gone to bed, and the luck was with Reuben, though it seems probable that he gave luck some assistance. At any rate, when the play was finished and the chest handed over, Silas roundly accused him of cheating, and we may assume that a pretty serious quarrel took place. Exactly what happened is not clear, for when the quarrel began Reuben dismissed the servant, who retired to her bedroom in distant part of the house. But in the morning it was discovered that Reuben and the chest of jewels had both disappeared, and there were distinct traces of blood in the room in which the two men had been playing. Silas professed to know nothing about the disappearance; but a strong—and probably just—suspicion arose that he had murdered his brother and made away with the jewels. The result was that Silas also disappeared, and for a long time his whereabouts was not known even by his wife.

“Later it transpired that he had taken up his abode under an assumed name, in Egypt, and that he had developed an enthusiastic interest in the then new science of Egyptology—the Rosetta Stone had been deciphered only a few years previously. After a time he resumed communication with his wife, but never made any statement as to the mystery of his brother's disappearance. A few months before his death he visited his home in disguise and he then handed to his wife a little sealed packet which was to be delivered to his only son, William, on his attaining the age of twenty-one. That packet contained the scarab and the letter which you have taken from the envelope.”

“Am I to read it?” asked Thorndyke.

“Certainly, if you think it worth while,” was the reply. Thorndyke opened the yellow sheet of paper and, glancing through the brown and faded writing, read aloud:

Cairo, 4 March, 1833.

My dear son,

I am sending you, as my last gift, a valuable scarab and a few words of counsel on which I would bid you meditate. Believe me, there is much wisdom in the lore of Old Egypt. Make it your own. Treasure the scarab as a precious inheritance. Handle it often but show it to none. Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial. It is your duty, and you will have your reward. He robbed your father, but he shall make restitution.

Farewell!

*Your affectionate father,
Silas Blowgrave.*

As Thorndyke laid down the letter he looked inquiringly at our client. "Well," he said, "here are some plain instructions. How have they been carried out?"

"They haven't been carried out at all," replied Mr. Blowgrave. "As to his son William, my grandfather, he was not disposed to meddle in the matter. This seemed to be a frank admission that Silas killed his brother and concealed the body, and William didn't choose to reopen the scandal. Besides, the instructions are not so very plain. It is all very well to say, 'Give your Uncle Reuben Christian burial,' but where the deuce is Uncle Reuben?"

"It is plainly hinted," said Thorndyke, "that whoever gives the body Christian burial will stand to benefit, and the word 'restitution' seems to suggest a clue to the whereabouts of the jewels. Has no one thought it worth while to find out where the body is deposited?"

"But how could they?" demanded Blowgrave. "He doesn't give the faintest clue. He talks as if his son knew where the body was. And then, you know, even supposing Silas did not take the jewels with him, there was the question, whose property were they? To begin with, they were pretty certainly stolen property, though no one knows where they came from. Then Reuben apparently got them from Silas by fraud, and Silas got them back by robbery and murder. If William had discovered them he would have had to give them up to Reuben's sons, and yet they weren't strictly Reuben's property. No one had an undeniable claim to them, even if they could have found them."

"But that is not the case now," said Miss Blowgrave.

"No," said Mr. Blowgrave, in answer to Thorndyke's look of inquiry. "The position is quite clear now. Reuben's grandson, my cousin Arthur, has died recently, and as he had no children, he has dispersed his property. The old farm-house and the bulk of his estate he has left to

a nephew, but he made a small bequest to my daughter and named her as the residuary legatee. So that what ever rights Reuben had to the jewels are now vested in her, and on my death she will be Silas's heir, too. As a matter of fact," Mr. Blowgrave continued, "we were discussing this very question on the night of the robbery. I may as well tell you that my girl will be left pretty poorly off when I go, for there is a heavy mortgage on our property and mighty little capital. Uncle Reuben's jewels would have made the old home secure for her if we could have laid our hands on them. However, I mustn't take up your time with our domestic affairs."

"Your domestic affairs are not entirely irrelevant," said Thorndyke. "But what is it that you want me to do in the matter?"

"Well," said Blowgrave, "my house has been robbed and my premises set fire to. The police can apparently do nothing. They say there is no clue at all unless the robbery was committed by somebody in the house, which is absurd, seeing that the servants were all engaged in putting out the fire. But I want the robber traced punished, and I want to get the scarab back. It may be intrinsically valueless, as M. Fouquet said, but Silas's testamentary letter seems to indicate that it had some value. At any rate, it is an heirloom, and I am loath to lose it. It seems a presumptuous thing to ask you to investigate a trumpery robbery, but I should take it as a great kindness if you would look into the matter."

"Cases of robbery pure and simple," replied Thorndyke, "are rather alien to my ordinary practice, but in this one there are certain curious features that seem to make an investigation worth while. Yes, Mr. Blowgrave, I will look into the case, and I have some hope that we may be able to lay our hands on the robber, in spite of the apparent absence of clues. I will ask you to leave both these letters for me to examine more minutely, and I shall probably want to make an inspection of the premises—perhaps to-morrow."

"Whenever you like," said Blowgrave. "I am delighted that you are willing to undertake the inquiry. I have heard so much about you from my friend Stalker, of the *GRIFFIN LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY*, for whom you have acted on several occasions."

"Before you go," said Thorndyke, "there is one point that we must clear up. Who is there besides yourselves that knows of the existence of the scarab and this letter and the history attaching to them?"

"I really can't say," replied Blowgrave. "No one has seen them but my cousin Arthur. I once showed them to him, and he may have talked about them in the family. I didn't treat the matter as a secret."

When our visitors had gone we discussed the bearings of the case.

"It is quite a romantic story," said I, "and the robbery has its points of interest, but I am rather inclined to agree with the police—there is mighty little to go on."

"There would have been less," said Thorndyke, "if our sporting friend hadn't been so pleased with himself. That typewritten letter was a piece of gratuitous impudence. Our gentleman overrated his security and crowed too loud."

"I don't see that there is much to be gleaned from the letter, all the same," said I.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Jervis," he exclaimed, "because I was proposing to hand the letter over to you to examine and report on."

"I was only referring to the superficial appearances," I said hastily. "No doubt a detailed examination will bring something more distinctive into view."

"I have no doubt it will," he said, "and as there are reasons for pushing on the investigation as quickly as possible, I suggest that you get to work at once. I will occupy myself with the old letter and the envelope."

On this I began my examination without delay, and as a preliminary I proceeded to take a facsimile photograph of the letter by putting it in a large printing frame with a sensitive plate and a plate of clear glass. The resulting negative showed not only the typewritten lettering, but also the watermark and wire lines of the paper, and a faint grease spot. Next I turned my attention to the lettering itself, and here I soon began to accumulate quite a number of identifiable peculiarities. The machine was apparently a Corona, fitted with the small "Elite" type, and the alignment was markedly defective. The "lower case"—or small—"a" was well below the line, although the capital "A" appeared to be correctly placed; the "u" was slightly above the line, and the small "m" was partly clogged with dirt.

Up to this point I had been careful to manipulate the letter with forceps (although it had been handled by at least three persons, to my knowledge), and I now proceeded to examine it for finger-prints. As I could detect none by mere inspection, I dusted the back of the paper with finely powdered fuchsin, and distributed the powder by tapping the paper lightly. This brought into view quite a number of finger-prints, especially round the edges of the letter, and though most of them were very faint and shadowy, it was possible to make out the ridge pattern well enough for our purpose. Having blown off the excess of powder, I took the letter to the room where the large copying camera was set up,

to photograph it before developing the finger-prints on the front. But here I found our laboratory assistant, Polton, in possession, with the sealed envelope fixed to the copying easel. "It shan't be a minute, sir," said he. "The doctor wants an enlarged photograph of this seal. I've got the plate in."

I waited while he made his exposure and then proceeded to take the photograph of the letter, or rather of the finger-prints on the back of it. When I had developed the negative I powdered the front of the letter and brought out several more finger-prints—thumbs this time. They were a little difficult to see where they were imposed on the lettering, but, as the latter was bright blue and the fuchsin powder was red, this confusion disappeared in the photograph, in which the lettering was almost invisible while the finger-prints were more distinct than they had appeared to the eye. This completed my examination, and when I had verified the make of typewriter by reference to our album of specimens of typewriting, I left the negatives for Polton to dry and print and went down to the sitting-room to draw up my little report. I had just finished this and was speculating on what had become of Thorndyke, when I heard his quick step on the stair and a few moments later he entered with a roll of paper in his hand. This he unrolled on the table, fixing it open with one or two lead paper-weights, and I came round to inspect it, when I found it to be a sheet of the Ordnance map on the scale of twenty-five inches to the mile.

"Here is the Blowgraves' place," said Thorndyke, "nearly in the middle of the sheet. This is his house—Shawstead Manor—and that will probably be the out-building that was on fire. I take it that the house marked Dingle Farm is the one that Uncle Reuben occupied."

"Probably," I agreed. "But I don't see why you wanted this map if you are going down to the place itself tomorrow."

"The advantage of a map," said Thorndyke, "is that you can see all over it at once and get the lie of the land well into your mind; and you can measure all distances accurately and quickly with a scale and a pair of dividers. When we go down to-morrow, we shall know our way about as well as Blowgrave himself."

"And what use will that be?" I asked. "Where does the topography come into the case?"

"Well, Jervis," he replied, "there is the robber, for instance; he came from somewhere and he went somewhere. A study of the map may give us a hint as to his movements. But here comes Polton 'with the documents,' as poor Miss Flite would say. What have you got for us, Polton?"

"They aren't quite dry, sir," said Polton, laying four large bromide prints on the table. "There's the enlargement of the seal—ten by eight, mounted—and three unmounted prints of Dr. Jervis's."

Thorndyke looked at my photographs critically. "They're excellent, Jervis," said he. "The finger prints are perfectly legible, though faint. I only hope some of them are the right ones. That is my left thumb. I don't see yours. The small one is presumably Miss Blowgrave's. We must take her finger-prints to-morrow, and her father's, too. Then we shall know if we have got any of the robber's." He ran his eye over my report and nodded approvingly. "There is plenty there to enable us to identify the typewriter if we can get hold of it, and the paper is very distinctive. What do you think of the seal?" he added, laying the enlarged photograph before me.

"It is magnificent," I replied, with a grin. "Perfectly monumental."

"What are you grinning at?" he demanded.

"I was thinking that you seem to be counting your chickens in pretty good time," said I. "You are making elaborate preparations to identify the scarab, but you are rather disregarding the classical advice of the prudent Mrs. Glasse."

"I have a presentiment that we shall get that scarab," said he. "At any rate we ought to be in a position to identify it instantly and certainly if we are able to get a sight of it."

"We are not likely to," said I. "Still, there is no harm in providing for the improbable."

This was evidently Thorndyke's view, and he certainly made ample provision for this most improbable contingency; for, having furnished himself with a drawing-board and a sheet of tracing-paper, he pinned the latter over the photograph on the board and proceeded, with a fine pen and hectograph ink, to make a careful and minute tracing of the intricate and bewildering hieroglyphic inscription on the seal. When he had finished it he transferred it to a clay duplicator and took off half-a-dozen copies, one of which he handed to me. I looked at it dubiously and remarked: "You have said that the medical jurist must make all knowledge his province. Has he got to be an Egyptologist, too?"

"He will be the better medical jurist if he is," was the reply, of which I made a mental note for my future guidance. But meanwhile Thorndyke's proceedings were, to me, perfectly incomprehensible. What was his object in making this minute tracing? The seal itself was sufficient for identification. I lingered, awhile hoping that some fresh development might throw a light on the mystery. But his next proceeding was

like to have reduced me to stupefaction. I saw him go to the bookshelves and take down a book. As he laid it on the table I glanced at the title, and when I saw that it was »Raper's Navigation Tables« I stole softly out into the lobby, put on my hat and went for a walk.

When I returned the investigation was apparently concluded, for Thorndyke was seated in his easy chair, placidly reading »The Compleat Angler«². On the table lay a large circular protractor, a straight-edge, an architect's scale and a sheet of tracing-paper on which was a tracing in hectograph ink of Shawstead Manor.

"Why did you make this tracing?" I asked. "Why not take the map itself?"

"We don't want the whole of it," he replied, "and I dislike cutting up maps."

By taking an informal lunch in the train, we arrived at Shawstead Manor by half-past two. Our approach up the drive had evidently been observed, for Blowgrave and his daughter were waiting at the porch to receive us. The former came forward with outstretched hand, but a distinctly woebegone expression, and exclaimed: "It is most kind of you to come down; but alas! you are too late."

"Too late for what?" demanded Thorndyke.

"I will show you," replied Blowgrave, and seizing my colleague by the arm, he strode off excitedly to a little wicket at the side of the house, and, passing through it, hurried along a narrow alley that skirted the garden wall and ended in a large meadow, at one end of which stood a dilapidated windmill. Across this meadow he bustled, dragging my colleague with him, until he reached a heap of freshly-turned earth, where he halted and pointed tragically to a spot where the turf had evidently been raised and untidily replaced.

"There!" he exclaimed, stooping to pull up the loose turfs and thereby exposing what was evidently a large hole, recently and hastily filled in. "That was done last night or early this morning, for I walked over this meadow only yesterday evening and there was no sign of disturbed ground then."

Thorndyke stood looking down at the hole with a faint smile. "And what do you infer from that?" he asked.

"Infer!" shrieked Blowgrave. "Why, I infer that whoever dug this hole was searching for Uncle Reuben and the lost jewels!"

² Berühmtes Buch von Izaak Walton (1593–1683).

"I am inclined to agree with you," Thorndyke said calmly. "He happened to search in the wrong place, but that is his affair."

"The wrong place!" Blowgrave and his daughter exclaimed in unison. "How do you know it is the wrong place?"

"Because," replied Thorndyke, "I believe I know the right place, and this is not it. But we can put the matter to the test, and we had better do so. Can you get a couple of men with picks and shovels? Or shall we handle the tools ourselves?"

"I think that would be better," said Blowgrave, who was quivering with excitement. "We don't want to take anyone into our confidence if we can help it."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "Then I suggest that you fetch the tools while I locate the spot."

Blowgrave assented eagerly and went off at a brisk trot, while the young lady remained with us and watched Thorndyke with intense curiosity.

"I mustn't interrupt you with questions," said she "but I can't imagine how you found out where Uncle Reuben was buried."

"We will go into that later," he replied; "but first we have got to find Uncle Reuben." He laid his research case down on the ground, and opening it, took out three sheets of paper, each bearing a duplicate of his tracing of the map; and on each was marked a spot on this meadow from which a number of lines radiated like the spokes of a wheel.

"You see, Jervis," he said, exhibiting them to me "the advantage of a map. I have been able to rule off these sets of bearings regardless of obstructions, such as those young trees, which have arisen since Silas's day, and mark the spot in its correct place. If the recent obstructions prevent us from taking the bearings, we can still find the spot by measurements with the land-chain or tape."

"Why have you got three plans?" I asked.

"Because there are three imaginable places. No. 1 is the most likely; No. 2 less likely, but possible; No. 3 is impossible. That is the one that our friend tried last night. No. 1 is among those young trees, and we will now see if we can pick up the bearings in spite of them."

We moved on to the clump of young trees, where Thorndyke took from the research-case a tall, folding camera-tripod and a large prisma compass with an aluminium dial. With the latter he made one or two trial bearings and then, setting up the tripod, fixed the compass on it. For some minutes Miss Blowgrave and I watched him as he shifted the tripod from spot to spot, peering through the sight-vane of the compass and glancing occasionally at the map. At length he turned to us and

said: "We are in luck. None of these trees interferes with our bearings." He took from the research-case a surveyor's arrow, and sticking it in the ground under the tripod, added: "That is the spot. But we may have to dig a good way round it, for a compass is only a rough instrument." At this moment Mr. Blowgrave staggered up, breathing hard, and flung down on the ground three picks, two shovels and a spade. "I won't hinder you, doctor, by asking for explanations," said he, "but I am utterly mystified. You must tell us what it all means when we have finished our work."

This Thorndyke promised to do, but meanwhile he took off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves, seized the spade and began cutting out a large square of turf. As the soil was uncovered, Blowgrave and I attacked it with picks and Miss Blowgrave shovelled away the loose earth. "Do you know how far down we have to go?" I asked.

"The body lies six feet below the surface," Thorndyke replied; and as he spoke he laid down his spade, and taking a telescope from the research-case, swept it round the margin of the meadow and finally pointed it at a farm house some six hundred yards distant, of which he made a somewhat prolonged inspection, after which he took the remaining pick and fell to work on the opposite corner of the exposed square of earth. For nearly half-an-hour we worked on steadily, gradually eating our way downwards, plying pick and shovel alternately, while Miss Blowgrave cleared the loose earth away from the edges of the deepening pit. Then a halt was called and we came to the surface, wiping our faces.

"I think, Nellie," said Blowgrave, divesting himself of his waistcoat, "a jug of lemonade and four tumblers would be useful, unless our visitors would prefer beer."

We both gave our votes for lemonade, and Miss Nellie tripped away towards the house, while Thorndyke, taking up his telescope, once more inspected the farm house.

"You seem greatly interested in that house," I remarked.

"I am," he replied, handing me the telescope "Just take a look at the window in the right-hand gable, but keep under the tree."

I pointed the telescope at the gable and there observed an open window at which a man was seated. He held a binocular glass to his eyes and the instrument appeared to be directed at us.

"We are being spied on, I fancy," said I, passing the telescope to Blowgrave, "but I suppose it doesn't matter. This is your land, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Blowgrave, "but still, we didn't want any spectators. That is Harold Bowker," he added steadying the telescope against a tree, "my

cousin Arthur's nephew, whom I told you about as having inherited the farm-house. He seems mighty interested in us; but small things interest one in the country."

Here the appearance of Miss Nellie, advancing across the meadow with an inviting-looking basket, diverted our attention from our inquisitive watcher. Six thirsty eyes were riveted on that basket until it drew near and presently disgorged a great glass jug and four tumblers, when we each took off a long and delicious draught and then jumped down into the pit to resume our labours.

Another half-hour passed. We had excavated in some places to nearly the full depth and were just discussing the advisability of another short rest when Blowgrave, who was working in one corner, uttered a loud cry and stood up suddenly, holding something in his fingers. A glance at the object showed it to be a bone, brown and earth-stained, but evidently a bone. Evidently, too, a human bone, as Thorndyke decided when Blowgrave handed it to him triumphantly.

"We have been very fortunate," said he, "to get so near at the first trial. This is from the right great toe, so we may assume that the skeleton lies just outside this pit, but we had better excavate carefully in your corner and see exactly how the bones lie." This he proceeded to do himself, probing cautiously with the spade and clearing the earth away from the corner. Very soon the remaining bones of the right foot came into view and then the ends of the two leg-bones and a portion of the left foot.

"We can see now," said he, "how the skeleton lies, and all we have to do is to extend the excavation in that direction. But there is only room for one to work down here. I think you and Mr. Blowgrave had better dig down from the surface."

On this, I climbed out of the pit, followed reluctantly by Blowgrave, who still held the little brown bone in his hand and was in a state of wild excitement and exultation that somewhat scandalised his daughter.

"It seems rather ghoulish," she remarked, "to be gloating over poor Uncle Reuben's body in this way."

"I know," said Blowgrave, "it isn't reverent. But I didn't kill Uncle Reuben, you know, whereas—well it was a long time ago." With this rather inconsequent conclusion he took a draught of lemonade, seized his pick and fell to work with a will. I, too, indulged in a draught and passed a full tumbler down to Thorndyke. But before resuming my labours I picked up the telescope and once more inspected the farm-house. The

window was still open, but the watcher had apparently become bored with the not very thrilling spectacle. At any rate he had disappeared.

From this time onward every few minutes brought some discovery. First, a pair of deeply rusted steel shoe buckles; then one or two buttons, and presently a fine gold watch with a fob-chain and a bunch of seals, looking uncannily new and fresh and seeming more fraught with tragedy than even the bones themselves. In his cautious digging, Thorndyke was careful not to disturb the skeleton; and looking down into the narrow trench that was growing from the corner of the pit, I could see both legs, with only the right foot missing, projecting from the miniature cliff. Meanwhile our of the trench was deepening rapidly, so that Thorndyke presently warned us to stop digging and bade us come down and shovel away the earth as he disengaged it.

At length the whole skeleton, excepting the head, was uncovered, though it lay undisturbed as it might have lain in its coffin. And now, as Thorndyke picked away the earth around the head, we could see that the skull was propped forward as if it rested on a high pillow. A little more careful probing with the pick-point served to explain this appearance. For as the earth fell away and disclosed the grinning skull, there came into view the edge and ironbound corners of a small chest.

It was an impressive spectacle; weird, solemn and rather dreadful. There for over a century the ill-fated gambler had lain, his mouldering head pillowed on the booty of unrecorded villainy, booty that had been won by fraud, retrieved by violence, and hidden at last by the final winner with the witness of his crime.

"Here is a fine text for a moralist who would preach on the vanity of riches," said Thorndyke.

We all stood silent for a while, gazing, not without awe, at the stark figure that lay guarding the ill-gotten treasure. Miss Blowgrave—who had been helped down when we descended—crept closer to her father and murmured that it was "rather awful"; while Blowgrave himself displayed a queer mixture of exultation and shuddering distaste.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a voice from above, and we all looked up with a start. A youngish man was standing on the brink of the pit, looking down on us with very evident disapproval.

"It seems that I have come just in the nick of time," observed the newcomer. "I shall have to take possession of that chest, you know, and of the remains, too, I suppose. That is my ancestor, Reuben Blowgrave."

"Well, Harold," said Blowgrave, "you can have Uncle Reuben if you want him. But the chest belongs to Nellie."

Here Mr. Harold Bowker—I recognised him now as the watcher from the window—dropped down into the pit and advanced with something of a swagger.

“I am Reuben’s heir,” said he, “through my Uncle Arthur, and I take possession of this property and the remains.”

“Pardon me, Harold,” said Blowgrave, “but Nellie is Arthur’s residuary legatee, and this is the residue of the estate.”

“Rubbish!” exclaimed Bowker. “By the way, how did you find out where he was buried?”

“Oh, that was quite simple,” replied Thorndyke with unexpected geniality. “I’ll show you the plan.” He climbed up to the surface and returned in a few moments with the three tracings and his letter-case. “This is how we located the spot.” He handed the plan numbered 3 to Bowker, who took it from him and stood looking at it with a puzzled frown.

“But this isn’t the place,” he said at length.

“Isn’t it?” queried Thorndyke. “No, of course; I’ve given you the wrong one. This is the plan.” He handed Bowker the plan marked No. 1, and took the other from him, laying it down on a heap of earth. Then, as Bowker pored gloomily over No. 1, he took a knife and a pencil from his pocket, and with his back to our visitor; scraped the lead of the pencil, letting the black powder fall on the plan that he had just laid down. I watched him with some curiosity; and when I observed that the black scrapings fell on two spots near the edges of the paper, a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind, which was confirmed when I saw him tap the paper lightly with his pencil, gently blow away the powder, and quickly producing my photograph of the typewritten letter from his case, hold it for a moment beside the plan.

“This is all very well,” said Bowker, looking up from the plan, “but how did you find out about these bearings?”

Thorndyke swiftly replaced the letter in his case, and turning round, replied, “I am afraid I can’t give you any further information.”

“Can’t you, indeed!” Bowker exclaimed insolently. “Perhaps I shall compel you to. But, at any rate, I forbid any of you to lay hands on my property.”

Thorndyke looked at him steadily and said in an ominously quiet tone: “Now, listen to me, Mr. Bowker. Let us have an end of this nonsense. You have played a risky game and you have lost. How much you have lost I can’t say until I know whether Mr. Blowgrave intends to prosecute.”

"To prosecute!" shouted Bowker. "What the deuce do you mean by prosecute?"

"I mean," said Thorndyke, "that on the 7th of June, after nine o'clock at night, you entered the dwelling-house of Mr. Blowgrave and stole and carried away certain of his goods and chattels. A part of them you have restored, but you are still in possession of some of the stolen property, to wit, a scarab and a deed-box."

As Thorndyke made this statement in his calm, level tones, Bowker's face blanched to a tallowy white, and he stood staring at my colleague, the very picture of astonishment and dismay. But he fired a last shot.

"This is sheer midsummer madness," he exclaimed huskily; "and you know it."

Thorndyke turned to our host. "It is for you to settle, Mr. Blowgrave," said he. "I hold conclusive evidence that Mr. Bowker stole your deed-box. If you decide to prosecute I shall produce that evidence in court and he will certainly be convicted."

Blowgrave and his daughter looked at the accused man with an embarrassment almost equal to his own.

"I am astounded," the former said at length; "but I don't want to be vindictive. Look here, Harold, hand over the scarab and we'll say no more about it."

"You can't do that," said Thorndyke. "The law doesn't allow you to compound a robbery. He can return the property if he pleases and you can do as you think best about prosecuting. But you can't make conditions."

There was silence for some seconds; then, without another word, the crestfallen adventurer turned, and scrambling up out of the pit, took a hasty departure.

It was nearly a couple of hours later that, after a leisurely wash and a hasty, nondescript meal, we carried the little chest from the dining-room to the study. Here, when he had closed the French window and drawn the curtains, Mr. Blowgrave produced a set of tools and we fell to work on the iron fastenings of the chest. It was no light task, though a century's rust had thinned the stout bands, but at length the lid yielded to the thrust of a long case-opener and rose with a protesting creak. The chest was lined with a double thickness of canvas, apparently part of a sail, and contained a number of small leathern bags, which, as we lifted them out, one by one, felt as if they were filled with pebbles. But when we untied the thongs of one and emptied its contents into a wooden bowl, Blowgrave heaved a sigh of ecstasy and Miss Nellie uttered a little

scream of delight. They were all cut stones, and most of them of exceptional size; rubies, emeralds, sapphires and a few diamonds. As to their value, we could form but the vaguest guess; but Thorndyke, who was a fair judge of gem-stones, gave it as his opinion that they were fine specimens of their kind, though roughly cut, and that they had probably formed the enrichment of some shrine.

“The question is,” said Blowgrave, gazing gloatingly on the bowl of sparkling gems, “what are we to do with them?”

“I suggest,” said Thorndyke, “that Dr. Jervis stay here to-night to help you to guard them and that in the morning you take them up to London and deposit them, at your bank.”

Blowgrave fell in eagerly with this suggestion, which I seconded. “But,” said he, “that chest is a queer-looking package to be carrying abroad. Now, if we only had that confounded deed-box—”

“There’s a deed-box on the cabinet behind you,” said Thorndyke.

Blowgrave turned round sharply. “God bless us!” he exclaimed. “It has come back the way it went. Harold must have slipped in at the window while we were at tea. Well, I’m glad he has made restitution. When I look at that bowl and think what he must have narrowly missed, I don’t feel inclined to be hard on him. I suppose the scarab is inside—not that it matters much now.”

The scarab was inside in an envelope; and as Thorndyke turned it over in his hand and examined the hieroglyphics on it through his lens, Miss Blowgrave asked: “Is it of any value, Dr. Thorndyke? It can’t have any connection with the secret of the hiding-place, because you found the jewels without it.”

“By the way, doctor, I don’t know whether it is permissible for me to ask, but how on earth did you find out where the jewels were hidden? To me it looks like black magic.”

Thorndyke laughed in a quiet, inward fashion. “There is nothing magical about it,” said he. “It was a perfectly simple, straightforward problem. But Miss Nellie is wrong. We had the scarab; that is to say we had the wax impression of it, which is the same thing. And the scarab was the key to the riddle. You see,” he continued, “Silas’s letter and the scarab formed together a sort of intelligence test.”

“Did they?” said Blowgrave. “Then he drew a blank every time.”

Thorndyke chuckled. “His descendants were certainly a little lacking in enterprise,” he admitted. “Silas’s instructions were perfectly plain and explicit. Whoever would find the treasure must first acquire some knowledge of Egyptian lore and must study the scarab attentively. It



Thorndyke's Tracing of the Impression of the Scarab



The Transliteration of the Hieroglyphics

was the broadest of hints, but no one—excepting Harold Bowker, who must have heard about the scarab from his Uncle Arthur—seems to have paid any attention to it.

“Now it happens that I have just enough elementary knowledge of the hieroglyphic characters to enable me to spell them out when they are used alphabetically; and as soon as I saw the seal, I could see that these hieroglyphics formed English words. My attention was first attracted by the second group of signs, which spelled the word ‘Reuben,’ and then I saw that the first group spelled ‘Uncle.’ Of course, the instant I heard Miss Nellie speak of the connection between the scarab and Uncle Reuben, the murder was out. I saw at a glance that the scarab contained all the required information. Last night I made a careful tracing of the hieroglyphics and then rendered them into our own alphabet. This is the result.”

He took from his letter-case and spread out on the table a duplicate of the tracing which I had seen him make, and of which he had given me a copy. But since I had last seen it, it had received an addition; under each group of signs the equivalents in modern Roman lettering had been written, and these made the following words:

UNKL RUBN IS IN TH MILL FIELD SKS FT DOWN CHURCH
 SPIR NORTH TEN THIRTY EAST DINGL SOUTH GABL NORTH
 ATY FORTY FIF WEST GOD SAF KING JORJ.

Our two friends gazed at Thorndyke's transliteration in blank astonishment. At length Blowgrave remarked: “But this translation must have demanded a very profound knowledge of the Egyptian writing.”

“Not at all,” replied Thorndyke. “Any intelligent person could master the Egyptian alphabet in an hour. The language, of course, is quite

another matter. The spelling of this is a little crude, but it is quite intelligible and does Silas great credit, considering how little was known in his time.”

“How do you suppose M. Fouquet came to overlook this?” Blowgrave asked.

“Naturally enough,” was the reply. “He was looking for an Egyptian inscription. But this is not an Egyptian inscription. Does he speak English?”

“Very little. Practically not at all.”

“Then, as the words are English words and imperfectly spelt, the hieroglyphics must have appeared to him mere nonsense. And he was right as to the scarab being an imitation.”

“There is another point,” said Blowgrave. “How was it that Harold made that extraordinary mistake about the place? The directions are clear enough. All you had to do was to go out there with a compass and take the bearings just as they were given.”

“But,” said Thorndyke, “that is exactly what he did, and hence the mistake. He was apparently unaware of the phenomenon known as the Secular Variation of the Compass. As you know, the compass does not—usually—point to true north, but to the Magnetic North; and the Magnetic North is continually changing its position. When Reuben was buried—about 1810—it was twenty-four degrees, twenty-six minutes west of true north; at the present time it is fourteen degrees, forty-eight minutes west of true north. So Harold’s bearings would be no less than ten degrees out, which of course, gave him a totally wrong position. But Silas was a ship-master, a navigator, and of course knew all about the vagaries of the compass; and, as his directions were intended for use at some date unknown to him, I assumed that the bearings that he gave were true bearings—that when he said ‘north’ he meant true north, which is always the same; and this turned out to be the case. But I also prepared a plan with magnetic bearings corrected up to date. Here are the three plans: No. 1—the one we used—showing true bearings; No. 2, showing corrected magnetic bearings which might have given us the correct spot; and No. 3, with uncorrected magnetic bearings, giving us the spot where Harold dug, and which could not possibly have been the right spot.”

On the following morning I escorted the deed-box, filled with the booty and tied up and sealed with the scarab, to Mr. Blowgrave’s bank. And that ended our connection with the case; excepting that, a month or

two later, we attended by request the unveiling in Shawstead churchyard of a fine monument to Reuben Blowgrave. This took the slightly inappropriate form of an obelisk, on which were cut the name and approximate dates, with the added inscription: "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return after many days"; concerning which Thorndyke remarked dryly that he supposed the exhortation applied equally even if the bread happened to belong to someone else.

The New Jersey Sphinx

“**A** rather curious neighbourhood this, Jervis,” my friend Thorndyke remarked as we turned into Upper Bedford Place; “a sort of aviary for cosmopolitan birds of passage, especially those of the Oriental variety. The Asiatic and African faces that one sees at the windows of these Bloomsbury boarding houses almost suggest an overflow from the ethnographical galleries of the adjacent British Museum.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “there must be quite a considerable population of Africans, Japanese and Hindus in Bloomsbury; particularly Hindus.”

As I spoke, and as if in illustration of my statement, a dark-skinned man rushed out of one of the houses farther down the street and began to advance towards us in a rapid, bewildered fashion, stopping to look at each street door as he came to it. His hatless condition—though he was exceedingly well dressed—and his agitated manner immediately attracted my attention, and Thorndyke’s too, for the latter remarked, “Our friend seems to be in trouble. An accident, perhaps, or a case of sudden illness.”

Here the stranger, observing our approach, ran for ward to meet us and asked in an agitated tone, “Can you tell me, please, where I can find a doctor?”

“I am a medical man,” replied Thorndyke, “and so is my friend.”

Our acquaintance grasped Thorndyke’s sleeve and exclaimed eagerly, “Come with me, then, quickly, if you please. A most dreadful thing has happened.”

He hurried us along at something between a trot and a quick walk, and as we proceeded he continued excitedly, “I am quite confused and terrified; it is all so strange and sudden and terrible.”

“Try,” said Thorndyke, “to calm yourself a little and tell us what has happened.”

"I will," was the agitated reply. "It is my cousin, Dinanath Byramji—his surname is the same as mine. Just now I went to his room and was horrified to find him lying on the floor, staring at the ceiling and blowing—like this," and he puffed out his cheeks with a soft blowing noise. "I spoke to him and shook his hand, but he was like a dead man. This is the house."

He darted up the steps to an open door at which a rather scared page-boy was on guard, and running along the hall, rapidly ascended the stairs. Following him closely, we reached a rather dark first-floor landing where, at a half-open door, a servant-maid stood listening with an expression of awe to a rhythmical snoring sound that issued from the room.

The unconscious man lay as Mr. Byramji had said staring fixedly at the ceiling with wide-open, glazy eyes, puffing out his cheeks slightly at each breath. But the breathing was shallow and slow, and it grew perceptibly slower, with lengthening pauses. And even as I was timing it with my watch while Thorndyke examined the pupils with the aid of a wax match, it stopped. I laid my finger on the wrist and caught one or two slow, flickering beats. Then the pulse stopped too.

"He is gone," said I. "He must have burst one of the large arteries."

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "though one would not have expected it at his age. But wait! What is this?"

He pointed to the right ear, in the hollow of which a few drops of blood had collected, and as he spoke he drew his hand gently over the dead man's head and moved it slightly from side to side.

"There is a fracture of the base of the skull," said he, "and quite distinct signs of contusion of the scalp." He turned to Mr. Byramji, who stood wringing his hand and gazing incredulously at the dead man, and asked: "Can you throw any light on this?"

The Indian looked at him vacantly. The sudden tragedy seemed to have paralysed his brain. "I don't understand," said he. "What does it mean?" "It means," replied Thorndyke, "that he has received a heavy blow on the head."

For a few moments Mr. Byramji continued to stare vacantly at my colleague. Then he seemed suddenly to realise the import of Thorndyke's remark, for he started up excitedly and turned to the door, outside which the two servants were hovering.

"Where is the person gone who came in with my cousin?" he demanded.

"You saw him go out, Albert," said the maid. "Tell Mr. Byramji where he went to."

The page tiptoed into the room with a fearful eye fixed on the corpse, and replied falteringly, "I only see the back of him as he went out, and all I know is that he turned to the left. P'raps he's gone for a doctor."

"Can you give us any description of him?" asked Thorndyke.

"I only see the back of him," repeated the page. "He was a shortish gentleman and he had on a dark suit of clothes and a hard felt hat. That's all I know."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "We may want to ask you some more questions presently." and having conducted the page to the door, he shut it and turned to Mr. Byramji.

"Have you any idea who it was that was with your cousin?" he asked.

"None at all," was the reply. "I was sitting in my room opposite, writing, when I heard my cousin come up the stairs with another person, to whom he was talking. I could not hear what he was saying. They went into his room—this room—and I could occasionally catch the sound of their voices. In about a quarter of an hour I heard the door open and shut, and then someone went downstairs, softly and rather quickly. I finished the letter that I was writing, and when I had addressed it I came in here to ask my cousin who the visitor was. I thought it might be someone who had come to negotiate for the ruby."

"The ruby!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What ruby do you refer to?"

"The great ruby," replied Byramji. "But of course you have not—" He broke off suddenly and stood for a few moments staring at Thorndyke with parted lips and wide-open eyes; then abruptly he turned, and kneeling beside the dead man he began, in a curious, caressing, half-apologetic manner, first to pass his hands gently over the body at the waist and then to unfasten the clothes. This brought into view a handsome, soft leather belt, evidently of native workmanship, worn next to the skin and furnished with three pockets. Mr. Byramji unbuttoned and explored them in quick succession, and it was evident that they were all empty.

"It is gone!" he exclaimed in low, intense tones, "Gone! Ah! But how little would it signify! But thou, dear Dinanath, my brother, my friend, thou art gone, too!"

He lifted the dead man's hand and pressed it to his cheek, murmuring endearments in his own tongue. Presently he laid it down reverently,

and sprang up, and I was startled at the change in his aspect. The delicate, gentle, refined face had suddenly become the face of a Fury—fierce, sinister, vindictive.

“This wretch must die!” he exclaimed huskily. “This sordid brute who, without compunction, has crushed out a precious life as one would carelessly crush a fly, for the sake of a paltry crystal—he must die, if I have to follow him and strangle him with my own hands!”

Thorndyke laid his hand on Byramji's shoulder. “I sympathise with you most cordially,” said he. “If it is as you think, and appearances suggest, that your cousin has been murdered as a mere incident of robbery, the murderer's life is forfeit, and Justice cries aloud for retribution. The fact of murder will be determined, for or against, by a proper inquiry. Meanwhile we have to ascertain who this unknown man is and what happened while he was with your cousin.”

Byramji made a gesture of despair. “But the man has disappeared, and nobody has seen him! What can we do?”

“Let us look around us,” plied Thorndyke, “and see if we can judge what has happened in this room. What, for instance, is this?”

He picked up from a corner near the door a small leather object, which he handed to Mr. Byramji. The Indian seized it eagerly, exclaiming: “Ah! It is the little bag in which my cousin used to carry the ruby. So he had taken it from his belt.”

“It hasn't been dropped, by any chance?” I suggested.

In an instant Mr. Byramji was down on his knees, peering and groping about the floor, and Thorndyke and I joined in the search. But, as might have been expected there was no sign of the ruby, nor, indeed, of anything else, excepting a hat which I picked up from under the table.

“No,” said Mr. Byramji, rising with a dejected air. “It is gone—of course it is gone, and the murderous villain—”

Here his glance fell on the hat, which I had laid on the table, and he bent forward to look at it.

“Whose hat is this?” he demanded, glancing at the chair on which Thorndyke's hat and mine had been placed.

“Is it not your cousin's?” asked Thorndyke.

“No, certainly not. His hat was like mine—we bought them both together. It had a white silk lining with his initials, D. B., in gold. This has no lining and is a much older hat. It must be the murderer's hat.”

“If it is,” said Thorndyke, “that is a most important fact—important in two respects. Could you let us see your hat?”

“Certainly,” replied Byramji, walking quickly, but with a soft tread, to the door. As he went out, shutting the door silently behind him, Thorndyke picked up the derelict hat and swiftly tried it on the head of the dead man. As far as I could judge, it appeared to fit, and this Thorndyke confirmed as he replaced it on the table.

“As you see,” said he, “it is at least a practical fit, which is a fact of some significance.”

Here Mr. Byramji returned with his own hat, which he placed on the table by the side of the other, and thus placed, crown uppermost, the two hats were closely similar. Both were black, hard felts of the prevalent “bowler” shape, and of good quality, and the difference in their age and state of preservation was not striking; but when Byramji turned them over and exhibited their interiors it was seen that whereas the strange hat was unlined save for the leather head-band, Byramji’s had a white silk lining and bore the owner’s initials in embossed gilt letters.

“What happened,” said Thorndyke, when he had carefully compared the two hats, “seems fairly obvious. The two men, on entering, placed their hats crown upwards on the table. In some way—perhaps during a struggle—the visitor’s hat was knocked down and rolled under the table. Then the stranger, on leaving, picked up the only visible hat—almost identically similar to his own—and put it on.”

“Is it not rather singular,” I asked, “that he should not have noticed the different feel of a strange hat?”

“I think not,” Thorndyke replied. “If he noticed anything unusual he would probably assume that he had put it on the wrong way round. Remember that he would be extremely hurried and agitated. And when once he had left the house he would not dare to take the risk of returning, though he would doubtless realise the gravity of the mistake. And now,” he continued, “would you mind giving us a few particulars? You have spoken of a great ruby, which your cousin had, and which seems to be missing.”

“Yes. You shall come to my room and I will tell you about it; but first let us lay my poor cousin decently on his bed.”

“I think,” said Thorndyke, “the body ought not to be moved until the police have seen it.”

“Perhaps you are right,” Byramji agreed reluctantly, “though it seems callous to leave him lying there.” With a sigh he turned to the door, and Thorndyke followed, carrying the two hats.

“My cousin and I,” said our host, when we were seated in his own large bed-sitting-room, “were both interested in gem-stones. I deal in all

kinds of stones that are found in the East, but Dinanath dealt almost exclusively in rubies. He was a very fine judge of those beautiful gems, and he used to make periodical tours in Burma in search of uncut rubies of unusual size or quality. About four months ago he acquired at Mogok, in Upper Burma, a magnificent specimen over twenty-eight carats in weight, perfectly flawless and of the most gorgeous colour. It had been roughly cut, but my cousin was intending to have it recut unless he should receive an advantageous offer for it in the meantime."

"What would be the value of such a stone?" I asked.

"It is impossible to say. A really fine large ruby of perfect colour is far, far more valuable than the finest diamond of the same size. It is the most precious of all gems, with the possible exception of the emerald. A fine ruby of five carats is worth about three thousand pounds, but of course, the value rises out of all proportion with increasing size. Fifty thousand pounds would be a moderate price for Dinanath's ruby."

During this recital I noticed that Thorndyke, while listening attentively, was turning the stranger's hat over in his hands, narrowly scrutinising it both inside and outside. As Byramji concluded, he remarked: "We shall have to let the police know what has happened, but, as my friend and I will be called as witnesses, I should like to examine this hat a little more closely before you hand it over to them. Could you let me have a small, hard brush? A dry nail-brush would do."

Our host complied readily—in fact eagerly. Thorndyke's authoritative, purposeful manner had clearly impressed him, for he said as he handed my colleague a new nail-brush: "I thank you for your help and value it. We must not depend on the police only."

Accustomed as I was to Thorndyke's methods, his procedure was not unexpected, but Mr. Byramji watched him with breathless interest and no little surprise as, laying a sheet of notepaper on the table, he brought the hat close to it and brushed firmly but slowly, so that the dust dislodged should fall on it. As it was not a very well-kept hat, the yield was considerable, especially when the brush was drawn under the curl of the brim, and very soon the paper held quite a little heap. Then Thorndyke folded the paper into a small packet and having written "outside" on it, put it in his pocket book.

"Why do you do that?" Mr. Byramji asked. "What will the dust tell you?"

"Probably nothing," Thorndyke replied. "But this hat is our only direct clue to the identity of the man who was with your cousin, and we must make the most of it. Dust, you know, is only a mass of fragments

detached from surrounding objects. If the objects are unusual the dust may be quite distinctive. You could easily identify the hat of a miller or a cement worker." As he was speaking he reversed the hat and turned down the leather head-lining, whereupon a number of strips of folded paper fell down into the crown.

"Ah!" exclaimed Byramji, "perhaps we shall learn something now."

He picked out the folded slips and began eagerly to open them out, and we examined them systematically one by one. But they were singularly disappointing and uninforming. Mostly they consisted of strips of newspaper, with one or two circulars, a leaf from a price list of gas stoves, a portion of a large envelope on which were the remains of an address which read "—n—don, W. C.³," and a piece of paper evidently cut down vertically and bearing the right-hand half of some kind of list. This read:

—el 3 oz. 5 dwts.
—eep 9½ oz."

"Can you make anything of this?" I asked, handing the paper to Thornydyke.

He looked at it reflectively, and answered, as he copied it into his notebook: "It has, at least, some character. If we consider it with the other data we should get some sort of hint from it. But these scraps of paper don't tell us much. Perhaps their most suggestive feature is their quantity and the way in which, as you have no doubt noticed, they were arranged at the sides of the hat. We had better replace them as we found them for the benefit of the police."

The nature of the suggestion to which he referred was not very obvious to me, but the presence of Mr. Byramji rendered discussion inadvisable; nor was there any opportunity, for we had hardly reconstituted the hat when we became aware of a number of persons ascending the stairs, and then we heard the sound of rather peremptory rapping at the door of the dead man's room.

Mr. Byramji opened the door and went out on to the landing, where several persons had collected, including the two servants and a constable.

"I understand," said the policeman, "that there is something wrong here. Is that so?"

³ West Central

"A very terrible thing has happened," replied Byramji. "But the doctors can tell you better than I can." Here he looked appealingly at Thorndyke, and we both went out and joined him.

"A gentleman—Mr. Dinanath Byramji—has met with his death under somewhat suspicious circumstances," said Thorndyke, and, glancing at the knot of naturally curious persons on the landing, he continued: "If you will come into the room where the death occurred, I will give you the facts so far as they are known to us."

With this he opened the door and entered the room with Mr. Byramji, the constable, and me. As the door opened, the bystanders craned forward and a middle-aged woman uttered a cry of horror and followed us into the room.

"This is dreadful!" she exclaimed, with a shuddering glance at the corpse. "The servants told me about it when I came in just now and I sent Albert for the police at once. But what does it mean? You don't think poor Mr. Dinanath has been murdered?"

"We had better get the facts, ma'am," said the constable, drawing out a large black notebook and laying his helmet on the table. He turned to Mr. Byramji, who had sunk into a chair and sat, the picture of grief, gazing at his dead cousin. "Would you kindly tell me what you know about how it happened?"

Byramji repeated the substance of what he had told us, and when the constable had taken down his statement, Thorndyke and I gave the few medical particulars that we could furnish and handed the constable our cards. Then, having helped to lay the corpse on the bed and cover it with a sheet, we turned to take our leave.

"You have been very kind," Mr. Byramji said as he shook our hands warmly. "I am more than grateful. Perhaps I may be permitted to call on you and hear if—if you have learned anything fresh," he concluded discreetly.

"We shall be pleased to see you," Thorndyke replied, "and to give you any help that we can"; and with this we took our departure, watched inquisitively down the stairs by the boarders and the servants who still lurked in the vicinity of the chamber of death.

"If the police have no more information than we have," I remarked as we walked homeward, "they won't have much to go on."

"No," said Thorndyke. "But you must remember that this crime—as we are justified in assuming it to be—is not an isolated one. It is the fourth of practically the same kind within the last six months. I understand that the police have some kind of information respecting the presumed

criminal, though it can't be worth much, seeing that no arrest has been made. But there is some new evidence this time. The exchange of hats may help the police considerably."

"In what way? What evidence does it furnish?"

"In the first place it suggests a hurried departure, which seems to connect the missing man with the crime. Then, he is wearing the dead man's hat, and though he is not likely to continue wearing it, it may be seen and furnish a clue. We know that that hat fits him fairly well and we know its size, so that we know the size of his head. Finally, we have the man's own hat."

"I don't fancy the police will get much information from that," said I.

"Probably not," he agreed. "Yet it offered one or two interesting suggestions, as you probably observed."

"It made no suggestions whatever to me," said I.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I can only recommend you to recall our simple inspection and consider the significance of what we found."

This I had to accept as closing the discussion for the time being, and as I had to make a call at my bookseller's concerning some reports that I had left to be bound, I parted from Thorndyke at the corner of Chichester Rents and left him to pursue his way alone. My business with the bookseller took me longer than I had expected, for I had to wait while the lettering on the backs was completed, and when I arrived at our chambers in King's Bench Walk, I found Thorndyke apparently at the final stage of some experiment evidently connected with our late adventure. The microscope stood on the table with one slide on the stage and a second one beside it; but Thorndyke had apparently finished his microscopical researches, for as I entered he held in his hand a test-tube filled with a smoky-coloured fluid.

"I see that you have been examining the dust from the hat," said I. "Does it throw any fresh light on the case?"

"Very little," he replied. "It is just common dust—assorted fibres and miscellaneous organic and mineral particles. But there are a couple of hairs from the inside of the hat—both lightish brown, and one of the atrophic, note-of-exclamation type that one finds at the margin of bald patches; and the outside dust shows minute traces of lead, apparently in the form of oxide. What do you make of that?"

"Perhaps the man is a plumber or a painter," I suggested.

"Either is possible and worth considering," he replied; but his tone made clear to me that this was not his own inference; and a row of five consecutive Post Office Directories, which I had already noticed ranged along

the end of the table, told me that he had not only formed a hypothesis on the subject, but had probably either confirmed or disproved it. For the Post Office Directory was one of Thorndyke's favourite books of reference; and the amount of curious and recondite information that he succeeded in extracting from its matter-of-fact pages would have surprised no one more than it would the compilers of the work.

At this moment the sound of footsteps ascending our stairs became audible. It was late for business callers, but we were not unaccustomed to late visitors; and a familiar rat-tat of our little brass knocker seemed to explain the untimely visit.

"That sounds like Superintendent Miller's knock," said Thorndyke, as he strode across the room to open the door. And the superintendent it turned out to be. But not alone.

As the door opened the officer entered with two gentlemen, both natives of India, and one of whom was our friend Mr. Byramji.

"Perhaps," said Miller, "I had better look in a little later."

"Not on my account," said Byramji. "I have only a few words to say and there is nothing secret about my business. May I introduce my kinsman, Mr. Khambata, a student of the Inner Temple?"

Byramji's companion bowed ceremoniously. "Byramji came to my chambers just now," he explained, "to consult me about this dreadful affair, and he chanced to show me your card. He had not heard of you, but supposed you to be an ordinary medical practitioner. He did not realise that he had entertained an angel unawares. But I, who knew of your great reputation, advised him to put his affairs in your hands—without prejudice to the official investigations," Mr. Khambata added hastily, bowing to the superintendent.

"And I," said Mr. Byramji, "instantly decided to act on my kinsman's advice. I have come to beg you to leave no stone unturned to secure the punishment of my cousin's murderer. Spare no expense. I am a rich man and my poor cousin's property will come to me. As to the ruby, recover it if you can, but it is of no consequence. Vengeance—justice is what I seek. Deliver the wretch into my hands, or into the hands of justice, and I give you the ruby or its value, freely—gladly."

"There is no need," said Thorndyke, "of such extraordinary inducement. If you wish me to investigate this case, I will do so and will use every means at my disposal, without prejudice, as your friend says, to the proper claims of the officers of the law. But you understand that I can make no promises. I cannot guarantee success."

“We understand that,” said Mr. Khambata. “But we know that if you undertake the case, everything that is possible will be done. And now we must leave you to your consultation.”

As soon as our clients had gone, Miller rose from his chair with his hand in his breast pocket. “I dare say, doctor,” said he, “you can guess what I have come about. I was sent for to look into this Byramji case and I heard from Mr. Byramji that you had been there and that you had made a minute examination of the missing man’s hat. So have I; and I don’t mind telling you that I could learn nothing from it.”

“I haven’t learnt much myself,” said Thorndyke.

“But you’ve picked up something,” urged Miller, “if it is only a hint; and we have just a little clue. There is very small doubt that this is the same man—‘The New Jersey Sphinx,’ as the papers call him—that committed those other robberies; and a very difficult type of criminal he is to get hold of. He is bold, he is wary, he plays a lone hand, and he sticks at nothing. He has no confederates, and he kills every time. The American police never got near him but once; and that once gives us the only clues we have.”

“Finger-prints?” inquired Thorndyke.

“Yes, and very poor ones, too. So rough that you can hardly make out the pattern. And even those are not absolutely guaranteed to be his; but in any case, finger-prints are not much use until you’ve got the man. And there is a photograph of the fellow himself, but it is only a snapshot, and a poor one at that. All it shows is that he has a mop of hair and a pointed beard—or at least he had when the photograph was taken. But for identification purposes it is practically worthless. Still, there it is; and what I propose is this: we want this man and so do you; we’ve worked together before and can trust one another. I am going to lay my cards on the table and ask you to do the same.”

“But, my dear Miller,” said Thorndyke, “I haven’t any cards. I haven’t a single solid fact.”

The detective was visibly disappointed. Nevertheless, he laid two photographs on the table and pushed them towards Thorndyke, who inspected them through his lens and passed them to me.

“The pattern is very indistinct and broken up,” he remarked.

“Yes,” said Miller; “the prints must have been made on a very rough surface, though you get prints something like those from fitters or other men who use files and handle rough metal. And now, doctor, can’t you give us a lead of any kind?”

Thorndyke reflected a few moments. "I really have not a single real fact," said he, "and I am unwilling to make merely speculative suggestions."

"Oh, that's all right," Miller replied cheerfully. "Give us a start. I shan't complain if it comes to nothing."

"Well," Thorndyke said reluctantly, "I was thinking of getting a few particulars as to the various tenants of No. 51 Clifford's Inn. Perhaps you could do it more easily and it might be worth your while."

"Good!" Miller exclaimed gleefully. "He 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name'⁴."

"It is probably the wrong name," Thorndyke reminded him.

"I don't care," said Miller. "But why shouldn't we go together? It's too late to-night, and I can't manage to-morrow morning. But say to-morrow after noon. Two heads are better than one, you know, especially when the second one is yours. Or perhaps," he added, with a glance at me, "three would be better still."

Thorndyke considered for a moment or two and then looked at me.

"What do you say, Jervis?" he asked.

As my afternoon was unoccupied, I agreed with enthusiasm, being as curious as the superintendent to know how Thorndyke had connected this particular locality with the vanished criminal, and Miller departed in high spirits with an appointment for the morrow three o'clock in the afternoon.

For some time after the superintendent's depart I sat wrapped in profound meditation. In some mysterious way the address, 51 Clifford's Inn, had emerged from the formless data yielded by the derelict hat. But what had been the connection? Apparently the fragment of the addressed envelope had furnished the clue. But how had Thorndyke extended "-n" into "51, Clifford's Inn"? It was to me a complete mystery.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke had seated himself at writing-table, and I noticed that of the two letters which he wrote, one was written on our

⁴ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1:

*The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.*

headed paper and other on ordinary plain notepaper. I was speculating on the reason for this when he rose, and as he stuck on the stamps, said to me, "I am just going out to post these two letters. Do you care for a short stroll through the leafy shades of Fleet Street? The evening is still young."

"The rural solitudes of Fleet Street attract me at all hours," I replied, fetching my hat from the adjoining office, and we accordingly sallied forth together, strolling up King's Bench Walk and emerging into Fleet Street by way of Mitre Court. When Thorndyke had dropped his letters into the post office box he stood awhile gazing up at the tower of St. Dunstan's Church.

"Have you ever been in Clifford's Inn, Jervis?" he inquired.

"Never," I replied (we passed through it together on an average a dozen times a week), "but it is not too late for an exploratory visit."

We crossed the road, and entering Clifford's Inn Passage, passed through the still half-open gate, crossed the outer court and threaded the tunnel-like entry by the hall to the inner court, in the middle of which Thorndyke halted, and looking up at one of the ancient houses, remarked, "No. 51."

"So that is where our friend hangs out his flag," said I.

"Oh come, Jervis," he protested, "I am surprised at you; you are as bad as Miller. I have merely suggested a possible connection between these premises and the hat that was left at Bedford Place. As to the nature of that connection I have no idea, and there may be no connection at all. I assure you, Jervis, that I am on the thinnest possible ice. I am working on a hypothesis which is in the highest degree speculative, and I should not have given Miller a hint but that he was so eager and so willing to help—and also that I wanted his finger-prints. But we are really only at the beginning, and may never get any farther."

I looked up at the old house. It was all in darkness excepting the top floor, where a couple of lighted windows showed the shadow of a man moving rapidly about the room. We crossed to the entry and inspected the names painted on the door-posts. The ground floor was occupied by a firm of photo-engravers, the first floor by a Mr. Carrington, whose name stood out conspicuously on its oblong of comparatively fresh white paint, while the tenants of the second floor—old residents, to judge by the faded and discoloured paint in which their names were announced—were Messrs. Burt & Highley, metallurgists.

"Burt has departed," said Thorndyke, as I read out the names; and he pointed to two red lines of erasure which I had not noticed in the dim

light, "so the active gentleman above is presumably Mr. Highley, and we may take it that he has residential as well as business premises. I wonder who and what Mr. Carrington is—but I dare say we shall find out to-morrow."

With this he dismissed the professional aspects of Clifford's Inn, and, changing the subject to its history and associations, chatted in his inimitable, picturesque manner until our leisurely perambulations brought us at length to the Inner Temple Gate.

On the following morning we bustled through our work in order to leave the afternoon free, making several joint visits to solicitors from whom we were taking instructions. Returning from the last of these—a City lawyer—Thorndyke turned into St. Helen's Place and halted at a doorway bearing the brass plate of a firm of assayers and refiners. I followed him into the outer office, where, on his mentioning his name, an elderly man came to the counter.

"Mr. Grayson has put out some specimens for you, sir," said he. "They are about thirty grains to the ton—you said that the content was of no importance—I am to tell you that you need not return them. They are not worth treating." He went to a large safe from which he took a canvas bag, and returning to the counter, turned out on it the contents of the bag, consisting, about a dozen good-sized lumps of quartz and a glittering yellow fragment, which Thorndyke picked out and dropped in his pocket.

"Will that collection do?" our friend inquired.

"It will answer my purpose perfectly," Thorndyke replied, and when the specimens had been replaced the bag, and the latter deposited in Thorndyke's hand-bag, my colleague thanked the assistant and we went on our way.

"We extend our activities into the domain of mineralogy," I remarked. Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile. "We also employ the suction pump as an instrument of research," he observed. "However, the strategic uses of chunks of quartz—otherwise than as missiles—will develop themselves in due course, and the interval may be used for reflection." It was. But my reflection brought no solution. I noticed, however, that when at three o'clock we set forth in company with the superintendent, the bag went with us; and having offered to carry it and having had my offer accepted with a sly twinkle, its weight assured me that the quartz was still inside.

"Chambers and Offices to let," Thorndyke read aloud as we approached the porter's lodge. "That lets us in, I think. And the porter knows Dr.

Jervis and me by sight, so he will talk more freely.”

“He doesn’t know me,” said the superintendent, “but I’ll keep in the background, all the same.”

A pull at the bell brought out a clerical-looking man in a tall hat and a frock coat, who regarded Thorndyke and me through his spectacles with an amiable air of recognition.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Larkin,” said Thorndyke. “I am asked to get particulars of vacant chambers. What have you got to let?”

Mr. Larkin reflected. “Let me see. There’s a ground floor at No. 5—rather dark—and a small second-pair set at No. 12. And then there is—oh, yes, there is a good first-floor set at No. 51. They wouldn’t have been vacant until Michaelmas⁵, but Mr. Carrington, the tenant, has had to go abroad suddenly. I had a letter from him this morning, enclosing the key. Funny letter, too.” He dived into his pocket, and hauling out a bundle of letters, selected one and handed it to Thorndyke with a broad smile.

Thorndyke glanced at the postmark (“London, E.”), and having taken out the key, extracted the letter, which he opened and held so that Miller and I could see it. The paper bore the printed heading, “Baltic Shipping Company, Wapping,” and the further written heading, “S. S. Gothenburg,” and the letter was brief and to the point:

Dear sir,

I am giving up my chambers at No. 51, as I have been suddenly called abroad. I enclose the key, but am not troubling you with the rent. The sale of my costly furniture will more than cover it, and the surplus can be expended on painting the garden railings,

*Yours sincerely,
A. Carrington.*

Thorndyke smilingly replaced the letter and the key in the envelope and asked: “What is the furniture like?”

“You’ll see,” chuckled the porter, “if you care to look at the rooms. And I think they might suit. They’re a good set.”

“Quiet?”

⁵ Der 29. September. B. L.

"Yes, pretty quiet. There's a metallurgist overhead—Highley—used to be Burt & Highley, but Burt has gone to the City, and I don't think Highley does much business now."

"Let me see," said Thorndyke, "I think I used to meet Highley sometimes—a tall, dark man, isn't he?"

"No, that would be Burt. Highley is a little, fairish man, rather bald, with a pretty rich complexion"—here Mr. Larkin tapped his nose knowingly and raised his little finger—"which may account for the falling off of business."

"Hadn't we better have a look at the rooms?" Miller interrupted a little impatiently.

"Can we see them, Mr. Larkin?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly," was the reply. "You've got the key. Let me have it when you've seen the rooms; and whatever ever you do," he added with a broad grin, "be careful of the furniture."

"It looks," the superintendent remarked as we crossed the inner court, "as if Mr. Carrington had done a mizzle. That's hopeful. And I see," he continued, glancing at the fresh paint on the door-post as we passed through the entry, "that he hasn't been here long. That's hopeful, too."

We ascended to the first floor, and as Thorndyke unlocked and threw open the door, Miller laughed aloud. The "costly furniture" consisted of a small kitchen table, a Windsor chair and a dilapidated deck-chair. The kitchen contained a gas ring, a small saucepan and a frying-pan, and the bedroom was furnished with a camp-bed devoid of bed-clothes, a wash-hand basin on a packing-case, and a water can.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the superintendent. "He's left a hat behind. Quite a good hat, too." He took it down from the peg, glanced at its exterior and then, turning it over, looked inside. And then his mouth opened with a jerk.

"Great Solomon Eagle!" he gasped. "Do you see, doctor? It's *the* hat." He held it out to us, and sure enough on the white silk lining of the crown were the embossed, gilt letters, D. B., just as Mr. Byramji had described them.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, as the superintendent snatched up a green-grocer's paper bag from the kitchen floor and persuaded the hat into it, "it is undoubtedly the missing link. But what are you going to do now?"

"Do!" exclaimed Miller. "Why, I am going to collar the man. These Baltic boats put in at Hull and Newcastle—perhaps he didn't know that—and they are pretty slow boats, too. I shall wire to Newcastle to have the ship detained and take Inspector Badger down to make the

arrest. I'll leave you to explain to the porter, and I owe you a thousand thanks for your valuable tip."

With this he bustled away, clasping the precious hat and from the window we saw him hurry across the court and dart out through the postern into Fetter Lane.

"I think Miller was rather precipitate," said Thorndyke. "He should have got a description of the man and some further particulars."

"Yes," said I. "Miller had much better have waited until you had finished with Mr. Larkin. But you can get some more particulars when we take back the key."

"We shall get more information from the gentleman who lives on the floor above, and I think we will go up and interview him now. I wrote to him last night and made a metallurgical appointment, signing myself W. Polton. Your name, if he should ask, is Stevenson."

As we ascended the stairs to the next floor, I meditated on the rather tortuous proceedings of my usually straightforward colleague. The use of the lumps of quartz was now obvious; but why these mysterious tactics? And why, before knocking at the door, did Thorndyke carefully take the reading of the gas meter on the landing?

The door was opened in response to our knock—a shortish, alert-looking, clean-shaved man in a white overall, who looked at us keenly and rather forbiddingly. But Thorndyke was geniality personified.

"How do you do, Mr. Highley?" said he, holding out his hand, which the metallurgist shook coolly. "You got my letter, I suppose?"

"Yes. But I am not Mr. Highley. He's away and I am carrying on. I think of taking over his business if there is any to take over. My name is Sherwood. Have you got the samples?"

Thorndyke produced the canvas bag, which Mr. Sherwood took from him and emptied out on a bench, picking up the lumps of quartz one by one and examining them closely. Meanwhile Thorndyke took a rapid survey of the premises. Against the wall were two cupel furnaces and a third larger furnace like a small pottery kiln. On a set of narrow shelves were several rows of bone-ash cupels, looking like little white flower-pots, and near them was the cupel-press—an appliance into which powdered bone-ash was fed and compressed by a plunger to form the cupels—while by the side of the press was a tub of bone-ash—a good deal coarser, I noticed, than the usual fine powder. This coarseness was also observed by Thorndyke, who edged up to the tub and dipped his hand into the ash and then wiped his fingers on his handkerchief.

"This stuff doesn't seem to contain much gold," said Mr. Sherwood. "But we shall see when we make the assay."

"What do you think of this?" asked Thorndyke, taking from his pocket the small lump of glittering, golden-looking mineral that he had picked out at the assayist's. Mr. Sherwood took it from him and examined it closely. "This looks more hopeful," said he; "rather rich, in fact."

Thorndyke received this statement with an unmoved countenance; but as for me, I stared at Mr. Sherwood in amazement. For this lump of glittering mineral was simply a fragment of common iron pyrites! It would not have deceived a schoolboy, much less a metallurgist.

Still holding the specimen, and taking a watchmaker's lens from a shelf, Mr. Sherwood moved over to the window. Simultaneously, Thorndyke stepped softly to the cupel shelves and quickly ran his eye along the rows of cupels. Presently he paused at one, examined it more closely, and then, taking it from the shelf, began to pick at it with his finger-nail.

At this moment Mr. Sherwood turned and observed him; and instantly there flashed into the metallurgist's face an expression of mingled anger and alarm.

"Put that down!" he commanded peremptorily, and then, as Thorndyke continued to scrape with his finger nail, he shouted furiously, "Do you hear? Drop it!"

Thorndyke took him literally at his word and let the cupel fall on the floor, when it shattered into innumerable fragments, of which one of the largest separated itself from the rest. Thorndyke pounced upon it, and in an instantaneous glance, as he picked it up, I recognised it as a calcined tooth.

Then followed a few moments of weird, dramatic silence. Thorndyke, holding the tooth between his finger and thumb, looked steadily into the eyes of the metallurgist; and the latter, pallid as a corpse, glared at Thorndyke and furtively unbuttoned his overall.

Suddenly the silence broke into a tumult as bewildering as the crash of a railway collision. Sherwood's right hand darted under his overall. Instantly, Thorndyke snatched up another cupel and hurled it with such truth of aim that it shattered on the metallurgist's forehead. And as he flung the missile, he sprang forward, and delivered a swift upper-cut. There was a thunderous crash, a cloud of white dust, and an automatic pistol clattered along the floor.

I snatched up the pistol and rushed to my friend's assistance. But there was no need. With his great strength and his uncanny skill—to say

nothing of the effects of the knock-out blow—Thorndyke had the man pinned down immovably.

“See if you can find some cord, Jervis,” he said in a calm, quiet tone that seemed almost ridiculously out of character with the circumstances.

There was no difficulty about this, for several corded boxes stood in a corner of the laboratory. I cut off two lengths, with one of which I secured the prostrate man’s arms and with the other fastened his knees and ankles.

“Now,” said Thorndyke, “if you will take charge of his hands, we will make a preliminary inspection. Let us first see if he wears a belt.”

Unbuttoning the man’s waistcoat, he drew up the shirt, disclosing a broad, webbing belt furnished with several leather pockets, the buttoned flaps of which he felt carefully, regardless of the stream of threats and imprecations that poured from our victim’s swollen lips. From the front pockets he proceeded to the back, passing an exploratory hand under the writhing body.

“Ah!” he exclaimed suddenly, “just turn him over, and look out for his heels.”

We rolled our captive over, and as Thorndyke “skinned the rabbit,” a central pocket came into view, into which, when he had unbuttoned it, he inserted his fingers. “Yes,” he continued, “I think this is what we are looking for.” He withdrew his fingers, between which he held a small packet of Japanese paper, and with feverish excitement I watched him open out layer after layer of the soft wrapping. As he turned back the last fold a wonderful crimson sparkle told me that the “great ruby” was found.

“There, Jervis,” said Thorndyke, holding the magnificent gem towards me in the palm of his hand, “look on this beautiful, sinister thing, charged with untold potentialities of evil—and thank the gods that it is not yours.”

He wrapped it up again carefully and, having bestowed it in an inner pocket, said, “And now give me the pistol and run down to the telegraph office and see if you can stop Miller. I should like him to have the credit for this.”

I handed him the pistol and made my way out into Fetter Lane and so down to Fleet Street, where at the post office my urgent message was sent off to Scotland Yard immediately. In a few minutes the reply came that Superintendent Miller had not yet left and that he was starting immediately for Clifford’s Inn. A quarter of an hour later he drove up in a hansom to the Feters Lane gate and I conducted him up to the second

floor, where Thorndyke introduced him to his prisoner and witnessed the official arrest.

"You don't see how I arrived at it," said Thorndyke as we walked home-ward after returning the key. "Well, I am not surprised. The initial evidence was of the weakest; it acquired significance only by cumulative effect. Let us reconstruct it as it developed.

"The derelict hat was, of course, the starting-point. Now, the first thing one noticed was that it appeared to have had more than one owner. No man would buy a new hat that fitted so badly as to need all that packing; and the arrangement of the packing suggested a long-headed man wearing a hat that had belonged to a man with a short head. Then there were the suggestions offered by the slips of paper. The fragmentary address referred to a place the name of which ended in 'n' and the remainder was evidently 'London, W.C.' Now what West Central place names end in 'n'? It was not a street, a square or a court, and Barbican is not in the W.C. district. It was almost certainly one of the half-dozen surviving Inns of Court or Chancery. But, of course, it was not necessarily the address of the owner of the hat.

"The other slip of paper bore the end of a word ending in 'el,' and another word ending in 'eep,' and connected with these were quantities stated in ounces and pennyweights troy weight. But the only persons who use troy weight are those who deal in precious metals. I inferred therefore that the 'el' was part of 'lemel,' and that the 'eep' was part of 'floor-sweep,' an inference that was supported by the respective quantities, three ounces five pennyweights of lemel and nine and a half ounces of floor-sweep."

"What is lemel?" I asked.

"It is the trade name for the gold or silver filings that collect in the 'skin' of a jeweller's bench. Floor-sweep is, of course, the dust swept up on the floor of a jeweller's or goldsmith's workshop. The lemel is actual metal, though not of uniform fineness, but the sweep is a mixture of dirt and metal. Both are saved and sent to the refiners to have the gold and silver extracted.

"This paper, then, was connected either with a gold smith or a gold refiner—who might call himself an assayer or a metallurgist. The connection was supported by the leaf of a price list of gas stoves. A metallurgist would be kept well supplied with lists of gas stoves and furnaces. The traces of lead in the dust from the hat gave us another straw blowing the same direction, for gold assayed by the dry process is fused in the cupel furnace with lead; and as the lead oxidises and the oxide is

volatile, traces of lead would tend to appear in the dust deposited in the laboratory.

“The next thing to do was to consult the directory; and when I did so, I found that there were no goldsmiths in any of the Inns and only one assayer—Mr. Highley, of Clifford’s Inn. The probabilities therefore, slender as they were, pointed to some connection between this stray hat and Mr. Highley. And this was positively all the information that we had when we came out this afternoon.

“As soon as we got to Clifford’s Inn, however, the evidence began to grow like a rolling snowball. First there was Larkin’s contribution; and then there was the discovery of the missing hat. Now, as soon as I saw that hat my suspicions fell upon the man upstairs. I felt a conviction that the hat had been left there purposely and that the letter to Larkin was just a red herring to create a false trail. Nevertheless, the presence of that hat completely confirmed the other evidence. It showed that the apparent connection was a real connection.”

“But,” I asked, “what made you suspect the man upstairs?”

“My dear Jervis!” he exclaimed, “consider the facts. That hat was enough to hang the man who left it there. Can you imagine this astute, wary villain making such an idiot’s mistake—going away and leaving the means of his conviction for anyone to find? But you are forgetting that whereas the missing hat was found on the first floor, the murderer’s hat was connected with the second floor. The evidence suggested that it was Highley’s hat. And now, before we go on to the next stage, let me remind you of those finger-prints. Miller thought that their rough appearance was due to the surface on which they had been made, but it was not. They were the prints of a person who was suffering from ichthyosis, palmar psoriasis or sonic dry dermatitis.

“There is one other point. The man we were looking for was a murderer. His life was already forfeit. To such a man another murder more or less is of no consequence. If this man, having laid the false trail, had determined to take sanctuary in Highley’s rooms, it was probable that he had already got rid of Highley. And remember that a metallurgist has unrivalled means disposing of a body; for not only is each of his muffle furnaces a miniature crematorium, but the very residue of a cremated body—bone-ash—is one of the materials of his trade.

“When we went upstairs, I first took the reading of the gas meter and ascertained that a large amount of gas had been used recently. Then, when we entered I took the opportunity to shake hands with Mr. Sherwood, and immediately I became aware that he suffered from a rather

extreme form of ichthyosis. That was the first point of verification. Then we discovered that he actually could not distinguish between iron pyrites and auriferous quartz. He was not a metallurgist at all. He was a masquerader. Then the bone-ash in the tub was mixed with fragments of calcined bone, and the cupels all showed similar fragments. In one of them I could see part of the crown of a tooth. That was pure luck. But observe that by that time I had enough evidence to justify an arrest. The tooth served only to bring the affair to a crisis; and his response to my unspoken accusation saved us the trouble of further search for confirmatory evidence."

"What is not quite clear to me," said I, "is when and why he made away with Highley. As the body has been completely reduced to bone-ash, Highley must have been dead at least some days."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed. "I take it that the course of events was like this: The police have been searching eagerly for this man, and every new crime must have made his position more unsafe—for a criminal can never be sure that he has not dropped some clue. It began to be necessary for him to make some arrangements for leaving the country and mean while to have a retreat in case his whereabouts should chance to be discovered. Highley's chambers were admirable for both purposes. Here was a solitary man who seldom had a visitor, and who would probably not be missed for some considerable time; and in those chambers were the means of rapidly and completely disposing of the body. The mere murder would be a negligible detail to this ruffian.

"I imagine that Highley was done to death at least a week ago, and that the murderer did not take up his new tenancy until the body was reduced to ash. With that large furnace in addition to the small ones, this would not take long. When the new premises were ready, he could make a sham disappearance to cover his actual flight later; and you must see how perfectly misleading that sham disappearance was. If the police had discovered that hat in the empty room only a week later, they would have been certain that he had escaped to one of the Baltic ports; and while they were following his supposed tracks, he could have gone off comfortably via Folkestone or Southampton."

"Then you think he had only just moved into Highley's rooms?"

"I should say he moved in last night. The murder of Byramji was probably planned on some information that the murderer had picked up, and as soon as it was accomplished he began forthwith to lay down the false tracks. When he reached his rooms yesterday afternoon, he must have written the letter to Larkin and gone off at once to the East End

to post it. Then he probably had his bushy hair cut short and shaved off his beard and moustache—which would render him quite unrecognisable by Larkin—and moved into Highley’s chambers, from which he would have quietly sallied forth in a few days’ time to take his passage to the Continent. It was quite a good plan, and but for the accident of taking the wrong hat, would almost certainly have succeeded.”

Once every year, on the second of August, there is delivered with un-failing regularity at No. 5A King’s Bench Walk a large box of carved sandal-wood filled with the choicest Trichinopoly cheroots and accompanied by an affectionate letter from our late client, Mr. Byramji. For the second of August is the anniversary of the death (in the execution shed at Newgate) of Cornelius Barnett, otherwise known as the “New Jersey Sphinx.”

The Touchstone

It happened not uncommonly that the exigencies of practice committed my friend Thorndyke to investigations that lay more properly within the province of the police. For problems that had arisen as secondary consequences of a criminal act could usually not be solved until the circumstances of that act were fully elucidated and, incidentally, the identity of the actor established. Such a problem was that of the disappearance of James Harewood's will, a problem that was propounded to us by our old friend, Mr. Marchmont, when he called on us, by appointment, with the client of whom he had spoken in his note. It was just four o'clock when the solicitor arrived at our chambers, and as I admitted him he ushered in a gentlemanly-looking man of about thirty-five, whom he introduced as Mr. William Crowhurst.

"I will just stay," said he with an approving glance at the tea-service on the table, "and have a cup of tea with you, and give you an outline of the case. Then I must run away and leave Mr. Crowhurst to fill in the details."

He seated himself in an easy chair within comfortable reach of the table, and as Thorndyke poured out the tea, he glanced over a few notes scribbled on a sheet of paper.

"I may say," he began, stirring his tea thoughtfully, "that this is a forlorn hope. I have brought the case to you, but I have not the slightest expectation that you will be able to help us."

"A very wholesome frame of mind," Thorndyke commented with a smile. "I hope it is that of your client also."

"It is indeed," said Mr. Crowhurst; "in fact, it seems to me a waste of your time to go into the matter. Probably you will think so too, when you have heard the particulars."

"Well, let us hear the particulars," said Thorndyke. "A forlorn hope has, at least, the stimulating quality of difficulty. Let us have your outline sketch, Marchmont."

The solicitor, having emptied his cup and pushed it towards the tray for replenishment, glanced at his notes and began: "The simplest way in which to present the problem is to give a brief recital of the events that have given rise to it, which are these: The day before yesterday—that is last Monday—at a quarter to two in the afternoon, Mr. James Harewood executed a will at his house at Merbridge, which is about two miles from Welsbury. There were present four persons: two of his servants, who signed as witnesses, and the two principal beneficiaries—Mr. Arthur Baxfield, a nephew of the testator, and our friend here, Mr. William Crowhurst. The will was a holograph written on the two pages of a sheet of letter-paper. When the witnesses signed, the will was covered by another sheet of paper so that only the space for the signatures was exposed. Neither of the witnesses read the will, nor did either of the beneficiaries; and so far as I am aware, no one but the testator knew what were its actual provisions, though, after the servants had left the room, Mr. Harewood explained its general purport to the beneficiaries."

"And what was its general purport?" Thorndyke asked.

"Broadly speaking," replied Marchmont, "it divided the estate in two very unequal portions between Mr. Baxfield and Mr. Crowhurst. There were certain small legacies of which neither the amounts nor the names of the legatees are known. Then, to Baxfield was given a thousand pounds to enable him either to buy a partnership or to start a small factory—he is a felt hat manufacturer by trade—and the remainder to Crowhurst, who was made executor and residuary legatee. But, of course, the residue of the estate is an unknown quantity, since we don't know either the number or the amounts of the legacies.

"Shortly after the signing of the will, the parties separated. Mr. Harewood folded up the will and put it in a leather wallet which he slipped into his pocket, stating his intention of taking the will forthwith to deposit with his lawyer at Welsbury. A few minutes after his guests had departed, he was seen by one of the servants to leave the house, and afterwards was seen by a neighbour walking along a footpath which, after passing through a small wood, joins the main road about a mile and a quarter from Welsbury. From that time, he was never again seen alive. He never visited the lawyer, nor did anyone see him at or near Welsbury or elsewhere else.

"As he did not return home that night, his housekeeper (he was a widower and childless) became extremely alarmed, and in the morning she communicated with the police. A search-party was organised, and, following the path on which he was last seen, explored the wood—which

is known as Gilbert's Copse—and here, at the bottom of an old chalk-pit, they found him lying dead with a fractured skull and a dislocated neck. How he came by these injuries is not at present known; but as the body had been robbed of all valuables, including his watch, purse, diamond ring and the wallet containing the will, there is naturally a strong suspicion that he has been murdered. That, however, is not our immediate concern—at least not mine. I am concerned with the will, which, as you see, has disappeared, and as it has presumably been carried away by a thief who is under suspicion of murder, it is not likely to be returned.”

“It is almost certainly destroyed by this time,” said Mr. Crowhurst.

“That certainly seems probable,” Thorndyke agreed. “But what do you want me to do? You haven't come for counsel's opinion?”

“No,” replied Marchmont. “I am pretty clear about the legal position. I shall claim, as the will has presumably been destroyed, to have the testator's wishes carried out in so far as they are known. But I am doubtful as to the view the court may take. It may decide that the testator's wishes are not known, that the provisions of the will are too uncertain to admit of administration.”

“And what would be the effect of that decision?” asked Thorndyke.

“In that case,” said Marchmont, “the entire estate would go to Baxfield, as he is the next of kin and there was no previous will.”

“And what is it that you want me to do?”

Marchmont chuckled deprecatingly. “You have to pay the penalty of being a prodigy, Thorndyke. We are asking you to do an impossibility—but we don't really expect you to bring it off. We ask you to help us to recover the will.”

“If the will has been completely destroyed, it can't be recovered,” said Thorndyke. “But we don't know that it has been destroyed. The matter is, at least, worth investigating; and if you wish me to look into it, I will.”

The solicitor rose with an air of evident relief.

“Thank you, Thorndyke,” said he. “I expect nothing—at least, I tell myself that I do—but I can now feel that everything that is possible will be done. And now I must be off. Crowhurst can give you any details that you want.”

When Marchmont had gone, Thorndyke turned to our client and asked, “What do you suppose Baxfield will do, if the will is irretrievably lost? Will he press his claim as next of kin?”

“I should say yes,” replied Crowhurst. “He is a business man and his natural claims are greater than mine. He is not likely to refuse what the

law assigns to him as his right. As a matter of fact, I think he felt that his uncle had treated him unfairly in alienating the property.”

“Was there any reason for this diversion of the estate?”

“Well,” replied Crowhurst, “Harewood and I have been very good friends and he was under some obligations to me; and then Baxfield had not made himself very acceptable to his uncle. But the principal factor, I think, was a strong tendency of Baxfield’s to gamble. He had lost quite a lot of money by backing horses, and a careful, thrifty man like James Harewood doesn’t care to leave his savings to a gambler. The thousand pounds that he did leave to Baxfield was expressly for the purpose of investment in a business.”

“Is Baxfield in business now?”

“Not on his own account. He is a sort of foreman or shop-manager in a factory just outside Welsbury, and I believe he is a good worker and knows his trade thoroughly.”

“And now,” said Thorndyke, “with regard to Mr Harewood’s death. The injuries might, apparently, have been either accidental or homicidal. What are the probabilities of accident—disregarding the robbery?”

“Very considerable, I should say. It is a most dangerous place. The footpath runs close beside the edge of a disused chalk-pit with perpendicular or over hanging sides, and the edge is masked by bushes and brambles. A careless walker might easily fall over—or be pushed over, for that matter.”

“Do you know when the inquest is to take place?”

“Yes. The day after to-morrow. I had the *subpoena* this morning for Friday afternoon at 2.30, at the Welsbury Town Hall.”

At this moment footsteps were heardhurriedly ascending the stairs and then came a loud and peremptory rat-tat at our door. I sprang across to see who our visitor was, and as I flung open the door, Mr. Marchmont rushed in, breathing heavily and flourishing a newspaper.

“Here is a new development,” he exclaimed. “It doesn’t seem to help us much, but I thought you had better know about it at once.” He sat down, and putting on his spectacles, read aloud as follows:

“A new and curious light has been thrown on the mystery of the death of Mr. James Harewood, whose body was found yesterday in a disused chalk-pit near Merbridge. It appears that on Monday—the day on which Mr. Harewood almost certainly was killed—a passenger alighting from a train at Barwood Junction before it had stopped, slipped

and fell between the train and the platform. He was quickly extricated, and as he had evidently sustained internal injuries, he was taken to the local hospital, where he was found to be suffering from a fractured pelvis. He gave his name as Thomas Fletcher, but refused to give any address, saying that he had no relatives. This morning he died, and on his clothes being searched for an address, a parcel, formed of two handkerchiefs tied up with string, was found in his pocket. When it was opened it was found to contain five watches, three watch-chains, a tie-pin and a number of bank-notes. Other pockets contained a quantity of loose money—gold and silver mixed—and a card of the Welsbury Races, which were held on Monday. Of the five watches, one has been identified as the one taken from Mr. Harewood; and the bank-notes have been identified as a batch handed to him by the cashier, of his bank at Welsbury last Thursday and presumably carried in the leather wallet which was stolen from his pocket. This wallet, by the way, has also been found. It was picked up—empty—last night on the railway embankment just outside Welsbury Station. Appearances thus suggest that the man, Fletcher, when on his way to the races, encountered Mr. Harewood in the lonely copse, and murdered and robbed him; or perhaps found him dead in the chalk-pit and robbed the body—a question that is now never likely to be solved.”

As Marchmont finished reading, he looked up at Thorndyke. “It doesn't help us much, does it?” said he. “As the wallet was found empty, it is pretty certain that the will has been destroyed.”

“Or perhaps merely thrown away,” said Thorndyke. “In which case an advertisement offering a substantial reward may bring it to light.”

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders sceptically, but agreed to publish the advertisement. Then, once more he turned to go; and as Mr. Crowhurst had no further information to give, he departed with his lawyer.

For some time after they had gone, Thorndyke sat with his brief notes before him, silent and deeply reflective. I, too, maintained a discreet silence, for I knew from long experience that the motionless pose and quiet, impassive face were the outward signs of a mind in swift and strenuous action. Instinctively, I gathered that this apparently chaotic case was being quietly sorted out and arranged in a logical order; that Thorndyke, like a skilful chess-player, was “trying over the moves” before he should lay his hand upon the pieces.

Presently he looked up. “Well?” he asked. “What do you think, Jervis? Is it worth while?”

“That,” I replied, “depends on whether the will is or is not in existence. If it has been destroyed, an investigation would be a waste of our time and our client’s money.”

“Yes,” he agreed. “But there is quite a good chance that it has not been destroyed. It was probably dropped loose into the wallet, and then might have been picked out and thrown away before the wallet was examined. But we mustn’t concentrate too much on the will. If we take up the case—which I am inclined to do—we must ascertain the actual sequence of events. We have one clear day before the inquest. If we run down to Merbridge to-morrow and go thoroughly over the ground, and then go on to Barwood and find out all we can about the man Fletcher, we may get some new light from the evidence at the inquest.”

I agreed readily to Thorndyke’s proposal, not that I could see any way into the case, but I felt a conviction that my colleague had isolated some leading fact and had a definite line of research in his mind. And this conviction deepened when, later in the evening, he laid his research-case on the table, and rearranged its contents with evident purpose. I watched curiously the apparatus that he was packing in it and tried—not very successfully—to infer the nature of the proposed investigation. The box of powdered paraffin wax and the spirit blowpipe were obvious enough; but the “dust-aspirator”—a sort of miniature vacuum cleaner—the portable microscope, the coil of Manila line, with an eye spliced into one end, and especially the abundance of blank-labelled microscope slides, all of which I saw him pack in the case with deliberate care, defeated me utterly.

About ten o’clock on the following morning we stepped from the train in Welsbury Station, and having recovered our bicycles from the luggage van, wheeled them through the barrier and mounted. During the train journey we had both studied the one-inch Ordnance map to such purpose that we were virtually in familiar surroundings and immune from the necessity of seeking directions from the natives. As we cleared the town we glanced up the broad by-road to the left which led to the race-course; then we rode on briskly for a mile, which brought us to the spot where the footpath to Merbridge joined the road. Here we dismounted and, lifting our bicycles over the stile, followed the path towards a small wood which we could see ahead, crowning a low hill.

“For such a good path,” Thorndyke remarked as we approached the wood, “it is singularly unfrequented. I haven’t seen a soul since we left the road.” He glanced at the map as the path entered the wood, and when we had walked on a couple of hundred yards, he halted and stood

his bicycle against a tree. "The chalk-pit should be about here," said he, "though it is impossible to see." He grasped a stem of one of the small bushes that crowded on to the path and pulled it aside. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Just look at that, Jervis. It is a positive scandal that a public path should be left in this condition."

Certainly Mr. Crowhurst had not exaggerated. It was a most dangerous place. The parted branches revealed a chasm some thirty feet deep, the brink of which, masked by the bushes, was but a matter of inches from the edge of the path.

"We had better go back," said Thorndyke, "and find the entrance to the pit, which seems to be to the right. The first thing is to ascertain exactly where Harewood fell. Then we can come back and examine the place from above."

We turned back, and presently found a faint track which we followed until, descending steeply, it brought us out into the middle of the pit. It was evidently an ancient pit, for the sides were blackened by age, and the floor was occupied by a trees, some of considerable size. Against one of these we leaned our bicycles and then walked slowly round at the foot of the frowning cliff.

"This seems to be below the path," said Thorndyke, glancing up at the grey wall which jutted out above in stages like an inverted flight of steps. "Somewhere hereabouts we should find some traces of the tragedy."

Even as he spoke my eye caught a spot of white on a block of chalk, and on the freshly fractured surface a significant brownish-red stain. The block lay opposite the mouth of an artificial cave—an old wagon-shelter but now empty and immediately under a markedly overhanging part of the cliff.

"This is undoubtedly the place where he fell," said Thorndyke. "You can see where the stretcher was placed—an old-pattern stretcher with wheel-runners—and there is a little spot of broken soil at the top where he came over. Well, apart from the robbery, a clear fall of over thirty feet is enough to account for a fractured skull. Will you stay here, Jervis, while I run up and look at the path?"

He went off towards the entrance, and presently I heard him above, pulling aside the bushes, and after one or two trials, he appeared directly overhead.

"There are plenty of footprints on the path," said he, "but nothing abnormal. No trampling or signs of a struggle. I am going on a little

farther.”

He withdrew behind the bushes, and I proceeded to inspect the interior of the cave, noting the smoke-blackened roof and the remains of a recent fire, which, with a number of rabbit bones and a discarded tea of the kind used by the professional tramp, seemed not without a possible bearing on our investigation. I was thus engaged when I heard Thorn-dyke hail me from above and coming out of the cave, I saw his head thrust between the branches. He seemed to be lying down, for his face was nearly on a level with the top of the cliff.

“I want to take an impression,” he called out. “Will you bring up the paraffin and the blower? And you might bring the coil of line, too.”

I hurried away to the place where our bicycles were standing, and opening the research-case, took out the coil of line, the tin of paraffin wax and the spirit blowpipe, and having ascertained that the container of the latter was full, I ran up the incline and made my way along the path. Some distance along, I found my colleague nearly hidden in the bushes, lying prone, with his head over the edge of the cliff.

“You see, Jervis,” he said, as I crawled alongside and looked over, “this is a possible way down, and someone has used it quite recently. He climbed down with his face to the cliff—you can see the clear impression of the toe of a boot in the loam of that projection, and you can even make out the shape of an iron toe-tip. Now the problem is how to get down to take the impression without, dislodging the earth above it. I think I will secure myself with the line.”

“It is hardly worth the risk of a broken neck,” said I. “Probably the print is that of some schoolboy.”

“It is a man’s foot,” he replied. “Most likely it has no connection with our case. But it may have, and as a shower of rain would obliterate it we ought to secure it.” As he spoke, he passed the end of the cord through eye and slipped the loop over his shoulders, drawing tight under his arms. Then, having made the line fast to the butt of a small tree, he cautiously lowered himself over the edge and climbed down to the projection. As soon as he had a secure footing, I passed the spare cord through the ring on the lid of the wax tin and lowered it to him, and when he had unfastened it, I drew up the cord and in the same way let down the blowpipe. Then I watched his neat, methodical procedure. First he took out a spoonful of the powdered, or grated, wax and very delicately sprinkled it on the toe-print until the latter was evenly but very thinly covered. Next he lit the blowlamp, and as soon as the blue flame began to roar from the pipe, he directed it on to the toe-print.

Almost instantly the powder melted, glazing the impression like a coat of varnish. The flame was removed and the film of wax at once solidified and became dull and opaque. A second, heavier, sprinkling with the powder, followed by another application of the flame, thickened the film of wax, and this process, repeated four or five times, eventually produced a solid cake. Then Thorndyke extinguished the blowlamp, and securing it and the tin to the cord, directed me to pull them up. "And you might send me down the field-glasses," he added. "There is something farther down that I can't quite make out."

I slipped the glasses from my shoulder, and opening the case, tied the cord to the leather sling and lowered it down the cliff; and then I watched with some curiosity as Thorndyke stood on his insecure perch steadily gazing through the glasses (they were Zeiss 8-prismatics) at a clump of wallflowers that grew from a boss of chalk about half-way down. Presently he lowered the glasses and, slinging them round his neck by their lanyard, turned his attention to the cake of wax. It was by this time quite solid, and when he had tested it, he lifted it carefully, and placed it in the empty binocular case, when I drew it up.

"I want you, Jervis," Thorndyke called up, "to steady the line. I am going down to that wallflower clump."

It looked extremely unsafe, but I knew it was useless to protest, so I hitched the line around a massive stump and took a firm grip of the "fall."

"Ready," I sang out; and forthwith Thorndyke began to creep across the face of the cliff with feet and hands clinging to almost invisible projections. Fortunately, there was at this part no overhang, and though my heart was in my mouth as I watched, I saw him cross the perilous space in safety. Arrived at the clump, he drew an envelope from his pocket, stooped and picked up some small object, which he placed in the envelope, returning the latter to his pocket. Then he gave me another bad five minutes while he recrossed the nearly vertical surface to his starting-point; but at length this, too, was safely accomplished, and when he finally climbed up over the edge and stood beside me on solid earth, I drew a deep breath and turned to revile him.

"Well?" I demanded sarcastically, "what have you gathered at the risk of your neck? Is it samphire or edelweiss?"

He drew the envelope from his pocket, and dipping into it, produced a cigarette-holder—a cheap bone affair, black and clammy with long service and still holding the butt of a hand-made cigarette—and handed it to me. I turned it over, smelled it and hastily handed it back. "For my

part," said I, "I wouldn't have risked the cervical vertebra of a yellow cat for it. What do you expect to learn from it?"

"Of course, I expect nothing. We are just collecting facts on the chance that they may turn out to be relevant. Here, for instance, we find that a man has descended, within a few yards of where Harewood fell, by this very inconvenient route, instead of going round to the entrance to the pit. He must have had some reason for adopting this undesirable mode of descent. Possibly he was in a hurry, and probably he belonged to the district, since a stranger would not know of the existence of this short cut. Then it seems likely that this was his cigarette tube. If you look over, you will see by those vertical scrapes on the chalk that he slipped and must have nearly fallen. At that moment he probably dropped the tube, for you notice that the wallflower clump is directly under the marks of his toes."

"Why do you suppose he did not recover the tube?"

"Because the descent slopes away from the position of the clump, and he had no trusty Jervis with a stout cord to help him to cross the space. And if he went down this way because he was hurried, he would not have time to search for the tube. But if the tube was not his, still it belonged to somebody who has been here recently."

"Is there anything that leads you to connect this man with the crime?"

"Nothing but time and place," he replied. "The man has been down into the pit close to where Harewood was robbed and possibly murdered, and as the traces are quite recent, he must have been there near about the time of the robbery. That is all. I am considering the traces of this man in particular because there are no traces of any other. But we may as well have a look at the path, which, as you see, yields good impressions."

We walked slowly along the path towards Merbridge, keeping at the edges and scrutinising the surface closely. In the shady hollows, the soft loam bore prints of many feet, and among them we could distinguish one with an iron toe-tip, but it was nearly obliterated by another studded with hob-nails.

"We shan't get much information here," said Thorndyke as he turned about. "The search-party have trodden out the important prints. Let us see if we can find out where the man with the toe-tips went to."

We searched the path on the Welsbury side of the chalk-pit, but found no trace of him. Then we went into the pit, and having located the place where he descended, sought for some other exit than the track leading to the path. Presently, half-way up the slope, we found a second track,

bearing away in the direction of Merbridge. Following this for some distance, we came to a small hollow at the bottom of which was a muddy space. And here we both halted abruptly, for in the damp ground were the clear imprints of a pair of boots which we could see had, in addition to the toe-tips, half-tips to the heels.

"We had better have wax casts of these," said Thorndyke, "to compare with the boots of the man Fletcher. I will do them while you go back for the bicycles."

By the time that I returned with the machines two of the footprints were covered with a cake each of wax, and Thorndyke had left the track, and was peering among the bushes. I inquired what he was looking for.

"It is a forlorn hope, as Marchmont would say," he replied, "but I am looking to see if the will has been thrown away here. It was quite probably jettisoned at once, and this is the most probable route for the robber to have taken, if he knew of it. You see by the map that it must lead nearly directly to the race-course, and it avoids both the path and the main road. While the wax is setting we might as well look round."

It seemed a hopeless enough proceeding and I agreed to it without enthusiasm. Leaving the track on the opposite side to that which Thorndyke was searching, I wandered among the bushes and the little open spaces, peering about me and reminding myself of that "aged, aged man" who

"Sometimes searched the grassy knolls,
For wheels of hansom cabs."

I had worked my way nearly back to where I could see Thorndyke, also returning, when my glance fell on a small, brown object caught among the branches of a bush. It was a man's pigskin purse; and as I picked it out of the bush I saw that it was open and empty.

With my prize in my hand, I hastened to the spot where Thorndyke was lifting the wax casts. He looked up and asked, "No luck, I suppose?"

I held out the purse, on which he pounced eagerly. "But this is most important, Jervis," he exclaimed. "It is almost certainly Harewood's purse. You see the initials, 'J. H.,' stamped on the flap. Then we were right as to the direction that the robber took. And it would pay to search this place exhaustively for the will, though we can't do that now, as we have to go to Barwood, I wrote to say we were coming. We had better get back to the path now and make for the road. Barwood is only half-an-hour's run."

We packed the casts in the research-case (which was strapped to Thorn-dyke's bicycle), and turning back, made our way to the path. As it was still deserted, we ventured to mount, and soon reached the road, along which we started at a good pace toward Barwood.

Half-an-hour's ride brought us into the main Street of the little town, and when we dismounted at the police station we found the Chief Con- stable himself waiting to receive us, courteously eager to assist us, but possessed by a devouring curiosity which was somewhat inconvenient.

"I have done as you asked me in your letter, sir," he said. "Fletcher's body is, of course, in the mortuary, but I have had all his clothes and effects brought here; and I have had them put in my private office, so that you can look them over in comfort."

"It is exceedingly good of you," said Thorndyke, "and most helpful." He unstrapped the research-case, and following the officer into his sanc- tum, looked round with deep approval. A large table had been cleared for the examination, and the dead pickpocket's clothes and effects neat- ly arranged at one end.

Thorndyke's first proceeding was to pick up the dead man's boots—a smart but flimsy pair of light brown leather, rather down at heel and in need of re-soling. Neither toes nor heels bore any tips or even nails ex- cepting the small fastening brads. Having exhibited them to me without remark, Thorndyke placed them on a sheet of white paper and made a careful tracing of the soles, a proceeding that seemed to surprise the Chief Constable, for he remarked, "I should hardly have thought that the question of footprints would arise in this case. You can't charge a dead man."

Thorndyke agreed that this seemed to be true; and then he proceeded to an operation that fairly made the officer's eyes bulge. Opening the research-case—into which the officer cast an inquisitive glance—he took out the dust-aspirator, the nozzle of which he inserted into one after another of the dead thief's pockets while I worked the pump. When he had gone through them all, he opened the receiver and extracted quite a considerable ball of dusty fluff. Placing this on a glass slide, he tore it in halves with a pair of mounted needles and passing one half to me, when we both fell to work "teasing" it out into an open mesh, portions of which we separated and laid—each in a tiny pool of glycerine—on blank labelled glass slides, applying to each slide its cover-glass and writing on the label, "Dust from Fletcher's pockets."

When the series was complete, Thorndyke brought out the microscope, and fitting on a one-inch objective, quickly examined the slides, one

after another, and then pushed the microscope to me. So far as I could see, the dust was just ordinary dust—principally made up of broken cotton fibres with a few fibres of wool, linen, wood, jute, and others that I could not name and some undistinguishable mineral particles. But I made no comment, and resigning the microscope to the Chief Constable—who glared through it, breathing hard, and remarked that the dust was “rummy-looking stuff”—watched Thorndyke's further proceedings. And very odd proceedings they were.

First he laid the five stolen watches in a row, and with a Coddington lens minutely examined the dial of each. Then he opened the back of each in turn and copied into his notebook the watch-repairers' scratched inscriptions. Next he produced from the case a number of little vulcanite rods, and laying out five labelled slides, dropped a tiny drop of glycerine on each, covering it at once with a watch-glass to protect it from falling dust. Then he stuck a little label on each watch, wrote a number on it and similarly numbered the five slides. His next proceeding was to take out the glass of watch No. 1 and pick up one of the vulcanite rods, which he rubbed briskly on a silk handkerchief and passed across and around the dial of the watch, after which he held the rod close to the glycerine on slide No. 1 and tapped it sharply with the blade of his pocket-knife. Then he dropped a cover-glass on to the glycerine and made a rapid inspection of the specimen through the microscope.

This operation he repeated on the other four watches, using a fresh rod for each, and when he had finished he turned to the open-mouthed officer. “I take it,” said he, “that the watch which has the chain attached to it is Mr. Harewood's watch?”

“Yes, sir. That helped us to identify it.” Thorndyke looked at the watch reflectively. Attached to the bow by a short length of green tape was a small, rather elaborate key. This my friend picked up, and taking a fresh mounted needle, inserted it into the barrel of the key, from which he then withdrew it with a tiny ball of fluff on its point. I hastily prepared a slide and handed it to him, when, with a pair of dissecting scissors, he cut off a piece of the fluff and let it fall into the glycerine. He repeated this manoeuvre with two more slides and then labelled the three “Key, outside,” “middle” and “inside,” and in that order examined them under the microscope.

My own examination of the specimens yielded very little. They all seemed to be common dust, though that from the face of watch No. 3 contained a few broken fragments of what looked like animal hairs—possibly cat's—as also did the key-fluff marked “outside.” But if this

had any significance, I could not guess what it was. As to the Chief Constable, he clearly looked on the whole proceeding as a sort of legerdemain with no obvious purpose, for he remarked, as we were packing up to go, "I am glad I've seen how you do it, sir. But all the same, I think you are flogging a dead horse. We know who committed the crime and we know he's beyond the reach of the law."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "one must earn one's fee, you know. I shall put Fletcher's boots and the five watches in evidence at the inquest tomorrow, and I will ask you to leave the labels on the watches." With renewed thanks and a hearty handshake he bade the courteous officer adieu, and we rode off to catch the train to London.

That evening, after dinner, we brought out the specimens and went over them at our leisure; and Thorndyke added a further specimen by drawing a knotted piece of twine through the cigarette-holder that he had salvaged from the chalk-pit, and teasing out the unsavoury, black substance that came out on the string in glycerine on a slide. When he had examined it, he passed it to me, The dark, tarry liquid somewhat obscured the detail, but I could make out fragments of the same animal hairs that I had noted in the other specimens, only here they were much more numerous. I mentioned my observation to Thorndyke. "They are certainly parts of mammalian hairs," I said, "and they look like the hairs of a cat. Are they from a cat?"

"Rabbit," Thorndyke replied curtly; and even then, I am ashamed to admit, I did not perceive the drift of the investigation.

The room in the Welsbury Town Hall had filled up some minutes before the time fixed for the opening of the inquest, and in the interval, when the jury had retired to view the body in the adjacent mortuary, I looked round the assembly. Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Crowhurst were present, and a youngish, horsey-looking man in cord breeches and leggings, whom I correctly guessed to be Arthur Baxfield. Our friend the Chief Constable of Barwood was also there, and with him Thorndyke exchanged a few words in a retired corner. The rest of the company were strangers.

As soon as the coroner and the jury had taken their places the medical witness was called. The cause of death, he stated, was dislocation of the neck, accompanied by a depressed fracture of the skull. The fracture have been produced by a blow with a heavy weapon, or by the deceased falling on his head. The witness adopted the latter view, as the dislocation showed that deceased had fallen in that manner.

The next witness was Mr. Crowhurst, who repeated to the court what

he had told us, and further stated that on leaving deceased's house he went straight home, as he had an appointment with a friend. He was followed by Baxfield, who gave evidence to the same effect, and stated that on leaving the house of the deceased he went to his place of business at Welsbury. He was about to retire when Thorndyke rose to cross-examine.

"At what time did you reach your place of business?" he asked.

The witness hesitated for a few moments and then replied, "Half-past four."

"And what time did you leave deceased's house?"

"Two o'clock," was the reply.

"What is the distance?"

"In a direct line, about two miles. But I didn't go direct. I took a round in the country by Lenfield."

"That would take you near the race-course on the way back. Did you go to the races?"

"No. The races were just over when I returned."

There was a slight pause and then Thorndyke asked, "Do you smoke much, Mr. Baxfield?"

The witness looked surprised, and so did the jury, but the former replied, "A fair amount. About fifteen cigarettes a day."

"What brand of cigarettes do you smoke, and what kind of tobacco is it?"

"I make my own cigarettes. I make them of shag."

Here protesting murmurs arose from the jury, and the coroner remarked stiffly, "These questions do not appear to have much connection with the subject of this inquiry."

"You may take it, sir," replied Thorndyke, "that they have a very direct bearing on it." Then, turning to the witness he asked, "Do you use a cigarette-tube?"

"Sometimes I do," was the reply.

"Have you lost a cigarette-tube lately?"

The witness directed a startled glance at Thorndyke and replied after some hesitation, "I believe I mislaid one a little time ago."

"When and where did you lose that tube?" Thorndyke asked.

"I—I really couldn't say," replied Baxfield, turning perceptibly pale.

Thorndyke opened his dispatch-box, and taking out the tube that he had salvaged at so much risk, handed it to the witness. "Is that the tube that you lost?" he asked.

At this question Baxfield turned pale as death, and the hand in which he received the tube shook as if with a palsy. "It may be," he faltered. "I wouldn't swear to it. It is like the one I lost."

Thorndyke took it from him and passed it to the coroner. "I am putting this tube in evidence, sir," said he. Then addressing the witness, he said, "You stated that you did not go to the races. Did you go on the course or inside the grounds at all?"

Baxfield moistened his lips and replied, "I just went in for a minute or two, but I didn't stay. The races were over, and there was a very rough crowd."

"While you were in that crowd, Mr Baxfield, did you have your pocket picked?"

There was an expectant silence in the court as Baxfield replied in a low voice: "Yes. I lost my watch."

Again Thorndyke opened the dispatch-box, and taking out a watch (it was the one that had been labelled 3), handed it to the witness. "Is that the watch that you lost?" he asked.

Baxfield held the watch in his trembling hand and replied hesitatingly, "I believe it is, but I won't swear to it."

There was a pause. Then, in grave, impressive tones, Thorndyke said, "Now, Mr. Baxfield, I am going to ask you a question which you need not answer if you consider that by doing so you would prejudice your position in any way. That question is, When your pocket was picked, were any articles besides this watch taken from your person? Don't hurry. Consider your answer carefully."

For some moments Baxfield remained silent, regarding Thorndyke with a wild, affrighted stare. At length he began falteringly, "I don't remember missing any thing—" and then stopped.

"Could the witness be allowed to sit down, sir?" Thorndyke asked. And when the permission had been given and a chair placed, Baxfield sat down heavily and cast a bewildered glance round the court. "I think," he said, addressing Thorndyke, "I had better tell you exactly what happened and take my chance of the consequences. When I left my uncle's house on Monday, I took a circuit through the fields and then entered Gilbert's Copse to wait for my uncle and tell him what I thought of his conduct in leaving the bulk of his property to a stranger. I struck the path that I knew my uncle would take and walked along it slowly to meet him. I did meet him—on the path, just above where he was found—and I began to say what was in my mind. But he wouldn't listen. He flew into a rage, and as I was standing in the middle of the

path, he tried to push past me. In doing so he caught his foot in a bramble and staggered back, then he disappeared through the bushes and a few seconds after I heard a thud down below. I pulled the bushes aside and looked down into the chalk-pit, and there I saw him lying with his head all on one side. Now, I happened to know of a short cut down into the pit. It was rather a dangerous climb, but I took it to get down as quickly as possible. It was there that I dropped the cigarette-tube. When I got to my uncle I could see that he was dead. His skull was battered and his neck was broken. Then the devil put into my head the idea of making away with the will. But I knew that if I took the will only, suspicion would fall on me. So I took most of his valuables—the wallet, his watch and chain, his purse and his ring. The purse I emptied and threw away, and flung the ring after it. I took the will out of the wallet—it had just been dropped in loose—and put it in an inner pocket. Then I dropped the wallet and the watch and chain into my outside coat pocket.

“I struck across country, intending to make for the race-course and drop the things among the crowd, so that they might be picked up and safely carried away. But when I got there a gang of pickpockets saved me the trouble; they mobbed and hustled me and cleared my pockets of everything but my keys and the will.”

“And what has become of the will?” asked Thorndyke.

“I have it here.” He dipped into his breast pocket and produced a folded paper, which he handed to Thorndyke, who opened it, and having glanced at it, passed it to the coroner.

That was practically the end of the inquest. The jury decided to accept Baxfield's statement and recorded a verdict of “Death by Misadventure,” leaving Baxfield to be dealt with by the proper authorities.

“An interesting and eminently satisfactory case,” remarked Thorndyke, as we sat over a rather late dinner. “Essentially simple, too. The elucidation turned, as you probably noticed, on a single illuminating fact.”

“I judged that it was so,” said I, “though the illumination of that fact has not yet reached me.”

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “let us first take the general aspect of the case as it was presented by Marchmont. The first thing, of course, that struck one was that the loss of the will might easily have converted Baxfield from a minor beneficiary to the sole heir. But even if the court agreed to recognise the will, it would have to be guided by the statements of the only two men to whom its provisions were even approximately known,

and Baxfield could have made any statement he pleased. It was impossible to ignore the fact that the loss of the will was very greatly to Baxfield's advantage.

"When the stolen property was discovered in Fletcher's possession it looked, at the first glance, as if the mystery of the crime were solved. But there were several serious inconsistencies. First, how came Fletcher to be in this solitary wood, remote from any railway or even road? He appeared to be a London pickpocket. When he was killed he was travelling to London by train. It seemed probable that he had come from London by train to ply his trade at the races. Then, as you know, criminological experience shows that the habitual criminal is a rigid specialist. The burglar, the coiner, the pickpocket, each keeps strictly to his own special line. Now, Fletcher was a pickpocket, and had evidently be picking pockets on the race-course. The probabilities were against his being the original robber and in favour of his having picked the pocket of the person who robbed Harewood. But if this were so, who was that person? Once more the probabilities suggested Baxfield. There was the motive, as I have said, and further, the pocket-picking had apparently taken place on the race-course, and Baxfield was known to be a frequenter of race-courses. But again, if Baxfield were the person robbed by Fletcher, then one of the five watches was probably Baxfield's watch. Whether it was so or not might have been very difficult to prove, but here came in the single illuminating fact that I have spoken of.

"You remember that when Marchmont opened the case he mentioned that Baxfield was a manufacturer of felt hats, and Crowhurst told us that he was a sort of foreman or manager of the factory."

"Yes, I remember, now you speak of it. But what is the bearing of the fact?"

"My dear Jervis!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Don't you see that it gave us a touchstone? Consider, now. What is a felt hat? It is just a mass of agglutinated rabbits' hair. The process of manufacture consists in blowing a jet of the more or less disintegrated hair on to a revolving steel cone which is moistened by a spray of an alcoholic solution of shellac. But, of course, a quantity of the finer and more minute particles of the broken hairs miss the cone and float about in the air. The air of the factory is thus charged with the dust of broken rabbit hairs; and this dust settles on and penetrates the clothing of the workers. But when clothing becomes charged with dust, that dust tends to accumulate in the pockets and find its way into the hollows and interstices of any object carried in those pockets. Thus, if one of the five watches was Baxfield's

it would almost certainly show traces where this characteristic dust had crept under the bezel and settled on the dial. And so it turned out to be. When I inspected those five watches through the Coddington lens, on the dial of No. 3 I saw a quantity of dust of this character. The electrified vulcanite rod picked it all up neatly and transferred it to the slide, and under the microscope its nature was obvious. The owner of this watch was therefore, almost certainly, employed in a felt hat factory. But, of course, it was necessary to show not only the presence of rabbit hair in this watch but its absence in the others and in Fletcher's pockets; which I did.

"Then with regard to Harewood's watch. There was no rabbit hair on the dial, but there was a small quantity on the fluff from the key barrel. Now, if that rabbit hair had come from Harewood's pocket it would have been uniformly distributed through the fluff. But it was not. It was confined exclusively to the part of the fluff that was exposed. Thus it had come from some pocket other than Harewood's and the owner of that pocket was almost certainly employed in a felt hat factory, and was most probably the owner of watch No. 3. Then there was the cigarette-tube. Its bore was loaded with rabbit hair. But its owner had unquestionably been at the scene of the crime. There was a clear suggestion that his was the pocket in which the stolen watch had been carried and that he was the owner of watch No. 3. The problem was to piece this evidence together and prove definitely who this person was. And that I was able to do by means of a fresh item of evidence, which I acquired when I saw Baxfield at the inquest. I suppose you noticed his boots?"

"I am afraid I didn't," I had to admit.

"Well, I did. I watched his feet constantly, and when he crossed his legs I could see that he had iron toe-tips on his boots. That was what gave me confidence to push the cross-examination."

"It was certainly a rather daring cross-examination and rather irregular, too," said I.

"It was extremely irregular," Thorndyke agreed. "The coroner ought not to have permitted it. But it was all for the best. If the coroner had disallowed my questions we should have had to take criminal proceedings against Baxfield, whereas now that we have recovered the will, it is possible that no one will trouble to prosecute him."

Which, I subsequently ascertained, is what actually happened.

A Fisher of Men

“The man,” observed Thorndyke, “who would successfully practise the scientific detection of crime must take all knowledge for his province. There is no single fact which may not, in particular circumstances, acquire a high degree of evidential value; and in such circumstances success or failure is determined by the possession or non-possession of the knowledge wherewith to interpret the significance of that fact.”

This *obiter dictum* was thrown off apropos of our investigation of the case rather magniloquently referred to in the press as “The Blue Diamond Mystery”; and more particularly of an incident which occurred in the office of our old friend, Superintendent Miller, at Scotland Yard. Thorndyke had called to verify the few facts which had been communicated to him, and having put away his notebook and picked up his green canvas-covered research-case, had risen to take his leave, when his glance fell on a couple of objects on a side-table—a leather handbag and a walking-stick, lashed together with string, to which was attached a descriptive label.

He regarded them for a few moments reflectively and then glanced at the superintendent.

“Derelicts?” he inquired, “or jetsam?”

“Jetsam,” the superintendent replied, “literally jetsam—thrown overboard to lighten the ship.”

Here Inspector Badger, who had been a party to the conference, looked up eagerly.

“Yes,” he broke in. “Perhaps the doctor wouldn’t mind having a look at them. It’s quite a nice little problem, doctor, and entirely in your line.”

“What is the problem?” asked Thorndyke.

“It’s just this,” said Badger. “Here is a bag. Now the question is, whose bag is it? What sort of person is the owner? Where did he come from and where has he gone to?”

Thorndyke chuckled. "That seems quite simple," said he. "A cursory inspection ought to dispose of trivial details like those. But how did you come by the bag?"

"The history of the derelicts," said Miller, "is this: About four o'clock this morning, a constable on duty in King's Road, Chelsea, saw a man walking on the opposite side of the road, carrying a handbag. There was nothing particularly suspicious in this, but still the constable thought he would cross and have a closer look at him. As he did so the man quickened his pace and, of course, the constable quickened his. Then the man broke into a run, and so did the constable, and a fine, stern chase started. Suddenly the man shot down a by-street, and as the constable turned the corner he saw his quarry turn into a sort of alley. Following him into this, and gaining on him perceptibly, he saw that the alley ended in a rather high wall. When the fugitive reached the wall he dropped his bag and stick and went over like a harlequin. The constable went over after him, but not like a harlequin—he wasn't dressed for the part. By the time he got over, into a large garden with a lot of fruit trees in it, my nabs had disappeared. He traced him by his footprints across the garden to another wall, and when he climbed over that he found himself in by-street. But there was no sign of our agile friend. The constable ran up and down the street to the next crossings, blowing his whistle, but of course it was no go. So he went back across the garden and secured the bag and stick, which were at once sent here for examination."

"And no arrest has been made?"

"Well," replied Miller with a faint grin, "a constable in Oakley Street who had heard the whistle arrested a man who was carrying a suspicious-looking object. But he turned out to be a cornet player coming home from the theatre."

"Good," said Thorndyke. "And now let us have a look at the bag, which I take it has already been examined?"

"Yes, we've been through it," replied Miller, "but everything has been put back as we found it."

Thorndyke picked up the bag and proceeded to make a systematic inspection of its exterior.

"A good bag," he commented; "quite an expensive one originally, though it has seen a good deal of service. You noticed the muddy marks on the bottom?"

"Yes," said Miller. "Those were probably made when he dropped the bag to jump over the wall."

“Possibly,” said Thorndyke, “though they don’t look like street mud. But we shall probably get more information from the contents.” He opened the bag, and after a glance at its interior, spread out on the table a couple of sheets of foolscap from the stationery rack, on which he began methodically to deposit the contents of the bag, accompanying the process with a sort of running commentary on their obvious characteristics.

“Item one: a small leather dressing-wallet. Rather shabby, but originally of excellent quality. It contains two Swedish razors, a little Washita hone, a diminutive strop, a folding shaving-brush, which is slightly damp to the fingers and has a scent similar to that of the stick of shaving soap. You notice that the hone is distinctly concave in the middle and that the inscription on the razors, ‘Arensburg, Eskilstuna, Sweden,’ is partly ground away. Then there is a box containing a very dry cake of soap, a little manicure set, a well-worn toothbrush, a nailbrush, dental-brush, button-hook, corn-razor, a small clothesbrush and a pair of small hairbrushes. It seems to me, Badger, that this wallet suggests—mind, I only say ‘suggests’—a pretty complete answer to one of your questions.”

“I don’t see how,” said the inspector. “Tell us what it suggests to you.”

“It suggests to me,” replied Thorndyke, laying down the lens through which he had been inspecting the hair-brushes, “a middle-aged or elderly man with a shaven upper lip and a beard; a well-preserved, healthy man, neat, orderly, provident and careful as to his appearance; a man long habituated to travelling, and—though I don’t insist on this, but the appearances suggest that he had been living for some time in a particular households and that at the time when he lost the bag, he was changing his residence.”

“He was that,” cackled the inspector, “if the constable’s account of the way he went over that wall is to be trusted. But still, I don’t see how you have arrived at all those facts.”

“Not facts, Badger,” Thorndyke corrected. “I said suggestions. And those suggestions may be quite misleading. There may be some factor, such as change of ownership of the wallet, which we have not allowed for. But, taking the appearances at their face value, that is what they suggest. There is the wallet itself, for instance—strong, durable, but shabby with years of wear. And observe that it is a travelling-wallet and would be subjected to wear only during travel. Then further, as to the time factor, there are the hone and the razors. It takes a good many years to wear a Washita hone hollow or to wear away the blade of a Swedish razor until the maker’s mark is encroached on. The state of health, and to some extent the age, are suggested by the tooth brush and

the dental-brush. He has lost some teeth, since he wears a plate, but not many; and he is free from pyorrhoea and alveolar absorption. You don't wear a toothbrush down like this on half a dozen rickety survivors. But a man whose teeth will bear hard brushing is probably well-preserved and healthy."

"You say that he shaves his upper lip but wears a beard," said the inspector. "How do you arrive at that?"

"It is fairly obvious," replied Thorndyke. "We see that he has razors and uses them, and we also see that he has a beard."

"Do we?" exclaimed Badger. "How do we?"

Thorndyke delicately picked a hair from one of the hairbrushes and held it up. "That is not a scalp hair," said he. "I should say that it came from the side of the chin."

Badger regarded the hair with evident disfavour. "Looks to me," he remarked, "as if a small tooth-comb might have been useful."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed, "but the appearance is deceptive. This is what is called a moniliform hair—like a string of beads. But the bead-like swellings are really parts of the hair. It is a diseased, or perhaps we should say an abnormal, condition." He handed me the hair together with his lens, through which I examined it and easily recognised the characteristic swellings.

"Yes," said I, "it is an early case of *trichlorrexia nodosa*."

"Good Lord!" murmured the inspector. "Sounds like a Russian nobleman. Is it a common complaint?"

"It is not a rare disease—if you can call it a disease," I replied, "but it is a rare condition, taking the population as a whole."

"It is rather a remarkable coincidence that it should happen to occur in this particular case," the superintendent observed.

"My dear Miller," exclaimed Thorndyke, "surely your experience must have impressed on you the astonishing frequency of the unusual and the utter failure of the mathematical laws of probability in practice. Believe me, Miller, the bread-and-butterfly was right. It is the exceptional that always happens."

Having discharged this paradox, he once more dived into the bag, and this time handed out a singular and rather unsavoury-looking parcel, the outer investment of which was formed by what looked like an excessively dirty towel, but which, as Thorndyke delicately unrolled it, was seen to be only half a towel which was supplemented by a still dirtier and excessively ragged coloured handkerchief. This, too, being opened out, disclosed an extremely soiled and rather frayed collar

(which, like the other articles, bore no name or mark), and a mass of grass, evidently used as packing material.

The inspector picked up the collar and quoted reflectively, "He is a man, neat, orderly and careful as to his appearance," after which he dropped the collar and ostentatiously wiped his fingers.

Thorndyke smiled grimly but refrained from repartee as he carefully separated the grass from the contained objects, which turned out to be a small telescopic jemmy, a jointed auger, a screwdriver and a bunch of skeleton keys.

"One understands his unwillingness to encounter the constable with these rather significant objects in his possession," Thorndyke remarked. "They would have been difficult to explain away." He took up the heap of grass between his hands and gently compressed it to test its freshness. As he did so a tiny, cigar-shaped object dropped on the paper.

"What is that?" asked the superintendent. "It looks like a chrysalis."

"It isn't," said Thorndyke. "It is a shell, a species of *Clausilia*, I think." He picked up the little shell and closely examined its mouth through his lens. "Yes," he continued, "it is a *Clausilia*. Do you study our British mollusca, Badger?"

"No, I don't," the inspector replied with emphasis.

"Pity," murmured Thorndyke. "If you did, you would be interested to learn that the name of this little shell is *Clausilia biplicata*."

"I don't care what its beastly name is," said Badger. "I want to know whose bag this is; what the owner is like; and where he came from and where he has gone to. Can you tell us that?"

Thorndyke regarded the inspector with wooden gravity. "It is all very obvious," said he, "very obvious. But still, I think I should like to fill in a few details before making a definite statement. Yes, I think I will reserve my judgement until I have considered the matter a little further."

The inspector received this statement with a dubious grin. He was in somewhat of a dilemma. My colleague was addicted to a certain dry facetiousness, and was probably pulling the inspector's leg. But, on the other hand, I knew, and so did both the detectives, that it was perfectly conceivable that he had actually solved Badger's problem, impossible as it seemed, and was holding back his knowledge until he had seen whither it led.

"Shall we take a glance at the stick?" said he, picking it up as he spoke and running his eye over its not very distinctive features. It was a common ash stick, with a crooked handle polished and darkened by prolonged contact with an apparently ungloved hand, and it was smeared

for about three inches from the tip with a yellowish mud. The iron shoe of the ferrule was completely worn away and the deficiency had been made good by driving a steel boot-stud into the exposed end.

"A thrifty gentleman, this," Thorndyke remarked, pointing to the stud as he measured the diameter of the ferrule with his pocket calliper-gauge. "Twenty-three thirty-seconds is the diameter," he added, looking gravely at the inspector. "You had better make a note of that, Badger." The inspector smiled sourly as Thorndyke laid down the stick, and once more picking up the little green canvas case that contained his research outfit, prepared to depart.

"You will hear from us, Miller," he said, "if we pick up anything that will be useful to you. And now, Jervis, we must really take ourselves off."

As the tinkling hansom bore us down Whitehall towards Waterloo, I remarked, "Badger half suspects you of having withheld from him some valuable information in respect of that bag."

"He does," Thorndyke agreed with a mischievous smile; "and he doesn't in the least suspect me of having given him a most illuminating hint."

"But did you?" I asked, rapidly reviewing the conversation and deciding that the facts elicited from the dressing-wallet could hardly be described as hints.

"My learned friend," he replied, "is pleased to counterfeit obtuseness. It won't do, Jervis. I've known you too long."

I grinned with vexation. Evidently I had missed the point of a subtle demonstration, and I knew that it was useless to ask further questions; and for the remainder of our journey, in the cab I struggled vainly to recover the "illuminating hint" that the detectives—and I—had failed to note. Indeed, so preoccupied was I with this problem that I rather overlooked the fact that the jettisoned bag was really no concern of ours, and that we were actually engaged in the investigation of a crime of which, at present, I knew practically nothing. It was not until we had secured an empty compartment and the train had begun to move that this suddenly dawned on me; whereupon I dismissed the bag problem and applied to Thorndyke for details of the "Brentford Train Mystery."

"To call it a mystery," said he, "is a misuse of words. It appears to be a simple train robbery. The identity of the robber is unknown, but there is nothing very mysterious in that; and the crime otherwise is quite commonplace. The circumstances are these:

"Some time ago, Mr. Lionel Montague, of the firm, Lyons, Montague & Salaman, art dealers, bought from a Russian nobleman a very valuable diamond necklace and pendant. The peculiarity of this necklace

was that the stones were all of a pale blue colour and pretty accurately matched, so that in addition to the aggregate value of the stones—which were all of large size and some very large—was the value of the piece as a whole due to this uniformity of colour. Mr. Montague gave £70,000 for it, and considered that he had made an excellent bargain. I should mention that Montague was the chief buyer for the firm, and that he spent most of his time travelling about the Continent in search of works of art and other objects suitable for the purposes of his firm, and that, naturally, he was an excellent judge of such things. Now, it seems that he was not satisfied with the settings of this necklace, and as soon as he had purchased it he handed it over to Messrs. Binks, of Old Bond Street, to have the settings replaced by others of better design. Yesterday morning he was notified by Binks that the resetting was completed, and in the afternoon he called to inspect the work and take the necklace away if it was satisfactory. The interview between Binks and Montague took place in a room behind the shop, but it appears that Montague came out into the shop to get a better light for his inspection and Mr. Binks states that as his customer stood facing the door, examining the new settings, he, Binks, noticed a man standing by the doorway furtively watching Mr. Montague.”

“There is nothing very remarkable in that,” said I. “If a man stands at a shop door with a necklace of blue diamonds in his hand, he is rather likely to attract attention.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke agreed. “But the significance of an antecedent is apt to be more appreciated after the consequences have developed. Binks is now very emphatic about the furtive watcher. However, to continue: Mr. Montague, being satisfied with the new settings, replaced the necklace in its case, put the latter into his bag—which he had brought with him from the inner room—and a minute or so later left the shop. That was about 5 p. m.; and he seems to have gone direct to the flat of his partner, Mr. Salaman, with whom he had been staying for a fortnight, at Queen’s Gate. There he remained until about half-past eight, when he came out accompanied by Mr. Salaman. The latter carried a small suit-case, while Montague carried a handbag in which was the necklace. It is not known whether it contained anything else.

“From Queen’s Gate the two men proceeded to Waterloo, walking part of the way and covering the remainder by omnibus.”

“By omnibus!” I exclaimed, “with seventy thousand pounds of diamonds about them!”

“Yes, it sounds odd. But people who habitually handle portable property

of great value seem to resemble those who habitually handle explosives. They gradually become unconscious of the risks. At any rate, that is how they went, and they arrived safely at Waterloo in time to catch the 9.15 train for Isleworth. Mr. Salaman saw his partner established in an empty first-class compartment and stayed with him, chatting, until the train started.

“Mr. Montague's destination was Isleworth, in which rather unlikely neighbourhood Mr. Jacob Lowenstein, late of Chicago, and now of Berkeley Square, has a sort of river-side villa with a motor boat-house attached. Lowenstein had secured the option of purchasing the blue diamond necklace, and Montague was taking it down to exhibit it and carry out the deal. He was proposing to stay a few days with Lowenstein, and then he was proceeding to Brussels on one of his periodic tours. But he never reached Isleworth. When the train stopped at Brentford, a porter noticed a suit-case on the luggage-rack of an apparently empty first-class compartment. He immediately entered to take possession of it, and was in the act of reaching up to the rack when his foot came in contact with something soft under the seat. Considerably startled, he stooped and peered under, when, to his horror, he perceived the body of a man, quite motionless and apparently dead. Instantly he darted out and rushed up the platform in a state of wild panic until he, fortunately, ran against the station master, with whom and another porter he returned to the compartment. When they drew the body out from under the seat it was found to be still breathing, and they proceeded at once to apply such restoratives as cold water and fresh air, pending the arrival of the police and the doctor, who had been sent for.

“In a few minutes the police arrived accompanied by the police surgeon, and the latter, after a brief examination, decided that the unconscious man was suffering from the effects of a large dose of chloroform, violently and unskilfully administered, and ordered him to be carefully removed to a local nursing home. Mean while, the police had been able, by inspecting the contents of his pockets, to identify him as Mr. Lionel Montague.”

“The diamonds had vanished, of course?” said I.

“Yes. The handbag was not in the compartment, and later an empty handbag was picked up on the permanent way between Barnes and Chiswick, which seems to indicate the locality where the robbery took place.”

“And what is our present objective?”

“We are going, on instructions from Mr. Salaman, to the nursing home

to see what information we can pick up. If Montague has recovered sufficiently to give an account of the robbery, the police will have a description of the robber, and there may not be much for us to do. But you will have noticed that they do not seem to have any information at Scotland Yard at present, beyond what I have given you. So there is a chance yet that we may earn our fees."

Thorndyke's narrative of this somewhat commonplace crime, with the discussion which followed it, occupied us until the train stopped at Brentford Station. A few minutes later we halted in one of the quiet by-streets of this old-world town, at a soberly painted door on which was a brass plate inscribed "St. Agnes Nursing Home." Our arrival had apparently been observed, for the door was opened by a middle-aged lady in a nurse's uniform.

"Dr. Thorndyke?" she inquired; and as my colleague bowed assent she continued: "Mr. Salaman told me you would probably call. I am afraid I haven't very good news for you. The patient is still quite unconscious."

"That is rather remarkable," said Thorndyke.

"It is. Dr. Kingston, who is in charge of the case, is somewhat puzzled by this prolonged stupor. He is inclined to suspect a narcotic—possibly a large dose of morphine—in addition to the effects of the chloroform and the shock."

"He is probably right," said I; "and the marvel is that the man is alive at all after such outrageous treatment."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "He must be pretty tough. Shall we be able to see him?"

"Oh, yes," the matron replied. "I am instructed to give you every assistance. Dr. Kingston would like to have your opinion on the case."

With this she conducted us to a pleasant room on the first floor, where, in a bed placed opposite a large window—left uncurtained—with the strong light falling full on his face, a man lay with closed eyes, breathing quietly and showing no sign of consciousness when we somewhat noisily entered the room. For some time Thorndyke stood by the bedside, looking down at the unconscious man, listening to the breathing and noting its frequency by his watch. Then he felt the pulse, and raising both eyelids, compared the two pupils.

"His condition doesn't appear alarming," was his conclusion. "The breathing is rather shallow, but it is quite regular, and the pulse is not bad though slow. The contracted pupils strongly suggest opium, or more probably morphine. But that could easily be settled by a chemical test. Do you notice the state of the face, Jervis?"

"You mean the chloroform burns? Yes, the handkerchief or pad must have been saturated. But I was also noticing that he corresponds quite remarkably with the description you were giving Badger of the owner of the dressing-wallet. He is about the age you mentioned—roughly about fifty—and he has the same old-fashioned treatment of the beard, the shaven upper lip and the monkey-fringe under the chin. It is rather an odd coincidence."

Thorndyke looked at me keenly. "The coincidence is closer than that, Jervis. Look at the beard itself."

He handed me his lens, and, stooping down, I brought it to bear on the patient's beard. And then I started back in astonishment; for by the bright light I could see plainly that a considerable proportion of the hairs were distinctly moniliform. This man's beard, too, was affected by an early stage of *trichorrexia nodosa*!

"Well!" I exclaimed, "this is really an amazing coincidence. I wonder if it is anything more."

"I wonder," said Thorndyke. "Are those Mr. Montague's things, Matron?"

"Yes," she replied, turning to the side table on which the patient's effects were neatly arranged. "Those are his clothes and the things which were taken from his pockets, and that is his bag. It was found on the line and sent on here a couple of hours ago. There is nothing in it."

Thorndyke looked over the various objects—keys, card-case, pocket-book, etc.—that had been turned out of the patient's pockets, and then picked up the bag, which he turned over curiously and then opened to inspect the interior. There was nothing distinctive about it. It was just a plain, imitation leather bag, fairly new, though rather the worse for its late vicissitudes, lined with coarse linen to which two large, wash-leather pockets had been roughly stitched. As he laid the bag down and picked up his own canvas case, he asked: "What time did Mr. Salaman come to see the patient?"

"He came here about ten o'clock this morning, and he was not able to stay more than half an hour as he had an appointment. But he said he would look in again this evening. You can't stay to see him, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not," Thorndyke replied; "in fact we must be off now, for both Dr. Jervis and I have some other matters to attend to."

"Are you going straight back to the chambers, Jervis?" Thorndyke asked, as we walked down the main street towards the station.

"Yes," I replied in some surprise. "Aren't you?"

"No. I have a little expedition in view."

“Oh, have you?” I exclaimed, and as I spoke it began to dawn on me that I had overestimated the importance of my other business.

“Yes,” said Thorndyke “the fact is that—ha! excuse me one moment, Jervis.” He had halted abruptly outside a fishing-tackle shop and now, after a brief glance in through the window, entered with an air of business. I immediately bolted in after him, and was just in time to hear him demand a fishing-rod of a light and inexpensive character. When this had been supplied he asked for a line and one or two hooks; and I was a little surprised—and the vendor was positively scandalised—at his indifference to the quality or character of these appliances. I believe he would have accepted cod-line and a shark-hook if they had been offered.

“And now I want a float,” said he.

The shopkeeper produced a tray containing a varied assortment of floats over which Thorndyke ran a critical eye, and finally reduced the shopman to stupefaction by selecting a gigantic, pot-bellied scarlet-and-green atrocity that looked like a juvenile telegraph buoy.

I could not let this outrage pass without comment. “You must excuse me, Thorndyke,” I said, “if I venture to point out that the Greenland whale no longer frequents the upper reaches of the Thames.”

“You mind your own business,” he retorted, stolidly pocketing the telegraph buoy when he had paid for his purchases. “I like a float that you can see.”

Here the shopman, recovering somewhat from the shock of surprise, remarked deferentially that it was a long time since a really large pike had been caught in the neighbourhood; whereupon Thorndyke finished him off by replying: “Yes, I’ve no doubt. They don’t use the right sort of floats, you know. Now, when the pike see my float, they will just come tumbling over one another to get on the hook.” With this he tucked the rod under his arm and strolled out, leaving the shopman breathing hard and staring harder.

“But what on earth,” I asked, as we walked down the street (watched by the shopman who had come out on the pavement to see the last of us), “do you want with such an enormous float? Why, it will be visible a quarter of a mile away.”

“Exactly,” said Thorndyke. “And what more could a fisher of men require?”

This rejoinder gave me pause. Evidently Thorndyke had something in hand of more than common interest; and again it occurred to me that my own business engagements were of no special urgency. I was about

to mention this fact when Thorndyke again halted—at an oilshop this time.

“I think I will step in here and get a little burnt umber,” said he.

I followed him into the shop, and while the powder-colour was being weighed and made up into a little packet I reflected profoundly. Fishing-tackle and burnt umber had no obvious associations. I began to be mystified and correspondingly inquisitive.

“What do you want the burnt umber for?” I asked as soon as we were outside.

“To mix with plaster,” he replied readily.

“But why do you want to colour the plaster? And what are you going to do with it?”

“Now, Jervis,” he admonished with mock severity, “you are not doing yourself justice. An investigator of your experience shouldn't ask for explanations of the obvious.”

“And why,” I continued, “did you want to know if I was going straight back to the chambers?”

“Because I may want some assistance later. Probably Polton will be able to do all that I want, but I wished to know that you would both be within reach of a telegram.”

“But,” I exclaimed, “what nonsense it is to talk of sending a telegram to me when I'm here!”

“But I may not want any assistance, after all.”

“Well,” I said doggedly, “you are going to have it whether you want it or not. You've got something on and I'm going to be in it.”

“I like your enthusiasm, Jervis,” he chuckled; “but it is quite possible that I shall merely find a mare's nest.”

“Very well,” said I. “Then I'll help you to find it. I've had plenty of experience in that line, to say nothing of my natural gifts. So lead on.”

He led on, with a resigned smile, to the station, where we were fortunate enough to find a train just ready to start. But our journey was not a long one, for at Chiswick Thorndyke got out of the train, and on leaving the station struck out eastward with a very evident air of business. As we entered the outskirts of Hammersmith he turned into a by-street which presently brought us out into Bridge Road. Here he turned sharply to the right and, at the same brisk pace, crossed Hammersmith Bridge and made his way to the towing path. As he now slowed down perceptibly, I ventured to inquire whether this was the spot on which he proposed to exhibit his super-float.

“This, I think, will be our fishing-ground,” he replied; “but we will look over it carefully and select a suitable pitch.”

He continued to advance at an easy pace, and I noticed that, according to his constant habit, he was studying the peculiarities of the various feet that had trodden the path within the last day or two, keeping, for this purpose on the right-hand side, where the shade of a few pollard willows overhanging an indistinct dry ditch had kept the ground soft. We had walked on for nearly half a mile when he halted and looked round.

“I think we had better turn back a little way,” said he. “We seem to have overshot our mark.”

I made no comment on this rather mysterious observation, and we retraced our steps for a couple of hundred yards, Thorndyke still walking on the side farthest from the river and still keeping his eyes fixed on the ground. Presently he again halted, and looking up and down the path, of which we were at the moment the only occupants, placed the canvas case on the ground and unfastened its clasps.

“This, I think, will be our pitch,” said he.

“What are you going to do?” I asked.

“I am going to make one or two casts. And mean while you had better get the fishing-rod fixed together so as to divert the attention of any passers-by.”

I proceeded to make ready the fishing-tackle, but at the same time kept a close watch on my colleague’s proceedings. And very curious proceedings they were. First he dipped up a little water from the river in the rubber mixing bowl with which he mixed a bowlful of plaster, and into this he stirred a few pinches of burnt umber, whereby its dazzling white was changed to a muddy buff. Then, having looked up and down the path, he stooped and carefully poured the plaster into a couple of impressions of a walking-stick that were visible at the edge of the path and finished up by filling a deep impression of the same stick, at the margin of the ditch, where it had apparently been stuck in the soft, clayey ground.

As I watched this operation, a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind. Dropping the fishing-rod, I walked quickly along the path until I was able to pick up another impression of the stick. A very brief examination of it confirmed my suspicion. At the centre of the little shallow pit was a semicircular impression—clearly that of a half-worn boot-stud.

“Why!” I exclaimed, “this is the stick that we saw at Scotland Yard!”

"I should expect it to be and I believe it is," said Thorndyke. "But we shall be better able to judge from the casts. Pick up your rod. There are two men coming down the path."

He closed his "research-case" and drawing the fishing-line from his pocket, began meditatively to unwind it.

"I could wish," said I, "that our appearance was more in character with the part of the rustic angler; and for the Lord's sake keep float out of sight, or we shall collect a crowd."

Thorndyke laughed softly. "The float," said he, "was intended for Polton. He would have loved it. And the crowd would have been rather an advantage—as you will appreciate when you come to use it."

The two men—builder's labourers, apparently—now passed us with a glance of faint interest at the fishing-tackle; and as they strolled by I appreciated the value of the burnt umber. If the casts had been made of the snow-white plaster they would have stared conspicuously from the ground and these men would almost certainly have stopped to examine them and see what we were doing. But the tinted plaster was practically invisible.

"You are a wonderful man, Thorndyke," I said, as I announced my discovery. "You foresee everything."

He bowed his acknowledgments, and having tenderly felt one of the casts and ascertained that the plaster had set hard, he lifted it with infinite care, exhibiting a perfect facsimile of the end of the stick, on which the worn boot-stud was plainly visible, even to the remains of the pattern. Any doubt that might have remained as to the identity of the stick was removed when Thorndyke produced his calliper-gauge.

"Twenty-three thirty-seconds was the diameter, I think," said he as he opened the jaws of the gauge and consulted his notes. He placed the cast between the jaws, and as they were gently slid into contact, the index marked twenty-three thirty-seconds.

"Good," said Thorndyke, picking up the other two casts and establishing their identity with the one which we had examined. "This completes the first act." Dropping one cast into his case and throwing the other two into the river, he continued: "Now we proceed to the next and hope for a like success. You notice that he stuck his stick into the ground. Why do you suppose he did that?"

"Presumably to leave his hands free."

"Yes. And now let us sit down here and consider why he wanted his hands free. Just look around and tell me what you see."

I gazed rather hopelessly at the very indistinctive surroundings and began a bald catalogue. "I see a shabby-looking pollard willow, an assortment of suburban vegetation, an obsolete tin saucepan—unserviceable—and a bald spot where somebody seems to have pulled up a small patch of turf."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "You will also notice a certain amount of dry, powdered earth distributed rather evenly over the bottom of the ditch. And your patch of turf was cut round with a large knife before it was pulled up. Why do you suppose it was pulled up?"

I shook my head. "It's of no use making mere guesses."

"Perhaps not," said he, "though the suggestion is fairly obvious when considered with the other appearances. Between the roots of the willow you notice a patch of grass that looks denser than one would expect from its position. I wonder—"

As he spoke, he reached forward with his stick and prised vigorously at the edge of the patch, with the result that the clump of grass lifted bodily; and when I picked it up and tried it on the bald spot, the nicety with which it fitted left no doubt as to its origin.

"Ha!" I exclaimed, looking at the obviously disturbed earth between the roots of the willow, which the little patch of turf had covered; "the plot thickens. Something seems to have been either buried or dug up there; more probably buried."

"I hope and believe that my learned friend is correct," said Thorndyke, opening his case to abstract a large, powerful spatula.

"What do you expect to find there?" I asked.

"I have a faint hope of finding something wrapped in the half of a very dirty towel," was the reply.

"Then you had better find it quickly," said I, "for there is a man coming along the path from the Putney direction."

He looked round at the distant figure, and driving the spatula into the loose earth stirred it up vigorously.

"I can feel something," he said, digging away with powerful thrusts and scooping the earth out with his hands. Once more he looked round at the approaching stranger—who seemed now to have quickened his pace but was still four or five hundred yards distant. Then, thrusting his hands into the hole, he gave a smart pull. Slowly there came forth a package, about ten inches by six, enveloped in a portion of a peculiarly filthy towel and loosely secured with string. Thorndyke rapidly cast off the string and opened out the towel, disclosing a handsome morocco case with an engraved gold plate.

I pounced on the case and, pressing the catch, raised the lid; and though I had expected no less, it was with something like a shock of surprise that I looked on the glittering row and the dazzling cluster of steely-blue diamonds.

As I closed the casket and deposited it in the green canvas case, Thorndyke, after a single glance at the treasure and another along the path, crammed the towel into the hole and began to sweep the loose earth in on top of it. The approaching stranger was for the moment hidden from us by a bend of the path and a near clump of bushes, and Thorndyke was evidently working to hide all traces before he should appear. Having filled the hole, he carefully replaced the sod of turf and then, moving over to the little bare patch from whence the turf had been removed, he began swiftly to dig it up.

"There," said he, flinging on the path a worm which he had just disinterred, "that will explain our activities. You had better continue the excavation with your pocket knife, and then proceed to the capture of the leviathans. I must run up to the police station and you must keep possession of this pitch. Don't move away from here on any account until I come back or send somebody to relieve you. I will hand you over the float; you'll want that." With a malicious smile he dropped the gaudy monstrosity on the path, and having wiped the spatula and replaced it in the case, picked up the latter and moved away towards Putney.

At this moment the stranger reappeared, walking as if for a wager, and I began to peck up the earth with my pocket-knife.

As the man approached he slowed down by degrees until he came up at something like a saunter. He was followed at a little distance by Thorndyke, who had turned as if he had changed his mind, and now passed me with the remark that "Perhaps Hammersmith would be better." The stranger cast a suspicious glance at him and then turned his attention to me.

"Lookin' for worms?" he inquired, halting and surveying me inquisitively.

I replied by picking one up (with secret distaste) and holding it aloft, and he continued, looking wistfully at Thorndyke's retreating figure: "Your pal seems to have had enough."

"He hadn't got a rod," said I; "but he'll be back presently."

"Ah!" said he, looking steadily over my shoulder in the direction of the willow. "Well, you won't do any good here. The place where they rises

is a quarter of a mile farther down—just round the bend there. That’s a prime pitch. You just come along with me and I’ll show you.”

“I must stay here until my friend comes back,” said I. “But I’ll tell him what you say.”

With this I seated myself stolidly on the bank and, having flung the baited hook into the stream, sat and glared fixedly at the preposterous float. My acquaintance fidgeted about me uneasily, endeavouring from time to time to lure me away to the “prime pitch” round the bend. And so the time dragged on until three-quarters of an hour had passed.

Suddenly I observed two taxicabs crossing the bridge, followed by three cyclists. A minute or two later Thorndyke reappeared, accompanied by two other men, and then the cyclists came into view, approaching at a rapid pace.

“Seems to be a regular procession,” my friend remarked, viewing the new arrivals with evident uneasiness. As he spoke, one of the cyclists halted and dismounted to examine his tyre, while the other two approached and shot past us. Then they, too, halted and dismounted, and having deposited their machines in the ditch, they came back towards us. By this time I was able—with a good deal of surprise—to identify Thorndyke’s two companions as Inspector Badger and Superintendent Miller. Perhaps my acquaintance also recognised them, or possibly the proceedings of the third cyclist—who had also laid down his machine and was approaching on foot—disturbed him. At any rate he glanced quickly from the one group to the other and, selecting the smaller one, sprang suddenly between the two cyclists and sped away along the path like a hare.

In a moment there was a wild stampede. The three cyclists, remounting their machines, pedalled furiously after the fugitive, followed by Badger and Miller on foot. Then the fugitive, the cyclists, and finally the two officers disappeared round the bend of the path.

“How did you know that he was the man?” I asked, when my colleague and I were left alone.

“I didn’t, though I had pretty strong grounds for suspicion. But I merely brought the police to set a watch on the place and arrange an ambush. Their encircling movement was just an experimental bluff; they might have been chary of arresting the fellow if he hadn’t taken fright and bolted. We have been fortunate all round, for, by a lucky chance, Badger and Miller were at Chiswick making inquiries and I was able to telephone to them to meet me at the bridge.”

At this moment the procession reappeared, advancing briskly; and my late adviser marched at the centre securely handcuffed. As he was conducted past me he glared savagely and made some impolite references to a "blooming nark."

"You can take him in one of the taxis," said Miller, "and put your bicycles on top." Then, as the procession moved on towards the bridge he turned to Thorndyke. "I suppose he's the right man, doctor, but he hasn't got any of the stuff on him."

"Of course he hasn't," said Thorndyke.

"Well, do you know where it is?"

Thorndyke opened his case and taking out the casket, handed it to the superintendent. "I shall want a receipt for it," said he.

Miller opened the casket, and at the sight of the glittering jewels both the detectives uttered an exclamation of amazement, and the superintendent demanded: "Where did you get this, sir?"

"I dug it up at the foot of that willow."

"But how did you know it was there?"

"I didn't," replied Thorndyke; "but I thought I might as well look, you know," and he bestowed a smile of exasperating blandness on the astonished officer.

The two detectives gazed at Thorndyke, then they looked at one another and then they looked at me; and Badger observed, with profound conviction, that it was a "knock-out." "I believe the doctor keeps a tame clairvoyant," he added.

"And may I take it, sir," said Miller, "that you can establish a *prima facie* case against this man, so that we can get a remand until Mr. Montague is well enough to identify him?"

"You may," Thorndyke replied. "Let me know when and where he is to be charged and I will attend and give evidence."

On this Miller wrote out a receipt for the jewels and the two officers hurried off to their taxicab, leaving us, as Badger put it, "to our fishing." As soon as they were out of sight, Thorndyke opened his case and mixed another bowlful of plaster. "We want two more casts," said he; "one of the right foot of the man who buried the jewels and one of the right foot of the prisoner. They are obviously identical, as you can see by the arrangement of the nails and the shape of the new patch on the sole. I shall put the casts in evidence and compare them with the prisoner's right boot."

I understood now why Thorndyke had walked away towards Putney and then returned in rear of the stranger. He had suspected the man

and had wanted to get a look at his footprints. But there was a good deal in this case that I did not understand at all.

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"There," said Thorndyke, as he deposited the casts, each with its pencilled identification, in his canvas case, "that is the end of the Blue Diamond Mystery."

"I beg your pardon," said I, "but it isn't. I want a full explanation. It is evident that from the house at Brentford you made a bee line to that willow. You knew then pretty exactly where the necklace was hidden. For all I know, you may have had that knowledge when we left Scotland Yard."

"As a matter of fact, I had," he replied. "I went to Brentford principally to verify the ownership of the wallet and the bag."

"But what was it that directed you with such certainty to the Hammer-smith towing-path?"

It was then that he made the observation that I have quoted at the beginning of this narrative.

"In this case," he continued, "a curious fact, well known to naturalists, acquired vital evidential importance. It associated a bag, found in one locality, with another apparently unrelated locality. It was the link that joined up the two ends of a broken chain. I offered that fact to Inspector Badger, who, lacking the knowledge wherewith to interpret it, rejected it with scorn."

"I remember that you gave him the name of that little shell that dropped out of the handful of grass."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That was the crucial fact. It told us where the handful of grass had been gathered."

"I can't imagine how," said I. "Surely you find shells all over the country?"

"That is, in general, quite true," he replied, "but *Clausilia biplicata* is one of the rare exceptions. There are four British species of these queer little univalves (which are so named from the little spring door with which the entrance of the shell is furnished): *Clausilia laminata*, *rolphii*, *rugosa* and *biplicata*. The first three species have what we may call a normal distribution, whereas the distribution of *biplicata* is abnormal. This seems to be a dying species. It is in process of becoming extinct in this island. But when a species of animal or plant becomes extinct, it does not fade away evenly over the whole of its habitat, but it disappears in patches, which gradually extend, leaving, as it were, islands

of survival. This is what has happened to *Clausilia biplicata*. It has disappeared from this country with the exception of two localities; one of these is in Wiltshire, and the other is the right bank of the Thames at Hammersmith. And this latter locality is extraordinarily restricted. Walk down a few hundred yards towards Putney, and you have walked out of its domain; walk up a few hundred yards towards the bridge, and again you have walked out of its territory. Yet within that little area it is fairly plentiful. If you know where to look—it lives on the bark or at the roots of willow trees—you can usually find one or two specimens. Thus, you see, the presence of that shell associated the handful of grass with a certain willow tree, and that willow was either in Wiltshire or by the Hammersmith towing-path. But there was nothing otherwise to connect it with Wiltshire, whereas there was something to connect it with Hammersmith. Let us for a moment dismiss the shell and consider the other suggestions offered by the bag and stick.

“The bag, as you saw, contained traces of two very different persons. One was a middle-class man, probably middle-aged or elderly, cleanly, careful as to his appearance and of orderly habits; the other, uncleanly, slovenly and apparently a professional criminal. The bag itself seemed to appertain to the former person. It was an expensive bag and showed signs of years of careful use. This, and the circumstances in which it was found, led us to suspect that it was a stolen bag. Now, we knew that the contents of a bag had been stolen. We knew that an empty bag had been picked up on the line between Barnes and Chiswick, and it was probable that the thief had left the train at the latter station. The empty bag had been assumed to be Mr. Montague's, whereas the probabilities—as for instance, the fact of its having been thrown out on the line—suggested that it was the thief's bag, and that Mr. Montague's had been taken away with its contents.

“The point, then, that we had to settle when we left Scotland Yard was whether this apparently stolen bag had any connection with the train robbery. But as soon as we saw Mr. Montague it was evident that he corresponded exactly with the owner of the dressing-wallet; and when we saw the bag that had been found on the line—a shoddy, imitation leather bag—it was practically certain that it was not his, while the roughly-stitched leather pockets, exactly suited to the dimensions of house-breaking tools, strongly suggested that it was a burglar's bag. But if this were so, then Mr. Montague's bag had been stolen, and the robber's effects stuffed into it.

“With this working hypothesis we were now able to take up the case

from the other end. The Scotland Yard bag was Montague's bag. It had been taken from Chiswick to the Hammersmith towpath, where—judging from the clay smears on the bottom—it had been laid on the ground, presumably close to a willow tree. The use of the grass as packing suggested that something had been removed from the bag at this place—something that had wedged the tools together and prevented them from rattling; and there appeared to be half a towel missing. Clearly, the towpath was our next field of exploration.

“But, small as this area was geographically, it would have taken a long time to examine in detail. Here, however, the stick gave us invaluable aid. It had a perfectly distinctive tip, and it showed traces of having been stuck about three inches into earth similar to that on the bag. What we had thus to look for was a hole in the ground about three inches deep, and having at the bottom the impression of a half-worn boot-stud. This hole would probably be close to a willow.

“The search turned out even easier than I had hoped. Directly we reached the towpath I picked up the track of the stick, and not one track only, but a double track, showing that our friend had returned to the bridge. All that remained was to follow the track until it came to an end and there we were pretty certain to find the hole in the ground, as, in fact, we did.”

“And why,” I asked, “do you suppose he buried the stuff?”

“Probably as a precaution, in case he had been seen and described. This morning's papers will have told him that he had not been. Probably, also, he wanted to make arrangements with a fence and didn't want to have the booty about him.”

There is little more to tell. When the case was heard on the following morning, Thorndyke's uncannily precise and detailed description of the course of events, coupled with the production of the stolen property, so unnerved the prisoner that he pleaded guilty forthwith.

As to Mr. Montague, he recovered completely in a few days, and a handsome pair of Georgian silver candlesticks may even to this day be seen on our mantelpiece testifying to his gratitude and appreciation of Thorndyke's brilliant conduct of the case.

The Stolen Ingots

“In medico-legal practice,” Thorndyke remarked, “one must be constantly on one’s guard against the effects of suggestion, whether intentional or unconscious. When the facts of a case are set forth by an informant, they are nearly always presented, consciously or unconsciously, in terms of inference. Certain facts, which appear to the narrator to be the leading facts, are given with emphasis and in detail, while other facts, which appear to be subordinate or trivial, are partially suppressed. But this assessment of evidential value must never be accepted. The whole case must be considered and each fact weighed separately, and then it will commonly happen that the leading fact turns out to be the one that had been passed over as negligible.” The remark was made apropos of a case, the facts of which had just been stated to us by Mr. Halethorpe, of the *SPHINX ASSURANCE COMPANY*. I did not quite perceive its bearing at the time, but looking back when the case was concluded, I realised that I had fallen into the very error against which Thorndyke’s warning should have guarded me.

“I trust,” said Mr. Halethorpe, “that I have not come at an inconvenient time. You are so tolerant of unusual hours—”

“My practice,” interrupted Thorndyke, “is my recreation, and I welcome you as one who comes to furnish entertainment. Draw your chair up to the fire, light a cigar and tell us your story.”

Mr. Halethorpe laughed, but adopted the procedure suggested, and having settled his toes upon the kerb and selected a cigar from the box, he opened the subject of his call.

“I don’t quite know what you can do for us,” he began, “as it is hardly your business to trace lost property, but I thought I would come and let you know about our difficulty. The fact is that our company looks like dropping some four thousand pounds, which the directors won’t like. What has happened is this:

“About two months ago the London House of the *AKROPONG GOLD*

FIELDS COMPANY applied to us to insure a parcel of gold bars that were to be consigned to Minton and Borwell, the big manufacturing jewellers. The bars were to be shipped at Accra and landed at Bellhaven, which is the nearest port to Minton and Borwell's works. Well, we agreed to underwrite the risk—we have done business with the Akropong people before—and the matter was settled. The bars were put on board the Labadi at Accra, and in due course were landed at Belhaven, where they were delivered to Minton's agents. So far, so good. Then came the catastrophe. The case of bars was put on the train at Belhaven, consigned to Anchester, where Minton's have their factory. But the line doesn't go to Anchester direct. The junction is at Garbridge, a small country station close to the river Crouch, and here the case was put out and locked up in the station-master's office to wait for the Anchester train. It seems that the station-master was called away and detained longer than he had expected, and when the train was signalled he hurried back in a mighty twitter. However, the case was there all right, and he personally superintended its removal to the guard's van and put it in the guard's charge. All went well for the rest of the journey. A member of the firm was waiting at Anchester station with a closed van. The case was put into it and taken direct to the factory, where it was opened in the private office—and found to be full of lead pipe."

"I presume," said Thorndyke, "that it was not the original case."

"No," replied Halethorpe, "but it was a very fair imitation. The label and the marks were correct, but the seals were just plain wax. Evidently the exchange had been made in the station office, and it transpires that although the door was securely locked there was an unfastened window which opened on to the garden, and there were plain marks of feet on the flower-bed outside."

"What time did this happen?" asked Thorndyke.

"The Anchester train came in at a quarter past seven, by which time, of course, it was quite dark."

"And when did it happen?"

"The day before yesterday. We heard of it yesterday morning."

"Are you contesting the claim?"

"We don't want to. Of course, we could plead negligence, but in that case I think we should make a claim on the railway company. But, naturally, we should much rather recover the property. After all, it can't be so very far away."

"I wouldn't say that," said Thorndyke. "This was no impromptu theft. The dummy case was prepared in advance, and evidently by somebody

who knew what the real case was like, and how and when it was to be despatched from Belhaven. We must assume that the disposal of the stolen case has been provided for with similar completeness. How far is Garbridge from the river?"

"Less than half a mile across the marshes. The detective-inspector—Badger, I think you know him—asked the same question."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "A heavy object like this case is much more easily and inconspicuously conveyed by water than on land. And then, see what facilities for concealment a navigable river offers. The case could be easily stowed away on a small craft, or even in a boat; or the bars could be taken out and stowed amongst the ballast, or even, at a pinch, dropped over board at a marked spot and left until the hue and cry was over."

"You are not very encouraging," Halethorpe remarked gloomily. "I take it that you don't much expect that we shall recover those bars."

"We needn't despair," was the reply, "but I want you to understand the difficulties. The thieves have got away with the booty, and that booty is an imperishable material which retains its value even if broken up into unrecognisable fragments. Melted down into small ingots, it would be impossible to identify."

"Well," said Halethorpe, "the police have the matter in hand—Inspector Badger, of the C. I. D., is in charge of the case—but our directors would be more satisfied if you would look into it. Of course we would give you any help we could. What do you say?"

"I am willing to look into the case," said Thorndyke, "though I don't hold out much hope. Could you give me a note to the shipping company and another to the consignees, Minton and Borwell?"

"Of course I will. I'll write them now. I have some of our stationery in my attaché case. But, if you will pardon my saying so, you seem to be starting your inquiry just where there is nothing to be learned. The case was stolen after it left the ship and before it reached the consignees—although their agent had received it from the ship."

"The point is," said Thorndyke, "that this was a preconcerted robbery, and that the thieves possessed special information. That information must have come either from the ship or from the factory. So, while we must try to pick up the track of the case itself, we must seek the beginning of the clue at the two ends—the ship and the factory one of which it must have started."

"Yes, that's true," said Halethorpe. "Well, I'll write those two notes and then I must run away; and we'll hope for the best."

He wrote the two letters asking for facilities from the respective parties, and then took his departure in a somewhat chastened frame of mind.

"Quite an interesting little problem," Thorndyke remarked, as Halethorpe's footsteps died away on the stairs, "but not much in our line. It is really a police case—a case for patient and intelligent inquiry. And that is what we shall have to do—make some careful inquiries on the spot."

"Where do you propose to begin?" I asked.

"At the beginning," he replied. "Belhaven. I propose that we go down there to-morrow morning and pick up the thread at that end."

"What thread?" I demanded. "We know that the package started from there. What else do you expect to learn?"

"There are several curious possibilities in this case, as you must have noticed," he replied "The question is, whether any of them are probabilities. That is what I want to settle before we begin a detailed investigation."

"For my part," said I, "I should have supposed that the investigation would start from the scene of the robbery. But I presume that you have seen some possibilities that I have overlooked."

Which eventually turned out to be the case.

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"I think," said Thorndyke as we alighted at Belhaven on the following morning, "we had better go first to the Customs and make quite certain, if we can, that the bars were really in the case when it was delivered to the consignees' agents. It won't do to take it for granted that the substitution took place at Garbridge, although that is by far the most probable theory." Accordingly we made our way to the harbour, where an obliging mariner directed us to our destination.

At the Custom House we were received by a genial officer, who, when Thorndyke had explained his connection with the robbery, entered into the matter with complete sympathy and a quick grasp of the situation.

"I see," said he. "You want clear evidence that the bars were in the case when it left here. Well, I think we can satisfy you on that point. Bullion is not a customable commodity, but it has to be examined and reported. If it is consigned to the Bank of England or the Mint, the case is passed through with the seals unbroken, but as this was a private consignment, the seals will have been broken and the contents of the case examined. Jeffson, show these gentlemen the report on the case of gold bars from the Labadi."

"Would it be possible," Thorndyke asked, "for us to have a few words with the officer who opened the case? You know the legal partiality for personal testimony."

"Of course it would. Jeffson, when these gentlemen have seen the report, find the officer who signed it and let them have a talk with him."

We followed Mr. Jeffson into an adjoining office, where he produced the report and handed it to Thorndyke. The particulars that it gave were in effect those that would be furnished by the ship's manifest and the bill of lading. The case was thirteen inches long by twelve wide and nine inches deep, outside measurement; and its gross weight was one hundred and seventeen pounds three ounces, and it contained four bars of the aggregate weight of one hundred and thirteen pounds two ounces.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, handing back the report. "And now can we see the officer—Mr. Byrne, I think—just to fill in the details?"

"If you will come with me," replied Mr. Jeffson, "I'll find him for you. I expect he is on the wharf."

We followed our conductor out on to the quay among a litter of cases, crates and barrels, and eventually, amidst a battalion of Madeira wine casks, found the officer deep in problems of "content and ullage," and other customs mysteries. As Jeffson introduced us, and then discreetly retired, Mr. Byrne confronted us, with a mahogany face and truculent blue eye.

"With reference to this bullion," said Thorndyke, "I understand that you weighed the bars separately from the case?"

"Oi did," replied Mr. Byrne.

"Did you weigh each bar separately?"

"Oi did not," was the concise reply.

"What was the appearance of the bars—I mean as to shape and size? Were they of the usual type?"

"Oi've not had a great deal to do with bullion," said Mr. Byrne, "but Oi should say that they were just ordinary gold bars, about nine inches long by four wide and about two inches deep."

"Was there much packing material in the case?"

"Very little. The bars were wrapped in thick canvas and jammed into the case. There wouldn't be more than about half an inch clearance all round to allow for the canvas. The case was inch and half stuff strengthened with iron bands."

"Did you seal the case after you had closed it up?"

"Oi did. 'Twas all shipshape when it was passed back to the mate. And Oi saw him hand it over to the consignees' agent; so 'twas all in order when it left the wharf."

"That was what I wanted to make sure of," said Thorndyke; and, having pocketed his notebook and thanked the officer, he turned away among the wilderness of merchandise.

"So much for the Customs," said he. "I am glad we went there first. As you have no doubt observed, we have picked up some useful information."

"We have ascertained," I replied, "that the case was intact when it was handed over to the consignees' agents, so that our investigations at Garbridge will start from a solid basis. And that, I take it, is all you wanted to know."

"Not quite all," he rejoined. "There are one or two little details that I should like to fill in. I think we will look in on the shipping agents and present Halethorpe's note. We may as well learn all we can before we make our start from the scene of the robbery."

"Well," I said, "I don't see what more there is to learn here. But apparently you do. That seems to be the office, past those sheds."

The manager of the shipping agent's office looked us up and down as he sat at his littered desk with Halethorpe's letter in his hand.

"You've come about that bullion that was stolen," he said brusquely.

"Well, it wasn't stolen here. Hadn't you better inquire at Garbridge, where it was?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke. "But I am making certain preliminary inquiries. Now, first, as to the bill of lading, who has that—the original, I mean?"

"The captain has it at present, but I have a copy."

"Could I see it?" Thorndyke asked.

The manager raised his eyebrows protestingly, but produced the document from a file and handed it to Thorndyke, watching him inquisitively as he copied the particulars of the package into his notebook.

"I suppose," said Thorndyke as he returned the document, "you have a copy of the ship's manifest?"

"Yes," replied the manager, "but the entry in the manifest is merely a copy of the particulars given in the bill of lading."

"I should like to see the manifest, if it is not troubling you too much."

"But," the other protested impatiently, "the manifest contains no information respecting this parcel of bullion excepting the one entry, which, as I have told you, has been copied from the bill of lading."

"I realise that," said Thorndyke; "but I should like to look over it, all the same."

Our friend bounced into an inner office and presently returned with a voluminous document, which he slapped down on a side-table.

"There, sir," he said. "That is the manifest. This is the entry relating to the bullion that you are inquiring about. The rest of the document is concerned with the cargo, in which I presume you are not interested."

In this, however, he was mistaken; for Thorndyke, having verified the bullion entry, turned the leaves over and began systematically, though rapidly, to run his eye over the long list from the beginning, a proceeding that the manager viewed with frenzied impatience.

"If you are going to read it right through, sir," the latter observed, "I shall ask you to excuse me. Art is long but life is short," he added with a sour smile.

Nevertheless he hovered about uneasily, and when Thorndyke proceeded to copy some of the entries into his notebook, he craned over and read them without the least disguise, though not without comment.

"Good God, sir!" he exclaimed. "What possible bearing on this robbery can that parcel of scivelloes have? And do you realise that they are still in the ship's hold?"

"I inferred that they were, as they are consigned to London," Thorndyke replied, drawing his finger down the "description" column and rapidly scanning the entries in it. The manager watched that finger, and as it stopped successively at a bag of gum copal, a case of quartz specimens, a case of six-inch brass screw-bolts, a bag of beni-seed and a package of kola nuts, he breathed hard and muttered like an angry parrot. But Thorndyke was quite unmoved. With calm deliberation he copied out each entry, conscientiously noting the marks, descriptions of packages and contents, gross and net weights, dimensions, names of consignors and consignees, ports of shipment and discharge, and, in fact, the entire particulars. It was certainly an amazing proceeding, and I could make no more of it than could our impatient friend.

At last Thorndyke closed and pocketed his notebook, and the manager heaved a slightly obtrusive sigh. "Is there nothing more, sir?" he asked. "You don't want to examine the ship, for instance?"

The next moment, I think, he regretted his sarcasm, for Thorndyke inquired, with evident interest: "Is the ship still here?"

"Yes," was the unwilling admission. "She finishes unloading here at mid-day to-day and will probably haul into the London Docks to-morrow morning."

"I don't think I need go on board," said Thorndyke, "but you might give me a card in case I find that I want to."

The card was somewhat grudgingly produced, and when Thorndyke had thanked our entertainer for his help, we took our leave and made our way towards the station.

"Well," I said, "you have collected a vast amount of curious information, but I am hanged if I can see that any of it has the slightest bearing on our inquiry."

Thorndyke cast on me a look of deep reproach. "Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you astonish me; you do, indeed. Why, my dear fellow, it stares you in the face!"

"When you say 'it,'" I said a little irritably, "you mean—?"

"I mean the leading fact from which we may deduce the *modus operandi* of this robbery. You shall look over my notes in the train and sort out the data that we have collected. I think you will find them extremely illuminating."

"I doubt it," said I. "But, meanwhile, aren't we wasting a good deal of time? Halethorpe wants to get the gold back; he doesn't want to know how the thieves contrived to steal it."

"That is a very just remark," answered Thorndyke. My learned friend displays his customary robust common sense. "Nevertheless, I think that a clear understanding of the mechanism of this robbery will prove very helpful to us, though I agree with you that we have spent enough time on securing our preliminary data. The important thing now is to pick up a trail from Garbridge. But I see our train is signalled. We had better hurry."

As the train rumbled into station, we looked out for an empty smoking compartment, and having been fortunate enough to secure one, we settled ourselves in opposite corners and lighted our pipes. Then Thorndyke handed me his notebook and as I studied, with wrinkled brows, the apparently disconnected entries, he sat and observed me thoughtfully and with the faintest suspicion of a smile. Again and again I read through those notes with ever-dwindling hopes of extracting the meaning that "stared me in the face." Vainly did I endeavour to connect gum copal, scrivelloes or beni-seed with the methods of the unknown robbers. The entries in the notebook persisted obstinately in remaining totally disconnected and hopelessly irrelevant. At last I shut the book with a savage snap and handed it back to its owner.

"It's no use, Thorndyke," I said. "I can't see the faintest glimmer of light."

"Well," said he, "it isn't of much consequence. The practical part of our task is before us, and it may turn out a pretty difficult part. But we have got to recover those bars if it is humanly possible. And here we are at our jumping-off place. This is Garbridge Station—and I see an old acquaintance of ours on the platform."

I looked out, as the train slowed down, and there, sure enough, was no less a person than Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"We could have done very well without Badger," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but we shall have to take him into partnership, I expect. After all, we are on his territory and on the same errand. How do you do, inspector?" he continued, as the officer, having observed our descent from the carriage, hurried forward with unwonted cordiality.

"I rather expected to see you here, sir," said he. "We heard that Mr. Halethorpe had consulted you. But this isn't the London train."

"No," said Thorndyke. "We've been to Belhaven, just to make sure that the bullion was in the case when it started."

"I could have told you that two days ago," said Badger. "We got on to the Customs people at once. That was all plain sailing; but the rest of it isn't."

"No clue as to how the case was taken away?"

"Oh, yes; that is pretty clear. It was hoisted out, and the dummy hoisted in, through the window of the Station-master's office. And the same night, two men were seen carrying a heavy package, about the size of the bullion-case, towards the marshes. But there the clue ends. The stuff seems to have vanished into thin air. Of course our people are on the look-out for it in various likely directions, but I am staying here with a couple of plain-clothes men. I've a conviction that it is still somewhere in this neighbourhood, and I mean to stick here in the hope that I may spot somebody trying to move it."

As the inspector was speaking we had been walking slowly from the station towards the village, which was on the opposite side of the river. On the bridge Thorndyke halted and looked down the river and over the wide expanse of marshy country.

"This is an ideal place for a bullion robbery," he remarked. "A tidal river near to the sea and a network of creeks, in any one of which one could hide a boat or sink the booty below tide-marks. Have you heard of any strange craft having put in here?"

“Yes. There’s a little ramshackle bawley from Leigh—but her crew of two ragamuffins are not Leigh men. And they’ve made a mess of their visit—got their craft on the mud on the top of the spring tide. There here she’ll be till next spring tide. But I’ve been over her carefully and I’ll swear the stuff isn’t aboard her. I bad all the ballast out and emptied the lazarette and the chain locker.”

“And what about the barge?”

“She’s a regular trader here. Her crew—the skipper and his son—are quite respectable men and they belong here. There they go in that boat; I expect they are off on this tide. But they seem to be making for the bawley.”

As he spoke the inspector produced a pair of glasses, through which he watched the movement of the barge’s jolly, and a couple of elderly fishermen, who were crossing the bridge, halted to look on. The barge’s boat ran alongside the stranded bawley, and one of the rowers hailed; whereupon two men tumbled up from the cabin and dropped into the boat, which immediately pushed off and headed for the barge.

“Them bawley blokes seems to be taking a passage along of old Bill Somers,” one of the fishermen remarked, levelling a small telescope at the barge as the boat drew alongside and the four men climbed on board. “Going to work their passage, too,” he added as the two passengers proceeded immediately to man the windlass while the crew let go the brails and hooked the main block to the traveller.

“Rum go,” commented Badger, glaring at the barge through his glasses; “but they haven’t taken anything aboard with them. I could see that.”

“You have overhauled the barge, I suppose?” said Thorndyke.

“Yes. Went right through her. Nothing there. She’s light. There was no place aboard her where you could hide a split-pea.”

“Did you get her anchor up?”

“No,” replied Badger. “I didn’t. I suppose I ought to have done so. However, they’re getting it up themselves now.” As he spoke, the rapid clink of a windlass-pawl was borne across the water, and through my prismatic glasses I could see the two passengers working for all they were worth at the cranks. Presently the clink of the pawl began to slow down somewhat and the two bargemen, having got the sails set, joined the toilers at the windlass, but even then there was no great increase of speed.

“Anchor seems to come up uncommon heavy,” one of the fishermen remarked.

“Aye,” the other agreed. “Got foul of an old mooring, maybe.”

"Look out for the anchor, Badger," Thorndyke said in a low voice, gazing steadily through his binocular. "It is out of the ground. The cable is up and down and the barge is drifting off on the tide."

Even as he spoke the ring and stock of the anchor rose slowly out of the water, and now I could see that a second chain was shackled loosely to the cable, down which it had slid until it was stopped by the ring of the anchor. Badger had evidently seen it too, for he ejaculated, "Hallo!" and added a few verbal flourishes which I need not repeat. A few more turns of the windlass brought the flukes of the anchor clear of the water, and dangling against them was an undeniable wooden case, securely slung with lashings of stout chain. Badger cursed volubly, and, turning to the fishermen, exclaimed in a rather offensively peremptory tone: "I want a boat. Now. This instant."

The elder piscator regarded him doggedly and replied "All right. I ain't got no objection."

"Where can I get a boat?" the inspector demanded, nearly purple with excitement and anxiety.

"Where do you think?" the mariner responded, evidently nettled by the inspector's masterful tone. "Pastrycook's? Or livery stables?"

"Look here," said Badger. "I'm a police officer and I want to board that barge, and I am prepared to pay handsomely. Now where can I get a boat?"

"We'll put you aboard of her," replied the fisherman, "that is, if we can catch her. But I doubt it. She's off, that's what she is. And there's something queer a-going on aboard of her," he added in a somewhat different tone.

There was. I had been observing it. The case had been, with some difficulty, hoisted on board, and then suddenly there had broken out an altercation between the two bargees and their passengers, and this had now developed into what look like a free fight. It was difficult to see exactly what was happening, for the barge was drifting rapidly down the river, and her sails, blowing out first on one side and then on the other, rather obscured the view. Presently, however, the sails filled and a man appeared at the wheel; then the barge jibed round, and with a strong ebb tide and a fresh breeze, very soon began to grow small in the distance.

Meanwhile the fishermen had bustled off in search of a boat, and the inspector had raced to the bridge-head, where he stood gesticulating frantically and blowing his whistle, while Thorndyke continued placidly to watch the receding barge through his binocular.

“What are we going to do?” I asked, a little surprised at my colleague’s inaction.

“What can we do?” he asked in reply. “Badger will follow the barge. He probably won’t overtake her, but he will prevent her from making a landing until they get out into the estuary, and then he may possibly get assistance. The chase is in his hands.”

“Are we going with him?”

“I am not. This looks like being an all-night expedition, and I must be at our chambers to-morrow morning. Besides, the chase is not our affair. But if you would like to join Badger there is no reason why you shouldn’t. I can look after the practice.”

“Well,” I said, “I think I should rather like to be in at the death, if it won’t inconvenience you. But it is possible that they may get away with the booty.”

“Quite,” he agreed; “and then it would be useful to know exactly how and where it disappears. Yes, go with them, by all means, and keep a sharp look-out.”

At this moment Badger returned with the two plain clothes men whom his whistle had called from their posts, and simultaneously a boat was seen approaching the steps by the bridge, rowed by the two fishermen. The inspector looked at us inquiringly. “Are you coming to see the sport?” he asked.

“Doctor Jervis would like to come with you,” Thorndyke replied. “I have to get back to London. But you will be a fair boat-load without me.”

This appeared to be also the view of the two fishermen, as they brought up at the steps and observed the four passengers; but they made no demur beyond inquiring if there were not any more; and when we had taken our places in the stern sheets, they pushed off and pulled through the bridge and away down stream. Gradually, the village receded and the houses and the bridge grew small and more distant, though they remained visible for a long time over the marshy levels; and still, as I looked back through my glasses, I could see Thorndyke on the bridge, watching the pursuit with his binocular to his eyes.

Meanwhile the fugitive barge, having got some two miles start, seemed to be drawing ahead. But it was only at intervals that we could see her, for the tide was falling fast and we were mostly hemmed in by the high, muddy banks. Only when we entered a straight reach of the river could we see her sails over the land; and every time that she came into view, she appeared perceptibly smaller.

When the river grew wider, the mast was stepped and a good-sized lug-sail hoisted, though one of the fishermen continued to ply his oar on the weather side, while the other took the tiller. This improved our pace appreciably; but still, whenever we caught a glimpse of the barge, it was evident that she was still gaining.

On one of these occasions the man at the tiller, standing up to get a better view, surveyed our quarry intently for nearly a minute and then addressed the inspector.

"She's a-going to give us the go-by, mister," he observed with conviction. "Still gaining?" asked Badger.

"Aye. She's a-going to slip across the tail of Foulness Sand into the deep channel. And that's the last we shall see of her."

"But can't we get into the channel the same way?" demanded Badger.

"Well, d'ye see," replied the fisherman, "'tis like this. Tide's a-running out, but there'll be enough for her. It'll just carry her out through the Whitaker Channel and across the spit. Then it'll turn, and up she'll go, London way, on the flood. But we shall catch the flood-tide in the Whitaker Channel, and a rare old job we'll have to get out; and when we do get out, that barge'll be miles away."

The inspector swore long and earnestly. He even alluded to himself as a "blithering idiot." But that helped matters not at all. The fisherman's dismal prophecy was fulfilled in every horrid detail. When we were approaching the Whitaker Channel the barge was just crossing the spit, and the last of the ebb-tide was trickling out. By the time we were fairly in the Channel the tide had turned and was already flowing in with a speed that increased every minute; while over the sand we could see the barge, already out in the open estuary, heading to the west on the flood-tide at a good six knots.

Poor Badger was frantic. With yearning eyes fixed on the dwindling barge, he cursed, entreated, encouraged and made extravagant offers. He even took an oar and pulled with such desperate energy that he caught a crab and turned a neat back somersault into the fisherman's lap. The two mariners pulled until their oars bent like canes; but still the sandy banks crept by, inch by inch, and ever the turbid water seemed to pour up the channel more and yet more swiftly. It was a fearful struggle and seemed to last for hours; and when, at last, the boat crawled out across the spit and the exhausted rowers rested on their oars, the sun was just setting and the barge had disappeared into the west.

I was really sorry for Badger. His oversight in respect of the anchor was a very natural one for a landsman, and he had evidently taken infinite

pains over the case and shown excellent judgement in keeping a close watch on the neighbourhood of Garbridge; and now, after all his care, it looked as if both the robbers and their booty had slipped through his fingers. It was desperately bad luck.

“Well,” said the elder fisherman, “they’ve give us a run for our money; but they’ve got clear away. What’s to be done now, mister?”

Badger had nothing to suggest excepting that we should pull or sail up the river in the hope of getting some assistance on the way. He was in the lowest depths of despair and dejection. But now, when Fortune seemed to have deserted us utterly, and failure appeared to be an accomplished fact, Providence intervened.

A small steam vessel that had been approaching from the direction of the East Swin suddenly altered her course and bore down as if to speak us. The fisherman who had last spoken looked at her attentively for a few moments and then slapped his thigh. “Saved by gum!” he exclaimed. “This’ll do your trick, mister. Here comes a Customs cruiser.” Instantly the two fishermen bent to their oars to meet the oncoming craft, and in a few minutes we were alongside, Badger hailing like a bull of Bashan. A brief explanation to the officer in charge secured a highly sympathetic promise of help. We all scrambled up on deck; the boat was dropped astern at the scope of her painter; the engine-room bell jangled merrily, and the smart, yacht-like vessel began to forge ahead. “Now then,” said the officer, as his craft gathered way, “give us a description of this barge. What is she like?”

“She’s a small stumpy,” the senior fisherman explained, “flying light; wants paint badly; steers with a wheel; green transom with Bluebell, Maldon, cut in and gilded. Seemed to be keeping along the north shore.”

With these particulars in his mind, the officer explored the western horizon with a pair of night-glasses, although it was still broad daylight. Presently he reported: “There’s a stumpy in a line with the Blacktail Spit buoy. Just take a look at her.” He handed his glasses to the fisherman, who, after a careful inspection of the stranger, gave it as his opinion that she was our quarry. “Probably makin’ for Southend or Leigh,” said he, and added: “I’ll bet she’s bound for Benfleet Creek. Nice quiet place, that, to land the stuff.”

Our recent painful experience was now reversed, for as our swift little vessel devoured the miles of water, the barge, which we were all watching eagerly, loomed up larger every minute. By the time we were abreast of the Mouse Lightship, she was but a few hundred yards ahead,

and even through my glasses, the name ›Bluebell‹ was clearly legible. Badger nearly wept with delight; the officer in charge smiled an anticipatory smile; the deck-hands girded up their loins for the coming capture and the plain-clothes men each furtively polished a pair of handcuffs.

At length the little cruiser came fairly abreast of the barge—not unobserved by the two men on her deck. Then she sheered in suddenly and swept alongside. One hand neatly hooked a shroud with a grappling iron and made fast while a couple of preventive officers, the plain men and the inspector jumped down simultaneously on to the barge's deck. For a moment, the two bawley men were inclined to show fight; but the odds were too great. After a perfunctory scuffle they both submitted to be handcuffed and were at once hauled up on board the cruiser and lodged in the fore-peak under guard. Then the chief officer, the two fishermen and I jumped on board the barge and followed Badger down the companion hatch to the cabin.

It was a curious scene that was revealed in that little cupboard-like apartment by the light of Badger's electric torch. On each of the two lockers was stretched man, securely lashed with lead-line and having drawn over his face a knitted stocking cap, while on the little triangular fixed table rested an iron-bound box which I instantly identified by my recollection of the description of the bullion-case in the ship's manifest. It was but the work of a minute to liberate the skipper and his son and send them up, wrathful but substantially uninjured, to refresh on the cruiser; and then the ponderous treasure-chest was borne in triumph by two muscular deck-hands, up the narrow steps, to be hoisted to the Government vessel.

“Well, well,” said the inspector, mopping his face with his handkerchief, “all's well that ends well, but I thought I had lost the men and the stuff that time. What are you going to do? I shall stay on board as this boat is going right up to the Custom House in London; but if you want to get home sooner, I dare say the chief officer will put you ashore at Southend.”

I decided to adopt this course, and I was accordingly landed at Southend Pier with a telegram from Badger to his head-quarters; and at Southend I was fortunate enough to catch an express train which brought me to Fenchurch Street while the night was still young.

When I reached our chambers, I found Thorndyke seated by the fire, serenely studying a brief. He stood up as I entered and, laying aside the brief, remarked: “You are back sooner than I expected. How sped the chase? Did you catch the barge?”

“Yes. We’ve got the men and we’ve got the bullion. But we very nearly lost both”; and here I gave him an account of the pursuit and the capture, to which he listened with the liveliest interest. “That Customs cruiser was a piece of sheer luck,” said he, when I had concluded. “I am delighted. This capture simplifies the case for us enormously.”

“It seems to me to dispose of the case altogether,” said L. “The property is recovered and the thieves are in custody. But I think most of the credit belongs to Badger.”

Thorndyke smiled enigmatically. “I should let him have it all, Jervis,” he said; and then, after a reflective pause, he continued: “We will go round to Scotland Yard in the morning to verify the capture. If the package agrees with the description in the bill of lading, the case, as you say, is disposed of.”

“It is hardly necessary,” said I. “The marks were all correct and the Customs seals were unbroken—but still, I know you won’t be satisfied until you have verified everything for yourself. And I suppose you are right.”

It was past eleven in the following forenoon when we invaded Superintendent Miller’s office at Scotland Yard. That genial officer looked up from his desk as we entered and laughed joyously. “I told you so, Badger,” he chuckled, turning to the inspector, who had also looked up and was regarding us with a foxy smile. “I knew the doctor wouldn’t be satisfied until he had seen it with his own eyes. I suppose that is what you have come for, sir?”

“Yes,” was the reply. “It is a mere formality, of course, but, if you don’t mind—”

“Not in the least,” replied Miller. “Come along, Badger, and show the doctor your prize.”

The two officers conducted us to a room, which the superintendent unlocked, and which contained a small table, a measuring standard, a weighing machine, a set of Snellen’s test-types, and the now historic case of bullion. The latter Thorndyke inspected closely, checking the marks and dimensions by his notes.

“I see you haven’t opened it,” he remarked.

“No,” replied Miller. “Why should we? The Customs seals are intact.”

“I thought you might like to know what was inside,” Thorndyke explained.

The two officers looked at him quickly and the inspector exclaimed: “But we do know. It was opened and checked at the Customs.”

“What do you suppose is inside?” Thorndyke asked.

"I don't suppose," Badger replied testily. "I know. There are four bars of gold inside."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "as the representative of the Insurance Company, I should like to see the contents of that case."

The two officers stared at him in amazement, as also, I must admit, did I. The implied doubt seemed utterly contrary to reason.

"This is scepticism with a vengeance!" said Miller. "How on earth is it possible—but there, I suppose if you are not satisfied, we should be justified—"

He glanced at his subordinate, who snorted impatiently: "Oh, open it and let him see the bars. And then, I suppose, he will want us to make an assay of the metal."

The superintendent retired with wrinkled brows and presently returned with a screwdriver, a hammer and a case-opener. Very deftly he broke the seals, extracted the screws and prised up the lid of the case, inside which were one or two folds of thick canvas. Lifting these with something of a flourish, he displayed the upper pair of dull, yellow bars.

"Are you satisfied now, sir?" demanded Badger. "Or do you want to see the other two?"

Thorndyke looked reflectively at the two bars, and the two officers looked inquiringly at him (but one might as profitably have watched the expression on the face of a ship's figure). Then he took from his pocket a folding foot-rule and quickly measured the three dimensions of one of the bars.

"Is that weighing machine reliable?" he asked.

"It is correct to an ounce," the superintendent replied, gazing at my colleague with a slightly uneasy expression. "Why?"

By way of reply Thorndyke lifted out the bar that he had measured and carrying it across to the machine, laid it on the platform and carefully adjusted the weights.

"Well?" the superintendent queried anxiously, as Thorndyke took the reading from the scale.

"Twenty-nine pounds, three ounces," replied Thorndyke.

"Well?" repeated the superintendent. "What about it?"

Thorndyke looked at him impassively for a moment, and then, in the same quiet tone, answered: "Lead."

"What!" the two officers shrieked in unison, darting across to the scale and glaring at the bar of metal. Then Badger recovered himself and

expostulated, not without temper, "Nonsense, sir. Look at it. Can't you see that it is gold?"

"I can see that it is gilded," replied Thorndyke.

"But," protested Miller, "the thing is impossible! What makes you think it is lead?"

"It is just a question of specific gravity," was the reply. "This bar contains seventy-two cubic inches of metal and it weighs twenty pounds, three ounces. Therefore it is a bar of lead. But if you are still doubtful, it is quite easy to settle the matter. May I cut a small piece off the bar?"

The superintendent gasped and looked at his subordinate. "I suppose," said he, "under the circumstances, eh, Badger? Yes. Very well, doctor."

Thorndyke produced a strong pocket-knife and, having lifted the bar to the table, applied the knife to one corner and tapped it smartly with the hammer. The blade passed easily through the soft metal, and as the detached piece fell to the floor, the two officers and I craned forward eagerly. And then all possible doubts were set at rest. There was no mistaking the white, silvery lustre of the freshly-cut surface.

"Snakes!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a fair knock-out! Why, the blighters have got away with the stuff, after all! Unless," he added, with a quizzical look at Thorndyke, "you know where it is, doctor. I expect you do."

"I believe I do," said Thorndyke, "and if you care to come down with me to the London Docks, I think I can hand it over to you."

The superintendent's face brightened appreciably. Not so Badger's. That afflicted officer flung down the chip of metal that he had been examining, and turning to Thorndyke, demanded sourly: "Why didn't you tell us this before, sir? You let me go off chivvying that damn barge, and you knew all the time that the stuff wasn't on board."

"My dear Badger," Thorndyke expostulated, "don't you see that these lead bars are essential to our case? They prove that the gold bars were never landed and that they are consequently still on the ship. Which empowers us to detain any gold that we may find on her."

"There, now, Badger," said the superintendent, "it's no use for you to argue with the doctor. He's like a giraffe. He can see all round him at once. Let us get on to the Docks."

Having locked the room, we all sallied forth, and, taking a train at Charing Cross Station, made our way by Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street to Wapping, where, following Thorndyke, we entered the Docks and proceeded straight to a wharf near the Wapping entrance. Here Thorndyke exchanged a few words with a Customs official, who hurried away and

presently returned, accompanied by an officer of higher rank. The latter, having saluted Thorndyke and cast a slightly amused glance at our little party, said: "They've landed that package that you spoke about. I've had it put in my office for the present. Will you come and have a look at it?"

We followed him to his office behind a long row of sheds, where, on a table, was a strong wooden case, somewhat larger than the "bullion"-case, while on the desk a large, many-leaved document lay open.

"This is your case, I think," said the official; "but you had better check it by the manifest. Here is the entry: 'One case containing seventeen and three-quarter dozen brass six-inch by three-eighths screw-bolts with nuts. Dimensions, sixteen inches by thirteen by nine. Gross weight a hundred and nineteen pounds; net weight a hundred and thirteen pounds.' Consigned to 'Jackson and Walker, 593 Great Alie Street, London, E.' Is that the one?"

"That is the one," Thorndyke replied.

"Then," said our friend, "we'll get it open and have a look at those brass screw-bolts."

With a dexterity surprising in an official of such high degree, he had the screws out in a twinkling, and prising up the lid, displayed a fold of coarse canvas. As he lifted this the two police officers peered eagerly into the case; and suddenly the eager expression on Badger's face changed to one of bitter disappointment.

"You've missed fire this time, sir," he snapped. "This is just a case of brass bolts."

"Gold bolts, inspector," Thorndyke corrected, placidly. He picked out one and handed it to the astonished detective. "Did you ever feel a brass bolt of that weight?" he asked.

"Well, it certainly is devilish heavy," the inspector admitted, weighing it in his hand and passing it on to Miller.

"Its weight, as stated on the manifest," said Thorndyke, "works out at well over eight and a half ounces, but we may as well check it." He produced from his pocket a little spring balance, to which he slung the bolt. "You see," he said, "it weighs eight ounces and two-thirds. But a brass bolt of the same size would weigh only three ounces and four-fifths. There is not the least doubt that these bolts are gold; and as you see that their aggregate weight is a hundred and thirteen while the weight of the four missing bars is a hundred and thirteen pounds, two ounces, it is a reasonable inference that these bolts represent those bars;

and an uncommonly good job they made of the melting to lose only two ounces. Has the consignee's agent turned up yet?"

"He is waiting outside," replied the officer, with a pleased smile, "hoping about like a pea in a frying-pan. I'll call him in."

He did so, and a small, seedy man of strongly Semitic aspect approached the door with nervous caution and a rather pale face. But when his beady eye fell on the open case and the portentous assembly in the office, he turned about and fled along the wharf as if the hosts of the Philistines were at his heels.

"Of course it is all perfectly simple, as you say," I replied to Thorndyke as we strolled back up Nightingale Lane, "but I don't see where you got your start. What made you think that the stolen case was a dummy?"

"At first," Thorndyke replied, "it was just a matter of alternative hypotheses. It was purely speculative. The robbery described by Halethorpe was a very crude affair. It was planned in quite the wrong way. Noting this, I naturally asked myself: What is the right way to steal a case of gold ingots? Now, the outstanding difficulty in such a robbery arises from the ponderous nature of the thing stolen, and the way to overcome that difficulty is to get away with the booty at leisure before the robbery is discovered—the longer the better. It is also obvious that if you can delude someone into stealing your dummy you will have covered up your tracks most completely; for if that someone is caught, the issues are extremely confused, and if he is not caught, all the tracks lead away from you. Of course, he will discover the fraud when he tries to dispose of the swag, but his lips are sealed by the fact that he has, himself, committed a felony. So that is the proper strategical plan and, though it was wildly improbable, and there was nothing whatever to suggest it, still, the possibility that this crude robbery might cover a more subtle one had to be borne in mind. It was necessary to make absolutely certain that the gold bars were really in the case when it left Belhaven. I had practically no doubt that they were. Our visit to the Custom House was little more than a formality, just to give us an undeniable datum from which to make our start. We had to find somebody who had actually seen the case open and verified the contents, and when we found that man—Mr. Byrne—it instantly became obvious that the wildly improbable thing had really happened. The gold bars had already disappeared. I had calculated the approximate size of the real bars. They would contain forty-two cubic inches, and would be about seven inches by three by two. The dimensions given by Byrne—evidently correct, as shown by those of the case, which the bars fitted pretty closely—were

impossible. If those bars had been gold, they would have weighed two hundred pounds, instead of the hundred and thirteen pounds shown on his report. The astonishing thing is that Byrne did not observe the discrepancy. There are not many Customs officers who would have let it pass."

"Isn't it rather odd," I asked, "that the thieves should have gambled on such a remote chance?"

"It is pretty certain," he replied, "that they were unaware of the risk they were taking. Probably they assumed—as most persons would have done—that a case of bullion would be merely inspected and passed. Few persons realise the rigorous methods of the Customs officers. But to resume: It was obvious that the 'gold' bars that Byrne had examined were dummies. The next question was, where were the real bars? Had they been made away with, or were they still on the ship? To settle this question I decided to go through the manifest and especially through the column of net weights. And there, presently, I came upon a package the net weight of which was within two ounces of the weight of stolen bars. And that package was a parcel of brass screw-bolts—on a homeward-bound ship! But who on earth sends brass bolts from Africa to London? The anomaly was so striking that I examined the entry more closely, and then I found—by dividing the net weight by the number of bolts—that each of these little bolts weighed over half a pound. But, if this were so, those bolts could be of no other metal than gold or platinum, and were almost certainly gold. Also, their aggregate weight was exactly that of the stolen bars, less two ounces, which probably represented loss in melting."

"And the scivelloes," said I, "and the gum copal and the kola nuts; what was their bearing on the inquiry? I can't, even now, trace any connection."

Thorndyke cast an astonished glance at me, and then replied with a quiet chuckle: "There wasn't any. Those notes were for the benefit of the shipping gentleman. As he would look over my shoulder, I had to give him something to read and think about. If I had noted only the brass bolts, I should have virtually informed him of the nature of my suspicions."

"Then, really, you had the case complete when we left Belhaven?"

"Theoretically, yes. But we had to recover the stolen case, for without those lead ingots we could not prove that the gold bolts were stolen property, any more than one could prove a murder without evidence of the death of the victim."

“And how do you suppose the robbery was carried out? How was the gold got out of the ship’s strong-room?”

“I should say it was never there. The robbers, I suspect, are the ship’s mate, the chief engineer and possibly the purser. The mate controls the stowage of cargo, and the chief engineer controls the repair shop and has the necessary skill and knowledge to deal with the metal. On receiving the advice of the bullion consignment, I imagine they prepared the dummy case in agreement with the description. When the bullion arrived, the dummy case would be concealed on deck and the exchange made as soon as the bullion was put on board. The dummy would be sent to the strong-room and the real case carried to a prepared hiding place. Then the engineer would cut up the bars, melt them piecemeal and cast them into bolts in an ordinary casting flask, using an iron bolt as a model, and touching up the screw-threads with a die. The mate could enter the case on the manifest when he pleased, and send the bill of lading by post to the nominal consignee. That is what I imagine to have been the procedure.”

Thorndyke’s solution turned out to be literally correct. The consignee, pursued by Inspector Badger along the quay, was arrested at the dock gates and immediately volunteered King’s evidence. Thereupon the mate, the chief engineer and the purser of the steamship ›Labadi‹ were arrested and brought to trial; when they severally entered a plea of guilty and described the method of the robbery almost in Thorndyke’s words.

The Funeral Pyre

Thorndyke did not often indulge in an evening paper, and was even disposed to view that modern institution with some disfavour; whence it happened that when I entered our chambers shortly before dinner time with a copy of the *EVENING GAZETTE* in my hand, he fixed upon the folded news-sheet an inquiring and slightly disapproving eye.

“Orrible discovery near Dartford,” I announced, quoting the juvenile vendor.

The disapproval faded from his face, but the inquiring expression remained.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied; “but it seems t be something in our line.”

“My learned friend does us an injustice,” he rejoined, with his eye riveted on the paper. “Still, if you are going to make my flesh creep, I will try to endure it.”

Thus invited, I opened the paper and read out as follows:

“A shocking tragedy has come to light in a meadow about a mile from Dartford. About two o’clock this morning, a rural constable observed a rick on fire out on the marshes near the creek. By the time he reached it the upper half of the rick was burning fiercely in the strong wind, and as he could do nothing alone, he rent to the adjacent farm-house and gave the alarm. The farmer and two of his sons accompanied the constable to the scene of the conflagration, but the rick was now a blazing mass, roaring in the wind and giving out an intense heat. As it was obviously impossible to save any part of it, and as there were no other ricks near, the farmer decided to abandon it to its fate and went home.

“At eight o’clock he returned to the spot and found the rick still burning, though reduced to a heap of glowing cinders and ashes, and ap-

proaching it, he was horrified to perceive a human skull grinning out from the cindery mass. Closer examination showed other bones—all calcined white and chalky—and close to the skull a stumpy clay pipe. The explanation of this dreadful occurrence seems quite simple. The rick was not quite finished, and when the farm hands knocked off work they left the ladder in position. It is assumed that some tramp, in search of a night's lodging, observed the ladder, and climbing up it, made himself comfortable in the loose hay at the top of the rick, where he fell asleep with his lighted pipe in his mouth. This ignited the hay and the man must have been suffocated by the fumes without awakening from his sleep."

"A reasonable explanation," was Thorndyke's comment, "and quite probable; but of course it is pure hypothesis. As a matter of fact, any one of the three conceivable causes of violent death is possible in this case—accident, suicide or homicide."

"I should have supposed," said I, "that we could almost exclude suicide. It is difficult to imagine a man electing to roast himself to death."

"I cannot agree with my learned friend," Thorndyke rejoined. "I can imagine a case—and one of great medico-legal interest—that would exactly fit the present circumstances. Let us suppose a man, hopelessly insolvent, desperate and disgusted with life, who decides to provide for his family by investing the few pounds that he has left in insuring his life heavily and then making away with himself. How would he proceed? If he should commit suicide by any of the orthodox methods he would simply invalidate his policy. But now, suppose he knows of a likely rick; that he provides himself with some rapidly-acting poison, such as potassium cyanide—he could even use prussic acid if he carried it in a rubber or celluloid bottle, which would be consumed in the fire; that he climbs on to the rick; sets fire to it, and as soon as it is fairly alight, takes his dose of poison and falls back dead among the hay. Who is to contest his family's claim? The fire will have destroyed all traces of the poison, even if they should be sought for. But it is practically certain that the question would never be raised. The claim would be paid without demur."

I could not help smiling at this calm exposition of a practicable crime. "It is a mercy, Thorndyke," I remarked, "that you are an honest man. If you were not—"

"I think," he retorted, "that I should find some better means of livelihood than suicide. But with regard to this case: it will be worth watching. The tramp hypothesis is certainly the most probable; but its very

probability makes an alternative hypothesis at least possible. No one is likely to suspect fraudulent suicide; but that immunity from suspicion is a factor that increases the probability of fraudulent suicide. And so, to a less extent, with homicide. We must watch the case and see if there are any further developments."

Further developments were not very long in appearing. The report in the morning paper disposed effectually of the tramp theory without offering any other.

"The tragedy of the burning rick," it said, "is taking a somewhat mysterious turn. It is now clear that the unknown man, who was assumed to have been a tramp, must have been a person of some social position, for careful examination of the ashes by the police have brought to light various articles which would have been carried only by a man of fair means. The clay pipe was evidently one of a pair—of which the second one has been recovered—probably silver-mounted and carried in a case, the steel frame of which has been found. Both pipes are of the 'Burns Cutty' pattern and have neatly scratched on the bowls the initials 'R. R.' The following articles have also been found: Remains of a watch, probably gold, and a rather singular watch-chain, having alternate links of platinum and gold. The gold links have partly disappeared, but numerous beads of gold have been found, derived apparently from the watch and chain. The platinum links are intact and are fashioned of twisted square wire. A bunch of keys, partly fused; a rock crystal seal, apparently from a ring; a little porcelain mascot figure, with a hole for suspension—possibly from the watch-chain—and a number of artificial teeth. In connection with the latter, a puzzling and slightly sinister aspect has been given to the case by the finding of an upper dental plate by a ditch some two hundred yards from the rick. The plate has two gaps and, on comparison with the skull of the unknown man, these have been found by the police surgeon to correspond with two groups of remaining teeth. Moreover, the artificial teeth found in the ashes all seem to belong to a lower plate. The presence of this plate, so far from the scene of the man's death, is extremely difficult to account for."

As Thorndyke finished reading the extract he looked at me as if inviting some comment.

"It is a most remarkable and mysterious affair," said I, "and naturally recalls to my mind the hypothetical case that you suggested yesterday. If that case was possible then, it is actually probable now. It fits these new facts perfectly not only in respect of the abundant means of identification but even to this dental plate—if we assume that he took the

poison as he was approaching the rick, and that the poison was of an acrid or irritating character which caused him to cough or retch. And I can think of no other plausible explanation.”

“There are other possibilities,” said Thorndyke, “but fraudulent suicide is certainly the most probable theory on the known facts. But we shall see. As you say, the body can hardly fail to be identified at a pretty early date.”

As a matter of fact it was identified in the course of that same day. Both Thorndyke and I were busily engaged until evening in the courts and elsewhere and had not had time to give this curious case any consideration. But as we walked home together, we encountered Mr. Stalker of the *GRIFFIN LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY* pacing up and down King’s Bench Walk near the entry of our chambers.

“Ha!” he exclaimed, striding forward to meet us near the Mitre Court gateway, “you are just the very men I wanted to see. There is a little matter that I want to consult you about. I shan’t detain you long.”

“It won’t matter much if you do,” said Thorndyke. “We have finished our routine work for the day and our time is now our own.” He led the way up to our chambers, where, having given the fire a stir, he drew up three arm-chairs.

“Now, Stalker,” said he. “Warm your toes and tell us your troubles.”

Mr. Stalker spread out his hands to the blaze began reflectively: “It will be enough, I think, if I give you the facts—and most of them you probably know already. You have heard about this man whose remains were found in the ashes of a burnt rick? Well, it turns out that he was a certain Mr. Reginald Reed, an outside broker, as I understand; but what is of more interest to us is that he was a client of ours. We have issued a policy on his life for three thousand pounds. I thought I remembered the name when I saw it in the paper this afternoon, so I looked up our files and there it was, sure enough.”

“When was the policy issued?” Thorndyke asked.

“Ah!” exclaimed Stalker. “That’s the exasperating feature of the case. The policy was issued less than a year ago. He has only paid a single premium. So we stand to drop practically the whole three thousand. Of course, we have to take the fat with the lean, but we don’t like to take it in such precious large lumps.”

“Of course you don’t,” agreed Thorndyke. “But now you have come to consult me—about what?”

“Well,” replied Stalker, “I put it to you: isn’t there something obviously fishy about the case? Are the circumstances normal? For instance, how

the devil came a respectable city gentleman to be smoking his pipe in a haystack out in a lonely meadow at two o'clock in the morning, or thereabouts?"

"I agree," said Thorndyke, "that the circumstances are highly abnormal. But there is no doubt that the man is dead. Extremely dead, if I may use the expression. What is the point that you wish to raise?"

"I am not raising any point," replied Stalker. "We should like you to attend the inquest and watch the case for us. Of course, in our policies, as you know, suicide is expressly ruled out; and if this should turn out to have been a case of suicide—"

"What is there to suggest that it was?" asked Thorndyke.

"What is there to suggest that it wasn't?" retorted Stalker.

"Nothing," rejoined Thorndyke. "But a negative plea is of no use to you. You will have to furnish positive proof of suicide, or else pay the claim."

"Yes, I realise that," said Stalker, "and I am not suggesting—But there, it is of no use discussing the matter while we know so little. I leave the case in your hands. Can you attend the inquest?"

"I shall make it my business to do so," replied Thorndyke.

"Very well," said Stalker, rising and putting on his gloves, "then we will leave it at that; and we couldn't leave it in better case."

When our visitor had gone I remarked to Thorndyke: "Stalker seems to have conceived the same idea as my learned senior—fraudulent suicide."

"It is not surprising," he replied. "Stalker is a shrewd man and he perceives that when an abnormal thing has happened we may look for an abnormal explanation. Fraudulent suicide was a speculative possibility yesterday: to-day, in the light of these new facts, it is the most probable theory. But mere probabilities won't help Stalker. If there is no direct evidence of suicide—and there is not likely to be any—the verdict will be Death by Misadventure, and the GRIFFIN Company will have to pay."

"I suppose you won't do anything until you have heard what transpires at the inquest?"

"Yes," he replied. "I think we should do well to go down and just go over the ground. At present we have the facts at third hand, and we don't know what may have been overlooked. As to-morrow is fairly free I propose that we make an early start and see the place ourselves."

"Is there any particular point that you want to clear up?"

"No; I have nothing definite in view. The circumstances are compatible with either accident, suicide or homicide, with an undoubted leaning towards suicide. But, at present, I have a completely open mind. I am,

in fact, going down to Dartford in the hope of getting a lead in some definite direction.”

When we alighted at Dartford Station on the following morning, Thorndyke looked inquiringly up and down the platform until he espied an inspector, when he approached the official and asked for a direction to the site of the burnt rick.

The official glanced at Thorndyke’s canvas-covered research-case and at my binocular and camera as he replied with a smile: “You are not the first, by a long way, that has asked that question. There has been a regular procession of Press gentlemen that way this morning. The place is about a mile from here. You take the foot-path to Joyce Green and turn off towards the creek opposite Temple Farm. This is about where the rick stood,” he added, as Thorndyke produced his one-inch Ordnance map and a pencil, “a few yards from that dyke.”

With this direction and the open map we set forth from the station, and taking our way along the unfrequented path soon left the town behind. As we crossed the second stile, where the path rejoined the road, Thorndyke paused to survey the prospect.

“Stalker’s question,” he remarked, “was not unreasonable. This road leads nowhere but to the river, and one does rather wonder what a city man can have been doing out on these marshes in the small hours of the morning. I think that will be our objective, where you see those men at work by the shepherd’s hut, or whatever it is.”

We struck off across the level meadows, out of which arose the red sails of a couple of barges, creeping down the invisible creek; and as we approached our objective the shepherd’s hut resolved itself into a contractor’s office van, and the men were seen to be working with shovels and sieves on the ashes of the rick. A police inspector was superintending the operations, and when we drew near he accosted us with a civil inquiry as to our business.

Thorndyke presented his card and explained that he was watching the case in the interests of the *GRIFFIN Insurance Company*. “I suppose,” he added, “I shall be given the necessary facilities?”

“Certainly,” replied the officer, glancing at my colleague with an odd mixture of respect and suspicion “and if you can spot anything that we’ve overlooked, you are very welcome. It’s all for the public good. Is there anything in particular that you want to see?”

“I should like to see everything that has been recovered so far. The remains of the body have been removed, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir. To the mortuary. But I have got all the effects here.”

He led the way to the office—a wooden hut on low wheels—and unlocking the door, invited us to enter. “Here are the things that we have salvaged,” he said, indicating a table covered with white paper on which the various articles were neatly set out, “and I think it’s about the lot. We haven’t come on anything fresh for the last hour or so.”

Thorndyke looked over the collection thoughtfully; picked up and examined successively the two clay pipes—each with the initials “R. R.” neatly incised on the bowl—the absurd little mascot figure, so incongruous with its grim surroundings and the tragic circumstances, the distorted keys, the platinum chain-links to several of which shapeless blobs of gold adhered, and the crystal seal; and then, collecting the artificial teeth, arranged them in what appeared to be their correct order and compared them with the dental plate.

“I think,” said he, holding the latter in his fingers, “that as the body is not here, I should like to secure the means of comparison of these teeth with the skull. There will be no objection to that, I presume?”

“What did you wish to do?” the inspector asked.

“I should like to take a cast of the plate and a wax impression of the loose teeth. No damage will be done to the originals, of course.”

The inspector hesitated, his natural, official tendency to refuse permission apparently contending with a desire to see with his own eyes how the famous expert carried out his mysterious methods of research. In the end the latter prevailed and the official sanction was given, subject to a proviso. “You won’t mind my looking on while you do it?”

“Of course not,” replied Thorndyke. “Why should I?”

“I thought that perhaps your methods were a sort of trade secret.”

Thorndyke laughed softly as he opened the research case. “My dear inspector,” said he, “the people who have trade secrets are those who make a profound mystery of simple processes that any schoolboy could carry out with once showing. That is the necessity for the secrecy.”

As he was speaking he half-filled a tiny aluminium saucepan with water, and having dropped into it a couple of cakes of dentist’s moulding composition, put it to heat over a spirit-lamp. While it was heating he greased the dental plate and the loose teeth, and prepared the little rubber basin and the other appliances for mixing the plaster.

The inspector was deeply interested. With almost ravenous attention he followed these proceedings, and eagerly watched Thorndyke roll the softened composition into the semblance of a small sausage and press it firmly on the teeth of the plate; peered into the plaster tin, and when the liquid plaster was mixed and applied, first to the top and then to the

lower surface of the plate, not only observed the process closely but put a number of very pertinent questions.

While the plaster and composition were setting Thorndyke renewed his inspection of the salvage from the rick, picking out a number of iron boot protectors which he placed apart in a little heap.

Then he proceeded to roll out two flat strips of softened composition, into one of which he pressed the loose teeth in what appeared to be their proper order, and into the other the boot protectors—eight in number—after first dusting the surface with powdered French chalk. By this time the plaster had set hard enough to allow of the mould being opened and the dental plate taken out. Then Thorndyke, having painted the surfaces of the plaster pieces with knotting, put the mould together again and tied it firmly with string, mixed a fresh bowl of plaster and poured it into the mould.

While this was setting Thorndyke made a careful inventory, with my assistance, of the articles found in the ashes and put a few discreet questions to the inspector. But the latter knew very little about the case. His duty was merely to examine and report on the rick for the information of the coroner. The investigation of the case was evidently being conducted from headquarters. There being no information to be gleaned from the officer, we went out and inspected the site of the rick. But here, also, there was nothing to be learned; the surface of the ground was now laid bare and the men who were working with the sieves reported no further discoveries. We accordingly returned to the hut, and as the plaster had now set hard Thorndyke proceeded with infinite care to open the mould. The operation was a complete success, and as my colleague extracted the cast—a perfect replica, in plaster, of the dental plate—the inspector’s admiration was unbounded. “Why,” he exclaimed, “excepting for the colour you couldn’t tell one from the other; but all the same, I don’t quite see what you want it for.”

“I want it to compare with the skull,” replied Thorndyke, “if I have time to call at the mortuary. As I can’t take the original plate with me, I shall need this copy to make the comparison. Obviously, it is important to make sure that this is Reed’s plate and not that of some other person. By the way, can you show us the spot where the plate was picked up?”

“Yes,” replied the inspector. “You can see the place from here. It was just by that gate at the crossing of the ditch.”

“Thank you, inspector,” said Thorndyke. “I think we will walk down and have a look at the place.” He wrapped the new cast in a soft cloth, and having repacked his research—case, shook hands with the officer

and prepared to depart.

"You will notice, Jervis," he remarked as we walked towards the gate, "that this denture was picked up at a spot beyond the rick—farther from the town, I mean. Consequently, if the plate is Reed's, he must have dropped it while he was approaching the rick from the direction of the river. It will be worthwhile to see if we can find out whence he came."

"Yes," I agreed. "But the dropping of the plate is a rather mysterious affair. It must have happened when he took the poison—assuming that he really did poison himself; but one would have expected that he would wait until he got to the rick to take his dose."

"We had better not make too many assumptions while we have so few facts," said Thorndyke. He put down his case beside the gate, which guarded a bridge across a broad ditch, or drainage dyke, and opened his map.

"The question is," said he, "did he come through this gate or was he only passing it? This dyke, you see, opens into the creek about three-quarters of a mile farther down. The probability is, therefore, that if he came up from the river across the marshes he would be on this side of the ditch and would pass the gate. But we had better try both sides. Let us leave our things by the gate and explore the ground for a few hundred yards, one on either side of the ditch. Which side will you take?"

I elected to take the side nearer the creek, and, having put my camera down by the research-case, climbed over the padlocked gate and began to walk slowly along by the side of the ditch, scanning the ground for foot prints showing the impression of boot-protectors. At first the surface was far from favourable for imprints of any kind, being, like that immediately around the gate, covered with thick turf. About a hundred and fifty yards down, however, I came upon a heap of worm-casts on which was plainly visible the print of a heel with a clear impression of a kidney-shaped protector such as I had seen in the hut. Thereupon I hailed Thorndyke and, having stuck my stick in the ground beside the heel-print, went back to meet him at the gate.

"This is rather interesting, Jervis," he remarked, when I had described my find. "The inference seems to be that he came from the creek—unless there is another gate farther down. We had better have our compo impressions handy for comparison." He opened his case and taking from it the strip of composition—now as hard as bone—on which were the impressions of the boot-protectors, slipped it into his outer pocket. We then took up the case and the camera and proceeded to the

spot marked by my stick.

“Well,” said Thorndyke, “it is not very conclusive, seeing that so many people use boot-protectors, but it is probably Reed’s foot-print. Let us hope that we shall find something more distinctive farther on.”

We resumed our march, keeping a few yards apart and examining the ground closely as we went. For a full quarter of a mile we went on without detecting any trace of a foot-print on the thick turf. Suddenly we perceived ahead of us a stretch of yellow mud occupying a slight hollow, across which the creek had apparently overflowed at the last spring tide. When we reached it we found that the mud was nearly dry, but still soft enough to take an impression; and the surface was covered with a maze of foot-prints.

We halted at the edge of the patch and surveyed the complicated pattern; and then it became evident that the whole group of prints had been produced by two pairs of feet, with the addition of a row of sheep-tracks.

“This seems to raise an entirely new issue,” I remarked.

“It does,” Thorndyke agreed. “I think we now begin to see a definite light on the case. But we must go cautiously. Here are two sets of foot-prints of which one is apparently Reed’s—to judge by the boot-protectors—while the other prints have been made by a man, whom we will call X, who wore boots or shoes with rubber soles and heels. We had better begin by verifying Reed’s.” He produced the composition strip from his pocket, and, stooping over one pair of footprints, continued: “I think we may assume that these are Reed’s feet. We have on the compo strip impressions of eight protectors from the rick, and on each foot-print there are four protectors. Moreover, the individual protectors are the same on the compo and on the foot-prints. Thus the compo shows two pairs of half-protectors, two single edge-pieces, and two kidney-shaped protectors; while each foot-print shows a pair of half-protectors on the outside of the sole, a single one on the inside and a kidney-shaped piece on the heel. Furthermore, in both cases the protectors are nearly new and show no appreciable signs of wear. The agreement is complete.”

“Don’t you think,” said I, “that we ought to take plaster records of them?”

“I do,” he replied, “seeing that a heavy shower or a high tide would obliterate them. If you will make the casts I will, meanwhile, make a careful drawing of the whole group to show the order of imposition.”

We fell to work forthwith upon our respective tasks, and by the time I had filled four of the clearest of the foot-prints with plaster, Thorndyke

had completed his drawing with the aid of a set of coloured pencils from the research-case. While the plaster was setting he exhibited and explained the drawing.

"You see, Jervis, that there are four lines of prints and a set of sheep-tracks. The first in order of time are these prints of X, drawn in blue. Then come the sheep, which trod on X's foot-prints. Next comes Reed, alone and after some interval, for he has trodden both on the sheep-tracks and on the tracks of X. Both men were going towards the river. Then we have the tracks of the two men coming back. This time they were together, for their tracks are parallel and neither treads into the prints of the other. Both tracks are rather sinuous as if the men were walking unsteadily, and both have trodden on the sheep-tracks and on the preceding tracks. Next, we have the tracks of X going alone towards the river and treading on all the others excepting number four, which is the tracks of X coming from the river and turning off towards that gate, which opens on to the road. The sequence of events is therefore pretty clear.

"First, X came along here alone to some destination which we have yet to discover. Later—how much later we cannot judge—came Reed, alone. The two men seem to have met, and later returned together, apparently the worse for drink. That is the last we see of Reed. Next comes X, walking back—quite steadily, you notice—towards the river. Later, he returns; but this time, for some reason—perhaps to avoid the neighbourhood of the rick—he crosses the ditch at that gate, apparently to get on the road, though you see by the map that the road is much the longer route to the town. And now we had better get on and see if we can discover the rendezvous to and from which these two men went and came."

As the plaster had now set quite hard I picked up the casts, and when I had carefully packed them in the case we resumed our progress riverwards. I had already noticed, some distance ahead, the mast of what looked like a small cutter yacht standing up above the marshes, and I now drew Thorndyke's attention to it. But he had already observed it and, like me, had marked it as the probable rendezvous of the two men. In a few minutes the probability became a certainty, for a bend in the creek showed us the little vessel—with the name ›Moonbeam‹ newly painted on the bow—made fast along side a small wooden staging; and when we reached this the bare earth opposite the gangway was seen to be covered with the foot-prints of both men.

"I wonder," said I, "which of them was the owner of the yacht."

“It is pretty obvious, I think,” said Thorndyke, “that X was the owner if either of them was. He came to the yacht alone, and he wore rubber-soled shoes such as yachtsmen favour; whereas Reed came when the other man was there, and he wore iron boot-protectors, which no yacht owner would do if he had any respect for his deck-planks. But they may have had a joint interest; appearances suggest that they were painting the woodwork when they were here together, as some of the paint is fresh and some of it old and shabby.” He gazed at the yacht reflectively for some time and then remarked: “It would be interesting—and perhaps instructive—to have a look at the inside.”

“It would be a flagrant trespass, to put it mildly,” said I.

“It would be more than trespass if that padlock is locked,” he replied. “But we need not take a pedantic view of the legal position. My learned friend has a serviceable pair of glasses and commands an unobstructed view of a mile or so; and if he maintains an observant attitude while I make an inspection of the premises any trifling irregularity will be of no consequence.” As he spoke he felt in his pocket and produced the instrument which our laboratory assistant, Polton, had made from a few pieces of stiff steel wire, and which was euphemistically known as a “smoker’s companion”. With this appliance in his hand he dropped down on to the yacht’s deck, and after a quick look round, tried the padlock. Finding it locked he proceeded to operate on it with the smoker’s companion, and in a few moments it fell open, when he pushed back the sliding hatch and stepped down into the little cabin.

His exploration did not take long. In a few minutes he reappeared and climbed the short ladder to the staging. “There isn’t much to see,” he reported, “but what there is is highly suggestive. If you slip down and have a look round, I think you will have no difficulty in forming a plausible reconstruction of the recent events. You had better take the camera. There is light enough for a time exposure.”

I handed him the glasses, and dropping on to the deck, stepped down through the open hatch into the cabin. It was an absurd little cave, barely four feet high from the floor to the coach-roof, open to the fore-peak and lighted by a little skylight and two portholes. Of the two sleeping berths, one had evidently been used as a seat, while the other appeared to have been slept in, to judge by the indented pillow and the tumbled blankets, left just as the occupant had crawled out of them. But the whole interior was in a state of squalid disorder. Paint-pots and unwashed brushes lay about the floor, in company with a couple of whisky-bottles—one empty and one half-full—two tumblers, a pair

of empty siphons and a litter of playing cards scattered broadcast and evidently derived from two packs. It was, as Thorndyke had said, easy to reconstruct the scene of sordid debauchery that the light of the two candles—each in its congealed pool of grease—must have displayed on that night of horror whose dreadful secret had been disclosed by the ashes of the rick. But I could see nothing that would enable me to give a name to the dead man's mysterious companion.

When I had completed my inspection and taken a photograph of the interior, I rejoined Thorndyke, who then descended and replaced the padlock on the closed hatch, relocking it with the invaluable smoker's companion.

"Well, Jervis," said he, as we turned our faces to wards the town, "it seems as if we had accomplished our task, so far as Stalker is concerned. It is still possible that this was a case of suicide, but it is no longer probable. All the appearances point to homicide. I think my learned friend will agree with me in that."

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "And to me there is a strong suggestion of premeditation. I take it that X, the owner of the yacht, enticed Reed out here, possibly to prepare for a cruise; that the two men worked at the repainting while the daylight lasted and then spent the evening drinking and gambling. The fact that they used several packs of cards suggests that they played for pretty heavy stakes. Then, I think, Reed became drunk and X offered to see him safely off the marshes. It is evident that X was not drunk, because, although both tracks appear unsteady when the men were walking together, the tracks of X returning to the yacht are quite steady and straight. I should say that the actual murder took place just after they had got over the gate; that Reed's false teeth fell out while his body was being dragged to the rick, and that this was unnoticed by X owing to the darkness. Then X dragged the body up the ladder and laid it in the middle of the rick at the top, set fire to the rick—probably on the lee side—and at once made off back to the yacht. There he passed the night, and in the morning he returned to the town along the road, giving the neighbourhood of the rick a wide berth. That is my reading of the evidence."

"Yes," said Thorndyke, "that seems to be the interpretation of the facts. And now all that remains is to give a name to the mysterious X, and I should think that will present no difficulties."

"Are you proposing to inspect the remains at the mortuary?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "It would be interesting, but it is not necessary. We have all the available data for identification, and our concern is now not

with Reed but with X. We had better get back to London.”

On our arrival at the station, we found the bookstall keeper in the act of sticking up a placard of the evening paper on which was the legend: “RICK TRAGEDY; SENSATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.”

We immediately provided ourselves each with a copy of the paper, and sitting down on a seat, proceeded to read the heavily-led report.

“A new and startling aspect has been given to the rick tragedy by some further inquiries that the police have made. It seems that the dead man, Reed, was a member of the firm of Reed and Jarman, outside brokers, and it now transpires that his partner, Walter Jarman, is also missing. There has been no one at the office this week, but the caretaker states that on Monday evening at about eight o'clock, he saw Mr. Jarman let himself into the office with his key (the rick was first seen to be on fire at two o'clock on Monday morning). It appears that three cheques, payable to the firm and endorsed by Jarman, were paid into the bank—Patmore's—by the first post on Tuesday morning, and that, also on Tuesday morning, Jarman purchased a parcel of diamonds of just over a thousand pounds in value from a diamond merchant in Hatton Garden, who accepted a cheque in payment after telephoning to the bank. It further appears that on the previous Saturday morning, Reed and Jarman visited the bank together and drew out in cash practically their whole balance, leaving only thirty-two pounds. The diamond merchant's cheque was met by the cheques that had just been paid in. It is premature to make any comments, but we may expect some strange disclosures at the inquest, which will be held at Dartford the day after to-morrow.”

“I assume,” said I, “that the identity of X is no longer a mystery. It looks as if these two men had agreed to realise their assets and abscond, and had then spent the night gambling for the swag, and, oddly enough, Reed appears to have been the winner, for otherwise there would have been no need to murder him.”

“That is so,” Thorndyke agreed, “assuming that X is Jarman, which is probable, though not certain. But we mustn't go beyond our facts, and we mustn't construct theories from newspaper reports. I think we had better call at Scotland Yard on our way home and verify those particulars.”

The report and our own observations occupied us during the journey to London, though our discussion produced no further conclusions. As

soon as we arrived at Charing Cross, Thorndyke sprang out of the train, and emerging from the station, walked swiftly towards Whitehall.

Our visit was fortunately timed, for as we approached the entrance to the head-quarters, our old friend, Superintendent Miller, came out. He smiled as he saw us and halted to utter the laconic query "Rick Case?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "We have come to verify the particulars given in the evening paper. Have you seen the report?"

"Yes; and you may take it as correct. Anything else?"

"I should have liked to look over a series of the cheques drawn by the firm. The last two, I suppose, are inaccessible?"

"Yes. They will be at the bank, and we couldn't inspect them without an order of the court. But, as to the others, if they are at the office, I think you could see them. I'll come along with you now if you like, and have a look round myself. Our people are in possession."

We at once closed with the superintendent's offer and proceeded with him by the Underground Railway to the Mansion House, from whence we made our way to Queen Victoria Street, where Reed and Jarman had their offices. A sergeant was in charge at the moment, and to him the superintendent addressed himself.

"Have you found any returned cheques?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant; "lots of 'em. We've been through them all."

As he spoke he produced several bundles of cheques and laid them on a desk, the drawers of which all stood open.

"Well," said Miller, "there they are, doctor. I don't know what you want to find out, but I expect you do." He placed a chair by the desk, and as Thorndyke sat down and proceeded to turn the cheques over, he watched him with politely-suppressed curiosity.

"It appears," said Thorndyke, "as if these two men had mixed up their private affairs with the business account. Here, for instance, is a cheque drawn by Reed for the Picardy Wine Company. But that company could hardly have been a client. And this one of Jarman's for the Secretary of the St. John's Nursing Home must be a private cheque, and so I should say are these two for F. Waller, Esq., F. R. C. S.⁶, and for Andrew Darton, Esq., L. D. S.⁷. They are drawn for professional men and both are—like the Nursing Home cheque—stated in even amounts of guineas, whereas

⁶ Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

⁷ Licentiate of Dental surgery

the business cheques are in uneven amounts of pounds, shillings and pence.”

“I think you are right, sir,” said Miller. “The business seems to have been conducted in a very casual manner. And just look at those signatures! Never twice alike. The banks hate that sort of thing, naturally. When a customer signs in the signature book, he has given a specimen for reference and he ought to keep to it strictly. A man who varies his signature is asking for trouble.”

“He is,” Thorndyke agreed, as he rapidly entered a few particulars of the cheques in his notebook; “particularly in the case of a firm with a staff of clerks.”

He stood up, and having pocketed his notebook, held out his hand.

“I am very much obliged to you, superintendent,” he said.

“Seen all that you wanted to see?” Miller asked.

“Thank you, yes,” Thorndyke replied.

“I should very much like to know what you have seen,” Miller rejoined; to which my colleague replied by waving his hand towards the cheques, as he turned to go.

“I don’t quite see the bearing of those cheques on our inquiry,” I said, as we took our way homeward along Cheapside.

“It is not very direct,” Thorndyke replied; “but the cheques help us to understand the characters of these two men and their relations with one another; which may be very necessary when we come to the inquest.”

During the following day I saw very little of Thorndyke, for our excursion to Dartford had put our work somewhat in arrear and we had to secure a free day for the inquest on the morrow. We met at dinner after the day’s work, but, beyond settling the programme for the next day nothing of importance passed with reference to the “Rick Case.”

The opening phases of the inquest, though of thrilling interest to the numerous spectators and Press men, did not particularly concern us. The evidence of the rural constable, the farmer and the police inspector—with whom Thorndyke had a little confidential talk and apparently surprised the officer considerably—merely amplified what we knew already. Of more interest was that of a local dentist who testified to having examined the dental plate and to having compared it with the skull of the dead man. “The plate and the jaw of deceased,” he said, “agree completely. The jaw contains five natural teeth in two groups, and the plate has two spaces which exactly correspond to those two groups of teeth. I have tried the plate on the jaw and have no doubt whatever that it belonged to deceased.”

"That is a very important fact," Thorndyke remarked to me as the witness retired. "It is the indispensable link in the chain."

"But surely it was obvious?" said I.

"No doubt," he replied. "But now it is proved and in evidence." I was somewhat puzzled by Thorndyke's remark, but the appearance of a new witness forbade discussion. Mr. Arthur Gerrard was an alert-looking, rather tall man, with bushy, Mephistophelian eyebrows and a small, dark moustache, who wore a pair of large bifocal spectacles, and to whom a small mole at the corner of the mouth imparted the effect of a permanent one-sided smile.

"It was on your information," said the coroner, "that the identity of the deceased was established."

"Yes," replied the witness, who spoke with a slight, but perceptible, Irish accent. "I saw the description in the papers of the things that had been found in the rick and at once recognised them as Reed's. I knew deceased intimately and had often noticed his peculiar watch-chain and the little china mascot and seen him smoking the clay pipe with his initials scratched on it; and I knew that he wore false teeth."

"Did you meet him frequently?"

"Oh, yes. For more than a year he was my partner in business, and we remained friends after I had dissolved the partnership."

"Why did you dissolve the partnership?"

"I had to. Reed was impossible in a business sense. He gambled incessantly in stocks and I had to pay his losses. I lent him, for this purpose, at one time and another, over two thousand pounds. He gave me bills for the loans, but he was never able to meet them, and in the end, when we dissolved, I got him to insure his life for three thousand pounds and to draw up a document making his debt to me the first charge on his estate in the event of his death."

"Had you ever any reason to suppose that he contemplated suicide?"

"None whatever. After he left me, he entered into partnership with a Mr. Walter Jarman, and whenever I met him, he seemed to be quite happy and contented, though I gathered that he was still gambling a good deal. I saw him a week ago to-day and he then told me that he proposed to take a short yachting holiday with his partner, who owned a small cutter. That was the last time that I saw him alive."

As the witness was about to retire, Thorndyke rose, and having obtained the coroner's permission to cross-examine, asked: "You have spoken of a yacht. Do you know what her name is and where she has been kept lately?"

“Her name is the ›Moonbeam‹, and I believe Jarman kept her somewhere in the Thames, but I don’t know where.”

“And as to Jarman himself: what do you know about him, as to his character, for instance?”

“I knew him very slightly. He appeared to be rather a dissipated man. Drank a good deal, I should say, and I think he was a bit of a gambler.”

“Do you know if he was a heavy smoker?”

“He didn’t smoke at all, but he was an inveterate snuff-taker.”

At this point the foreman of the jury interposed with the audible remark that “he didn’t see what this had to do with the inquiry,” and the coroner looked dubiously at Thorndyke; but as my colleague sat down, the objection was not pursued.

The next witness was the caretaker of the building in which Reed and Jarman’s office was situated. His evidence was to the effect that on the previous Monday evening at about eight o’clock, he saw Mr. Jarman let himself into the office with his key. “I don’t know how long he stayed there,” he continued, in reply to the coroner’s question. “I had finished my work and was going up to my rooms at the top of the building. I didn’t see him again.”

“Did you notice anything unusual in his appearance?” asked Thorndyke, rising to cross-examine. “Was his face at all flushed, for instance?”

“I couldn’t say. I was going up the stairs and I just looked back over my shoulder when I heard him. His face was turned away from me.”

“But you had no difficulty in recognising him?”

“No: I should have known him a mile off. He had his overcoat on, and it is a very peculiar overcoat—light brown with a sort of greenish check. You couldn’t possibly mistake it.”

“What should you say was Mr. Jarman’s height?”

“About five feet nine or ten, I should say.”

Here the foreman of the jury again interposed. “Aren’t we wasting time, sir?” he inquired impatiently. “These details about Jarman may be very important to the police, but they don’t concern us. We are inquiring into the death of Mr. Reginald Reed.”

The coroner looked deprecatingly at Thorndyke and remarked “There is some truth in what the foreman says.”

“I submit, sir,” replied Thorndyke, “that there is no truth in it at all. We are not inquiring into the death of Reginald Reed, but into that of a man whose remains were found in a burned rick.”

“But the body has been identified as that of Reginald Reed.”

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I submit that it has been wrongly identified. I suggest that the body is that of Walter Jarman and I am prepared to produce witnesses who will prove that it is."

"But," exclaimed the coroner, "we have just heard the evidence of a witness who states that he saw Jarman alive eighteen hours after the rick was fired."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thorndyke. "We have heard the witness say that he saw Jarman's overcoat. He expressly stated that he did not see the man's face."

The coroner hastily conferred with the jury—who openly scoffed at Thorndyke's suggestion—and then said: "I find what you say perfectly incredible and so do the jury. It is utterly irreconcilable with the facts. You had better call your witnesses and let us dispose of this extraordinary suggestion."

Thorndyke bowed to the coroner and called Mr. Andrew Darton; whereupon a middle-aged man of markedly professional aspect came forward and, having been sworn, gave evidence as follows: "I am a dental surgeon. A little over two years ago, Mr. Walter Jarman was under my care. I extracted some loose teeth from both jaws and made him two plates—an upper and a lower."

"Could you identify those plates?"

"Yes. I have with me the plaster model on which those plates were made." He opened a bag and produced a plaster cast of a pair of jaws fitted with a brass hinge so that the jaws could be opened and shut. On the upper jaw were two groups of teeth separated by a space of bare gums, while the lower jaw bore a single group of four front teeth.

"This model," the witness explained, "is an exact replica of the patient's jaws, and the two plates were actually moulded on it." He picked up the dental plate from the table and, amidst a hush of breathless expectancy, opened the mouth of the model and applied the plate to the upper jaw. At a glance, it was obvious that it fitted perfectly. The two groups of the plaster teeth slipped exactly into the spaces on the plate, making a complete row of teeth. Then the witness covered the lower gums with strips of plastic wax, and taking the loose teeth from the table, attached them to the wax; and again the correspondence was evident. The teeth thus applied exactly filled the vacant spaces.

"Can you now identify that plate?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "I am quite certain that this is the plate I made for Mr. Jarman and that those loose teeth are from his lower plate."

Thorndyke looked at the coroner, who nodded emphatically. "This evidence seems perfectly conclusive," he admitted. "What do you say, gentlemen?" he added, turning to the jury.

There was no doubt as to their sentiments. With one voice they declared their complete conviction. Had they not seen the demonstration with their own eyes?

"And now, sir," said the coroner, "as you appear to know more than anyone else about this case, and as it is perfectly incomprehensible to me, and probably also to the jury, I suggest that you give us an explanation. And you had better make it a sworn statement, so that it can go into the depositions."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "especially as I have some evidence to give." He was accordingly sworn and then proceeded to make the following statement:

"The first thing that struck me on reading the report of this case was the very remarkable character of the objects found in the ashes of the rick. They included objects composed of platinum, of pipe-clay, of iron and of porcelain—all substances practically indestructible by fire. And these imperishable objects were all highly distinctive and easily identifiable, and two of them actually bore the initials of their owner. There was almost a suggestion of the body having been prepared for identification after burning. This mere suggestion, however, gave place to definite suspicion when I saw the dental plate. That plate presented a most striking discrepancy. Here it is, sir, and you see that it is a clean polished plate of red vulcanite, with not a trace of stain or discoloration. But associated with that plate were two clay pipes. Now, the man who smokes a clay pipe is not only—as a rule—a heavy smoker, but he smokes strong and dark-coloured tobacco. And if he wears a dental plate, that plate becomes encrusted with a black deposit which is very difficult to remove. There is, as you see, no trace of any such deposit, or of any tobacco stain in the interstices of the teeth. It appeared to be almost certainly the plate of a non-smoker. But if that were so, it could not be Reed's. But it had been ascertained by the police surgeon that it fitted the jaw of the skull and undoubtedly belonged to the burned body. Consequently if the plate was not Reed's plate, the skull was not Reed's skull, and the body was not Reed's body. But the watch-chain was Reed's, the pipes were his and the mascot was his. That is to say that the very identifiable and fire-proof property of Reed was associated with the burned body of some other person; that, in other words, the body of some unknown person had been deliberately prepared to

counterfeit the body of Reed. This offered a further suggestion and raised a question. The suggestion was that the unknown person had been murdered—presumably somewhere near the spot where the dental plate was found. The question was—What was the object of causing the body to counterfeit that of Reed?

“Now, I knew, from the insurance company, that Reed had insured his life for three thousand pounds. Therefore, somebody stood to gain three thousand pounds by his death. The question was—Who was that somebody? I proceeded to make certain investigations on the spot;”—and here Thorndyke gave a summary of our discoveries on the marsh and on the yacht. “It thus appeared,” he continued, “that there were two men on the marshes that night, going towards the rick. One of them was the person whose body was found in the ashes; the other, who went back alone to the yacht, was presumably the person who stood to gain three thousand pounds by Reed’s death.”

“Have you formed any opinion as to who that person was?” the coroner asked.

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “I have very little doubt that he was Reginald Reed.”

“But,” exclaimed the coroner, “we have heard in evidence that it was Mr. Arthur Gerrard who stood to gain the three thousand pounds!”

“Precisely,” said Thorndyke; and for a while he and the coroner looked at one another without speaking.

Suddenly the latter cast a searching look around the court. “Where is Mr. Gerrard?” he demanded.

“He left the court about ten minutes ago,” said Thorndyke; “and a police inspector left immediately afterwards. I had advised him not to lose sight of Mr. Gerrard.”

“Then I take it that you suspect Gerrard of being in collusion with Reed?”

“I suspect that Arthur Gerrard and Reginald Reed are one and the same person.”

As Thorndyke made this statement, a murmur of astonishment arose from the jurymen and the spectators. The coroner, after a few moments’ puzzled reflection, remarked: “You are not forgetting that Reed’s caretaker was present while Gerrard was giving his evidence?” Then, turning to the caretaker, he asked: “What do you say? Was that Mr. Reed who gave evidence under the name of Gerrard?”

The caretaker, who had evidently been thinking furiously, was by no means confident. “I should say not,” he replied, “unless he was made

up a good deal. He was certainly about the same height and build and colour; but he had a moustache, whereas Mr. Reed was clean-shaved; he had a mole on his face, which Mr. Reed hadn't; he had bushy eyebrows, whereas Mr. Reed had hardly any eyebrows to speak of; and he wore spectacles, which Mr. Reed didn't, and he spoke like an Irishman, whereas Mr. Reed was English. Still it is possible—"

Before he could finish, the door rattled to a heavy concussion. Then it flew open, and Mr. Gerrard staggered into the room, thrust forward by the police inspector. His appearance was marvellously changed, for he had lost his spectacles, and one of his eyebrows had disappeared, as had also the mole and a portion of the built-up moustache. The caretaker started up with an exclamation, but at this moment Gerrard, with a violent effort, wrenched himself free. The inspector sprang forward to recapture him. But he was too late. The prisoner's hand flew upwards; there was a ringing report; and Arthur Gerrard—or Reginald Reed—fell back across a bench with a trickle of blood on his temple and a pistol still clutched in his hand.

"And so," said Stalker, when he called on us the next day for details, "it was a suicide after all. Very lucky, too, seeing that there was no provision in the policy for death by judicial hanging."

THE PUZZLE LOCK*
PART I

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The Puzzle Lock

I do not remember what was the occasion of my dining with Thornydyke at Giamborini's on the particular evening that is now in my mind. Doubtless, some piece of work completed had seemed to justify the modest festival. At any rate, there we were, seated at a somewhat retired table, selected by Thornydyke, with our backs to the large window through which the late June sunlight streamed. We had made our preliminary arrangements, including a bottle of Barsac, and were inspecting dubiously a collection of semi-edible hors d'oeuvres, when a man entered and took possession of a table just in front of ours, which had apparently been reserved for him, since he walked directly to it and drew away the single chair that had been set aslant against it.

I watched with amused interest his methodical procedure, for he was clearly a man who took his dinner seriously. A regular customer, too, I judged by the waiter's manner and the reserved table with its single chair. But the man himself interested me. He was out of the common and there was a suggestion of character, with perhaps a spice of oddity, in his appearance. He appeared to be about sixty years of age, small and spare, with a much-wrinkled, mobile and rather whimsical face, surmounted by a crop of white, upstanding hair. From his waistcoat pocket protruded the ends of a fountain-pen, a pencil and a miniature electric torch such as surgeons use; a silver-mounted Coddington lens hung from his watch-guard and the middle finger of his left hand bore the largest seal ring that I have ever seen.

"Well," said Thornydyke, who had been following my glance, "what do you make of him?"

"I don't quite know," I replied. "The Coddington suggests a naturalist or a scientist of some kind, but that blatant ring doesn't. Perhaps he is an antiquary or a numismatist or even a philatelist. He deals with small objects of some kind."

At this moment a man who had just entered strode up to our friend's

table and held out his hand, which the other shook, with no great enthusiasm, as I thought. Then the newcomer fetched a chair, and setting it by the table, seated himself and picked up the menu card, while the other observed him with a shade of disapproval. I judged that he would rather have dined alone, and that the personality of the new arrival—a flashy, bustling, obtrusive type of man—did not commend him.

From this couple my eye was attracted to a tall man who had halted near the door and stood looking about the room as if seeking someone. Suddenly he spied an empty, single table, and, bearing down on it, seated himself and began anxiously to study the menu under the supervision of a waiter. I glanced at him with slight disfavour. One makes allowances for the exuberance of youth, but when a middle-aged man presents the combination of heavily-greased hair parted in the middle, a waxed moustache of a suspiciously intense black, a pointed imperial and a single eye-glass, evidently ornamental in function, one views him with less tolerance. However, his get-up was not my concern, whereas my dinner was, and I had given this my undivided attention for some minutes when I heard Thorndyke emit a soft chuckle.

“Not bad,” he remarked, setting down his glass.

“Not at all,” I agreed, “for a restaurant wine.”

“I was not alluding to the wine,” said he “but to our friend Badger.”

“The inspector!” I exclaimed. “He isn’t here, is he? I don’t see him.”

“I am glad to hear you say that, Jervis,” said he. “It is a better effort than I thought. Still, he might manage his properties a little better. That is the second time his eye-glass has been in the soup.”

Following, the direction of his glance, I observed the man with the waxed moustache furtively wiping his eye-glass; and the temporary absence of the monocular grimace enabled me to note a resemblance to the familiar features of the detective officer.

“If you say that is Badger, I suppose it is,” said I. “He is certainly a little like our friend. But I shouldn’t have recognised him.”

“I don’t know that I should,” said Thorndyke, “but for the little unconscious tricks of movement. You know the habit he has of stroking the back of his head, and of opening his mouth and scratching the side of his chin. I saw him do it just now. He had forgotten his imperial until he touched it, and then the sudden arrest of movement was very striking. It doesn’t do to forget a false beard.”

“I wonder what his game is,” said I. “The disguise suggests that he is on the look-out for somebody who might know him; but apparently that

somebody has not turned up yet. At any rate, he doesn't seem to be watching anybody in particular."

"No," said Thorndyke. "But there is somebody whom he seems rather to avoid watching. Those two men at the table in front of ours are in his direct line of vision, but he hasn't looked at them once since he sat down, though I noticed that he gave them one quick glance before he selected his table. I wonder if he has observed us. Probably not, as we have the strong light of the window behind us and his attention is otherwise occupied."

I looked at the two men and from them to the detective, and I judged that my friend was right. On the inspector's table was a good-sized fern in an ornamental pot, and this he had moved so that it was directly between him and the two strangers, to whom he must have been practically invisible; and now I could see that he did, in fact, steal an occasional glance at them over the edge of the menu card. Moreover, as their meal drew to an end, he hastily finished his own and beckoned to the waiter to bring the bill.

"We may as well wait and see them off," said Thorndyke, who had already settled our account. "Badger always interests me. He is so ingenious and he has such shockingly bad luck."

We had not long to wait. The two men rose from the table and walked slowly to the door, where they paused to light their cigars before going out. Then Badger rose, with his back towards them and his eyes on the mirror opposite; and as they went out, he snatched up his hat and stick and followed. Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly.

"Do we indulge in the pleasures of the chase?" he asked, and as I replied in the affirmative, we, too, made our way out and started in the wake of the inspector.

As we followed Badger at a discreet distance, we caught an occasional glimpse of the quarry ahead, whose proceedings evidently caused the inspector some embarrassment, for they had a way of stopping suddenly to elaborate some point that they were discussing, whereby it became necessary for the detective to drop farther in the rear than was quite safe, in view of the rather crowded state of the pavement. On one of these occasions, when the older man was apparently delivering himself of some excruciating joke, they both turned suddenly and looked back, the joker pointing to some object on the opposite side of the road. Several people turned to see what was being pointed at, and, of course, the inspector had to turn, too, to avoid being recognised. At this moment the two men popped into an entry, and when the inspector once

more turned they were gone.

As soon as he missed them, Badger started forward almost at a run, and presently halted at the large entry of the Celestial Bank Chambers, into which he peered eagerly. Then, apparently sighting his quarry, he darted in, and we quickened our pace and followed. Half-way down the long hall we saw him standing at the door of a lift, frantically pressing the call-button.

“Poor Badger!” chuckled Thorndyke, as we walked past him unobserved. “His usual luck! He will hardly run them to earth now in this enormous building. We may as well go through to the Blenheim Street entrance.”

We pursued our way along the winding corridor and were close to the entrance when I noticed two men coming down the staircase that led to the ball.

“By Jingo! Here they are!” I exclaimed. “Shall we run back and give Badger the tip?”

Thorndyke hesitated. But it was too late. A taxi had just driven up and was discharging its fare. The younger man, catching the driver’s eye, ran out and seized the door-handle; and when his companion had entered the cab, he gave an address to the driver, and, stepping in quickly, slammed the door. As the cab moved off, Thorndyke pulled out his notebook and pencil and jotted down the number of the vehicle. Then we turned and retraced our steps; but when we reached the lift-door, the inspector had disappeared. Presumably, like the incomparable Tom Bowling, he had gone aloft.

“We must give it up, Jervis,” said Thorndyke. “I will send him anonymously the number of the cab, and that is all we can do. But I am sorry for Badger.”

With this we dismissed the incident from our minds—at least, I did; assuming that I had seen the last of the two strangers. Little did I suspect how soon and under what strange and tragic circumstances I should meet with them again!

R. A. F.

It was about a week later that we received a visit from our old friend, Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department. The passing years had put us on a footing of mutual trust and esteem, and the capable, straightforward detective officer was always a welcome visitor.

"I've just dropped in," said Miller, cutting off the end of the inevitable cigar, "to tell you about a rather queer case that we've got in hand. I know you are always interested in queer cases."

Thorndyke smiled blandly. He had heard that kind of preamble before, and he knew, as did I, that when Miller became communicative we could safely infer that the Millerian bark was in shoal water.

"It is a case," the superintendent continued, "of a very special brand of crook. Actually there is a gang, but it is the managing director that we have particularly got our eye on."

"Is he a regular 'habitual,' then?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well," replied Miller, "as to that, I can't positively say. The fact is that we haven't actually seen the man to be sure of him."

"I see," said Thorndyke, with a grim smile. "You mean to say that you have got your eye on the place where he isn't."

"At the present moment," Miller admitted, "that is the literal fact. We have lost sight of the man we suspected, but we hope to pick him up again presently. We want him badly, and his pals too. It is probably quite a small gang, but they are mighty fly; a lot too smart to be at large. And they'll take some catching, for there is someone running the concern with a good deal more brains than crooks usually have."

"What is their lay?" I asked.

"Burglary," he replied. "Jewels and plate, but principally jewels; and the special feature of their work is that the swag disappears completely every time. None of the stuff has ever been traced. That is what drew our attention to them. After each robbery we made a round of all the fences, but there was not a sign. The stuff seemed to have vanished into smoke. Now that is very awkward. If you never see the men and you can't trace the stuff, where are you? You've got nothing to go on."

"But you seem to have got a clue of some kind." I said.

"Yes. There isn't a lot in it; but it seemed worth following up. One of our men happened to travel down to Colchester with a certain man, and when he came back two days later, he noticed this same man on the platform at Colchester and saw him get out at Liverpool Street. In the interval there had been a jewel robbery at Colchester. Then there was a robbery at Southampton, and our man went at once to Waterloo and saw all the trains in. On the second day, behold! the Colchester sportsman turns up at the barrier, so our man, who had a special taxi waiting, managed to track him home and afterwards got some particulars about him. He is a chap named Shemmonds; belongs to a firm of

outside brokers. But nobody seems to know much about him and he doesn't put in much time at the office.

"Well, then, Badger took him over and shadowed him for a day or two, but just as things were looking interesting, he slipped off the hook. Badger followed him to a restaurant, and, through the glass door, saw him go up to an elderly man at a table and shake hands with him. Then he took a chair at the table himself, so Badger popped in and took a seat near them where he could keep them in view. They went out together and Badger followed them, but he lost them in the Celestial Bank Chambers. They went up in the lift just before he could get to the door and that was the last he saw of them. But we have ascertained that they left the building in a taxi and that the taxi set them down at Great Turnstile."

"It was rather smart of you to trace the cab," Thorndyke remarked.

"You've got to keep your eyes skinned in our line of business," said Miller. "But now we come to the real twister. From the time those two men went down Great Turnstile, nobody has set eyes on either of them. They seem to have vanished into thin air."

"You found out who the other man was, then?" said I.

"Yes. The restaurant manager knew him; an old chap named Luttrell. And we knew him, too, because he has a thumping burglary insurance, and when he goes out of town he notifies his company, and they make arrangements with us to have the premises watched."

"What is Luttrell?" I asked.

"Well, he is a bit of a mug, I should say, at least that's his character in the trade. Goes in for being a dealer in jewels and antiques, but he'll buy anything—furniture, pictures, plate, any blooming thing. Does it for a hobby, the regular dealers say. Likes the sport of bidding at the sales. But the knock-out men hate him; never know what he's going to do. Must have private means, for though he doesn't often drop money, he can't make much. He's no salesman. It is the buying that he seems to like. But he is a regular character, full of cranks and oddities. His rooms in Thavies Inn look like the British Museum gone mad. He has got electric alarms from all the doors up to his bedroom and the strong-room in his office is fitted with a puzzle lock instead of keys."

"That doesn't seem very safe," I remarked.

"It is," said Miller. "This one has fifteen alphabets. One of our men has calculated that it has about forty billion changes. No one is going to work that out, and there are no keys to get lost. But it is that strong-room that is worrying us, as well as the old joker himself. The Lord

knows how much valuable stuff there is in it. What we are afraid of is that Shemmonds may have made away with the old chap and be lying low, waiting to swoop down on that strong-room."

"But you said that Luttrell goes away sometimes," said I.

"Yes; but then he always notifies his insurance company and he seals up his strong-room with a tape round the door-handle and a great seal on the door-post. This time he hasn't notified the company and the door isn't sealed. There's a seal on the door-post—left from last time, I expect—but only the cut ends of tape. I got the caretaker to let me see the place this morning; and, by the way, doctor, I have taken a leaf out of your book. I always carry a bit of squeezing wax in my pocket now and a little box of French chalk. Very handy they are, too. As I had 'em with me this morning, I took a squeeze of the seal. May want it presently for identification."

He brought out of his pocket a small tin box from which he carefully extracted an object wrapped in tissue paper. When the paper had been tenderly removed there was revealed a lump of moulding wax, one side of which was flattened and bore a sunk design.

"It's quite a good squeeze," said Miller, handing it to Thorndyke. "I dusted the seal with French chalk so that the wax shouldn't stick to it." My colleague examined the "squeeze" through his lens, and passing it and the lens to me, asked: "Has this been photographed, Miller?"

"No," was the reply, "but it ought to be before it gets damaged."

"It ought, certainly," said Thorndyke, "if you value it. Shall I get Polton to do it now?"

The superintendent accepted the offer gratefully and Thorndyke accordingly took the squeeze up to the laboratory, where he left it for our assistant to deal with. When he returned, Miller remarked: "It is a baffling case, this. Now that Shemmonds has dropped out of sight, there is nothing to go on and nothing to do but wait for something else to happen; another burglary or an attempt on the strong-room."

"Is it clear that the strong-room has not been opened?" asked Thorndyke.

"No, it isn't," replied Miller. "That's part of the trouble. Luttrell has disappeared and he may be dead. If he is, Shemmonds will probably have been through his pockets. Of course there is no strong-room key. That is one of the advantages of a puzzle lock. But it is quite possible that Luttrell may have kept a note of the combination and carried it about him. It would have been risky to trust entirely to memory. And he would have had the keys of the office about him. Any one who

had those could have slipped in during business hours without much difficulty. Luttrell's premises are empty, but there are people in and out all day going to the other offices. Our man can't follow them all in. I suppose you can't make any suggestion, doctor?"

"I am afraid I can't," answered Thorndyke. "The case is so very much in the air. There is nothing against Shemmonds but bare suspicion. He has disappeared only in the sense that you have lost sight of him, and the same is true of Luttrell—though there is an abnormal element in his case. Still, you could hardly get a search-warrant on the facts that are known at present."

"No," Miller agreed, "they certainly would not authorise us to break open the strong-room, and nothing short of that would be much use."

Here Polton made his appearance with the wax squeeze in a neat little box such as jewellers use.

"I've got two enlarged negatives," said he; "nice clear ones. How many prints shall I make for Mr. Miller?"

"Oh, one will do, Mr. Polton," said the superintendent. "If I want any more I'll ask you." He took up the little box, and, slipping it in his pocket, rose to depart. "I'll let you know, doctor, how the case goes on, and perhaps you wouldn't mind turning it over a bit in the interval. Something might occur to you."

Thorndyke promised to think over the case, and when we had seen the superintendent launched down the stairs, we followed Polton up to the laboratory, where we each picked up one of the negatives and examined it against the light. I had already identified the seal by its shape—a *vesica piscis* or boat-shape—with the one that I had seen on Mr. Luttrell's finger. Now, in the photograph, enlarged three diameters, I could clearly make out the details. The design was distinctive and curious rather than elegant. The two triangular spaces at the ends were occupied respectively by a *memento mori* and a winged hour-glass and the central portion was filled by a long inscription in Roman capitals, of which I could at first make nothing.

"Do you suppose this is some kind of cryptogram?" I asked.

"No," Thorndyke replied. "I imagine the words were run together merely to economise space. This is what I make of it."

He held the negative in his left hand, and with his right wrote down in pencil on a slip of paper the following four lines of doggerel verse

Eheu alas how fast the dam fugaces
Labuntur anni especially in the cases

Of poor old blokes like you and me Posthumus
Who only wait for vermes to consume us.”

“Well,” I exclaimed, “it is a choice specimen; one of old Luttrell’s merry conceited jests, I take it. But the joke was hardly worth the labour of engraving on a seal.”

“It is certainly a rather mild jest,” Thorndyke admitted. “But there may be something more in it than meets the eye.”

He looked at the inscription reflectively and appeared to read it through once or twice. Then he replaced the negative in the drying rack, and, picking up the paper, slipped it into his pocket-book.

“I don’t quite see,” said I, “why Miller brought this case to us or what he wants you to think over. In fact, I don’t see that there is a case at all.”

“It is a very shadowy case,” Thorndyke admitted. “Miller has done a good deal of guessing, and so has Badger; and it may easily turn out that they have found a mare’s nest. Nevertheless there is something to think about.”

“As, for instance—?”

“Well, Jervis, you saw the men; you saw how they behaved; you have heard Miller’s story and you have seen Mr. Luttrell’s seal. Put all those data together and you have the material for some very interesting speculation, to say the least. You might even carry it beyond speculation.”

I did not pursue the subject, for I knew that when Thorndyke used the word “speculation,” nothing would induce him to commit himself to an opinion. But later, bearing in mind the attention that he had seemed to bestow on Mr. Luttrell’s schoolboy verses, I got a print from the negative and studied the foolish in exhaustively. But if it had any hidden meaning—and I could imagine no reason for supposing that it had—that meaning remained hidden; and the only conclusion at which I could arrive was that a man of Luttrell’s age might have known better than to write such nonsense.

The superintendent did not leave the matter long in suspense. Three days later he paid us another visit. and half-apologetically reopened the subject.

“I am ashamed to come badgering you like this,” he said, “but I can’t get this case out of my head. I’ve a feeling that we ought to, get a move of some kind on. And, by the way—though that is nothing to do with it—I’ve copied out the stuff on that seal and I can’t make any sense of it. What the deuce are fugaces? I suppose ‘vermes’ are worms, though I don’t see why he spelt it that way.”

“The verses,” said Thorndyke, “are apparently a travesty of a Latin poem; one of the odes of Horace which begins:

*‘Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume, labuntur anni,’*¹

which means, in effect, ‘Alas! Postumus, the flying years slip by.’”

“Well,” said Miller, “any fool knows that—any middle-aged fool, at any rate. No need to put it into Latin. However, it’s of no consequence. To return to this case; I’ve got an authority to look over Luttrell’s premises—not to pull anything about, you know, just to look round. I called in on my way here to let the caretaker know that I should be coming in later. I thought that perhaps you might like to come with me. I wish you would, doctor. You’ve got such a knack of spotting things that other people overlook.”

He looked wistfully at Thorndyke, and as the latter was considering the proposal, he added: “The caretaker mentioned a rather odd circumstance. It seems that he keeps an eye on the electric meters in the building and that he has noticed a leakage of current in Mr. Luttrell’s. It is only a small leak; about thirty watts an hour. But he can’t account for it in any way. He has been right through the premises to see if any lamp has been left on in any of the rooms. But all the switches are off everywhere, and it can’t be a short circuit. Funny, isn’t it?”

It was certainly odd, but there seemed to me nothing in it to account for the expression of suddenly awakened interest that I detected in Thorndyke’s face. However, it evidently had some special significance for him, for he asked almost eagerly “When are you making your inspection?”

“I am going there now,” replied Miller, and he added coaxingly, “Couldn’t you manage to run round with me?”

Thorndyke stood up. “Very well,” said he. “Let us go together. You may as well come, too, Jervis, if you can spare an hour.”

I agreed readily, for my colleague’s hardly disguised interest in the inspection suggested a definite problem in his mind; and we at once issued forth and made our way by Mitre Court and Fetter Lane to the abode of the missing dealer, an old-fashioned house near the end of Thavies Inn. “I’ve been over the premises once,” said Miller, as the caretaker appeared with the keys, “and I think we had better begin the regular inspection with the offices. We can examine the stores and living-rooms afterwards.”

¹Horaz, carm. 2, 14. B. L.

We accordingly entered the outer office, and as this was little more than a waiting-room, we passed through into the private office, which had the appearance of having been used also as a sitting-room or study. It was furnished with an easy-chair, a range of book-shelves and a handsome bureau book-case, while in the end wall was the massive iron door of the strong-room. On this, as the chief object of interest, we all bore down, and the superintendent expounded its peculiarities.

"It is quite a good idea," said he, "this letter-lock. There's no keyhole—though a safe-lock is pretty hopeless to pick even if there was a keyhole—and no keys to get lost. As to guessing what the 'open sesame' may be—well, just look at it. You could spend a life time on it and be no forrader."

The puzzle lock was contained in the solid iron door post, through a slot in which a row of fifteen A's seemed to grin defiance on the would-be safe-robber. I put my finger on the milled edges of one or two of the letters and rotated the discs, noticing how easily and smoothly they turned.

"Well," said Miller, "it's no use fumbling with that. I'm just going to have a look through his ledger and see who his customers were. The book-case is unlocked. I tried it last time. And we'd better leave this as we found it."

He put back the letters that I had moved, and turned away to explore the book-case; and as the letter-lock appeared to present nothing but an insoluble riddle, I followed him, leaving Thorndyke earnestly gazing at the meaningless row of letters.

The superintendent glanced back at him with an indulgent smile.

"The doctor is going to work out the combination," he chuckled. "Well, well. There are only forty billion changes and he's a young man for his age."

With this encouraging comment, he opened the glass door of the book-case, and reaching down the ledger, laid it on the desk-like slope of the bureau.

"It is a poor chance," said he, opening the ledger at the index, "but some of these people may be able to give us a hint where to look for Mr. Luttrell, and it is worth while to know what sort of business he did."

He ran his finger down the list of names and had just turned to the account of one of the customers when we were startled by a loud click from the direction of the strong-room. We both turned sharply and beheld Thorndyke grasping the handle of the strong-room door, and I saw with amazement that the door was now slightly ajar.

“God!” exclaimed Miller, shutting the ledger and starting forward, “he’s got it open!” He strode over to the door, and directing an eager look at the indicator of the lock, burst into a laugh. “Well, I’m hanged!” he exclaimed. “Why, it was unlocked all the time! To think that none of us had the sense to tug the handle! But isn’t it just like old Luttrell to have a fool’s answer like that to the blessed puzzle!”

I looked at the indicator, not a little astonished to observe the row of fifteen A’s, which apparently formed the key combination. It may have been a very amusing joke on Mr. Luttrell’s part, but it did not look very secure. Thorndyke regarded us with an inscrutable glance and still grasped the handle, holding the door a bare half-inch open.

“There is something pushing against the door,” said he. “Shall I open it?” “May as well have a look at the inside,” replied Miller. Thereupon Thorndyke released the handle and quickly stepped aside. The door swung slowly open and the dead body of a man fell out into the room and rolled over on to its back.

“Mercy on us!” gasped Miller, springing back hastily and staring with horror and amazement at the grim apparition. “That is not Luttrell.” Then, suddenly starting forward and stooping over the dead man, he exclaimed “Why, it is Shemmonds. So that is where he disappeared to. I wonder what became of Luttrell?”

“There is somebody else in the strong-room,” said Thorndyke; and now, peering in through the doorway, I perceived a dim light, which seemed to come from a hidden recess, and by which I could see a pair of feet projecting round the corner. In a moment Miller had sprung in, and I followed. The strong-room was L-shaped in plan, the arm of the L formed by a narrow passage at right angles to the main room. At the end of this a single small electric bulb was burning, the light of which showed the body of an elderly man stretched on the floor of the passage. I recognised him instantly in spite of the dimness of the light and the disfigurement caused by a ragged wound on the forehead.

“We had better get him out of this,” said Miller, speaking in a flurried tone, partly due to the shock of the horrible discovery and partly to the accompanying physical unpleasantness, “and then we will have a look round, This wasn’t just a mere robbery. We are going to find things out.”

With my help he lifted Luttrell’s corpse and together we carried it out, laying it on the floor of the room at the farther end, to which we also dragged the body of Shemmonds.

“There is no mystery as to how it happened,” I said, after a brief inspection of the two corpses. “Shemmonds evidently shot the old man from behind with the pistol close to the back of the head. The hair is all scorched round the wound of entry and the bullet came out at the forehead.”

“Yes,” agreed Miller, “that is all clear enough. But the mystery is why on earth Shemmonds didn’t let himself out. He must have known that the door was unlocked. Yet instead of turning the handle, he must have stood there like a fool, battering at the door with his fists. Just look at his hands.”

“The further mystery,” said Thorndyke who, all this time, had been making a minute examination of the lock both front without and within, “is how the door came to be shut. That is quite a curious problem.”

“Quite,” agreed Miller. “But it will keep. And there is a still more curious problem inside there. There is nearly all the swag from that Colchester robbery. Looks as if Luttrell was in it.”

Half reluctantly he re-entered the strong-room and Thorndyke and I followed. Near the angle of the passage he stooped to pick up an automatic pistol and a small, leather book, which he opened and looked into by the light of the lamp. At the first glance he uttered an exclamation and shut the book with a snap.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked, holding it out to us. “It is the nominal roll, address book and journal of the gang. We’ve got them in the hollow of our hand; and it is dawning upon me that old Luttrell was the managing director whom I have been looking for so long. Just run your eyes along those shelves. That’s loot; every bit of it. I can identify the articles from the lists that I made out.”

He stood looking gloatingly along the shelves with their burden of jewellery, plate and other valuables. Then his eye lighted on a drawer in the end wall just under the lamp; an iron drawer with a disproportionately large handle and bearing a very legible label inscribed “unmounted stones.”

“We’ll have a look at his stock of unmounted gems,” said Miller; and with that he bore down on the drawer, and seizing the handle, gave a vigorous pull. “Funny,” said he. “It isn’t locked, but something seems to be holding it back.”

He planted his foot on the wall and took a fresh purchase on the handle. “Wait a moment, Miller,” said Thorndyke; but even as he spoke, the superintendent gave a mighty heave; the drawer came out a full two

feet; there was a loud click, and a moment later the strong-room door slammed.

“Good God!” exclaimed Miller, letting go the drawer, which immediately slid in with another click. “What was that?”

“That was the door shutting,” replied Thorndyke. “Quite a clever arrangement; like the mechanism of a repeater watch. Pulling out the drawer wound up and released a spring that shut the door. Very ingenious.”

“But,” gasped Miller, turning an ashen face to my colleague, “we’re shut in.”

“You are forgetting,” said I—a little nervously, I must admit—“that the lock is as we left it.”

The superintendent laughed, somewhat hysterically. “What a fool I am!” said he. “As bad as Shemmonds. Still we may as well—” Here he started along the passage and I heard him groping his way to the door, and later heard the handle turn. Suddenly the deep silence of the tomb-like chamber was rent by a yell of terror.

“The door won’t move! It’s locked fast!”

On this I rushed along the passage with a sickening fear at my heart. And even as I ran, there rose before my eyes the horrible vision of the corpse with the battered hands that had fallen out when we opened the door of this awful trap. He had been caught as we were caught. How soon might it not be that some stranger would be looking in on our corpses.

In the dim twilight by the door I found Miller clutching the handle and shaking it like a madman. His self-possession was completely shattered. Nor was my own condition much better. I flung my whole weight on the door in the faint hope that the lock was not really closed, but the massive iron structure was as immovable as a stone wall. I was nevertheless, gathering myself up for a second charge when I heard Thorndyke’s voice close behind me.

“That is no use, Jervis. The door is locked. But there is nothing to worry about.”

As he spoke, there suddenly appeared a bright circle of light from the little electric lamp that he always carried in his pocket. Within the circle, and now clearly visible, was a second indicator of the puzzle lock on the inside of the door-post. Its appearance was vaguely reassuring, especially in conjunction with Thorndyke’s calm voice; and it evidently appeared so to Miller, for he remarked, almost in his natural tones: “But

it seems to be unlocked still. There is the same AAAAAA that it showed when we came in.”

It was perfectly true. The slot of the letter-lock still showed the range of fifteen A's, just as it had when the door was open. Could it be that the lock was a dummy and that there was some other means of opening the door? I was about to put this question to Thorndyke when he put the lamp into my hand, and, gently pushing me aside, stepped up to the indicator.

“Keep the light steady, Jervis,” said he, and forth with he began to manipulate the milled edges of the letter discs, beginnings as I noticed, at the right or reverse end of the slot and working backwards. I watched him with feverish interest and curiosity, as also did Miller, looking to see some word of fifteen letters develop in the slot. Instead of which, I saw, to my amazement and bewilderment my colleague's finger transforming the row of A's into a succession of M's, which, however, were presently followed by an L and some X's. When the row was completed it looked like some remote, antediluvian date set down in Roman numerals.

“Try the handle now, Miller,” said Thorndyke.

The superintendent needed no second bidding. Snatching at the handle, he turned it and bore heavily on the door. Almost instantly a thin line of light appeared at the edge; there was a sharp click, and the door swung right open. We fell out immediately—at least the superintendent and I did—thankful to find ourselves outside and alive. But, as we emerged, we both became aware of a man, white-faced and horror-stricken of aspect, stooping over the two corpses at the other end of the room. Our appearance was so sudden and unexpected—for the massive solidity of the safe-door had rendered our movements inaudible outside—that, for a moment or two, he stood immovable, staring at us, wild-eyed and open-mouthed. Then, suddenly, he sprang up erect, and, darting to the door, opened it and rushed out with Miller close on his heels.

He did not get very far. Following the superintendent, I saw the fugitive wriggling in the embrace of a tall man on the pavement, who, with Miller's assistance, soon had a pair of handcuffs snapped on the man's wrists and then departed with his captive in search of a cab.

“That's one of 'em, I expect,” said Miller, as we returned to the office; then, as his glance fell on the open strong-room door, he mopped his face with his handkerchief. “That door gives me the creeps to look at it,” said he. “Lord I what a shake-up that was! I've never had such a scare in my life. When I heard that door shut and I remembered how

that poor devil, Shemmonds, came tumbling out—phoo!” He wiped his brow again, and, walking towards the strong-room door, asked: “By the way, what was the magic word after all?” He stepped up to the indicator, and, after a quick glance, looked round at me in surprise. “Why!” he exclaimed, “blow me if it isn’t AAAA still! But the doctor altered it, didn’t he?”

At this moment Thorndyke appeared from the strong-room, where he had apparently been conducting some explorations, and to him the superintendent turned for an explanation.

“It is an ingenious device,” said he; “in fact, the whole strong-room is a monument of ingenuity, somewhat misapplied, but perfectly effective, as Mr. Shemmonds’s corpse testifies. The key-combination is a number expressed in Roman numerals, but the lock has a fly-back mechanism which acts as soon as the door begins to open. That was how Shemmonds was caught. He, no doubt purposely, avoided watching Luttrell set the lock—or else Luttrell didn’t let him—but as he went in with his intended victim, he looked at the indicator and saw the row of A’s, which he naturally assumed to be the key. Then, when he tried to let himself out, of course, the lock wouldn’t open.”

“It is rather odd that he didn’t try some other combinations,” said I.

“He probably did,” replied Thorndyke “but when they failed he would naturally come back to the A’s, which he had seen when the door was open. This is how it works.”

He shut the door, and then, closely watched by the superintendent and me, turned the milled rims of the letter-discs until the indicator showed a row of numerals thus: MMMMMMMCCCLXXXV. Grasping the handle, he turned it and gave a gentle pull, when the door began to open. But the instant it started from its bed, there was a loud click and all the letters of the indicator flew back to A.

“Well, I’m jiggered!” exclaimed Miller. “It must have been an awful suck-in for that poor blighter, Shemmonds. Took me in, too. I saw those A’s and the door open, and I thought I knew all about it. But what beats me, doctor, is how you managed to work it out. I can’t see what you had to go on. Would it be allowable to ask how it was done?”

“Certainly,” replied Thorndyke “but we had better defer the explanation. You have got those two bodies to dispose of and some other matters, and we must get back to our chambers. I will write down the key-combination, in case you want it, and then you must come and see us and let us know what luck you have had.”

He wrote the numerals on a slip of paper, and when he had handed it to the superintendent, we took our leave.

“I find myself,” said I, as we walked home, “in much the same position as Miller. I don’t see what you had to go on. It is clear to me that you not only worked out the lock-combination—from the seal inscription, as I assume—but that you identified Luttrell as the director of the gang. I don’t, in the least, understand how you did it.”

“And yet, Jervis,” said he, “it was an essentially simple case. If you review it and cast up the items of evidence, you will see that we really had all the facts. The problem was merely to co-ordinate them and extract their significance. Take first the character of Luttrell. We saw the man in company with another, evidently a fairly intimate acquaintance. They were being shadowed by a detective, and it is pretty clear that they detected the sleuth, for they shook him off quite neatly. Later, we learn from Miller that one of these men is suspected to be a member of a firm of swell burglars and that the other is a well-to-do, rather eccentric and very miscellaneous dealer, who has a strong-room fitted with a puzzle lock. I am astonished that the usually acute Miller did not notice how well Luttrell fitted the part of the managing director whom he was looking for. Here was a dealer who bought and sold all sorts of queer but valuable things, who must have had unlimited facilities for getting rid of stones, bullion and silver, and who used a puzzle lock. Now, who uses a puzzle lock? No one, certainly, who can conveniently use a key. But to the manager of a gang of thieves it would be a valuable safeguard, for he might at any moment be robbed of his keys, and perhaps made away with. But he could not be robbed of the secret passwords and his possession of it would be a security against murder. So you see that the simple probabilities pointed to Luttrell as the head of the gang.

“And now consider the problem of the lock. First, we saw that Luttrell wore on his left hand a huge, cumbrous seal ring, that he carried a Coddington lens on his watch-guard, and a small electric lamp in his pocket. That told us very, little. But when Miller told us about the lock and showed us the squeeze of the seal, and when we saw that the seal bore a long inscription in minute lettering, a connection began to appear. As Miller justly observed, no man—especially no elderly man—could trust the key combination exclusively to his memory. He would carry about him some record to which he could refer in case his memory failed him. But that record would hardly be one that anybody could read, or the secrecy and safety of the lock would be gone. It would probably be some kind of cryptogram; and when we saw this inscrip-

tion and considered it in conjunction with the lens and the lamp, it seemed highly probable that the key-combination was contained in the inscription; and that probability was further increased when we saw the nonsensical doggerel of which the inscription was made up. The suggestion was that the verses had been made for some purpose independent of their sense. Accordingly I gave the inscription very careful consideration.

"Now we learned from Miller that the puzzle lock had fifteen letters. The key might be one long word, such as 'superlativeness', a number of short words, or some chemical or other formula. Or it was possible that it might be of the nature of a chronogram. I have never heard of chronograms being used for secret records or messages, but it has often occurred to me that they would be extremely suitable. And this was an exceptionally suitable case."

"Chronogram," said I. "Isn't that something connected with medals?"

"They have often been used on medals," he replied. "In effect, a chronogram is an inscription some of the letters of which form a date connected with the subject of the inscription. Usually the date letters are or cut larger than the others for convenience in reading, but, of course, this is not essential. The principle of a chronogram is this. The letters of the Roman alphabet are of two kinds: those that are simply letters and nothing else, and those that are numerals as well as letters. The numeral letters are M = a thousand, D = five hundred, C = one hundred, L = fifty, X = ten, V = five, and I = one. Now, in deciphering a chronogram, you pick out all the numeral letters and add them up without regard to their order. The total gives you the date.

"Well, as I said, it occurred to me that this might be of the nature of a chronogram; but as the lock had letters and not figures, the number, if there was one, would have to be expressed in Roman numerals, and it would have to form a number of fifteen numeral letters. As it was thus quite easy to put my hypothesis to the test, I proceeded to treat the inscription as a chronogram and decipher it; and behold! it yielded a number of fifteen letters, which, of course, was as near certainty as was possible, short of actual experiment."

"Let us see how you did the decipherment," I said, as we entered our chambers and shut the door. I procured a large note-block and pencil, and, laying them on the table, drew up two chairs.

"Now," said I, "fire away."

"Very well," he said. "We will begin by writing the inscription in proper chronogram form with the numeral letters double size and treating the

U's as V's and the W's as double V's according to the rules."

Here he wrote out the inscription in Roman capitals thus: "EHEV ALAS HOVV FAST THE DAM FVGACES LABVNTVR ANNI ESPECIALLY IN THE CASES OF POOR OLD BLOKES LIKE YO V AND ME POSTHVMVS VVHO ONLY VVAIT FOR VERMES TO CONSVME VS."

"Now," said he, "let us make a column of each line and add them up, thus:

- (a) V=5, L=50, VV=10, D=500, M=1000, V=5, C=100—Total 1670
- (b) L=50, V=5, V=5, I=1, C=100, I=1, L=50, L=50, I=1, C=100—Total 363
- (c) L=50, D=500, L=50, L=50, I=1, V=5, D=500, M=1000, V=5, M=1000, V=5—Total 3166
- (d) VV=10, L=50, VV=10, I=1, V=5, M=1000, C=100, V=5, M=1000, V=5—Total 2186

"Now," he continued "we take the four totals and add them together, thus:

$$1670 + 363 + 3166 + 2186 = 7385$$

and we get the grand total of seven thousand three hundred and eighty-five and this, expressed in Roman numerals, is MMMMMMMCCC LXXXV. Here, then, is a number consisting of fifteen letters, the exact number of spaces in the indicator of the puzzle lock; and I repeat that this striking coincidence, added to, or rather multiplied into, the other probabilities, made it practically certain that this was the key-combination. It remained only to test it by actual experiment."

"By the way," said I, "I noticed that you perked up rather suddenly when Miller mentioned the electric meter."

"Naturally," he replied. "It seemed that there must be a small lamp switched on somewhere in the building, and the only place that had not been examined was the strong-room. But if there was a lamp alight there, someone had been in the strong-room. And, as, the only person who was known to be able to get in was missing, it seemed probable that he was in there still. But if he was, he was pretty certainly dead; and there was quite a considerable probability that some one else was in there with him, since his companion was missing, too, and both had disappeared at the same time. But I must confess that that spring drawer

was beyond my expectations, though I suspected it as soon as I saw Miller pulling at it. Luttrell was an ingenious old rascal; he almost deserved a better fate. However, I expect his death will have delivered the gang into the hands of the police.”

Events fell out as Thorndyke surmised. Mr. Luttrell’s little journal, in conjunction with the confession of the spy who had been captured on the premises, enabled the police to swoop down on the disconcerted gang before any breath of suspicion had reached them; with the result that they are now secured in strong-rooms of another kind whereof the doors are fitted with appliances as effective as, though less ingenious than, Mr. Luttrell’s puzzle lock.

The Green Check Jacket

The visits of our old friend, Mr. Brodribb, even when strictly professional, usually took the outward form of a friendly call. On the present occasion there was no such pretence. The old solicitor entered our chambers carrying a small suit-case (the stamped initials on which, "R. M.," I noticed, instantly attracted an inquisitive glance from Thorndyke, being obviously not Mr. Brodribb's own) which he placed on the table and then shook hands with an evident air of business.

"I have come, Thorndyke," he said, with unusual directness, "to ask your advice on a matter which is causing me some uneasiness. Do you know Reginald Merrill?"

"Slightly," was the reply. "I meet him occasionally in court; and, of course, I know him as the author of that interesting book on Prehistoric Flint-mines."

"Well," said Brodribb, "he has disappeared. He is missing. I don't like to use the expression; but when a responsible man is absent from his usual places of resort, when he apparently had no expectation of being so absent, and when he has made no provision for such absence, I think we may regard him as having disappeared in a legal sense. His absence calls for active inquiry."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Thorndyke; "and I take it that you are the person on whom the duty devolves?"

"I think so. I am his solicitor and the executor of his will—at least I believe so; and the only near relative of his whom I know is his nephew and heir, Ethelbert Crick, his sister's son. But Crick seems to have disappeared, too; and about the same time as Merrill. It is an extraordinary affair."

"You say that you believe you are Merrill's executor. Haven't you seen the will?"

"I have seen a will. I have it in my safe. But Merrill said he was going to draw up another, and he may have done so. But if he has, he will almost certainly have appointed me his executor, and I shall assume that he has and act accordingly."

"Was there any special reason for making a new will?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes," replied Brodribb. "He has just come into quite a considerable fortune, and he was pretty well off before. Under the old will, practically the whole of his property went to Crick. There was a small bequest to a man named Samuel Horder, his cousin's son; and Horder was the alternative legatee if Crick should die before Merrill. Now, I understood Merrill to say that, in view of this extra fortune, he wished to do rather more for Horder, and I gathered that he proposed to divide the estate more or less equally between the two men. The whole estate was more than he thought necessary for Crick. And now, as we have cleared up the preliminaries, I will give you the circumstances of the disappearance.

"Last Wednesday, the 5th, I had a note from him saying that he would have some reports ready for me on the following day, but that he would be away from his office from 10.30 a. m. to about 6.30, and suggesting that I should send round in the evening if I wanted the papers particularly. Now it happened that my clerk, Page, had to go to a place near London Bridge on Thursday morning, and, oddly enough, he saw Mr. Merrill come out of Edginton's, the ship-fitters, with a man who was carrying a largish hand-bag. There was nothing in it, of course, but Page is an observant man and he noticed Merrill's companion so far as to observe that he was wearing a Norfolk jacket of a greenish shepherd's plaid and a grey tweed hat. He also noted the time by the big clock in the street near to Edginton's—11.46—and that Merrill looked up at it, and that the two men then walked off rather quickly in the direction of the station. Well, in the evening, I sent Page round to Merrill's chambers in Fig-tree Court to get the papers. He arrived there just after 6.30, but he found the oak shut, and though he rapped at the door on the chance that Merrill might have come in—he lives in the chambers adjoining the office—there was no answer. So he went for a walk round the Temple, deciding to return a little later.

"Well, he had gone as far as the cloisters and was loitering there to look in the window of the wig shop when he saw a man in a greenish shepherd's plaid jacket and a tweed hat coming up Pump Court. As the man approached Page thought he recognised him; in fact, he felt

so sure that he stopped him and asked him if he knew what time Mr. Merrill would be home. But the man looked at him in astonishment. 'Merrill?' said he. 'I don't know anyone of that name.' Thereupon Page apologised and explained how he had been misled by the pattern and colour of the jacket.

"After walking about for nearly half an hour, Page went back to Merrill's chambers; but the oak was shut and he could get no answer by rapping with his stick, so he scribbled a note and dropped it into the letter-box and came away. The next morning I sent him round again, but the chambers were still shut up, and they have been shut up ever since; and nothing what ever has been seen or heard of Merrill.

"On Saturday, thinking it possible that Crick might be able to give me some news of his uncle, I called at his lodgings; and then, to my astonishment, I learned that he also was missing. He had gone away early on Thursday morning, saying that he had to go on business to Rochester, and that he might not be home to dinner. But he never came home at all. I called again on Sunday evening, and, as he had still not returned, I decided to take more active measures.

"This afternoon, immediately after lunch, I called at the Porter's Lodge, and, having briefly explained the circumstances and who I was, asked the porter to bring the duplicate key—which he had for the laundress—and accompany me to Mr. Merrill's chambers to see if, by chance, the tenant might be lying in them dead or insensible. He assured me that this could not be the case, since he had given the key every morning to the laundress, who had, in fact, returned it to him only a couple of hours previously. Nevertheless, he took the key and looked up the laundress, who had rooms near the lodge, who was fortunately at home and who turned out to be a most respectable and intelligent elderly woman; and we went together to Merrill's chambers. The porter admitted us, and when we had been right I through the set and ascertained definitely that Merrill was not there, he handed the key to the laundress, Mrs. Butler, and went away.

"When he was gone, I had a talk with Mrs. Butler, from which some rather startling facts transpired. It seemed that on Thursday, as Merrill was going to be out all day, she took the opportunity to have a grand clean-up of the chambers, to tidy up the lobby, and to look over the chests of drawers and the wardrobe and shake out and brush the clothes and see that no moths had got in. 'When I had finished,' she said, 'the place was like the inside of a band-box; just as he liked to see it.'

"'And, after all, Mrs. Butler,' said I, 'he never did see it.'

“‘Oh, yes, he did,’ says she. ‘I don’t know when he came in, but when I let myself in the next morning, I could see that he had been in since I left.’

“‘How did you know that?’ I asked.

“‘Well,’ says she, ‘I left the carpet-sweeper standing against the wardrobe door. I remembered it after I left and would have gone back and moved it, but I had already handed the key in at the Porter’s Lodge. But when I went in next morning it wasn’t there. It had been moved into the corner by the fireplace. Then the looking-glass had been moved. I could see that, because, before I went away, I had tidied my hair by it, and being short, I had to tilt it to see my face in it. Now it was tilted to suit a tall person and I could not see myself in it. Then I saw that the shaving had been moved, and when I put it back in its place, I found it was damp. It wouldn’t have kept damp for twenty-four hours at this time of year.’ That was perfectly true, you know, Thorndyke.”

“Perfectly,” agreed Thorndyke, “that woman is an excellent observer.”

“Well,” continued Brodrigg, “on this she examined the shaving soap and the sponge and found them both perceptibly damp. It appeared practically certain that Merrill had been in on the preceding evening and had shaved; but by way of confirmation, I suggested that she should look over his clothes and see whether he had changed any of his garments. She did so, beginning with those that were hanging in the wardrobe, which she took down one at a time. Suddenly she gave a cry of surprise, and I got a bit of a start myself when she handed out a greenish shepherd’s plaid Norfolk jacket.

“‘That,’ she said, ‘was not here when I brushed these clothes,’ and it was obvious from its dusty condition that it could not have been; ‘and,’ she added, ‘I have never seen it before to my knowledge, and I think I should have remembered it.’ I asked her if there was any coat missing and she answered that she had brushed a grey tweed jacket that seemed to have disappeared.

“Well, it was a queer affair. The first thing to be done was to ascertain, if possible whether that jacket was or was not Merrill’s. That, I thought, you would be able to judge better than I; so I borrowed his suit-case and popped the jacket into it, together with another jacket that was undoubtedly his, for comparison. Here is the suit-case and the two jackets are inside.”

“It is really a question that could be better decided by a tailor,” said Thorndyke. “The differences of measurement can’t be great if they could both be worn by the same person. But we shall see.” He rose,

and having spread some sheets of newspaper over the table, opened the suit-case and took out the two jackets, which he laid out side by side. Then, with his spring-tape, he proceeded systematically to measure the two garments, entering each pair of measurements on a slip of paper divided into two columns. Mr. Brodribb and I watched him expectantly and compared the two sets of figures as they were written down; and very soon it became evident that they were, at least, not identical. At length Thorndyke laid down the tape, and picking up the paper, studied it closely.

"I think," he said, "we may conclude that these two jackets were not made for the same person. The differences are not great, but they are consistent. The elbow creases, for instance, agree with the total length of the sleeves. The owner of the green jacket has longer arms and a bigger span than Merrill, but his chest measurement is nearly two inches greater and he has much more sloping shoulders. He could hardly have buttoned Merrill's jacket."

"Then," said Brodribb, "the next question is, did Merrill come home in some other man's coat or did some other man enter his chambers? From what Page has told us it seems pretty evident that a stranger must have got into those chambers. But if that is so, the questions arise: What the deuce was the fellow's object in changing into Merrill's clothes and shaving? How did he get into Merrill's chambers? What was he doing there? What has become of Merrill? And what is the meaning of the whole affair?"

"To some of those questions," said Thorndyke, "the answers are fairly obvious. If we assume, as I do, that the owner of the green jacket is the man whom Page saw at London Bridge and afterwards in the cloisters, the reason for the change of garments becomes plain enough. Page told the man that he had identified him by this very distinctive jacket as the person with whom Merrill was last seen alive. Evidently that man's safety demanded that he should get rid of the incriminating jacket without delay. Then, as to his having shaved: did Page give you any description of the man?"

"Yes; he was a tallish man, about thirty-five, with a large dark moustache and a torpedo beard."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "then we may say that the man who went into Merrill's chambers was a moustached bearded man in a green jacket and that the man who came out was a clean-shaved man in a grey jacket, whom Page himself would probably have passed without a second glance. That is clear enough. And as to how he got into the

chambers, evidently he let himself in with Merrill's key; and if he did, I am afraid we can make a pretty shrewd guess as to what has become of Merrill, and only hope that we are guessing wrong. As to what this man was doing in those chambers and what is the meaning of the whole affair, that is a more difficult question. If the man had Merrill's latch-key, we may assume that he had the rest of Merrill's keys; that he had, in fact, free access to any locked receptacles in those chambers. The circumstances suggest that he entered the chambers for the purpose of getting possession of some valuable objects contained in them. Do you happen to know whether Merrill had any property of considerable value on the premises?"

"I don't," replied Brodribb. "He had a safe, but I don't know what he kept in it. Principally documents, I should think. Certainly not money, in any considerable amounts. The only thing of value that I actually know of is the new will; and that would only be valuable in certain circumstances."

The abrupt and rather ambiguous conclusion of Mr. Brodribb's statement was not lost either on Thorndyke or on me. Apparently the cautious old lawyer had suddenly realised, as I had, that if anything had happened to Merrill, those "certain circumstances" had already come into being. From what he had told us it appeared that, under the new will, Crick stood to inherit a half of Mr. Merrill's fortune, whereas under the old will he stood to inherit nearly the whole. And it was a great fortune. The loss or destruction of the new will would be worth a good many thousand pounds to Mr. Crick.

"Well," said Brodribb, after a pause, "what is to be done? I suppose I ought to communicate with the police."

"You will have to, sooner or later," said Thorndyke; "but meanwhile, leave these two jackets—or, at least, the green one—with me for the present and let me see if I can extract any further information from it."

"You won't find anything in the pockets but dirt. I've tried them."

"I hope you left the dirt," said Thorndyke.

"I did," replied Brodribb, "excepting what came out on my fingers. Very well; I'll leave the coats with you for to-day, and I will see if I can get any further news of Crick from his landlady."

With this the old solicitor shook hands and went off with such an evident air of purpose that I remarked: "Brodribb is off to find out whether Mr. Crick was the proprietor of a green plaid Norfolk jacket."

Thorndyke smiled. "It was rather quaint," said he, "to see the sudden way in which he drew in his horns when the inwardness of the affair

dawned on him. But we mustn't start with a preconceived theory. Our business is to get hold of some more facts. There is little enough to go on at present. Let us begin by having a good look at this green jacket."

He picked it up and carried it to the window, where we both looked it over critically.

"It is rather dusty," I remarked, "especially on the front, and there is a white mark on the middle button."

"Yes. Chalk, apparently; and if you look closely, there are white traces on the other buttons and on the front of the coat. The back is much less dusty."

As he spoke, Thorndyke turned the garment round, and then, from the side of the skirt, picked a small, hair-like object which he felt between his finger and thumb, looked at closely and handed to me.

"A bit of barley beard," said I, "and there are two more on the other side. He must have walked along a narrow path through a barley field—the state of the front of his coat almost suggests that he had crawled."

"Yes; it is earthy dust; but Polton's extractor will give us more information about that. We had better hand it over to him; but first we will go through the pockets in spite of Brodribb's discouragement."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, as I thrust my hand into one of the side pockets, "he was right about the dirt. Look at this." I drew out my hand with a quite considerable pinch of dry earth and one or two little fragments of chalk. "It looks as if he had been crawling in loose earth."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed, inspecting his own "catch"—a pinch of reddish earth and a fragment of chalk of the size of a large pea. "The earth is very characteristic, this red-brown loam that you find overlying the chalk. All his outside pockets seem to have caught more or less of it. However, we can leave Polton to collect it and prepare it for examination. I'll take the coat up to him now, and while he is working at it I think I will walk round to Edginton's and see if I can pick up any further particulars."

He went up to the laboratory floor, where our assistant, Polton, carried on his curious and varied activities, and when he returned we sallied forth together. In Fleet Street we picked up a disengaged taxicab, by which we were whisked across Blackfriars Bridge and a few minutes later set down at the corner of Tooley Street. We made our way to the ship-chandler's shop, where Thorndyke proceeded to put a few discreet questions to the manager, who listened politely and with sympathetic interest.

“The difficulty is,” said he, “that there were a good many gentlemen in here last Thursday. You say they came about 11.45. If you could tell me what they bought, we could look at the bill-duplicate book and that might help us.”

“I don’t actually know what they bought,” said Thorndyke. “It might have been a length of rope; a rope, perhaps, say twelve or fourteen fathoms or perhaps more. But I may be wrong.”

I stared at Thorndyke in amazement. Long as I known him, this extraordinary faculty of instantaneous induction always came on me as a fresh surprise. I had supposed that in this case we had absolutely nothing to go on; and yet here he was with at least a tentative suggestion before the inquiry appeared to have begun. And that suggestion was clear evidence that he had already arrived at a hypothetical solution of the mystery. I was still pondering on this astonishing fact when the manager approached with an open book and accompanied by an assistant.

“I see,” said he, “that there is an entry, apparently about mid-day on Thursday, of the sale of a fifteen-fathom length of deep-sea lead-line, and my friend, here, remembers selling it.”

“Yes,” the assistant confirmed, “I remember it because he wanted to get it into his hand-bag, and it took the three of us to stuff it in. Thick lead-line is pretty stiff when it’s new.”

“Do you remember what these gentlemen were like and how they were dressed?”

“One was a rather elderly gentleman, clean-shaved, I think. The other I remember better because he had rather queer-looking eyes—very pale grey. He had a pointed beard and he wore a greenish check coat and a cloth hat. That’s all I remember about him.”

“It is more than most people would have remembered,” said Thorndyke. “I am very much obliged to you; and I think I will ask you to let me have a fifteen-fathom length of that same lead-line.”

By this time my capacity for astonishment was exhausted. What on earth could my colleague want with a deep-sea lead-line? But, after all, why not? If he had then and there purchased a Trotman’s anchor, a shark-hook and a set of International code signals, I should have been prepared to accept the proceeding with out comment. Thorndyke was a law unto himself.

Nevertheless, as I walked homeward by his side, carrying the coil of rope, I continued to speculate on this singular case. Thorndyke had arrived at a hypothetical solution of Mr. Brodrigg’s problem; and it was

evidently correct, so far, as the entry in the bill-book proved. But what was the connection between a dusty jacket and a length of thin rope? And why this particular length? I could make nothing of it. But I determined, as soon as we got home, to see what new facts Polton's activities had brought to light.

The results were disappointing. Polton's dust extractor had been busy, and the products in the form of tiny heaps of dust, were methodically set out on a sheet of white paper, each little heap covered with a watch-glass and accompanied by its written particulars as to the part of the garment from which it had come. I examined a few samples under the microscope, but though curious and interesting, as all dust is, they showed nothing very distinctive. The dust might have come from anyone's coat. There was, of course, a good deal of yellowish sandy loam, a few particles of chalk, a quantity of fine ash, clinker and particles of coal—railway dust from a locomotive—ordinary town and house dust and some oddments such as pollen grains, including those of the sow-thistle, mallow, poppy and valerian, and in one sample I found two scales from the wing of the common blue butterfly. That was all; and it told me nothing but that the owner of the coat had recently been in a chalk district and that he had taken a railway journey.

While I was working with the microscope, Polton was busy with an occupation that I did not understand. He had cemented the little pieces of chalk that we had found in the pockets to a plate of glass by means of pitch, and he was now brushing them under water with a soft brush and from time to time decanting the milky water into a tall sediment glass. Now, as most people know, chalk is largely composed of microscopic shells—*foraminifera*—which can be detached by gently brushing the chalk under water. But what was the object? There was no doubt that the material was chalk, and we knew that *foraminifera* were there. Why trouble to prove what is common knowledge? I questioned Polton, but he knew nothing of the purpose of the investigation. He merely beamed on me like a crinkly old graven image and went on brushing. I dipped up a sample of the white sediment and examined it under the microscope. Of course there were *foraminifera*, and very beautiful they were. But what about it? The whole proceeding looked purposeless. And yet I knew that it was not. Thorndyke was the last man in the world to expend his energies in flogging a dead horse.

Presently he came up to the laboratory, and, when he had looked at the dust specimens and confirmed my opinion of them, he fell to work on the chalk sediment. Having prepared a number of slides, he sat down at the microscope with a sharp pencil and a block of smooth paper with

the apparent purpose of cataloguing and making drawings of the *foraminifera*. And at this task I left him while I went forth to collect some books that I had ordered from a bookseller in the Charing Cross Road. When I returned with my purchases about an hour later I found him putting back in a press a portfolio of large-scale Ordnance maps of Kent which he had apparently been consulting, and I noticed on the table his sheet of drawings and a monograph of the fossil *foraminifera*.

"Well, Thorndyke," I said cheerfully, "I suppose this time, you know exactly what has become of Merrill."

"I can guess," he replied, "and so can you. But the actual data are distressingly vague. We have certain indications, as you will have noticed. The trouble will be to bring them to a focus. It is a case for constructive imagination on the one hand and the method of exclusion on the other. I shall make a preliminary circle-round tomorrow."

"Meaning by that?"

"I have a hypothesis. It is probably wrong. If it is, we must try another, and yet another. Every time we fail we shall narrow the field of inquiry until by eliminating one possibility after another, we may hope to arrive at the solution. My first essay will take me down into Kent."

"You are not going into those wild regions alone, Thorndyke," said I. "You will need my protection and support to say nothing of my invaluable advice. I presume you realise that?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied gravely. "I was reckoning on a two-man expedition. Besides, you are as much interested in the case as I am. And now, let us go forth and dine and fortify ourselves for the perils of tomorrow."

In the course of dinner I led the conversation to the products of Polton's labours and remarked upon their very indefinite significance; but Thorndyke was more indefinite still, as he usually was in cases of a highly speculative character.

"You are expecting too much from Polton," he said with a smile. "This is not a matter of *foraminifera* or pollen or butterfly-scales; they are only items of circumstantial evidence. What we have to do is to consider the whole body of facts in our possession; what Brodribb has told us, what we know for ourselves and what we have ascertained by investigation. The case is still very much in the air, but it is not so vague as you seem to imply."

This was all I could get out of him; and as the "whole body of facts" yielded no suggestion at all to me, I could only possess my soul in patience and hope for some enlightenment on the morrow.

About a quarter to eleven on the following morning, while Thorndyke was giving final instructions to Polton and I was speculating on the contents of the suit-case that was going to accompany us, footsteps became audible on our stairs. Their crescendo terminated in a flourish on our little brass knocker which I recognised as Brodribb's knock. I accordingly opened the door, and in walked our old friend. His keen blue eye took in at once our informal raiment and the suit-case and lighted up with something like curiosity.

"Off on an expedition?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "A little trip down into Kent. Gravesend², in fact."

"Gravesend," repeated Brodribb with further awakened interest. "That was rather a favourite resort of poor Merrill's. By the way, your expedition is not connected with his disappearance, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact it is," replied Thorndyke. "Just a tentative exploration, you know."

"I know," said Brodribb, all agog now, "and I'm coming with you. I've got a clear day and I'm not going to take a refusal."

"No refusal was contemplated," rejoined Thorndyke. "You'll probably waste a day, but we shall benefit by your society. Polton will let your clerk know that you haven't absconded, or you can look in at the office yourself. We have plenty of time."

Brodribb chose the latter plan, which enabled him to exchange his tall hat and morning coat for a soft hat and jacket, and we accordingly made our way to Charing Cross via Lincoln's Inn, where Brodribb's office was situated. I noticed that Brodribb, with his customary discretion, asked no questions, though he must have observed, as I had, the striking fact that Thorndyke had in some way connected Merrill with Gravesend; and in fact with the exception of Brodribb's account of his failure to get any news of Mr. Crick, no reference was made to the nature of our expedition until we alighted at our destination.

On emerging from the station, Thorndyke turned to the left and led the way out of the approach into a street, on the opposite side of which a rather grimy statue of Queen Victoria greeted us with a supercilious stare. Here we turned to the south along a prosperous thoroughfare, and presently crossing a main road, followed its rather sordid continuation until the urban squalor began to be tempered by traces of rusticity, and the suburb became a village. Passing a pleasant looking inn and

² Der Wohnort des Autors, wie wir uns erinnern. B. L.

a smithy, which seemed to have an out-patient department for invalid carts, we came into a quiet lane offering a leafy vista with glimpses of thatched and tiled cottages whose gardens were gay with summer flowers. Opposite these, some rough stone steps led up to a stile by the side of an open gate which gave access to a wide cart-track. Here Thorndyke halted, and producing his pocket map-case, compared the surroundings with the map. At length he pocketed the case, and turning towards the cart-track, said: "This is our way, for better or worse. In a few minutes we shall probably know whether we have found a clue or a mare's nest."

We followed the track up a rise until, reaching the crest of the hill, we saw stretching away below us a wide, fertile valley with wooded heights beyond, over the brow of which peeped the square tower of some village church.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking off his hat to enjoy the light breeze, "clue or no clue, this is perfectly delightful and well worth the journey. Just look at those charming little blue butterflies fluttering round that mallow. What a magnificent prospect. And where, but in Kent, will you see such a barley field as that?"

It was, indeed, a beautiful landscape. But as my eye travelled over the enormous barley field, its tawny surface rippling, in golden waves before the summer breeze, it was not the beauty of the scene that occupied my mind. I was thinking of those three ends of barley beard that we had picked from the skirts of the green jacket. The cart-track had now contracted to a foot path; but it was a broader path than I should have looked for, running straight across the great field to a far-away stile; and half way along it on the left hand side I could see, rising above the barley, the top of a rough fence around a small, square enclosure that looked like a pound—though it was in an unlikely situation.

We pursued the broad path across the field until we were nearly abreast of the pound, and I was about to draw Thorndyke's attention to it, when I perceived a narrow lane through the barley—hardly a path, but rather a track, trodden through the crop by some persons who had gone to the enclosure. Into this track Thorndyke turned as if he had been looking for it, and walked towards the enclosure, closely scrutinising the ground as he went. Brodribb and I, of course, followed in single file, brushing through the barley as we went; and as we drew nearer we could see that there was an opening in the enclosing fence and that inside was a deep hollow the edges of which were fringed with clumps of pink valerian. At the opening of the fence Thorndyke halted and looked back.

"Well," said Brodribb, "is it going to be a mare's nest?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "It is a clue, and something more!"

As he spoke, he pointed to the foot of one of the principal posts of the fence, to which was secured a short length of rope, the frayed ends of which suggested that it had broken under a heavy strain. And now I could see what the enclosure was. Inside it was a deep pit, and at the bottom of the pit, to one side, was a circular hole, black as night, and apparently leading down into the bowels of the earth.

"That must be a dene hole," said I, looking at the yawning cavity.

"It is," Thorndyke replied.

"Ha," said Brodribb, "so that is a dene hole, is it? Damned unpleasant looking place. Dene holes were one of poor Merrill's hobbies. He used to go down to explore them. I hope you are not suggesting that he went down this one."

"I am afraid that is what has happened, Brodribb," was the reply. "That end of rope looks like his. It is deep-sea lead-line. I have a length of it here, bought at the same place as he bought his, and probably cut from the same sample." He opened the suit-case, and taking out the coil of line that we had bought, flung it down by the foot of the post. Obviously it was identical with the broken end. "However," he added, "we shall see."

"We are going down, are we?" asked Brodribb.

"We?" repeated Thorndyke. "I am going down if it is practicable. Not otherwise. If it is an ordinary seventy-foot shaft with perpendicular sides, we shall have to get proper appliances. But you had better stay above, in any case."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Brodribb. "I am not such a back number as you think. I have been a mountain-climber in my time and I'm not a bit nervous. I can get down all right if there is any foothold, and I've got a rope to hang on to. And you can see for yourself that somebody has been down with a rope only."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "but I don't see that that somebody has come up again."

"No," Brodribb admitted; "that's true. The rope seems to have broken; and you say your rope is the same stuff?"

Thorndyke looked at me inquiringly as I stooped and examined the frayed end of the strange rope.

"What do you say, Jervis?" he asked.

"That rope didn't break," I replied. "It has been, chafed or sawn through. It is quite different in appearance from a broken end."

"That was what I decided as soon as I saw it," said Thorndyke. "Besides, a new rope of this size and quality couldn't possibly break under the weight of a man."

Brodribb gazed at the frayed end with an expression of horror.

"What a diabolical thing!" he exclaimed. "You mean that some wretch deliberately cut the rope and let another man drop down the shaft! But it can't be. I really think you must be mistaken. It must have been a defective rope."

"Well, that is what it looks like," replied Thorndyke. He made a "running bowline" at the end of our rope and slipped the loop over his shoulders, drawing it tight under his arms. Then he turned towards the pit. "You had better take a couple of turns round the foot of the post, Jervis," said he, "and pay out just enough to keep the rope taut."

He took an electric inspection-lamp from the suit case, slipped the battery in his pocket and hooked the bull's-eye to a button-hole, and when all was ready, he climbed down into the pit, crossed the sloping floor, and crouching down, peered into the forbidding hole, throwing down it a beam of light from his bull's-eye. Then he stood up and grasped the rope.

"It is quite practicable," said he; "only about twenty feet deep, and good foothold all the way." With this he crouched once more, backed into the hole and disappeared from view. He evidently descended pretty quickly, to judge by the rate at which I had to pay out the rope, and in quite a short time I felt the tension slacken and began to haul up the line. As the loop came out of the hole, Mr. Brodribb took possession of it, and regardless of my protests, proceeded to secure it under his arms.

"But how the deuce am I going to get down?" I demanded.

"That's all right, Jervis," he replied persuasively. "I'll just have a look round and then come up and let you down."

It being obviously useless to argue, I adjusted the rope and made ready to pay out. He climbed down into the pit with astonishing agility, backed into the hole and disappeared; and the tension of the rope informed me that he was making quite a rapid descent. He had nearly reached the bottom when there were borne to my ears the hollow reverberations of what sounded like a cry of alarm. But all was apparently well, for the rope continued to draw out steadily, and when at last its tension relaxed, I felt an unmistakable signal shake, and at once drew it up.

As my curiosity made me unwilling to remain passively waiting for Brodribb's return, I secured the end of the rope to the post with a "fish-

erman's bend" and let myself down into the pit. Advancing to the hole, I lay down and put my head over the edge. A dim light from Thorn-dyke's lamp came up the shaft and showed me that we were by no means the first explorers, for there were foot-holes cut in the chalk all the way down, apparently of some considerable age. With the aid of these and the rope, it appeared quite easy to descend and I decided to go down forthwith. Accordingly I backed towards the shaft, found the first of the foot-holes, and grasping the rope with one hand and using the other to hang on to the upper cavities, easily let myself down the well-like shaft. As I neared the bottom the light of the lamp was thrown full on the shaft-wall; a pair of hands grasped me and I heard Thorn-dyke's voice saying: "Look where you are treading, Jervis"; on which I looked down and saw immediately below me a man lying on his face by an irregular coil of rope.

I stepped down carefully on to the chalk floor and looked round. We were in a small chamber in one side of which was the black opening of a low tunnel. Thorndyke and Brodribb were standing at the feet of the prostrate figure examining a revolver which the solicitor held.

"It has certainly been fired," said the latter. "One chamber is empty and the barrel is foul."

"That may be," replied Thorndyke; "but there is no bullet wound. This man died from a knife wound in the chest." He threw the light of his lamp on the corpse and as I turned it partly over to verify his statement, he added: "This is poor Mr. Merrill. We found the revolver lying by his side."

"The cause of death is clear enough," said I, "and it certainly wasn't suicide. The question is—" At this moment Thorndyke stooped and threw a beam of light down the tunnel, and Brodribb and I simultaneously uttered an exclamation. At the extreme end, about forty feet away, the body of another man lay. Instantly Brodribb started forward, and stooping to clear the low roof—it was about four feet six inches high—hurried along the tunnel. Thorndyke and I followed close behind. As we reached the body, which was lying supine with a small electric torch by its side, and the light of Thorndyke's lamp fell on the upturned face, Brodribb gasped: "God save us! it's Crick! And here is the knife." He was about to pick up the weapon when Thorndyke put out his hand.

"That knife," said he, "must be touched by no hand but the one that dealt the blow. It may be crucial evidence."

"Evidence of what?" demanded Brodribb. "There is Merrill with a knife wound in his chest and a pistol by his side. Here is Crick with a bullet

wound in his breast, a knife by his side and the empty sheath secured round his waist. What more evidence do you want?"

"That depends on what you seek to prove," said Thorndyke. "What is your interpretation of the facts that you have stated?"

"Why, it is as plain as daylight," answered Brodribb, "incredible as the affair seems, having regard to the characters of the two men. Crick stabbed Merrill and Merrill shot him dead. Then Merrill tried to escape, but the rope broke, he was trapped and he bled to death at the foot of the shaft."

"And who do you say died first?" Thorndyke asked.

It was a curious question and it caused me to look inquisitively at my colleague. But Brodribb answered promptly: "Why, Crick, of course. Here he lies where he fell. There is a track of blood along the floor of the tunnel, as you can see, and there is Merrill at the entrance, dead in the act of trying to escape."

Thorndyke nodded in a rather mysterious way and there was a brief silence. Then I ventured to remark: "You seem to be losing sight of the man with the green jacket."

Brodribb started and looked at me with a frown of surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "so I am. I had clean forgotten him in these horrors. But what is your point? Is there any evidence that he has been here?"

"I don't know," said I. "He bought the rope and he was seen with Merrill apparently going towards London Bridge Station. And I gather that it was the green jacket that piloted Thorndyke to this place."

"In a sense," Thorndyke admitted, "that is so. But we will talk about that later. Meanwhile there are one or two facts that I will draw your attention to. First as to the wounds; they are almost identical in position. Each is on the left side, just below the nipple; a vital spot, which would be fully exposed by a man who was climbing down holding on to a rope. Then, if you look along the floor where I am throwing the light, you can see a distinct trace of something having been dragged along, although there seems to have been an effort to obliterate it; and the blood marks are more in the nature of smears than drops." He gently turned the body over and pointed to the back, which was thickly covered with chalk. "This corpse has obviously been dragged along the floor," he continued. "It wouldn't have been marked in that way by merely falling. Further, the rope, when last seen, was being stuffed into a hand-bag. The rope is here, but where is the hand-bag? Finally, the rope was cut

by some one outside, and evidently after the murders had been committed."

As he concluded, he spread his handkerchief over the knife, and wrapping it up carefully without touching it with his fingers, placed it in his outside breast-pocket. Then we went back towards the shaft, where Thorndyke knelt down by the body of Merrill and systematically emptied the pockets.

"What are you searching for?" asked Brodribb.

"Keys," was the reply; "and there aren't any, It is a vital point, seeing that the man with the green jacket evidently let himself into Merrill's chambers that same day."

"Yes," Brodribb agreed with a reflective frown; "it is. But tell us, Thorndyke, how you reconstruct this horrible crime."

"My theory," said Thorndyke "is that the three men came here together. They made the rope fast to the post. The stranger in the green jacket came down first and waited at the foot of the shaft. Merrill came down next, and the stranger stabbed him just as he reached the bottom, while his arms were still up hanging on to the rope. Crick followed and was shot in the same place and the same manner. Then the stranger dragged Crick's body along the tunnel, swept away the marks as well as he could, put the knife and the lamp by the body, dropped the revolver by Merrill's corpse, took the keys and went up, sawed through the rope—probably with a pocket saw—and threw the end down the shaft. Then he took the next train to London and went straight to Merrill's chambers, where he opened the safe or other receptacles and took possession of what he wanted."

Brodribb nodded. "It was a diabolically clever scheme," said he.

"The scheme was ingenious enough," Thorndyke agreed, "but the execution was contemptible. He has left traces at every turn. Otherwise we shouldn't be here. He has acted on the assumption that the world contains no one but fools. But that is a fool's assumption."

When we had ascended, in the reverse order of our descent, Thorndyke detached our rope and also the frayed end, which we took with us, and we then took our way back towards the town; and I noted that as we stood by the den hole, there was not a human creature in sight; nor did we meet a single person until we were close to the village. It was an ideal spot for a murder.

"I suppose you will notify the police?" said Brodribb.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I shall call on the Chief Constable and give him the facts and advise him to keep some of them to himself for the

present, and also to arrange for an adjournment of the inquest. Our friend with the green jacket must be made to think that he has played a trump card.”

Apparently the Chief Constable was a man who knew all the moves of criminal investigation, for at the inquest the discovery was attributed to the local police acting on information received from somebody who had “noticed the broken rope.”

None of us was summoned to give evidence nor were our names mentioned, but the inquest was adjourned for three weeks, for further inquiries.

But in those three weeks there were some singular developments, of which the scene was the clerks’ office at Mr. Brodribb’s premises in Lincoln’s Inn. There late on a certain forenoon, Thorndyke and I arrived, each provided with a bag and a sheaf of documents, and were duly admitted by Mr. Page.

“Now,” said Thorndyke, “are you quite confident, Mr. Page, that you would recognise this man, even if he had shaved off his beard and moustache?”

“Quite confident,” replied Page. “I should know him by his eyes. Very queer eyes they were; light, greenish grey. And I should know his voice, too.”

“Good,” said Thorndyke; and as Page disappeared into the private office, we sat down and examined our documents, eyed furtively by the junior clerk. Some ten minutes later the door opened and a man entered; and the first glance at him brought my nerves to concert pitch. He was a thick-set, muscular man, clean-shaved and rather dark. But my attention was instantly arrested by his eyes—singularly pale eyes which gave an almost unhuman character to his face. He reminded me of a certain species of lemur that I once saw.

“I have got an appointment with Mr. Brodribb,” he said, addressing the clerk. “My name is Horder.”

The clerk slipped off his stool and moved towards the door of the private office, but at that moment Page came out. As his eyes met Horder’s, he stopped dead; and instantly the two men seemed to stiffen like a couple of dogs that have suddenly met at a street corner. I watched Horder narrowly. He had been rather pale when he came in. Now he was ghastly, and his whole aspect indicated extreme nervous tension.

“Did you wish to see Mr. Brodribb?” asked Page, still gazing intently at the other.

“Yes,” was the irritable reply; “I have given my name once—Horder.”

Mr. Page turned and re-entered the private office, leaving the door ajar. "Mr. Horder to see you, sir," I heard him say. He came out and shut the door. "If you will sit down, Mr. Brodribb will see you in a minute or two," he said, offering a chair; he then took his hat from a peg, glanced at his watch and went out.

A couple of minutes passed. Once, I thought I heard stealthy footsteps out in the entry; but no one came in or knocked. Presently the door of the private office opened and a tall gentleman came out. And then, once more, my nerves sprang to attention. The tall gentleman was Detective-Superintendent Miller.

The superintendent walked across the office, opened the door, looked out, and then, leaving it ajar, came back to where Horder was sitting.

"You are Mr. Samuel Horder, I think," said he.

"Yes, I am," was the reply. "What about it?"

"I am a police officer, and I arrest you on a charge of having unlawfully entered the premises of the late Reginald Merrill; and it is my duty to caution you—"

Here Horder, who had risen to his feet, and slipped his right hand under the skirt of his coat, made a sudden spring at the officer. But in that instant Thorndyke had gripped his right arm at the elbow and wrist and swung him round; the superintendent seized his left arm while I pounced upon the revolver in his right hand and kept its muzzle pointed to the floor. But it was an uncomfortable affair. Our prisoner was a strong man and he fought like a wild beast; and he had his finger hooked round the trigger of the revolver. The four of us, locked together, gyrated round the office, knocking over chairs and bumping against the walls, the junior clerk skipped round the room with his eyes glued on the pistol and old Brodribb charged out of his sanctum, flourishing a long ruler. However, it did not last long. In the midst of the uproar, two massive constables stole in and joined the fray. There was a yell from the prisoner, the revolver rattled to the floor and then I heard two successive metallic clicks.

"He'll be all right now," murmured the constable who had fixed on the handcuffs, with the manner of one who has administered a soothing remedy.

"I notice," said Thorndyke, when the prisoner had been removed, "that you charged him only with unlawful entry."

"Yes," replied Miller, "until we have taken his finger-prints. Mr. Singleton has developed up three fingers and a thumb, beautifully clear, on

that knife that you gave us. If they prove to be Horder's finger prints, of course, it is a true bill for the murder."

The finger-prints on the knife proved undoubtedly to be Horder's. But the case did not rest on them alone. When his rooms were searched, there were found not only Mr. Merrill's keys but also Mr. Merrill's second will, which had been missed from the safe when it was opened by the maker's locksmith; thus illustrating afresh the perverse stupidity of the criminal mind.

"A satisfactory case," remarked Thorndyke, "in respect of the result; but there was too much luck for us to take much credit from it. On Brodribb's opening statement, it was pretty clear that a crime had been committed. Merrill was missing and some one had possession of his keys and had entered his premises. It also appeared nearly certain that the thing stolen must be the second will, since there was nothing else of value to steal; and the will was of very great value to two persons, Crick and Horder, to each of whom its destruction was worth many thousands of pounds. To both of them its value was conditional on the immediate death of Merrill, before another will could be made; and to Horder it was further conditional on the death of Crick and that he should die before Merrill—for otherwise the estate would go to Crick's heirs or next of kin. The *prima facie* suspicion therefore fell on these two men. But Crick was missing; and the question was, had he absconded or was he dead?"

"And now as to the investigation. The green jacket showed earthy dust and chalk on the front and chalk-marks on the buttons. The indication was that the wearer had either crawled on chalky ground or climbed up a chalky face. But the marks on the buttons suggested climbing; for a horizontal surface is usually covered by soil, whereas on a vertical surface the chalk is exposed. But the time factor showed us that this man could not have travelled far from London. He was seen going towards London Bridge Station about the time when a train was due to go down to Kent. That train went to Maidstone and Gillingham, calling at Gravesend, Strood, Snodland, Rochester, Chatham and other places abounding in chalk and connected with the cement industry. In that district there were no true cliffs, but there were numerous chalk-pits, railway embankments and other excavations. The evidence pointed to one of these excavations. Then Crick was known to have gone to Rochester—earlier in the day—which further suggested the district, though Rochester is the least chalky part of it.

"The question was, what kind of excavation had been climbed into?"

And for what purpose had the climbing been performed? But here the personality of the missing man gave us a hint. Merrill had written a book to prove that dene holes were simply prehistoric flint-mines. He had explored a number of dene holes and described them in his book. Now the district through which this train had passed was peculiarly rich in dene holes; and then there was the suggestive fact that Merrill had been last seen coming out of a rope-seller's shop. This latter fact was so important that I followed it up at once by calling at Edginton's. There I ascertained that Merrill or his companion had bought a fifteen-fathom length of deep-sea lead-line. Now this was profoundly significant. The maximum depth of a dene hole is about seventy feet. Fifteen fathoms—ninety feet—is therefore the exact length required, allowing for loops and fastenings. This new fact converted the dene-hole hypothesis into what was virtually a certainty, especially when one considered how readily these dangerous pits lent themselves either to fatal accidents or to murder. I accordingly adopted the dene-hole suggestion as a working hypothesis.

“The next question was, ‘Where was this dene-hole?’ And an uncommonly difficult question it was. I began to fear that the inquiry would fail from the impossibility of solving it. But at this point I got some help from a new quarter. I had given the coat to Polton to extract the dust and I had told him to wash the little lumps of chalk for *foraminifera*.”

“What are *foraminifera*?” asked Brodribb.

“They are minute sea shells. Chalk is largely composed of them; and although chalk is in no sense a local rock, there is nevertheless a good deal of variation in the species of *foraminifera* found in different localities. So I had the chalk washed out as a matter of routine. Well, the dust was confirmatory but not illuminating. There was railway dust, of the South Eastern type—I expect you know it—chalk, loam dust, pollen-grains of the mallow and valerian (which grows in chalk-pits and railway cuttings) and some wing scales of the common blue butterfly, which haunts the chalk—I expect he had touched a dead butterfly. But all this would have answered for a good part of Kent. Then I examined the *foraminifera* and identified the species by the plates in Warnford's Monograph. The result was most encouraging. There were nine species in all, and of these five were marked as ‘found in the Gravesend chalk,’ two more ‘from the Kentish chalk’ and the other two ‘from the English chalk.’ This was a very striking result. More than half the contained *foraminifera* were from the Gravesend chalk.

“The problem now was to determine the geologic meaning of the term

Gravesend. I ruled out Rochester, as I had heard of no dene holes in that neighbourhood, and I consulted Merrill's book and the large-scale Ordnance map. Merrill had worked in the Gravesend district and the adjacent part of Essex and he gave a list of the dene holes that he had explored, including the Clapper Napper Hole in Swanscombe Wood. But, checking his list by the Ordnance map, I found that there was one dene hole marked on the map which was not in his list. As it was evidently necessary to search all the dene holes in the district, I determined to begin with the one that he seemed to have missed. And there luck favoured us. It turned out to be the right one."

"I don't see that there was much luck in it," said Brodribb. "You calculated the probabilities and adopted the greatest."

"At any rate," said Thorndyke, "there was Merrill and there was Crick; and as soon as I saw them I knew that Horder was the murderer. For the whole tableau had obviously been arranged to demonstrate that Crick died before Merrill and establish Horder as Merrill's heir."

"A diabolical plot," commented Brodribb. "Horribly ingenious, too. By the way—which of them did die first in your opinion?"

"Merrill, I should say, undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke.

"That will be good hearing for Crick's next of kin," said Brodribb. "And you haven't done with this case yet, Thorndyke. I shall retain you on the question of survivorship."

The Seal of Nebuchadnezzar

“I suppose, Thorndyke,” said I, “footprints yield quite a lot of information if you think about them enough?”

The question was called forth by the circumstance of my friend halting and stooping to examine the little pit made in the loamy soil of the path by the walking stick of some unknown wayfarer. Ever since we had entered this path—to which we had been directed by the station-master of Pinwell Junction as a short cut to our destination—I had noticed my friend scanning its surface, marked with numerous footprints, as if he were mentally reconstructing the personalities of the various travellers who had trodden it before us. This I knew to be a habit of his, almost unconsciously pursued; and the present conditions certainly favoured it, for here, as the path traversed a small wood, the slightly moist, plastic surface took impressions with the sharpness of moulding wax.

“Yes,” he answered, “but you must do more than think. You need to train your eyes to observe in conspicuous characteristics.”

“Such as these, for instance,” said I, with a grin, pointing to a blatant print of a Cox’s “Invicta” rubber sole with its prancing-horse trademark.

Thorndyke smiled. “A man,” said he, “who wears a sole like that is a mere advertising agent. He who runs may read those characteristics, but as there are thousands of persons wearing ‘Invicta’ soles, the observation merely identifies the wearer as a member of a large genus. It has to be carried a good deal further to identify him as an individual; otherwise, a standardised sole is apt to be rather misleading than helpful. Its gross distinctiveness tends to divert the novice’s attention from the more specific characteristics which he would seek in a plain footprint like that of this man’s companion.”

“Why companion?” I asked. “The two men were walking the same way, but what evidence is there that they were companions?”

“A good deal, if you follow the series of tracks, as I have been doing. In the first place, there is the stride. Both men were rather tall, as shown by the size of their feet, but both have a distinctly short stride. Now the leather-soled man’s short stride is accounted for by the way in which he put down his stick. He held it stiffly, leaning upon it to some extent and helping himself with it. There is one impression of the stick to every two paces; every impression of his left foot has a stick impression opposite to it. The suggestion is that he was old, weak or infirm. But the rubber-soled man walked with his stick in the ordinary way—one stick impression to every four paces. His abnormally short stride is not to be accounted for excepting by the assumption that he stepped short to keep pace with the other man.

“Then the two sets of footprints are usually separate. Neither man has trodden nor set his stick on the other man’s tracks, excepting in those places where the path is too narrow for them to walk abreast, and there, in the one case I noticed the rubber soles treading on the prints of the leather soles, whereas at this spot the prints of the leather soles are imposed on those of the rubber soles. That, of course, is conclusive evidence that the two men were here at the same time.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “that settles the question without troubling about the stride. But after all, Thorndyke, this is a matter of reasoning, as I said; of thinking about the footprints and their meaning. No special acuteness of observation or training of vision comes into it. The mere facts are obvious enough; it is their interpretation that yields the knowledge.”

“That is true so far,” said he, “but we haven’t exhausted our material. Look carefully at the impressions of the two sticks and tell me if you see any thing remarkable in either of them?”

I stooped and examined the little pits that the two sticks had made in the path, and, to tell the truth, found them extremely unilluminating.

“They seem very much alike,” I said. “The rubber-soled man’s stick is rather larger than the other and the leather-soled man’s stick has made deeper holes—probably because it was smaller and he was leaning on it more heavily.”

Thorndyke shook his head. “You’ve missed the point, Anstey³, and you’ve missed it because you have failed to observe the visible facts.

³ Der Ich-Erzähler in dieser Geschichte ist also nicht – wie gewöhnlich – Dr. Jervis, sondern Robert Anstey, K. C., der auch der Erzähler im Roman »The Cat’s Eye« (1923) ist.

It is quite a neat point, too, and might in certain circumstances be a very important one."

"Indeed," said I. "What is the point?"

"That," said he, "I shall leave you to infer from the visible facts, which are these: first, the impressions of the smaller stick are on the right-hand side of the man who made them, and second, that each impression is shallowest towards the front and the right-hand side."

I examined the impressions carefully and verified Thorndyke's statement.

"Well," I said, "what about it? What does it prove?"

Thorndyke smiled in his exasperating fashion. "The proof," said he, "is arrived at by reasoning from the facts. My learned friend has the facts. If he will consider them, the conclusion will emerge."

"But," said I, "I don't see your drift. The impression is shallower on one side, I suppose, because the ferrule of the stick was worn away on that side. But I repeat, what about it? Do you expect me to infer why the fool that it belonged to wore his stick away all at one side?"

"Now, don't get irritable, Anstey," said he. "Preserve a philosophic calm. I assure you that this is quite an interesting problem."

"So it may be," I replied. "But I'm hanged if I can imagine why he wore his stick down in that way. However, it doesn't really matter. It isn't my stick—and by Jingo, here is old Brodribb—caught us in the act of wasting our time on academic chin-wags and delaying his business. The debate is adjourned."

Our discussion had brought us to the opening of the wood, which now framed the figure of the solicitor. As he caught sight of us, he hurried forward, holding out his hand.

"Good men and true!" he exclaimed. "I thought you would probably come this way, and it is very good of you to have come at all, especially as it is a mere formality."

"What is?" asked Thorndyke. "Your telegram spoke of an 'alleged suicide.' I take it that there is some ground for inquiry?"

"I don't know that there is," replied Brodribb. "But the deceased was insured for three thousand pounds, which will be lost to the estate if the suicide is confirmed. So I put it to my fellow that it was worth an expert's fee to make sure whether or not things are what they seem. A verdict of death by misadventure will save us three thousand pounds. *Verbum sap.*" As he concluded, the old lawyer winked with exaggerated cunning and stuck his elbow into my ribs.

Thorndyke ignored the facetious suggestion of bribery and corruption and inquired dryly: "What are the circumstances of the case?"

"I'd better give you a sketch of them before we get to the house," replied Brodribb. "The dead man is Martin Rowlands, the brother of my neighbour in New Square, Tom Rowlands. Poor old Tom found the telegram waiting when he got to his office this morning and immediately rushed into my office with it and begged me to come down here with him. So I came. Couldn't refuse a brother solicitor. He's waiting at the house now.

"The circumstances are these. Last evening, when he had finished dinner, Rowlands went out for a walk. That is his usual habit in the summer months—it is light until nearly half-past nine nowadays. Well, that is the last time he was seen alive by the servants. No one saw him come in. But there was nothing unusual in that, for he had a private entrance to the annexe in which his library, museum and workrooms were situated, and when he returned from his walk, he usually entered the house that way and went straight to his study or workroom and spent the evening there. So the servants very seldom saw him after dinner.

"Last night he evidently followed his usual custom. But, this morning, when the housemaid went to his bedroom with his morning tea, she was astonished to find the room empty and the bed undisturbed. She at once reported to the housekeeper, and the pair made their way to the annexe. There they found the study door locked, and as there was no answer after repeated knockings, they went out into the grounds to reconnoitre. The study window was closed and fastened, but the workroom window was unbolted, so that they were able to open it from outside. Then the housemaid climbed in and went to the side door, which she opened and admitted the housekeeper. The two went to the workroom, and as the door which communicated with the study was open, they were able to enter the latter, and there they found Martin Rowlands, sitting in an arm-chair by the table, stone-dead, cold and stiff. On the table were a whisky decanter, a siphon of soda water, a box of cigars, an ash-bowl with the stump of a cigar in it, and a bottle of photographic tabloids of cyanide of potassium.

"The housekeeper immediately sent off for a doctor and dispatched a telegram to Tom Rowlands at his office. The doctor arrived about nine and decided that the deceased had been dead about twelve hours. The cause of death was apparently cyanide poisoning, but, of course, that will be ascertained or disproved by the post-mortem. Those are all the known facts at present. The doctor helped the servants to place the

body on a sofa, but as it is as stiff as a frozen sheep, they might as well have left it where it was.”

“Have the police been communicated with?” I asked.

“No,” replied Brodribb. “There were no suspicious circumstances, so far as any of us could see, and I don’t know that I should have felt justified in sending for you—though I always like to have Thorndyke’s opinion in a case of sudden death—if it had not been for the insurance.”

Thorndyke nodded. “It looks like a straightforward case of suicide,” said he. “As to the state of deceased’s affairs, his brother will be able to give us any necessary information, I suppose?”

“Yes,” replied Brodribb. “As a matter of fact, I think Martin has been a bit worried just lately; but Tom will tell you about that. This is the place.”

We turned in at a gateway that opened into the grounds of a substantial though unpretentious house, and as we approached the front door, it was opened by a fresh-coloured, white-haired man whom we both knew pretty well in our professional capacities. He greeted us cordially, and though he was evidently deeply shocked by the tragedy, struggled to maintain a calm, business-like manner.

“It is good of you to come down,” said he; “but I am afraid we have troubled you rather unnecessarily. Still, Brodribb thought it best—*ex abundantia cautelarum*, you know—to have the circumstances reviewed by a competent authority. There is nothing abnormal in the affair excepting its having happened. My poor brother was the sanest of men, I should say, and we are not a suicidal family. I suppose you had better see the body first?”

As Thorndyke assented, he conducted us to the end of the hall and into the annexe, where we entered the study, the door of which was now open, though the key was still in the lock. The table still bore the things that Brodribb had described, but the chair was empty, and its late occupant lay on a sofa, covered with a large table-cloth. Thorndyke advanced to the sofa and gently drew away the cloth, revealing the body of a man, fully dressed, lying stiffly and awkwardly on its back with the feet raised and the stiffened limbs extended. There was something strangely and horribly artificial in the aspect of the corpse, for, though it was lying down, it had the posture of a seated figure, and thus bore the semblance of a hideously realistic effigy which had been picked up from a chair and laid down. I stood looking at it from a little distance with a layman’s distaste for the presence of a dead body, but still regarding it with attention and some curiosity. Presently my glance fell on the

soles of the shoes—which were, indeed, exhibited plainly enough—and I noted, as an odd coincidence that they were “Invicta” rubber soles, like those which we had just been discussing in the wood; that it was even possible that those very footprints had been made by the feet of this grisly lay figure.

“I expect, Thorndyke,” Brodribb said tactfully, “you would rather make your inspection alone. If you should want us, you will find us in the dining room,” and with this he retired, taking Mr. Rowlands with him.

As soon as they were gone I drew Thorndyke’s attention to the rubber soles.

“It is a queer thing,” said I, “but we may have actually been discussing this poor fellow’s own prints.”

“As a matter of fact, we were,” he replied, pointing to a drawing-pin that had been trodden on and had stuck into one of the rubber heels. “I noticed this at the time, and apparently you did not, which illustrates what I was saying about the tendency of these very distinctive types of sole to distract attention from those individual peculiarities which are the ones that really matter.”

“Then,” said I, “if they were his footprints, the man with the remarkable stick was with him. I wonder who he was. Some neighbour who was walking home from the station with him, I expect.”

“Probably,” said Thorndyke, “and as the prints were quite recent—they might even have been made last night—that person may be wanted as a witness at the inquest as the last person who saw deceased alive. That depends on the time the prints were made.”

He walked back to the sofa and inspected the corpse very methodically, giving close attention to the mouth and hands. Then he made a general inspection of the room, examined the objects on the table and the floor under it, strayed into the adjoining workshop, where he peered into the deep laboratory sink, took an empty tumbler from a shelf, held it up to the light and inspected the shelf—where a damp ring showed that the tumbler had been put there to drain—and from the workshop wandered into a little lobby and from thence out at the side door, down the flagged path to the side gate and back again.

“It is all very negative,” he remarked discontentedly, as we returned to the study, “except that bottle of tabloids, which is pretty positive evidence of premeditation. That looks like a fresh box of cigars. Two missing. One stump in the ash-tray and more ash than one cigar would account for. However, let us go into the dining and hear what Rowlands

has to tell us," and with this he walked out and crossed the hall and I followed him.

As we entered the dining the two men looked at us and Brodribb asked: "Well, what is the verdict?"

"At present," Thorndyke replied, "it is an open verdict. Nothing has come to light that disagrees with the obvious appearances. But I should like to hear more of the antecedents of the tragedy. You were saying that deceased had been somewhat worried lately. What does that amount to?"

"It amounts to nothing," said Rowlands "at least, I should have thought so, in the case of a level-headed man like my brother. Still as it is all there is, so far as I know, to account for what has happened, I had better give you the story, It seems trivial enough.

"Some short time ago, a Major Cohen, who has just come home from Mesopotamia, sold to a dealer named Lyon a small gold cylinder seal that he had picked up in the neighbourhood of Baghdad. The Lord knows how he came by it, but he had it and he showed it to Lyon, who bought it of him for a matter of twenty pounds. Cohen, of course, knew nothing about the thing, and Lyon didn't know much more, for although he is a dealer, he is no expert. But he is a very clever faker—or rather, I should say, restorer, for he does quite a legitimate trade. He was a jeweller and watch-jobber originally, a most ingenious workman, and his line is to buy up damaged antiques and restore them. Then he sells them to minor collectors, though quite honestly as restorations, so I oughtn't to call him a faker. But, as I said, he has no real knowledge of antiques, and all he saw in Cohen's seal was a gold cylinder seal, apparently ancient and genuine, and on that he bought it for about twice the value of the gold and thought no more about it.

"About a fortnight later, my brother Martin went to his shop in Petty France, Westminster, to get some repairs done, and Lyon, knowing that my brother was a collector of Babylonian antiquities, showed him the seal; and Martin, seeing at once that it was genuine and a thing of some interest and value, bought it straight-way for forty pounds without examining it at all minutely, as it was obviously worth that much in any case. But when he got home and took a rolled impression of it on moulding wax, he made a most astonishing discovery. The impression showed a mass of minute cuneiform characters, and on deciphering these he learned with amazement and delight that this was none other than the seal of Nebuchadnezzar.

"Hardly able to believe in his good fortune, he hurried off to the Brit-

ish Museum and showed his treasure to the Keeper of the Babylonian Antiquities, who fully confirmed the identity of the seal and was naturally eager to acquire it for the Museum. Of course, Martin wouldn't sell it, but he allowed the keeper to take a record of its weight and measurements and to make an impression on clay to exhibit in the case of seal-rollings.

"Meanwhile, it seems that Cohen, before disposing of the seal, had amused himself by making a number of rolled impressions on clay. Some of these he took to Lyon, who bought them for a few shillings and put one of them in his shop window as a curio. There it was seen and recognised by an American Assyriologist, who went in and bought it and then began to question Lyon closely as to whence he had obtained it. The dealer made no secret of the matter, but gave Cohen's name and address, saying nothing, however, about the seal. In fact, he was unaware of the connection between the seal and the rollings as Cohen had sold him the latter as genuine clay tablets which he said he had found in Mesopotamia. But, of course, the expert saw that it was a recent rolling and that some one must have the seal.

"Accordingly, off he went to Cohen and questioned him closely, whereupon Cohen began to smell a rat. He admitted that he had had the seal, but refused to say what had become of it until the expert told him what it was and how much it was worth. This the expert did, very reluctantly and in strict confidence, and when Cohen learned that it was the seal of Nebuchadnezzar and that it was worth anything up to ten thousand pounds, he nearly fainted; and then he and the expert together hustled off to Lyon's shop.

"But now Lyon smelt a rat, too. He refused absolutely to disclose the whereabouts of the seal; and having, by now, guessed that the seal-rollings were those of the seal, he took one of them to the British Museum, and then, of course, the murder was out. And further to complicate the matter, the Assyriologist, Professor Bateman, seems to have talked freely to his American friends at his hotel, with the result that Lyon's shop was besieged by wealthy American collectors, all roaring for the seal and all perfectly regardless of cost. Finally, as they could get no change out of Lyon, they went to the British Museum, where they learned that my brother had the seal and got his address—or rather mine, for he had, fortunately for himself, given my office as his address. Then they proceeded to bombard him with letters, as also did Cohen and Lyon.

"It was an uncomfortable situation. Cohen was like a madman. He

swore that Lyon had swindled him and he demanded to have the seal returned or the proper price paid. Lyon, for his part, went about like a roaring lion of Judah, making a similar demand; and the millionaire collectors offered wild sums for the seal. Poor Martin was very much worried about it. He was particularly unhappy about Cohen, who had actually found the seal and who was a disabled soldier—he had been wounded in both legs and was permanently lame. As to Lyon, he had no grievance, for he was a dealer and it was his business to know the value of his own stock; but still it was hard luck even on him. And then there were the collectors, pestering him daily with entreaties and extravagant offers. It was very worrying for him. They would probably have come down here to see him, but he kept his private address a close secret.

“I don’t know what he meant to do about it. What he did was to arrange with me for the loan of my private office and have a field day, interviewing the whole lot of them—Lyon, the Professor and the assorted millionaires. That was three days ago, and the whole boiling of them turned up; and by the same token one of them was the kind of pestilent fool that walks off with the wrong hat or umbrella.”

“Did he walk off with your hat?” asked Brodribb.

“No, but he took my stick; a nice old stick that belonged to my father.”

“What sort of stick did he leave in its place?” Thorndyke asked.

“Well,” replied Rowlands, “I must admit that there was some excuse, for the stick that he left was almost a facsimile of my own. I don’t think I should have noticed it but for the feel. When I began to walk with it, I was aware of something unusual in the feel of it.”

“Perhaps it was not quite the same length as yours,” Thorndyke suggested.

“No, it wasn’t that,” said Rowlands. “The length was all right, but there was some more subtle difference. Possibly, as I am left-handed and carry my stick on the left side, it may in the course of years have acquired a left-handed bias, if such a thing is possible. I’ll go and get the stick for you to see.”

He went out of the room and returned in a few moments with an old-fashioned Malacca cane, the ivory handle of which was secured by a broad silver band. Thorndyke took it from him and looked it over with a degree of interest and attention that rather surprised me. For the loss of Rowlands’ stick was a trivial incident and no concern of ours. Nevertheless, my colleague inspected it most methodically, handle, silver

band and ferrule; especially the ferrule, which he examined as if it were quite a rare and curious object.

"You needn't worry about your stick, Tom," said Brodribb with a mischievous smile. "Thorndyke will get it back if you ask him nicely."

"It oughtn't to be very difficult," said Thorndyke, handing back the stick, "if you have a list of the visitors who called that day."

"Their names will be in the appointments book," said Rowlands. "I must look them up. Some of them I remember—Cohen, Lyon, Bateman and two or three of the collectors. But to return to our history. I don't know what passed at the interviews or what Martin intended to do, but I have no doubt he made some notes on the subject. I must search for them, for, of course, we shall have to dispose of the seal."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "where is the seal?"

"Why, it is here in the safe," replied Rowlands; "and it oughtn't to be. It should have been taken to the bank."

"I suppose there is no doubt that it is in the safe?" said Thorndyke.

"No," replied Rowlands; "at least—" He stood up suddenly. "I haven't seen it," he said. "Perhaps we had better make sure."

He led the way quickly to the study, where he halted and stood looking at the shrouded corpse. "The key will be in his pocket," he said, almost in a whisper. Then, slowly and reluctantly, he approached the sofa, and gently drawing away the cover from the body, began to search the dead man's pockets.

"Here it is," he said at length, producing a bunch of keys and separating one, which he apparently knew. He crossed to the safe, and inserting the key, threw open the door.

"Ha!" he exclaimed with evident relief, "it is all right.. Your question gave me quite a start. Is it necessary to open the packet?"

He held out a little sealed parcel on which was written "The Seal of Nebuchadnezzar," and looked inquiringly at Thorndyke.

"You spoke of making sure," the latter replied with a faint smile.

"Yes, I suppose it would be best," said Rowlands; and with that, he cut the thread with which it was fastened, broke the seal and opened the package, disclosing a small cardboard box in which lay a cylindrical object rolled up in a slip of paper.

Rowlands picked it out, and removing the paper, displayed a little cylinder of gold pitted all over with minute cuneiform characters. It was about an inch and a quarter long by half an inch thick and had a hole bored through its axis from end to end.

“This paper, I see,” said Rowlands, “contains a copy of the keeper’s description of the seal—its weight, dimensions and so on. We may as well take care of that.”

He handed the little cylinder to Thorndyke, who held it delicately in his fingers and looked at it with a gravely reflective air. Indeed, small as it was, there was some thing very impressive in its appearance and in the thought that it had been handled by and probably worn on the person of the great king in those remote, almost mythical times, so familiar and yet so immeasurably far away. So I reflected as I watched Thorndyke inspecting the venerable little object in his queer, exact, scientific way, examining the minute characters through his lens, scrutinising the ends and even peering through the central hole.

“I notice,” he said, glancing at the paper which Rowlands held, “that the keeper has given only one transverse diameter, apparently assuming that it is a true cylinder. But it isn’t. The diameter varies. It is not quite circular in section and the sides are not perfectly parallel.”

He produced his pocket calliper-gauge, and, closing the jaws on the cylinder, took the reading of the vernier. Then he turned the cylinder, on which the gauge became visibly out of contact.

“There is a difference of nearly two millimetres,” he said when he had again closed the gauge and taken the reading.

“Ah, Thorndyke,” said Brodribb, “that keeper hadn’t got your mathematically exact eye; and, in fact, the precise measurements don’t seem to matter much.”

“On the other hand,” retorted Thorndyke, “inexact measurements are of no use at all.”

When we had all handled and inspected the seal, Rowlands repacked it and returned it to the safe, and we went back to the dining-room.

“Well, Thorndyke,” said Brodribb, “how does the insurance question stand? What is our position?”

“I think,” Thorndyke replied, “that we will leave the question open until the inquest has been held. You must insist on an expert analysis, and perhaps that may throw fresh light on the matter. And now we must be off to the station. I expect you have plenty to do.”

“We have,” said Brodribb, “so I won’t offer to walk with you. You know the way.”

Politely but firmly declining Rowlands’ offer of material hospitality, Thorndyke took up his research-case, and having shaken hands with our hosts, we followed them to the door and took our departure.

“Not a very satisfactory case,” I remarked as we set forth along the road, “but you can’t make a bull’s-eye every time.”

“No,” he agreed; “you can only observe and note the facts. Which reminds me that we have some data to collect in the wood. I shall take casts of those foot prints in case they should turn out to be of importance. It is always a useful precaution, seeing that footprints are fugitive.”

It seemed to me an excessive precaution, but I made no comment; and when we arrived at the footpath through the wood and he had selected the sharpest foot prints, I watched him take out from his case the plaster-tin, water-bottle, spoon and little rubber bowl, and wondered what was in his mind. The “Invicta” footprints were obviously those of the dead man. But what if they were? And of what use were the casts of the other man’s feet? The man was unknown, and as far as I could see, there was nothing suspicious in his presence here. But when Thorndyke had poured the liquid plaster into the two pairs of footprints, he went on to a still more incomprehensible proceeding. Mixing some fresh plaster, he filled up with it two adjoining impressions of the strange man’s stick. Then, taking a reel of thread from the case, he cut off about two yards, and stretching it taut, held it exactly across the middle of the two holes, until the plaster set and fixed it in position. After waiting for the plaster to set hard, and having, meanwhile, taken up and packed the casts of the footprints, he gently raised, first the one and then the other cast; each of which was a snowy-white facsimile of the tip of the stick which had made the impression the two casts, being joined by a length of thread which gave the exact distance apart of the two impressions.

“I suppose,” said I, as he made a pencil mark on one of the casts, “the thread is to show the length of the stride?”

“No,” he answered. “It is to show the exact direction in which the man was walking and to mark the front and back of the stick.”

I could make nothing of this. It was highly ingenious, but what on earth was the use of it? What could it possibly prove?

I put a few tentative questions, but could get no explanation beyond the obvious truth that it was of no use to postpone the collection of evidence until after the event. What event he was referring to, I did not gather; nor was I any further enlightened when, on arriving at Victoria, he hailed a taxicab and directed the driver to set him down at Scotland Yard.

“You had better not wait,” he said, as he got out. I have some business

to talk over with Miller or the Assistant Commissioner and may be detained some time. But I shall be at home all the evening."

Taking this as an invitation to drop in at his chambers, I did so after dinner and made another ineffectual attempt to pump him.

"I am sorry to be so evasive," said he, "but this case is so extremely speculative that I cannot come to any definite conclusion until I have more data. I may have been theorising in the air. But I am going forth tomorrow morning at half-past eight in the hope of putting some of my inferences to the test. If my learned friend would care to lend his distinguished support to the expedition, his society would be appreciated. But it will be a case of passive observation and quite possibly nothing will happen."

"Well, I will come and look on," said I. "Passive observation is my speciality"; and with this I took my departure, rather more mystified than ever.

Punctually, next morning at half-past eight, I arrived at the entry of Thorndyke's chambers. A taxicab was already waiting at the kerb, and, as I stepped on the threshold, my colleague appeared on the stairs. Together we entered the cab which at once moved off, and proceeding down Middle Temple Lane to the Embankment, headed westward. Our first stopping-place was New Scotland Yard, but there Thorndyke remained only a minute or two. Our further progress was in the direction of Westminster, and in a few minutes we drew up at the corner of Petty France, where we alighted and paid off the taxi. Sauntering slowly westward and passing a large, covered car that was drawn up by the pavement, we presently encountered no less a person than Mr. Superintendent Miller, dressed in the height of fashion and smoking a cigar. The meeting was not, apparently, unexpected, for Miller began, without preamble: "It's all right, so far, doctor, unless we are too late. It will be an awful suck-in if we are. Two plain-clothes men have been here ever since you called yesterday evening, and nothing has happened yet."

"You mustn't treat it as a certainty, Miller," said Thorndyke. "We are only acting on reasonable probabilities. But it may be a false shot, after all."

Miller smiled indulgently. "I know, sir. I've heard you say that sort of thing before. At any rate, he's there at present; I saw him just now through the shop window—and, by gum! here he is!"

I followed the superintendent's glance and saw a tallish, elderly man advancing on the opposite side of the street. He walked stiffly with the

aid of a stick and with a pronounced stoop as if suffering from some weakness of the back, and he carried in his free hand a small wooden case suspended by a rug-strap. But what instantly attracted my attention was his walking-stick, which appeared, so far as I could remember, to be an exact replica of the one that Tom Rowlands had shown us.

We continued to walk westward, allowing Mr. Lyon—as I assumed him to be—to pass us. Then we turned back and followed at a little distance; and I noticed that two tall, military-looking men whom we had met kept close behind us. At the corner of Petty France Mr. Lyon hailed a taxicab; and Miller quickened his pace and bore down on the big covered car.

“Jump in,” he said, opening the door as Lyon entered the cab. “We mustn’t lose sight of him,” and with this he fairly shoved Thorndyke and me into the car, and having spoken a word to the driver, stepped in himself and was followed by the two plain-clothes men. The car started forward, and having made a spurt which brought it within a few yards of the taxi, slowed down to the pace of the latter and followed it through the increasing traffic until we turned into Whitehall, where our driver allowed the taxi to draw ahead somewhat. At Charing Cross, however, we closed up and kept immediately behind our quarry in the dense traffic of the Strand; and when it turned to cross opposite the Acropolis Hotel, we still followed and swept past it in the hotel courtyard so that we reached the main entrance first. By the time that Mr. Lyon had paid his fare we had already entered and were waiting in the hall of the hotel.

As he followed us in, he paused and looked about him until his glance fell on a stoutish, clean-shaved man who was sitting in a wicker chair, who, on catching his eye, rose and advanced towards him. At this moment Superintendent Miller touched him on the shoulder, causing him to spin round with an expression of very distinct alarm.

“Mr. Maurice Lyon, I think,” said Miller. “I am a detective officer.” He paused and looked hard at the dealer, who had turned deathly pale. Then he continued: “You are carrying a walking-stick which I believe is not your property.”

Lyon gave a gasp of relief. “You are quite right,” said he. “But I don’t know whose property it is. If you do, I shall be pleased to return it in exchange for my own, which I left by mistake.”

He held it out in an irresolute fashion, and Miller took it from him and handed it to Thorndyke.

“Is that the stick?” he asked.

Thorndyke looked the stick over quickly, and then, inverting it, made a minute examination of the ferrule, finishing up by taking its dimensions in two diameters and comparing the results with some written notes.

Mr. Lyon fidgeted impatiently. "There's no need for all this fuss," said he. "I have told you that the stick is not mine."

"Quite so," said Miller, "but we must have a few words privately about that stick."

Here he turned to an hotel official, who had just arrived under the guidance of one of the plain-clothes men, and who suggested rather anxiously that our business would be better transacted in a private room at the back of the building than in the public hall. He was just moving off to show us the way when the clean-shaved stranger edged up to Lyon and extended his hand towards the wooden case.

"Shall I take this?" he asked suavely.

"Not just now, sir," said Miller, firmly fending him off. "Mr. Lyon will talk to you presently."

"But that case is my property," the other objected truculently; "and who are you, anyway?"

"I am a police officer," replied Miller. "But if that is your property, you had better come with us and keep an eye on it."

I have never seen a man look more uncomfortable than did the owner of that case—with the exception of Mr. Lyon; whose complexion had once more taken on a tallowy whiteness. But as the manager led the way to the back of the hall the two men followed silently, shepherded by the superintendent and the rest of our party, until we reached a small, marble-floored lobby or ante-room, when our conductor shut us in and retired.

"Now," said Miller, "I want to know what is in that case."

"I can tell you," said the stranger. "It is a piece of sculpture, and it belongs to me."

Miller nodded. "Let us have a look at it," said he.

There being no table, Lyon sat down on a chair, and resting the case on his knees, unfastened the straps with trembling fingers on which a drop of sweat fell now and again from his forehead. When the case was free, he opened the lid and displayed the head of a small plaster bust, a miniature copy of Donatello's "St. Cecilia," the shoulders of which were wedged in with balls of paper. These Lyon picked out clumsily, and when he had removed the last of them, he lifted out the bust with infinite care and held it out for Miller's inspection. The officer took

it from him tenderly—after an eager glance into the empty case—and holding it with both hands, looked at it rather blankly.

“Feels rather damp,” he remarked with a somewhat nonplussed air; and then he cast an obviously inquiring glance at Thorndyke, who took the bust from him, and holding it poised in the palm of his hand, appeared to be estimating its weight. Glancing past him at Lyon, I noticed with astonishment that the dealer was watching him with a ghastly stare of manifest terror, while the stranger was hardly less disturbed.

“For God’s sake, man, be careful!” the latter exclaimed, starting forward. “You’ll drop it!”

The prediction was hardly uttered before it was verified. Drop it he did; and in a perfectly deliberate, purposeful manner, so that the bust fell on its back on the marble floor and was instantly shattered into a hundred fragments. It was an amazing affair. But what followed was still more amazing. For, as the snowy fragments scattered to right and left, from one of them a little yellow metal cylinder detached itself and rolled slowly along the floor. The stranger darted forward and stooped to seize it; but Miller stooped, too, and I judged that the superintendent’s cranium was the harder, for he rose, rubbing his head with one hand and with the other holding out the cylinder to Thorndyke.

“Can you tell us what this is, doctor?” he asked.

“Yes,” was the reply. “It is the seal of Nebuchadnezzar, and it is the property of the executors of the late Martin Rowlands, who was murdered the night before last.”

As he finished speaking, Lyon slithered from his chair and lay upon the floor insensible, while the stranger made a sudden burst for the door, where he was instantly folded in the embrace of a massive plain-clothes man, who held him immovable while his colleague clicked on the handcuffs.

“So,” I remarked, as we walked home, “your casts of the stick and the footprints were not wanted after all.”

“On the contrary,” he replied, “they are wanted very much. If the seal should fail to hang Mr. Lyon, the casts will assuredly fit the rope round his neck.” (This, by the way, actually happened. The defence that Lyon received the seal from some unknown person was countered by the unexpected production in court of the casts of Lyon’s feet and the stick, which proved that the prisoner had been at Pinwell, and in the company of the deceased at or about the date of the murder, and secured his conviction.)

“By the way,” said I, “how did you fix this crime on Lyon? It began, I think, with those stick impressions in the wood. What was there peculiar about those impressions?”

“Their peculiarity was that they were the impressions of a stick which apparently did not belong to the person who was carrying it.”

“Good Lord, Thorndyke!” I exclaimed, “is that possible? How could an impression on the ground suggest ownership?”

“It is a curious point,” he replied, “though essentially simple, which turns on the way in which the ferrule of a stick becomes worn. In a plain, symmetrical stick with out a handle, the ferrule wears evenly all round; but in a stick with a crook or other definite handle, which is grasped in a particular way and always put down in the same position, the ferrule becomes worn on one side—the side opposite the handle, or the front of the stick. But the important point is that the bevel of wear is not exactly opposite the handle. It is slightly to one side, for this reason. A man puts his stick down with the handle fore and aft; but as he steps forward, his hand swings away from his body, rotating the stick slightly outward. Consequently, the wear on the ferrule is slightly inward. That is to say, that in a right-handed man’s stick the wear is slightly to the left and in a left-handed man’s stick the wear is slightly to the right. But if a right-handed man walks with a left-handed stick, the impression on the ground will show the bevel of wear on the right side—which is the wrong side; and the right-handed rotation will throw it still farther to the right. Now in this case, the impressions showed a shallow part, corresponding to the bevel of wear, on the right side. Therefore it was a left-handed stick. But it was being carried in the right hand. Therefore it—apparently—did not belong to the person who was carrying it.

“Of course, as the person was unknown, the point was merely curious and did not concern us. But see how quickly circumstantial evidence mounts up. When we saw the feet of deceased, we knew that the foot-prints in the wood were his. Consequently the man with the stick was in his company; and that man at once came into the picture. Then Tom Rowlands told us that he had lost his stick and that he was left-handed; and he showed us the stick that he had got in exchange, and behold! that is a right-handed stick, as I ascertained by examining the ferrule. Here, then, is a left-handed man who has lost a stick and got a right-handed one in exchange; and there, in the wood, was a right-handed man who was carrying a left-handed stick and who was in company with the deceased. It was a striking coincidence. But further, the suggestion was that this unknown man was one of those who had called

at Tom's office, and therefore one who wanted to get possession of the seal. This instantly suggested the question, Did he succeed in getting possession of the seal? We went to the safe and at once it became obvious that he did."

"The seal in the safe was a forgery, of course?"

"Yes; and a bad forgery, though skilfully done. It was an electrotype; it was unsymmetrical; it did not agree with the keeper's measurements; and the perforation, though soiled at the ends, was bright in the middle from the boring tool."

"But how did you know that Lyon had made it?"

"I didn't. But he was by far the most probable person. He had a seal-rolling, from which an electro could be made, and he had the great skill that was necessary to turn a flat electro into a cylinder. He was an experienced faker of antiques, and he was a dealer who would have facilities for getting rid of the stolen seal. But it was only a probability, though, as time pressed, we had to act on it. Of course, when we saw him with the stick in his hand, it became virtually a certainty."

"And how did you guess that the seal was in the bust?"

"I had expected to find it enclosed in some plaster object, that being the safest way to hide it and smuggle it out of this country and into the United States. When I saw the bust, it was obvious. It was a hastily-made copy of one of Brucciani's busts. The plaster was damp—Brucciani's bake theirs dry—and had evidently been made only a few hours before. So I broke it. If I had been mistaken I could have replaced it for five shillings, but the whole circumstances made it practically a certainty."

"Have you any idea as to how Lyon administered the poison?"

"We can only surmise," he replied. "Probably he took with him some solution of cyanide—if that was what was used—and poured it into Rowlands' whisky when his attention was otherwise occupied. It would be quite easy; and a single gulp of a quick-acting poison like that would finish the business in a minute or two. But we are not likely ever to know the details."

The evidence at the inquest showed that Thorndyke was probably right, and his evidence at the trial clenched the case against Lyon. As to the other man—who proved to be an American dealer well known to the New York Customs officials—the case against him broke down from lack of evidence that he was privy either to the murder or the theft. And so ended the case of Nebuchadnezzar's seal: a case that left Mr. Brodribb more than ever convinced that Thorndyke was either gifted with a sixth

sense which enabled him to smell out evidence or was in league with some familiar demon who did it for him.

Phyllis Annesley's Peril

“ne is sometimes disposed to regret,” said Thorndyke, as we sat waiting for the arrival of Mr. Mayfield⁴, the solicitor, “that our practice is so largely concerned with the sordid and the unpleasant.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “Medical Jurisprudence is not always a particularly delicate subject. But it is our line of practice and we have got to take it as we find it.”

“A philosophic conclusion, Jervis,” he rejoined, “and worthy of my learned friend. It happens that the most intimate contact of Law and Medicine is in crimes against the person and consequently the proper study of the Medical Jurist is crime of that type. It is a regrettable fact, but we must accept it.”

“At the same time,” said I, “there don’t seem to be any medico-legal issues in this Bland case. The woman was obviously murdered. The only question is, who murdered her? And the answer to that question seems pretty obvious.”

“It does,” said Thorndyke. “But we shall be better able to judge when we have heard what Mayfield has to tell us. And I think I hear him coming up the stairs now.”

I rose to open the door for our visitor, and, as he entered, I looked at him curiously. Mr. Mayfield was quite a young man, and the mixture of deference and nervousness in his manner as he entered the room suggested no great professional experience.

“I am afraid, sir,” said he, taking the easy-chair that Thorndyke offered him, “that I ought to have come to you sooner, for the inquest, or, at least, the police court proceedings.”

“You reserved your defence, I think?” said Thorndyke.

⁴ Der Erzähler im Roman »As a Thief in the Night« (1928). B. L.

"Yes," replied the solicitor, with a wry smile. "I had to. There seemed to be nothing to say. So I put in a plea of 'Not Guilty' and reserved the defence in the hope that something might turn up. But I am gravelled completely. It looks a perfectly hopeless case. I don't know how it strikes you, sir."

"I have seen only the newspaper reports," said Thorndyke. "They are certainly not encouraging. But let us disregard them. I suggest that you recite the facts of the case and I can ask any questions that are necessary to elucidate it further."

"Very well, sir," said Mayfield. "Then I will begin with the disappearance of Mrs. Lucy Bland. That occurred about the eighteenth of last May. At that time she was living, apart from her husband, at Wimbledon, in furnished lodgings. After lunch on the eighteenth she went out, saying that she should not be home until night. She was seen by someone who knew her at Wimbledon Station on the down side about three o'clock. At shortly after six probably on the same day, she went to the Post Office at Lower Ditton to buy some stamps. The postmistress, who knew her by sight, is certain that she called there, but cannot swear to the exact date. At any rate, she did not go home that night and was never seen alive again. Her landlady communicated with her husband and he at once applied to the police. But all the inquiries that were made led to nothing. She had disappeared without leaving a trace.

"The discovery was made four months later, on the sixteenth of September. On that day some workmen went to 'The Larches,' a smallish, old-fashioned, river side house just outside Lower Ditton, to examine the electric wiring. The house was let to a new tenant, and as the meter had shown an unaccountable leakage of current during the previous quarter, they went to see what was wrong.

"To get at the main, they had to take up part of the floor of the dining-room; and when they got the boards up, they were horrified to discover a pair of feet—evidently a woman's feet—projecting from under the next board. They immediately went to the police station and reported what they had seen, whereupon the inspector and a sergeant accompanied them back to the house and directed them to take up several more boards—which they did; and there, jammed in between the joists, was the body of a woman who was subsequently identified as Mrs. Lucy Bland. The corpse appeared to be perfectly fresh and only quite recently dead; but at the *post mortem* it was discovered that it had been embalmed or preserved by injecting a solution of formaldehyde and might have been dead three or four months. The cause of death

was given at the inquest as suffocation, probably preceded by the forcible administration of chloroform.”

“The house, I understand,” said Thorndyke, “belongs to one of the accused?”

“Yes. Miss Phyllis Annesley. It is her freehold, and she lived in it until recently. Last autumn, however, she took to travelling about and then partly dismantle the house and stored most of the furniture; but she kept two bedrooms furnished and the kitchen and dining, room in just usable condition, and she used to put up there for a day or two in the intervals of her journeys, either alone or with her maid.”

“And as to Miss Annesley’s relations with the Blands?”

“She had known them both for some years. With Leonard Bland she was admittedly on affectionate terms, though there is no suggestion of improper relations between them. But Bland used to visit her when she lived there and they used to go for picnics on the river in the boat belonging to the house. Mrs. Bland also occasionally visited Miss Annesley, and they seem to have been on quite civil terms. Of course, she knew about her husband’s affection for the lady, but she doesn’t seem to have had any strong feeling about it.”

“And what were the relations of the husband and wife?” asked Thorndyke.

“Rather queer. They didn’t suit one another, so they simply agreed to go their own ways. But they don’t seem to have been unfriendly, and Mr. Bland was most scrupulous in regard to his financial obligations to his wife. He not only allowed her liberal maintenance but went out of his way to make provision for her. I will give you an instance, which impressed me very much.

“An old acquaintance of his, a Mr. Julius Wicks, who had been working for some years in the film studio at Los Angeles, came to England about a year ago and proposed to Bland that they should start one or two picture theatres in the provinces, Bland to find the money—which he was able to do—and Wicks to provide the technical knowledge and do the actual management. Bland agreed, and a partnership was arranged on the basis of two-thirds of the profits to Bland and one-third to Wicks; with the proviso that if Bland should die, all his rights as partner should be vested in his wife.”

“And supposing Wicks should die?”

“Well, Wicks was not married, though he was engaged to a film actress. On his death, his share would go to Bland, and similarly, on Bland’s death, if he should die after his wife, his share would go to his partner.”

"Bland seems to have been a fairly good business man," said I.

"Yes," Mayfield agreed. "The arrangement was all in his favour. But he was the capitalist, you see. However, the point is that Bland was quite mindful of his wife's interests. There was nothing like enmity."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "one motive is excluded. Was the question of divorce ever raised?"

"It couldn't be," said Mayfield. "There were no grounds on either side. But it seems to have been recognised and admitted that if Bland had been free he would have married Miss Annesley. They were greatly attached to one another."

"That seems a fairly solid motive," said I.

"It appears to be," Mayfield admitted. "But to me, who have known these people for years and have always had the highest opinion of them, it seems—Well, I can't associate this atrocious crime with them at all. However, that is not to the point. I must get on with the facts."

"Very soon after the discovery at 'The Larches,' the police learned that there had been rumours in Lower Ditton for some time past of strange happenings at the house and that two labourers named Brodie and Stanton knew something definite. They accordingly looked up these two men and examined them separately, when both men made substantially identical statements, which were to this effect: About the middle of May—neither of them was able to give an exact date—between nine and ten in the evening, they were walking together along the lane in which 'The Larches' is situated when they saw a man lurking in the front garden of the house. As they were passing, he came to the gate and beckoned to them, and when they approached he whispered: 'I say, mates, there's something rummy going on in this house.'

"'How do you know?'" asked Brodie.

"'I've been looking in through a hole in the shutter,' the man replied. 'They seem to be hiding something under the floor. Come and have a look.'

"The two men followed him up the garden to the back of the house, where he took them to one of the windows of a ground-floor room and pointed to two holes in the outside shutters.

"'Just take a peep in through them,' said he.

"Each of the men put an eye to one of the holes and looked in; and this is what they both saw :—There were two rooms, communicating, with a wide arch between them. Through the arch and at the far end of the second room were two persons, a man and a woman. They were on their hands and knees, apparently doing something to the floor.

Presently the man, who had on a painter's white blouse, rose and picked up a board which he stood on end against the wall. Then he stooped again and seemed to lay hold of something that lay on the floor—something that looked like a large bundle or a roll of carpet. At this moment something passed across in front of the holes and shut out the view—so that there must have been a third person in the room. When the obstructing body moved away again, the man was kneeling on the floor looking down at the bundle and the woman had come forward and was standing just in the arch with a pair of pincers in her hand. She was dressed in a spotted pinafore with a white sailor collar, and both the men recognised her at once as Miss Annesley.”

“They knew her by sight, then?” said Thorndyke.

“Yes. They were Ditton men. It is a small place and everybody in it must have known Miss Annesley and Bland, too, for that matter. Well, they saw her standing in the archway quite distinctly. Neither of the men has the least doubt as to her identity. They watched her for perhaps half a minute. Then the invisible person inside moved in front of the peepholes and shut out the scene.

“When the obstruction moved away, the woman was back in the farther room, kneeling on the floor. The bundle had disappeared and the man was in the act of taking the board, which he had rested against the wall, and laying it in its place in the floor. After this, the obstruction kept coming and going, so that the watchers only got occasional glimpses of what was going on. They saw the man apparently hammering nails into the floor and they heard faint sounds of knocking. On one occasion, towards the end of the proceedings, they saw the man standing in the archway with his face towards them, apparently looking at something in his hand. They couldn't see what the thing was, but they clearly recognised the man as Mr. Bland, whom they both knew well by sight. Then the view was shut out again, and when they next saw Mr. Bland, he was standing by Miss Annesley in the farther room, looking down at the floor and taking off his blouse. As it seemed that the business was over and that Bland and Miss Annesley would probably be coming out, the men thought it best to clear off, lest they should be seen.

“As they walked up the lane, they discussed the mysterious proceedings that they had witnessed, but could make nothing of them. The stranger suggested that perhaps Miss Annesley was hiding her plate or valuables to keep them safe while she was travelling, and hinted that it might be worth someone's while to take the floor up later on and see what was there. But this suggestion Brodie and Stanton, who are

most respectable men, condemned strongly, and they agreed that, as the affair was no concern of theirs, they had better say nothing about it. But they evidently must have talked to some extent, for the affair got to be spoken about in the village, and, of course, when the body was discovered under the floor, the gossip soon reached the ears of the police."

"Has the third man come forward to give evidence?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, he has not been found yet. He was a stranger to both the men; apparently a labourer or farm-hand or tramp. But nothing is known about him. So that is the case; and it is about as hopeless as it is possible to be. Of course, there is the known character of the accused; but against that is a perfectly intelligible motive and the evidence of two eye-witnesses. Do you think you would be disposed to undertake the defence, sir? I realise that it is asking a great deal of you."

"I should like to think the matter over," said Thorndyke, "and make a few preliminary inquiries. And I should want to read over the depositions in full detail. Can you let me have them?"

"I have a verbatim report of the police court proceedings and of the inquest. I will leave them with you now. And when may I hope to have your decision?"

"By the day after to-morrow at the latest," was the reply, on which the young solicitor produced a bundle of papers from his bag, and having laid them on the table, thanked us both and took his leave.

"Well, Thorndyke," I said when Mayfield had gone, "I am fairly mystified. I know you would not undertake a merely formal defence, but what else you could do is, I must confess, beyond my imagination. It seems to me that the prosecution have only to call the witnesses and the verdict of 'Guilty' follows automatically."

"That is how it appears to me," said Thorndyke. "And if it still appears so when I have read the reports and made my preliminary investigations, I shall decline the brief. But appearances are sometimes misleading."

With this he took the reports and the notebook, in which he had made a few brief memoranda of Mayfield's summary of the case, and drawing a chair to the table, proceeded, with quiet concentration, to read through and make notes on the evidence. When he had finished, he passed the reports to me and rose, pocketing his note book and glancing at his watch.

"Read the evidence through carefully, Jervis," said he, "and tell me if you see any possible way out. I have one or two calls to make, but I shall

not be more than an hour. When I come back, I should like to hear your views on the case.”

During his absence I read the reports through with the closest attention. Something in Thorndyke’s tone had seemed to hint at a possible flaw in the case for the prosecution. But I could find no escape from the conviction that these two persons were guilty. The reports merely amplified what Mayfield had told us; and the added detail, especially in the case of the eye witnesses, only made the evidence more conclusive. I could not see the material for even a formal defence.

In less than an hour my colleague re-entered the room, and I was about to give him my impressions of the evidence when he said “It is rather early, Jervis, but I think we had better go and get some lunch. I have arranged to go down to Ditton this afternoon and have a look at the house. Mayfield has given me a note to the police sergeant, who has the key and is virtually in possession.”

“I don’t see what you will gain by looking at the house,” said I.

“Neither do I,” he replied. “But it is a good rule always to inspect the scene of a crime and o the evidence as far as possible.”

“Well,” I said, “it is a forlorn hope. I have read through the evidence and it seems to me that the accused are as good as convicted. I can see no line of defence at all. Can you?”

“At present I cannot,” he replied. “But there are one or two points that I should like to clear up before I decide whether or not to undertake the defence. And I have a great belief in first-hand observation.”

We consumed a simplified lunch at one of our regular haunts in Fleet Street and from thence were conveyed by a taxi to Waterloo, where we caught the selected train to Lower Ditton. I had put the reports in my pocket, and during our journey I read them over again, to see if I could discover any point that would be cleared up by an inspection of the premises.

For, in spite of the rather vague purpose implied by Thorndyke’s explanation, something in my colleague’s manner, coupled with long experience of his method made me suspect that he had some definite object in view. But nothing was said by either of us during the journey, nor did we discuss the case; indeed, so far as I could see, there was nothing to discuss.

Our reception at the Lower Ditton Police Station was something more than cordial. The sergeant recognised Thorndyke instantly—it appeared that he was an enthusiastic admirer of my colleague—and after a

brief glance at Mayfield's note, took a key from his desk and put on his helmet.

"Lord bless you, sir," said he, "I don't need to be told who you are. I've seen you in court, and heard you. I'll come along with you to the house myself."

I suspected that Thorndyke would have gladly dispensed with this attention, but he accepted it with genial courtesy, and we went forth through the village and along the quiet lane in which the ill-omened house was situated. And as we went, the sergeant commented on the case with curiously unofficial freedom.

"You've got your work cut out, sir, if you are going to conduct the defence. But I wish you luck. I've known Miss Annesley for some years—she was well known in the village here—and a nicer, gentler, more pleasant lady you wouldn't wish to meet. To think of her in connection with a murder—and such a murder, too—such a brutal, callous affair! Well, it's beyond me. And yet there it is, unless those two men are lying."

"Is there any reason to suppose that they are?" I asked.

"Well, no; there isn't. They are good, sober, decent men. And it would be such an atrociously wicked lie. And they both knew the prisoners, and liked them. Everybody liked Mr. Bland and Miss Annesley, though their friendship for one another may not have been quite in order. But I can tell you, sir, these two men are frightfully cut up at having to give evidence. This is the house!"

He opened a gate and we entered the garden, beyond which was a smallish, old-fashioned house, of which the ground-floor windows were protected by outside shutters. We walked round to the back of the house, where was another garden with a lawn and a path leading down to the river.

"Is that a boat-house?" Thorndyke asked, pointing to a small gable that appeared above a clump of lilac bushes.

"Yes," replied the sergeant. "And there is a boat in it; a good, beamy, comfortable tub that Miss Annesley and her friend used to go out picnicking in. This is the window that the men peeped in at, but you can't see much now because the room is all dark."

I looked at the two French windows, which opened on to the lawn, and reflected on this new instance of the folly of wrong-doers. Each window was fitted with a pair of strong shutters, which bolted on the inside, and each shutter was pierced, about five feet from the sill, by a circular hole a little over an inch in diameter. It seemed incredible that two sane persons, engaged in the concealment of a murdered body, should have

left those four holes uncovered for any chance eavesdropper to spy on their doings.

But my astonishment at this lack of precaution was still greater when the sergeant admitted us and we stood inside the room, for both the windows, as well as the pair in the farther room, were furnished with heavy curtains.

“Yes,” said the sergeant, in answer to my comment “it’s a queer thing how people overlook matters of vital importance. You see, they drew the drawing-room curtains all right, but they forgot these. Is there anything in particular that you want to see, sir?”

“I should like to see where the body was hidden,” said Thorndyke, “but I will just look round the rooms first.”

He walked slowly to and fro, looking about him and evidently fixing the appearance of the rooms on his memory. Not that there was much to see or remember. The two nearly square rooms communicated through a wide arch, once closed by curtains, as shown by the brass curtain-rod. The back room had been completely dismantled with the exception of the window curtains, but the front room, although the floor and the walls, were bare, was not entirely unfurnished. The sideboard was still in position and bore at each end a tall electric light standard, as did also the mantelpiece. There were three dining chairs and a good-sized gate-leg table stood closed against the wall.

“I see you have not had the floor-boards nailed down,” said Thorndyke.

“No, sir; not yet. So we can see where the body was hidden and where the electric main is. The electricians took up the wrong board at first—that is how they came to discover the body. And one of them said that the boards over the main had been raised recently, and he thought that the—er—the accused had meant to hide the body there, but when they got the floor up they struck the main and had to choose a fresh place.”

He stooped, and lifting the loose boards, which he stood on end against the mantelpiece, exposed the joists and the earth floor about a foot below them. In one of the spaces the electric main ran and in the adjoining one the apparently disused gas main.

“This is where we found poor Mrs. Bland,” said the sergeant, pointing to an empty space. “It was an awful sight. Gave me quite a turn. The poor lady was lying on her side jammed down between the joists and her nose flattened up against one of the timbers. They must have been brutes that did it, and I can’t—I really can’t believe that Miss Annesley was one of them.”

“It looks a narrow place for a body to lie in,” said I.

"The joists are sixteen inches apart," said Thorndyke, laying his pocket rule across the space, "and two and a half inches thick. Heavy timber and wide spaces."

He stood up, and turning round, looked towards the windows of the back room. I followed his glance and noted, almost with a start, the two holes in the shutter of the left-hand window (the right-hand window, of course, from outside) glaring into the darkened room like a pair of inquisitive, accusing eyes. The holes in the other window were hardly visible, and the reason for the difference was obvious. The one window had small panes and thick muntins, or sash-bars, whereas the other was glazed, with large sheets of plate glass and had no muntins.

"Of course it would be dark at the time," I said in response to his unspoken comment, "and this room would be lighted up, more or less."

"Not so very dark in May," he replied. "There is a furnished bedroom, isn't there, sergeant?"

"Two, sir," was the reply; and the sergeant forthwith opened the door and led the way across the hall and up the stairs.

"This is Miss Annesley's room," he said, opening a door gingerly and peering in.

We entered the room and looked about us with vague curiosity. It was a simply-furnished room, but dainty and tasteful, with its small four-post bedstead, light easy-chair and little, ladylike writing-table.

"That's Mr. Bland," said the sergeant, pointing to a double photograph-frame on the table, "and the lady is Miss Annesley herself."

I took up the frame and looked curio at the two portraits. For a pair of murderers they were certainly uncommonly prepossessing. The man, who looked about thirty-five, was a typical good-looking, middle-class Englishman, while the woman was distinctly handsome, with a thoughtful, refined and gentle cast of face.

"She has something of a Japanese air," said I, "with that coil on the top of the head and the big ivory hairpin stuck through it."

I passed the frame to Thorndyke, who regarded each portrait attentively, and then, taking both photograph out of the frame, closely examined each in turn, back and front, before replacing them.

"The other bedroom," said the sergeant as Thorndyke laid down the frame, "is the spare room. There's nothing to see in it."

Nevertheless he conducted us into it, and when we I had verified his statement we returned downstairs.

"Before we go," said Thorndyke, "I will just see what is opposite those holes."

He walked to the window and was just looking out through one of the holes when the sergeant, who had followed him closely, suddenly slid along the floor and nearly fell.

“Well, I never!” he exclaimed, recovering himself and stooping to pick up some small object. “There’s a dangerous thing to leave lying about the floor. Bit of slate pencil—at least, that is what it looks like.”

He handed it to Thorndyke, who glanced at it and remarked “Yes, things that roll under the foot are apt to produce broken bones; but I think you had better take care of it. I may have to ask you something about it at the trial.”

We bade the sergeant farewell at the bottom of the lane, and as we turned into the footpath to the station I said: “We don’t seem to have picked up very much more than Mayfield told us—excepting that bit of slate pencil. By the way, why did you tell the sergeant to keep it?”

“On the broad principle of keeping everything, relevant or irrelevant. But it wasn’t slate pencil; it was a fragment of a small carbon rod.”

“Presumably dropped by the electricians who had been working in the room,” said I, and then asked “Have you come to any decision about this case?”

“Yes; I shall undertake the defence.”

“Well,” I said, “I can’t imagine what line you will take. Strong suspicion would have fallen on these two persons even if there had been no witnesses; but the evidence of those two eye-witnesses seems to clench the matter.”

“Precisely,” said Thorndyke. “That is my position. I rest my case on the evidence of those two men—as I hope it will appear under cross-examination.”

This statement of Thorndyke’s gave me much food for reflection during the days that followed. But it was not very nourishing food, for the case still remained perfectly incomprehensible. To be sure, if the evidence of the two eye-witnesses could be shown to be false, the case against the prisoners would break down, since it would bring another suspected person into view. But their evidence was clearly not false. They were men of known respectability and no one doubted the truth of their statements.

Nor was the obscurity of the case lightened in any way by Thorndyke’s proceedings. We called together on the two prisoners, but from neither did we elicit any fresh facts. Neither could establish a clear alibi or suggest any explanation of the eye-witnesses’ statements. They gave a

simple denial of having been in the house at that time or of having ever taken up the floor.

Both prisoners, however, impressed me favourably. Bland, whom we interviewed at Brixton, seemed a pleasant, manly fellow, frank and straightforward though quite shrewd and business-like; while Miss Annesley, whom we saw at Holloway, was a really charming young lady—sweet-faced, dignified and very gracious and gentle in manner. In one respect, indeed, I found her disappointing. The picturesque coil had disappeared from the top of her head and her hair had been shortened (“bobbed” is, I believe, the correct term) into a mere fringe. Thorndyke also noticed the change, and in fact commented on it.

“Yes,” she admitted, “it is a disimprovement in my case. It doesn’t suit me. But I really had no choice. When I was in Paris in the spring I had an accident. I was having my hair cleaned with petrol when it caught fire. It was most alarming. The hairdresser had the presence of mind to throw a damp towel over my head, and that saved my life. But my hair was nearly all burnt. There was nothing for it but to have it trimmed as evenly as possible. But it looked horrid at first. I had my photograph taken by Barton soon after I came home, just as a record, you know, and it looks awfully odd. I look like a Bluecoat boy.”

“By the way,” said Thorndyke, “when did you return?”

“I landed in England about the middle of April and went straight to my little flat at Paddington, where I have been living ever since.”

“You don’t remember where you were on the eighteenth of May?”

“I was living at my flat, but I can’t remember what I did on that day. You don’t, as a rule, unless you keep a diary, which I do not.”

This was not very promising. As we came away from the prison, I felt, on the one hand, a conviction that this sweet, gracious lady could have had no hand in this horrible crime, and on the other an utter despair of extricating her from the web of circumstances in which she had become enmeshed.

From Thorndyke I could gather nothing, except that he was going on with his investigations—a significant fact, in his case. To my artfully disguised questions he had one invariable reply: “My dear Jervis, you have read the evidence, you have seen the house, you have all the facts. Think the case over and consider the possibilities of cross-examination.” And that was all I could get out of him.

He was certainly very busy, but his activities only increased my bewilderment. He sent a well-known architect down to make a scale-plan of the house and grounds; and he dispatched Polton to take photographs of

the place from every possible point of view. The latter, indeed, was up to his eyes in work, and enjoying himself amazingly, but as secret as an oyster. As he went about, beaming with happiness and crinkling with self-complacency, he exasperated me to that extent that I could have banged his little head against the wall. In short, though I had watched the development of the case from the beginning, I was still without a glimmer of understanding of it even when I took my seat in court on the morning of the trial.

It was a memorable occasion, and every incident in it is still vivid in my memory. Particularly do I remember looking with a sort of horrified fascination at the female prisoner, standing by her friend in the dock, pale but composed and looking the very type and picture of womanly beauty and dignity; and reflecting with a shudder that the graceful neck—looking longer and more slender from the shortness of the hair—might very probably be, within a matter of days, encircled by the hangman's rope. These lugubrious reflections were interrupted by the entrance of two persons, a man and a woman, who were apparently connected with the case, since as they took their seats they both looked towards the dock and exchanged silent greetings with the prisoners.

"Do you know who those people are, Mayfield?" I asked.

"That is Mr. Julius Wicks, Mr. Bland's partner, and his fiancée, Miss Eugenia Kropp, the film actress," he replied.

I was about to ask him if they were here to give evidence when, the preliminaries having come to an end, the counsel for the Crown, Sir John Turville, rose and began his opening speech.

It was a good speech and eminently correct; but its very moderation made it the more damaging. It began with an outline of the facts, almost identical with Mayfield's summary, and a statement of the evidence which would presently be given by the principal witnesses.

"And now," said Sir John, when he had finished his recital, "let us bring these facts to a focus. Considered as a related group, this is what they show us. On the sixteenth of September there is found, concealed under the floor of a certain room in a certain house, the body of a woman who has evidently been murdered. That woman is the separated wife of a man who is on affectionate terms with another woman whom he would admittedly wish to marry and who would be willing to marry him. This murdered woman is, in short, the obstacle to the marriage desired by these two persons. Now the house in which the corpse is concealed is the property of one of those two persons, and both of them have access to it; and no other person has access to it. Here, then, to begin with, is

a set of profoundly suspicious circumstances.

“But there are others far more significant. That unfortunate lady, the unwanted wife of the prisoner, Bland, disappeared mysteriously on the eighteenth of last May; and witnesses will prove that the body was deposited under the floor on or about that date. Now, on or about that same date, in that same house, in that same room, in the same part of that room, those two persons, the prisoners at the bar, were seen by two eminently respectable witnesses in the act of concealing some large object under the floor. What could that object have been? The floor of the room has been taken up and nothing whatever but the corpse of this poor murdered lady has been found under it. The irresistible conclusion is that those two persons were then and there engaged in concealing that corpse.

“To sum up, then, the reasons or believing that the prisoners are guilty of the crime with which they are charged are threefold. They had an intelligible and strong motive to commit that crime; they had the opportunity to commit it; and we have evidence from two eye-witnesses which makes it practically an observed fact that the prisoners did actually commit that crime.”

As the Crown counsel sat down, pending the swearing of the first witness, I turned to Thorndyke and said anxiously: “I can't imagine what you are going to reply to that.”

“My reply,” he answered quietly, “will be largely governed by what I am able to elicit in cross-examination.” Here the first witness was called—the electrician who discovered the body—and gave his evidence, but Thorndyke made no cross-examination. He was followed by the sergeant, who described the discovery in more detail. As the Crown counsel sat down, Thorndyke rose, and I pricked up my ears.

“Have you mentioned everything that you saw or found in this room?” he asked.

“Yes, at that time. Later—on the second of October—I found a small piece of a carbon pencil on the floor of the front room near the window.”

He produced from his pocket an envelope from which he extracted the fragment of the alleged “slate pencil” and passed it to Thorndyke, who, having passed to the judge with the intimation that he wished it to be put in evidence, sat down. The judge inspected the fragment curiously and then cast an inquisitive glance at Thorndyke—as he had done once or twice before. For my colleague's appearance in the role of counsel was a rare event, and one usually productive of surprises.

To the long succession of witnesses who followed Thorndyke listened attentively but did not cross-examine, I saw the judge look at him curiously from time to time and my own curiosity grew more and more intense. Evidently he was saving himself up for the crucial witnesses. At length the name of James Brodie was called, and a serious-looking elderly workman entered the box. He gave his evidence clearly and confidently, though with manifest reluctance, and I could see that his vivid description of that sinister scene made a great impression on the jury. When the examination in chief was finished, Thorndyke rose, and the judge settled himself to listen with an air of close attention.

“Have you ever been inside ‘The Larches’?” Thorndyke asked.

“No, sir. I’ve passed the house twice every day for years, but I’ve never been inside it.”

“When you looked in through the shutter, was the room well lighted?”

“No, ’twas very dim. I could only just see what the people were doing.”

“Yet you recognised Miss Annesley quite clearly?”

“Not at first, I didn’t. Not until she came and stood in the archway. The light seemed quite good there.”

“Did you see her come out of the front room and walk to the arch?”

“No. I saw her in the front room and then something must have stopped up the hole, for ’twas all dark. Then the hole got clear again and I saw her standing in the arch. But I only saw her for a moment or two. Then the hole got stopped again and when it opened she was back in the front room.”

“How did you know that the woman in the front room was Miss Annesley? Could you see her face in that dim light?”

“No, but I could tell her by her dress. She wore a striped pinafore with a big, white sailor-collar. Besides, there wasn’t nobody else there.”

“And with regard to Mr. Bland. Did you see him walk out of the front room and up to the arch?”

“No. ’Twas the same as with Miss Annesley. Something kept passing across the hole. I see him in the front room; then I see him in the arch and then I see him in the front room again.”

“When they were in the archway, were they moving or standing still?”

“They both seemed to be standing quite still.”

“Was Miss Annesley looking straight towards you?”

“No. Her face was turned away a little.”

“I want you to look at these photographs and tell us if any of them shows the head in the position in which you saw it.”

He handed a bundle of photographs to the witness, who looked at them, one after another, and at length picked out one.

"That is exactly how she looked," said he. "She might have been standing for this very picture."

He passed the photograph to Thorndyke, who noted the number written on it and passed it to the judge, who also noted the number and laid it on his desk. Thorndyke then resumed: "You say the light was very dim in the front room. Were the electric lamps alight?"

"None that I could see were alight."

"How many electric lamps could you see?"

"Well, there was three hanging from the ceiling and there was two standards on the mantelpiece and one on the sideboard. None of them was alight."

"Was there only one standard on the sideboard?"

"There may have been more, but I couldn't see 'em because I could only see just one corner of the sideboard."

"Could you see the whole of the mantelpiece?"

"Yes. There was a standard lamp at each end."

"Could you see anything on the near side of the mantelpiece?"

"There was a table there: a folding table with twisted legs. But I could only see part of that. The side of the arch cut it off."

"You have said that you could see Miss Annesley quite clearly and could see how she was dressed. Could you see how her hair was arranged?"

"Yes. 'Twas done up on the top of her head in what they calls a bun and there was a sort of a skewer stuck through it."

As the witness gave this answer, a light broke on me. Not a very clear light, for the mystery was still unsolved. But I could see that Thorndyke had a very definite strategic plan. And, glancing at the dock, I was immediately aware that the prisoners had seen the light, too.

"You have described what looked like a hole in the floor," Thorndyke resumed, "where some boards had been raised, near the middle of the room. Was that hole nearer the sideboard or nearer the mantel piece?"

"It was nearer the mantelpiece," the witness replied; on which Thorndyke sat down, the witness left the box, and both the judge and the counsel for the prosecution rapidly turned over their notes with evident surprise.

The next witness was Albert Stanton and his evidence was virtually a repetition of Brodie's; and when, in cross Thorndyke put over again the same series of questions, he elicited precisely the same answers even to

the recognition of the same photograph. And again I began to see a glimmer of light. But only a glimmer.

Stanton being the last of the witnesses for the Crown, his brief re-examination by Sir John Turville completed the case for the prosecution. Thereupon Thorndyke rose and announced that he called witnesses, and forth with the first of them appeared in the box. This was Frederick Stokes, A. R. I. B. A.⁵, architect, and he deposed that he had made a careful survey of the house called "The Larches" at Lower Ditton and prepared a plan on the scale of half an inch to a foot. He swore that the plan—of which he produced the original and a number of lithographed duplicates—was true and exact in every respect. Thorndyke took the plans from him and passing them to the judge asked that the original should be put in evidence and the duplicates handed to the jury.

The next witness was Joseph Barton of Kensington, photographer. He deposed to having taken photographs of Miss Annesley on various occasions, the last being on the twenty-third of last April. He produced copies of them all with the date written on each. He swore that the dates written were the correct dates. The photographs were handed up to the judge, who looked them over, one by one. Suddenly he seemed, as it were, to stiffen and turned quickly from the photographs to his notes; and I knew that he had struck the last portrait—the one with the short hair.

As the photographer left the box, his place was taken by no less a person than our ingenious laboratory assistant; who, having taken his place, beamed on the judge, the jury and the court in general, with a face wreathed in crinkly smiles. Nathaniel Polton, being sworn, deposed that, on the fifteenth of October, he proceeded to "The Larches" at Lower Ditton and took three photographs of the ground-floor rooms. The first was taken through the right-hand hole of the shutter marked A in the plan; the second through the left-hand hole, and the third from a point inside the back room between the windows and nearer to the window marked B. He produced those photographs with the particulars written on each. He had also made some composite photographs showing the two prisoners dressed as the witnesses, Brodie and Stanton, had described them. The bodies in those photographs were the bodies of Miss Winifred Blake and Mr. Robert Anstey, K. C., respectively. On these bodies the heads of the prisoners had been printed; and here Polton described the method of substitution in detail. The purpose

⁵ Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

of the photographs was to show that a photograph could be produced with the head of one person and the body of another. He also deposed to having seen and taken possession of two photographs, one of each of the two prisoners, which he found in the bedroom and which he now produced and passed to the judge. And this completed his evidence.

Thorndyke now called the prisoner, Bland, and having elicited from him a sworn denial of the charge, proceeded to examine him respecting the profits from his three picture theatres; which, it appeared, amount to over six thousand pounds per annum.

"In the event of your death, what becomes of this valuable property?"

"If my wife had been alive it would have gone to her, but as she is dead, it goes to my partner and manager, Mr. Julius Wicks."

"In whose custody was the house at Ditton while Miss Annesley was in France?"

"In mine. The keys were in my possession."

"Were the keys ever out of your possession?"

"Only for one day. My partner, Mr. Wicks, asked to be allowed to use the boat for a trip on the river and to take a meal in the house. So lent him the keys, which he returned the next day."

After a short cross-examination, Bland returned to the dock and was succeeded by Miss Annesley, who, having given a sworn denial of the charge, described her movements in France and in London about the period of the crime. She also described, in answer to a question, the circumstances under which she had lost her hair.

"Can you remember the date on which this accident happened?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes. It was on the thirtieth of March. I made a note of the date, so that I could see how long my hair took to grow."

As Thorndyke sat down, the counsel for the prosecution rose and made a somewhat searching cross-examination, but without in any way shaking the prisoner's evidence. When this was concluded and Miss Annesley had returned to the dock, Thorndyke rose to address the court for the defence.

"I shall not occupy your time, gentlemen," he began, "by examining the whole mass of evidence nor by arguing the question of motive. The guilt or innocence of the prisoners turns on the accuracy or inaccuracy of the evidence of the two witnesses, Brodie and Stanton; and to the examination of that evidence I shall confine myself.

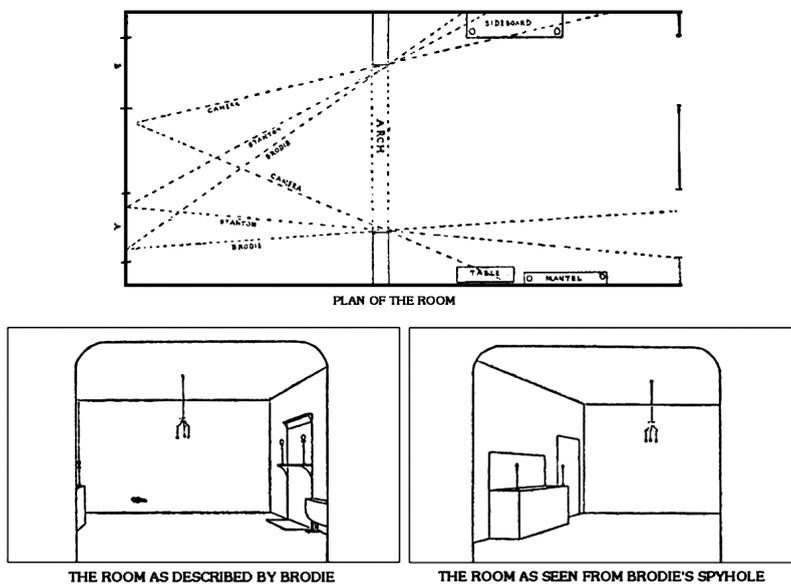
"Now that evidence, as you may have noticed, presents some remarkable discrepancies. In the first place, both witnesses describe what they

saw in identical terms. They saw exactly the same things in exactly the same relative positions. But this is a physical impossibility, if they were really looking into a room; for they were looking in from different points of view; through different holes, which were two feet six inches apart. But there is another much more striking discrepancy. Both these men have described, most intelligently, fully and clearly, a number of objects in that room which were totally invisible to both of them; and they have described as only partly visible other objects which were in full view. Both witnesses, for instance, have described the mantelpiece with its two standard lamps and a table with twisted legs on the near side of it; and both saw one corner only of the sideboard. But if you look at the architect's plan and test it with a straight-edge, you will see that neither the mantelpiece nor the table could possibly be seen by either. The whole of that side of the room was hidden from them by the jamb of the arch. While as to the sideboard, the whole of it, with its two standards, was visible to Brodie, and to Stanton the whole of it excepting a small portion of the near side. But further, if you lay the straight-edge on the point marked C and test it against the sides of the arch, you will see that a person standing at that spot would get the exact view described by both the witnesses. I pass round duplicate plans with pencil lines ruled on them; but in case you find any difficulty in following the plans, I have put in the photographs of the room taken by Polton. The first photograph was taken through the hole used by Brodie, and shows exactly what he would have seen on looking through that hole; and you see that it agrees completely with the plan but disagrees totally with his description. The second photograph shows what was visible to Stanton; and the third photograph, taken from the point marked C, shows exactly the view described by both the witnesses, but which neither of them could possibly have seen under the circumstances stated.

"Now what is the explanation of these extraordinary discrepancies? No one, I suppose, doubts the honesty of these witnesses. I certainly do not. I have no doubt whatever that they were telling the truth to the best of their belief. Yet they have stated that they saw things which it is physically impossible that they could have seen. How can these amazing contradictions be reconciled?"

He paused, and in the breathless silence, I noticed that the judge was gazing at him with an expression of intense expectancy; an expression that was reflected on the jury and indeed on every person present.

"Well, gentlemen," he resumed, "there is one explanation which completely reconciles these contradictions; and that explanation also reconciles all the other strange contradictions and discrepancies which you



may have noticed. If we assume that these two men, instead of looking through an arch into a room, as they believed, were really looking at a moving picture thrown on a screen stretched across the arch, all the contradictions vanish. Everything becomes perfectly plain, consistent and understandable.

“Thus both men, from two different points of view, saw exactly the same scene; naturally, if they were both looking at the same picture, but otherwise quite impossible. Again, both men, from the point A, saw a view which was visible only from the point C. Perfectly natural if they were both looking at a picture taken from the point C; for a picture is the same picture from whatever point of view it is seen. But otherwise a physical impossibility.

“You may object that these men would have seen the difference between a picture and a real room. Perhaps they would, even in that dim light—if they had looked at the scene with both eyes. But each man was looking with only one eye—through a small hole. Now it requires the use of both eyes to distinguish between a solid object and a flat picture. To a one-eyed man there is no difference—which is probably the reason that one-eyed artists are such accurate draughtsmen—they see the world around them as a flat picture, just as they draw it, whereas a two-eyed artist has to turn the solid into the flat. For the same reason, if you look at a picture with one eye shut it tends to look solid, really because the frame

and the solid objects around it have gone flat. So that, if this picture was coloured, as it must have been, it would have been indistinguishable, to these one-eyed observers, from the solid reality.

“Then, let us see how the other contradictions disappear. There is the appearance of the prisoner Annesley. She was seen—on or after the eighteenth of May—with her long hair coiled on the top of her head. But at that date her hair was quite short. You have heard the evidence and you have the photograph taken on the twenty-third of April showing her with short hair, like a man’s. Here is a contradiction which vanishes at once if you realise that these men were not looking at Miss Annesley at all, but at a photograph of her taken more than a year previously.

“And everything agrees with this assumption. The appearance of Miss Annesley has been declared by the witnesses to be identical with that photograph—a copy of which was in the house and could have been copied by anyone who had access to the house. Her figure was perfectly stationary. She appeared suddenly in the arch and then disappeared; she was not seen to come or to go. And the light kept coming and going, with intervals of darkness which are inexplicable, but that exactly fitted these appearances and disappearances. Then the figure was well lighted, though the room was nearly dark. Of course it was well lighted. It had to be recognised. And of course the rest of the room was dimly lighted, because the film-actors in the background had to be unrecognised.

“Then there is the extraordinary dress; the striped pinafore with the great white collar and the painter’s blouse worn by Bland. Why this ridiculous masquerade? Its purpose is obvious. It was to make these observers believe that the portraits in the arch—which they mistook for real people—were the same persons as the film-actors in the background, whose features they could not distinguish. And Mr. Polton has shown us how the clothing of the portraits was managed.

“Then there is the lighting of the room. How was it lighted? None of the electric lamps was alight. But—a piece of a carbon pencil from an arc lamp, such as kinematographers use, has been found near the point C, from which spot the picture would have been taken and exhibited; and the electric light meter showed, about this date, an unaccountable leakage of current such as would be explained by the use of an arc lamp.

“Then the evidence of the witnesses shows the hole in the floor in the wrong place. Of course it could not have been a real hole, for the gas and electric mains were just underneath. It was probably an oblong of black paper. But why was it in the wrong place? The explanation, I suggest,

is that the picture was taken before the murder (and probably shown before the murder, too); that the spot shown was the one in which it was intended to bury the body, but that when the floor was taken up after the murder, the mains were found underneath and a new spot had to be chosen.

“Finally—as to the discrepancies—what has become of the third spectator? The mysterious man who came to the gate and called in these two men from the lane—along which they were known to pass every day at about the same time? Who is this mysterious individual? And where is he? Can we give him a name? Can we say that he is at this moment in this court, sitting amongst the spectators, listening to the pleadings in defence of his innocent victims, the prisoners who stand at the bar on their deliverance? I affirm, gentlemen, that we can. And more than that it is not permitted to me to say.”

He paused, and a strange, impressive hush fell on the court. Men and women furtively looked about them; the jury stared openly into the body of the court, and the judge, looking up from his notes, cast a searching glance among the spectators. Suddenly my eye lighted on Mr. Wicks and his fiancée. The man was wiping away the sweat that streamed down his ashen, ghastly face; the woman had rested her head in her hands, and was trembling as if in an ague-fit.

I was not the only observer. One after another—spectators, ushers, jurymen, counsel, judge—noticed the terror-stricken pair, until every eye in the court was turned on them. And the silence that fell on the place was like the silence of the grave.

It was a dramatic moment. The air was electric; the crowded court tense with emotion. And Thorndyke, looking, with his commanding figure and severe impassive face, like a personification of Fate and Justices stood awhile motionless and silent, letting emotion set the coping-stone on reason.

At length he resumed his address. “Before concluding,” he began, “I have to say a few words on another aspect of the case. The learned counsel for the prosecution, referring to the motive for this crime, has suggested a desire on the part of the prisoners to remove the obstacle to their marriage. But it has been given in evidence that there are other persons who had a yet stronger and more definite motive for getting rid of the deceased Lucy Bland. You have heard that in the event of Bland’s death, his partner, Julius Wicks, stood to inherit property of the value of six thousand pounds per annum, provided that Bland’s wife was already dead. Now, the murder of Lucy Bland has fulfilled one of the conditions

for the devolution of this property; and if you should convict and his lordship should sentence the prisoner, Bland, then his death on the gallows would fulfil the other condition and this great property would pass to his partner, Julius Wicks—This is a material point; as is also the fact that Wicks is, as you have heard, an expert film-producer and cinema operator; that he has been proved to have had access to the house at Ditton, and that he is engaged to a film-actress.

“In conclusion, I submit that the evidence of Brodie and Stanton makes it certain that they were looking at a moving picture, and that all the other evidence confirms that certainty. But the evidence of this moving picture is the evidence of a conspiracy to throw suspicion on the prisoners. But a conspiracy implies conspirators. And there can be no doubt that those conspirators were the actual murderers of Lucy Bland. But if this be so, and I affirm that there can be no possible doubt that it is so, then it follows that the prisoners are innocent of the crime with which they are charged, and I accordingly ask you for a verdict of ‘Not Guilty.’”

As Thorndyke sat down a faint hum arose in the court; but still all eyes were turned towards Wicks and Eugenia Kropp. A moment later the pair rose and walked unsteadily towards the door. But here, I noticed, Superintendent Miller had suddenly appeared and stood at the portal with a uniformed constable. As Wicks and Miss Kropp reached the door, I saw the constable shake his head. With, or without authority, he was refusing to let them leave the court. There was a brief pause. Suddenly there broke out a confused uproar; a scuffle, a loud shriek, the report of a pistol and the shattering of glass; and then I saw Miller grasping the man’s wrists and pinning him to the wall, while the shrieking woman struggled with the constable to get to the door.

After the removal of the disturbers—in custody—events moved swiftly. The Crown counsel’s reply was brief and colourless, practically abandoning the charge, while the judge’s summing-up was a mere précis of Thorndyke’s argument with a plain direction for an acquittal. But nothing more was needed; for the jury had so clearly made up their minds that the clerk had hardly uttered his challenge when the foreman replied with the verdict of “Not Guilty.” A minute later, when the applause had subsided and after brief congratulations by the judge, the prisoners came down from the dock, into the court, moist-eyed but smiling, to wring Thorndyke’s hands and thank him for this wonderful deliverance.

“Yes,” agreed Mayfield—himself disposed furtively to wipe his eyes—

“that is the word. It was wonderful. And yet it was all so obvious—when you knew.”

A Sower of Pestilence

The affectionate relations that existed between Thorndyke and his devoted follower, Polton, were probably due, at least in part, to certain similarities in their characters. Polton was an accomplished and versatile craftsman, a man who could do anything, and do it well; and Thorndyke has often said that if he had not been a man of science, he would, by choice, have been a skilled craftsman. Even as things were, he was a masterly manipulator of all instruments of research, and a good enough workman to devise new appliances and processes and to collaborate with his assistant carrying them out.

Such a collaboration was taking place when the present case opened. It had occurred to Thorndyke that lithography might be usefully applied to medico-legal research, and on this particular morning he and Polton were experimenting in the art of printing from the stone. In the midst of their labours the bell from our chambers below was heard to ring, and Polton, reluctantly laying down the inking roller and wiping his hands on the southern aspect of his trousers, departed to open the door.

“It’s a Mr. Rabbage,” he reported on his return. “Says he has an appointment with you, sir.”

“So he has,” said Thorndyke. “And, as I understand that he is going to offer us a profound mystery for solution, you had better come down with me, Jervis, and hear what he has to say.”

Mr. Rabbage turned out to be an elderly gentleman who, as we entered, peered at us through a pair of deep, concave spectacles and greeted us “with a smile that was child like and bland.” Thorndyke looked him over and adroitly brought him to the point.

“Yes,” said Mr. Rabbage, “it is really a most mysterious affair that has brought me here. I have already laid it before a very talented detective officer whom I know slightly—a Mr. Badger; but he frankly admitted that it was beyond him and strongly advised me to consult you.”

“Inspector Badger was kind enough to pay me a very handsome compliment,” said Thorndyke.

“Yes. He said that you would certainly be able to solve this mystery without any difficulty. So here I am. And perhaps I had better explain who I am, in case you don’t happen to know my name. I am the director of the St. Francis Home of Rest for aged, invalid and destitute cats: an institution where these deserving animals are enabled to convert the autumn of their troubled lives into a sort of Indian summer of comfort and repose. The home is, I may say, my own venture. I support it out of my own means. But I am open to receive contributions; and to that end there is secured to the garden railings a large box with a wide slit and an inscription inviting donations of money, of articles of value, or of food or delicacies for the inmates.”

“And do you get much?” I asked.

“Of money,” he replied, “very little. Of articles of value, none at all. As to gifts of food, they are numerous, but they often display a strange ignorance of the habits of the domestic cat. Such things, for instance, as pickles and banana-skins, though doubtless kindly meant, are quite unsuitable as diet. But the most singular donation that I have ever received was that which I found in the box the day before yesterday. There were a number of articles, but all apparently from the same donor; and their character was so mysterious that I showed them to Mr. Badger, as I have told you, who was as puzzled as I was and referred me to you. The collection comprised three ladies’ purses, a morocco-leather wallet and a small aluminium case. I have brought them with me to show you.”

“What did the purses contain?” Thorndyke asked.

“Nothing,” replied Mr. Rabbage, gazing at us with wide-open eyes.

“They were perfectly empty. That is the astonishing circumstance.”

“And the leather wallet?”

“Empty, too, excepting for a few odd papers.”

“And the aluminium case?”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mr. Rabbage, “that was the most amazing of all. It contained a number of glass tubes! and those tubes contained—now, what do you suppose?” He paused impressively, and then, as neither of us offered a suggestion, he answered his own question. “Fleas and lice! Yes, actually! Fleas and lice! Isn’t that an extraordinary donation?”

“It is certainly,” Thorndyke agreed. “Anyone might have known that, with a houseful of cats, you could produce your own fleas.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Rabbage. “That is what instantly occurred to me, and also, I may say, to Mr. Badger. But let me show you the things.”

He produced from a hand-bag and spread out on the table a collection of articles which were, evidently, the “husks” of the gleanings of some facetious pickpocket, to whom Mr. Rabbage’s donation-box must have appeared as a perfect God-send. Thorndyke picked up the purses, one after the other, and having glanced at their empty interiors, put them aside. The letter-wallet he looked through more attentively, but without disturbing its contents, and then he took up and opened the aluminium case. This certainly was a rather mysterious affair. It opened like a cigarette case. One side was fitted with six glass specimen-tubes, each provided with a well-fitting parchment cap, perforated with a number of needle-holes; and of the six tubes, four contained fleas—about a dozen in each tube—some of which were dead, but others still alive, and the remaining two lice, all of which were dead. In the opposite side of the case, secured with a catch, was a thin celluloid note-tablet on which some numbers had been written in pencil.

“Well,” said Mr. Rabbage, when the examination was finished, “can you offer any solution of the mystery?”

Thorndyke shook his head gravely. “Not offhand,” he replied. “This is a matter which will require careful consideration. Leave these things with me for further examination and I will let you know, in the course of a few days, what conclusion we arrive at.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Rabbage, rising and holding out his hand. “You have my address, I think.”

He glanced at his watch, snatched up his hand-bag and darted to the door; and a moment later we heard him bustling down the stairs in the hurried, strenuous manner that is characteristic of persons who spend most of their lives doing nothing.

“I’m surprised at you, Thorndyke,” I said when he had gone, “encouraging that ass, Badger, in his silly practical jokes. Why didn’t you tell this old nincompoop that he had just got a pick-pocket’s leavings and have done with it?”

“For the reason, my learned brother, that I haven’t done with it. I am a little curious as to whose pocket has been picked, and what that person was doing with a collection of fleas and lice.”

“I don’t see that it is any business of yours,” said I. “And as to the vermin, I should suggest that the owner of the case is an entomologist who specialises in epizoa. Probably he is collecting varieties and races.”

“And how,” asked Thorndyke, opening the case and handing it to me, “does my learned friend account for the faint scent of aniseed that exhales from this collection?”

"I don't account for it at all," said I. "It is a nasty smell. I noticed it when you first opened the case. I can only suppose that the flea-merchant likes it, or thinks that the fleas do."

"The latter seems the more probable," said Thorndyke, "for you notice that the odour seems to principally from the parchment caps of the four tubes that contain fleas. The caps of the louse tubes don't seem to be scented. And now let us have a little closer look at the letter-wallet."

He opened the wallet and took out its contents, which were unilluminating enough. Apparently it had been gutted by the pickpocket and only the manifestly valueless articles left. One or two bills, recording purchases at shops, a time-table, a brief letter in French, without its envelope and bearing neither address, date, nor signature, and a set of small maps mounted on thin card: this was the whole collection, and not one of the articles appeared to furnish the slightest clue to the identity of the owner.

Thorndyke looked at the letter curiously and read it aloud.

"It is just a little singular," he remarked, "that this note should be addressed to nobody by name, should bear neither address, date, nor signature, and should have had its envelope removed. There is almost an appearance of avoiding the means of identification. Yet the matter is simple and innocent enough: just an appointment to meet at the Mile End Picture Palace. But these maps are more interesting; in fact, they are quite curious."

He took them out of the wallet—lifting them carefully by the edges, I noticed—and laid them out on the table. There were seven cards, and each had a map, or rather a section, pasted on both sides. The sections had been cut out of a three inches map⁶ of London, and as each card was three inches by four and a half, each section represented an area of one mile by a mile and a half. They had been very carefully prepared neatly stuck on the cards and varnished, and every section bore a distinguishing letter. But the most curious feature was a number of small circles drawn in pencil on various parts of the maps, each circle enclosing a number.

"What do you make of those circles, Thorndyke?" I asked.

"One can only make a speculative hypothesis," he replied. "I am disposed to associate them with the fleas and lice. You notice that the maps all represent the most squalid parts of East London—Spitalfields,

⁶ Eine Karte, bei der drei 'inches' eine Meile repräsentieren, d. i. ein Maßstab von 1 : 21120. B. L.

Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, and so forth, where the material would be plentiful; and you also notice that the celluloid tablet in the insect case bears a number of pencilled jottings that might refer to these maps. Here, for instance, is a note, 'B 21 a + b—,' and you observe that each entry has an a and a b with either a plus or a minus sign. Now, if we assume that a means fleas and b lice, or vice versa, the maps and the notes together might form a record of collections or experiments with a geographical basis."

"They might," I agreed, "but there isn't a particle of evidence that they do. It is a most fantastic hypothesis. We don't know, and we have no reason to suppose, that the insect-case and the wallet were the property of the same person. And we have no means of finding out whether they were or were not."

"There I think you do us an injustice, Jervis," said he. "Are we not lithographers?"

"I don't see where the lithography comes in," said I.

"Then you ought to. This is a test case. These maps are varnished, and are thus virtually lithographic transfer paper; and the celluloid tablet also has a non-absorbent surface. Now, if you handle transfer paper carelessly when drawing on it, you are apt to find, when you have transferred to the stone, that your finger prints ink up, as well as the drawing. So it is possible that if we put these maps and the note-tablet on the stone, we may be able to ink up the prints of the fingers that have handled them and so prove whether they were or were not the same fingers."

"That would be interesting as an experiment," said I, "though I don't see that it matters two straws whether they were the same or not."

"Probably it doesn't," he replied, "though it may. But we have a new method and we may as well try it."

We took the things up to the laboratory and explained the problem to Polton, who entered into the inquiry with enthusiasm. Producing from a cupboard a fresh stone, he picked the maps out of the wallet one by one (with a pair of watchmaker's tweezers) and fell to work forthwith on the task of transferring the invisible—and possibly non-existent—fingerprints from the maps and the note-tablet to the stone. I watched him go through the various processes in his neat, careful, dexterous fashion and hoped that all his trouble would not be in vain. Nor was it; for when he began cautiously ink up the stone, it was evident that something was there, though it was not so evident what that something was. Presently, however, the vague markings took more definite shape, and

now could be recognised eight rather confused masses of finger-prints, badly smeared, some incomplete, and all mixed up and superimposed so as to make the identification of any one print almost an impossibility.

Thorndyke looked them over dubiously. "It is a dreadful muddle," said he, "but I think we can pick out the prints well enough for identification if that should be necessary. Which of these is the notes tablet, Polton?"

"The one in the right-hand top corner, sir," was the reply.

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "then that answers our question. Confused as the impressions are, you can see quite plainly that the left thumb is the same thumb as that on the maps."

"Yes," I agreed after making the comparison, "there is not much doubt that they are the same. And now the question is, what about it?"

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "that is the question." And with this we retired from the laboratory, leaving Polton joyfully pulling off proofs.

During the next few days I had a vague impression that my colleague was working at this case, though with what object I could not imagine. Mr. Rabbage's problem was too absurd to take seriously, and Thorndyke was beyond working out cases, as he used to at one time, for the sake of mere experience. However, a day or two later, a genuine case turned up and occupied our attention to some purpose.

It was about six in the evening when Mr. Nicholas Balcombe called on us by appointment, and proceeded, in a business-like fashion, to state his case.

"I was advised by my friend Stalker, of the *GRIFFIN LIFE ASSURANCE OFFICE*, to consult you," said he. "Stalker tells me that you have got him out of endless difficulties, and I am hoping that you will be able to help me out of mine, though they are not so clearly within your province as Stalker's. But you will know about that better than I do.

"I am the manager of Rutherford's Bank—the Cornhill Branch—and I have just had a very alarming experience. The day before yesterday, about three in the afternoon, a deed-box was handed in with a note from one of our customers—Mr. Pilcher, the solicitor, of Pilcher, Markham and Sudburys—asking us to deposit it in our strong-room and give the bearer a receipt for it. Of course this was done, in the ordinary way of business; but there was one exceptional circumstance that turns out to have been, as it would appear, providential. Owing to the increase of business our strong-room had become insufficient for our needs, and we have lately had a second one built on the most modern lines and perfectly fire-proof. This had not been taken into use when Pilcher's

deed-box arrived, but as the old room was very full, I opened the new room and saw the deed-box deposited in it.

“Well, nothing happened up to the time that I left the bank, but about two o’clock in the morning the night watchman noticed a smell of burning, and on investigating, located the smell as apparently proceeding from the door of the new strong-room. He at once reported to the senior clerk, whose turn it was to sleep on the premises, and the latter at once telephoned to the police station. In a few minutes a police officer arrived with a couple of firemen and a hand-extinguisher. The clerk took them down to the strong-room and unlocked the door. As soon as it was opened, a volume of smoke and fumes burst out, and then they saw the deed-box—or rather the distorted remains of it—lying on the floor. The police took possession of what was left, but a very cursory examination on the spot showed that the box was, in effect, an incendiary bomb, with a slow time fuse or some similar arrangement.”

“Was any damage done?” Thorndyke asked.

“Mercifully, no,” replied Mr. Balcombe. “But just think of what might have happened! If I had put the box in the old strong-room it is certain that thousands of pounds’ worth of valuable property would have been destroyed. Or again, if instead of an incendiary bomb the box had contained a high explosive, the whole building would probably have been blown to pieces.”

“What explanation does Pilcher give?”

“A very simple one. He knows nothing about it. The note was a forgery; and on the firm’s headed paper, or a perfect imitation of it. And mind you,” Mr. Balcombe continued, “my experience is not a solitary one. I have made private inquiries of other bank managers, and I find that several of them have been subjected to similar outrages, some with serious results. And probably there are more. They don’t talk about these things, you know. Then there are those fires: the great timber fire at Stepney, and those big warehouse fires near the London Docks; there is something queer about them. It looks as if some gang was at work for purposes of pure mischief and destruction.”

“You have consulted the police, of course?”

“Yes. And they know something, I feel sure. But they are extremely reticent; so I suppose they don’t know enough. At any rate, I should like you to investigate the case independently and so would my directors. The position is most alarming.”

“Could you let me see Pilcher’s letter?” Thorndyke asked.

"I have brought it with me," said Balcombe. "Thought you would probably want to examine it. I will leave it with you; and if we can give you any other information or assistance, we shall be only too glad."

"Was the box brought by hand?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes," replied Balcombe, "but I didn't see the bearer. I can get you a description from the man who received the package, if that would be any use."

"We may as well have it," said Thorndyke, "and the name and address of the person giving it, in case he is wanted as a witness."

"You shall have it," said Balcombe, rising and picking up his hat. "I will see to it myself. And you will let me know, in due course, if any information comes to hand?"

Thorndyke gave the required promise and our client took his leave.

"Well," I said with a laugh, as the brisk footsteps died away on the stairs, "you have had a very handsome compliment paid you. Our friend seems to think that you are one of those master craftsmen who can make bricks, not only without straw, but without clay. There's absolutely nothing to go on."

"It is certainly rather in the air," Thorndyke agreed. "There is this letter and the description of the man who left the packet, when we get it, and neither of them is likely to help us much."

He looked over the letter and its envelope, held the former up to the light and then handed them to me.

"We ought to find out whether this is Pilcher's own paper or an imitation," said I, when I had examined the letter and envelope without finding anything in the least degree distinctive or characteristic; "because, if it is their paper, the unknown man must have had some sort of connection with their establishment or staff."

"There must have been some sort of connection in any case," said Thorndyke. "Even an imitation implies possession of an original. But you are quite right. It is a line of inquiry, and practically the only one that offers."

The inquiry was made on the following day, and the fact clearly established that the paper was Pitcher's paper, but the ink was not their ink. The handwriting appeared to be disguised, and no one connected with the firm was able to recognise it. The staff, even to the caretaker, were all eminently respectable and beyond suspicion of being implicated in an affair of the kind.

"But after all," said Mr. Pitcher, "there are a hundred ways in which a sheet of paper may go astray if anyone wants it: at the printer's, the

stationer's, or even in this office—for the paper is always in the letter-rack on the table.”

Thus our only clue—if so it could be called—came to an end, and I waited with some curiosity to see what Thorndyke would do next. But so far as I could see, he did nothing, nor did he make any reference to this obscure case during the next few days. We had a good deal of other work on hand, and I assumed that this fully occupied his attention.

One evening, about a week later, he made the first reference to the case and a very mysterious communication it seemed to me.

“I have projected a little expedition for to-morrow,” said he. “I am proposing to spend the day, or part of it, in the pastoral region of Bethnal Green.”

“In connection with any of our cases?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied. “Balcombe's. I have been making some cautious inquiries with Polton's assistance, principally among hawkers and coffee-shop keepers, and I think I have struck a promising track.”

“What kind of inquiries have you been making?” said I.

“I have been looking for a man, or men, engaged in giving street entertainments. That is what our data seemed to suggest, among other possibilities.”

“Our data!” I exclaimed. “I didn't know we had any.”

“We had Balcombe's account of the attempt to burn the bank. That gave us some hint as to the kind of man to look for. And there were certain other data, which my learned friend may recall.”

“I don't recall anything suggesting a street entertainer,” said I.

“Not directly,” he replied. “It was one of several hypotheses, but it is probably the correct one, as I have heard of such a person as I had assumed, and have ascertained where he is likely to be found on certain days. To-morrow I propose to go over his beat in the hope of getting a glimpse of him. If you think of coming with me, I may remind you that it is not a dressy neighbourhood.”

On the following morning we set forth about ten o'clock, and as raiment which is inconspicuous at Bethnal Green may be rather noticeable in the Temple, we slipped out by the Tudor Street gate and made our way to Blackfriars Station. In place of the usual “research-case,” I noticed that Thorndyke was carrying a somewhat shabby wood-fibre attaché case, and that he had no walking-stick. We got out at Aldgate and presently struck up Vallance Street in the direction of Bethnal Green; and by the brisk pace and the direct route adopted, I judged that Thorndyke had a definite objective. However, when we entered the maze of small streets

adjoining the Bethnal Green Road, our pace was reduced to a saunter, and at corners and crossroads Thorndyke halted from time to time to look along the streets; and occasionally he referred to a card which he produced from his pocket, on which were written the names of streets and days of the week.

A couple of hours passed in this apparently aimless perambulation of the back streets.

"It doesn't look as if you were going to have much luck," I remarked, suppressing a yawn. "And I am not sure that we are not, in our turn, being 'spotted'. I have noted a man—a small, shabby-looking fellow, apparently keeping us in view from a distance, though I don't see him at the moment."

"It is quite likely," said Thorndyke. "This is a shady neighbourhood, and any native could see that we don't belong to it. Good morning! Taking a little fresh air?"

The latter question was addressed to a man who was standing at the door of a small coffee-shop, having apparently come to the surface for a "breather."

"Dunno about fresh," was the reply, "but it's the best there is. By the by, I saw one of them blokes what I was a-tellin' you about go by just now. Foreigner with the rats. If you want to see him give a show, I expect you'll find him in that bit of waste ground off Bolter's Rents."

"Bolter's Rents?" Thorndyke repeated. "Is that a turning out of Salcombe Street?"

"Quite right," was the reply. "Half-way up on the right-hand side."

Thanking our informant, Thorndyke strode off up the street, and as we turned the next corner I glanced back. At the moment, the small man whom I had noticed before stepped out of a doorway and came after us at a pace suggesting anxiety not to lose sight of us.

Bolter's Rents turned out to be a wide paved alley, one side of which opened into a patch of waste ground where a number of old houses had been demolished. This space had an unspeakably squalid appearance; for not only had the debris of the demolished houses been left in unsavoury heaps, but the place had evidently been adopted by the neighbourhood as a general dumping-ground for household refuse. The earth was strewn with vegetable, and even animal, leavings; flies and blue-bottles hummed around and settled in hundreds on the garbage, and the air was pervaded by an odour like that of an old-fashioned brick dust-bin.

But in spite of these trifling disadvantages, a considerable crowd had collected, mainly composed of women and children; and at the centre of the crowd a man was giving an entertainment with a troupe of performing rats. We had sauntered slowly up the "Rents" and now halted to look on. At the moment, a white rat was climbing a pole at the top of which a little flag was stuck in a socket. We watched him rapidly climb the pole, seize the flagstaff in his teeth, lift it out of the socket, climb down the pole and deliver the flag to his master. Then a little carriage was produced and the rat harnessed into it, another white rat being dressed in a cloak and placed in the seat, and the latter—introduced to the audience as Lady Murphy—was taken for a drive round the stage.

While the entertainment was proceeding I inspected the establishment and its owner. The stage was composed of light hinged boards opened out on a small four-wheeled hand-cart, apparently home-made. At one end was a largish cage, divided by a wire partition into two parts, one of which contained a number of white and piebald rats, while the inmates of the other compartment were all wild rats; but not, I noted, the common brown or Norway rat, but the old-fashioned British black rat. I remarked upon the circumstance to Thorndyke.

"Yes," he said, "they were probably caught locally. The sewers here will be inhabited by brown rats, but the houses, in an old neighbourhood like this, will be infested principally by the black rat. What do you make of the exhibitor?"

I had already noticed him, and now unobtrusively examined him again. He was a medium-sized man with a sallow complexion, dark, restless eyes—which frequently wandered in our direction—a crop of stiff, bushy, upstanding hair—he wore no hat—and a ragged beard.

"A Slav of some kind, I should think," was my reply; "a Russian, or perhaps a Lett. But that beard is not perfectly convincing."

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "but it is a good make up. Perhaps we had better move on now; we have a deputy, you observe."

As he spoke, the small man whom I had observed following us strolled up the Rents; and as he drew nearer, revealed to my astonished gaze no less a person than our ingenious laboratory assistant, Polton. Strangely altered, indeed, was our usually neat and spruce artificer with his seedy clothing and grubby hands; but as he sauntered up, profoundly unaware of our existence, a faint reminiscence of the familiar crinkly smile stole across his face.

We were just moving off when a chorus of shrieks mingled with laughter arose from the spectators, who hastily scattered right and left, and I

had a momentary glimpse of a big black rat bounding across the space, to disappear into one of the many heaps of debris. It seemed that the exhibitor had just opened the cage to take out a black rat when one of the waiting performers—presumably a new recruit—had seized the opportunity to spring out and escape.

“Well,” a grinning woman remarked to me, genially, “there’s plenty more where that one came from. You should see this place on a moonlight night! Fair alive with ’em it is.”

We sauntered up the Rents and along the cross street at the top; and as we went, I reflected on the very singular inquiry in which Thorndyke seemed to be engaged. The rat-tamer’s appearance was suspicious. He didn’t quite look the part, and his beard was almost certainly a make-up—and a skilful one, too, for it was no mere “property” beard; and the restless, furtive eyes, and a certain suppressed excitement in his bearing, hinted at something more than met the eye. But if this was Mr. Balcombe’s incendiary, how had Thorndyke arrived at his identity, and, above all, by what process of reasoning had he contrived to associate the bank outrage with performing rats? That he had done so, his systematic procedure made quite clear. But how? It had seemed to me that we had not a single fact on which to start an investigation.

We had walked the length of the cross street, and had halted before turning, when a troop of children emerged from the Rents. Then came the exhibitor, towing his cart, with the cage shrouded in a cloth, then more children, and finally, at a little distance, Polton, slouching along idly but keeping the cart in view.

“I think,” said Thorndyke, “it would be instructive, as a study in urban sanitation, to have a look round the scene of the late exhibition.”

We retraced our steps down Bolter’s Rents, now practically deserted, and wandered around the patch of waste land and in among the piles of bricks and rotting timber where the houses had been pulled down.

“Your lady friend was right,” said Thorndyke. “This is a perfect Paradise for rats. Convenient residences among the ruins and unlimited provisions to be had for the mere picking up.”

“Apparently you were right, too,” said I, “as to the species inhabiting these eligible premises. That seems to be a black rat,” and I pointed to a deceased specimen that lay near the entrance to a burrow.

Thorndyke stooped over the little corpse, and after a brief inspection, drew a glove on his right hand.

“Yes,” he said, “this is a typical specimen of *Mus rattus*, though it is unusually light in colour. I think it will be worth taking away to examine

at our leisure.”

Glancing round to see that we were unobserved, he opened his attaché case and took from it a largish tin canister and removed the lid—which, I noted, was anointed at the joint with vaseline. Stooping, he picked up the dead rat by the tail with his gloved fingers dropped it into the canister, clapped on the lid, and replaced it in the attache case. Then he pulled off the glove and threw it on a rubbish heap.

“You are mighty particular,” said I.

“A dead rat is a dirty thing,” said he, “and it was only an old glove.”

On our way home I made various cautious attempt to extract from Thorndyke some hint as to the purpose of his investigation and his mode of procedure. But I could extract nothing from him beyond certain generalities.

“When a man,” said he, “introduces an incendiary bomb into the strong-room of a bank, we may reasonably inquire as to his motives. And when we have reached the fairly obvious conclusion as to what those motives must be, we may ask ourselves what kind of conduct such motives will probably generate; that is, what sort of activities will be likely to be associated with such motives and with the appropriate state of mind. And when we have decided on that, too, we may look for a person engaged in those activities; and if we find such a person we may consider that we have a *prima facie* case. The rest is a matter of verification.”

“That is all very well, Thorndyke,” I objected, “but if I find a man trying to set fire to a bank, I don’t immediately infer that his customary occupation is exhibiting performing rats in a back street of Bethnal Green.”

Thorndyke laughed quietly. “My learned friend’s observation is perfectly just. It is not a universal rule. But we are dealing with a specific case in which certain other facts are known to us. Still, the connection, if there is one, has yet to be established. This exhibitor may turn out not to be Balcombe’s man after all.”

“And if he is not?”

“I think we shall want him all the same; but I shall know better in a couple of hours’ time.”

What transpired during those two hours I did not discover at the time, for I had an engagement to dine with some legal friends and must need hurry away as soon as I had purified myself from the effects of our travel in the unclean East. When I returned to our chambers, about half-past ten, I found Thorndyke seated in his easy chair immersed in a treatise on old musical instruments. Apparently he had finished with the case.

“How did Polton get on?” I asked.

“Admirably,” replied Thorndyke. “He shadowed our entertaining friend from Bethnal Green to a by-street in Ratcliff, where he apparently resides. But he did more than that. We had made up a little book of a dozen leaves of transfer paper in which I wrote in French some infallible rules for taming rats. Just as the man was going into his house, Polton accosted him and asked him for an expert opinion on these directions. The foreign gentleman was at first impatient and huffy, but when he had glanced at the book, he became interested, and a good deal amused, and finally read the whole set of rules through attentively. Then he handed the book back to Polton and recommended him to follow the rules carefully, offering to supply him with a few rats to experiment on, an offer which Polton asked him to hold over for a day or two.

“As soon as he got home, Polton dismembered the book and put the leaves down on the stone, with this result.”

He took from his pocket-book a number of small pieces of paper, each of which was marked more or less distinctly with lithographed reproductions of fingerprints, and laid them on the table. I looked through them attentively, and with a faint sense of familiarity.

“Isn’t that left thumb,” said I, “rather similar to the print on the maps from Mr. Rabbage’s letter wallet?”

“It is identical,” he replied. “Here are the proofs of the map-prints and the note-tablet. If you compare them you can see that not only the left thumb but the other prints are the same in all.”

Careful comparison showed that this was so.

“But,” I exclaimed, “I don’t understand this at all. These are the fingerprints of Mr. Rabbage’s mysterious entomologist. I thought you were looking for Balcombe’s man.”

“My impression,” he replied “is that they are the same person, though the evidence is far from conclusive. But we shall soon know. I have sworn an information against the foreign gent, and Miller has arranged to raid the house at Ratcliff early to-morrow and as it promises to be a highly interesting event, I propose to be present. Shall I have the pleasure of my learned friend’s company?”

“Most undoubtedly,” I replied, “though I am absolutely in the dark as to the meaning of the whole affair.”

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I recommend you to go over the history of both cases systematically in the interval.”

Six o’clock on the following morning found us in an empty house in Old Gravel Lane, Ratcliff, in company with Superintendent Miller and three stalwart plain clothes men, awaiting the report of a patrol. We

were all dressed in engineers' overalls, reeking with naphthalin. Our trousers were tucked into our socks, and socks and boots were thickly smeared with vaseline, as were our wrists, around which our sleeves were bound closely with tape. These preparations, together with an automatic pistol served out to each of us, gave me some faint inkling of the nature of the case, though it was still very confused in my mind.

About a quarter-past six a messenger arrived and reported that the house which was to be raided was open. Thereupon Miller and one of his men set forth, and the rest of us followed at short intervals. On arriving at the house, which was but a short distance from our rendezvous, we found a stolid plain-clothes man guarding the open door and a frowsy-looking woman, who carried a jug of milk, angrily demanding in very imperfect English to be allowed to pass into her house. Pushing past the protesting housekeeper, we entered the grimy passage, where Miller was just emerging from a ground-floor room.

"That is the woman's quarters," said he, "and the kitchen seems to be a sort of rat-menagerie. We'd better try the first-floor."

He led the way up the stairs, and when he reached the landing he tried the handle of the front room. Finding the door locked or bolted, he passed on to the back room and tried the door of that, with the same result. Then, holding up a warning finger, he proceeded to whistle a popular air in a fine, penetrating tone, and to perform a double shuffle on the bare floor. Almost immediately an angry voice was heard in the front room, and slippers padded quickly across the floor. Then a bolt was drawn noisily, the door flew open, and for an instant I had a view of the rat-show man, clothed in a suit of very soiled pyjamas. But it was only for an instant. Even as our eyes met, he tried to slam the door to, and failing—in consequence of an intruding constabulary foot—he sprang back, leaped over a bed and darted through a communicating doorway into the back room and shut and bolted the door.

"That's unfortunate," said Miller. "Now we're going to have trouble."

The superintendent was right. On the first attempt to force the door, a pistol-shot from within blew a hole in the top panel and made a notch in the ear of the would-be invader. The latter replied through the hole, and there followed a sort of snarl and the sound of a shattered bottle. Then, as the constable stood aside and shot after shot came from within, the door became studded with ragged holes. Meanwhile Miller, Thorn-dyke and I tiptoed out on the landing, and taking as long a run as was possible, flung ourselves, simultaneously on the back-room door. The weight of three large men was too much for the crazy woodwork. As

we fell on it together, there was a bursting crash, the hinges tore away, the door flew inwards, and we staggered into the room.

It was a narrow shave for some of us. Before we could recover our footing, the showman had turned with his pistol pointing straight at Miller's head. A bare instant before it exploded, Thorndyke, whose momentum had carried him half-way across the room, caught it with an upward snatch, and its report was followed by a harmless shower of plaster from the ceiling. Immediately our quarry changed his tactics. Leaving the pistol in Thorndyke's grasp, he darted across the room towards a work-bench on which stood a row of upright, cylindrical tins. He was in the act of reaching out for one of these when Thorndyke grasped his pyjamas between the shoulders and dragged him back, while Miller rushed forward and seized him. For a few moments there was a frantic and furious struggle, for the fellow fought with hands and feet and teeth with the ferocity of a wild cat, and, overpowered as he was, still strove to drag his captors towards the bench. Suddenly, once more, a pistol-shot rang out, and then all was still. By accident or design the struggling man had got hold of the pistol that Thorndyke still grasped and pressed the trigger, and the bullet had entered his own head just above the ear. "Pooh!" exclaimed Miller, rising and wiping his forehead, "that was a near one. If you hadn't stopped him, doctor, we'd all have gone up like rockets."

"You think those things are bombs, then?" said I.

"Think!" he repeated. "I removed two exactly like them from the General Post Office, and they turned out to be charged with T.N.T. And those square ones on the shelf are twin brothers of the one that went off in Rutherford's Bank."

As we were speaking, I happened to glance round at the doorway, and there, to my surprise, was the woman whom we had seen below, still holding the jug of milk and staring in with an expression of horror at the dead revolutionary. Thorndyke also observed her, and stepping across to where she stood, asked: "Can you tell me if there has been, or is now, anyone sick in this house?"

"Yes," the woman replied, without removing her eyes from the dead man. "Dere is a chentleman sick upstairs. I haf not seen him. He used to look after him," and she nodded to the dead body of the showman.

"I think we will go up and have a look at this sick gentleman," said Thorndyke. "You had better not come, Miller."

We started together up the stairs, and as we went I asked: "Do you suppose this is a case of plague?"

"No," he replied. "I fancy the plague department is in the kitchen; but we shall see."

He looked round the landing which we had now reached and then opened the door of the front room, Immediately I was aware of a strange, intensely fetid odour, and glancing into the room, I perceived a man lying, apparently in a state of stupor, in a bed covered with indescribably filthy bed-clothes. Thorndyke entered and approached the bed, and I followed. The light was rather dim, and it was not until we were quite close that I suddenly recognised the disease.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "it is typhus!"

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "and look at the bed clothes, and look at the poor devil's neck. We can see now how that villain collected his specimens."

I stooped over the poor, muttering, unconscious wretch and was filled with horror. Bed-clothes, pillow and patient were all alike crawling with vermin.

R. A. F.

"Of course," I said as we walked homewards, "I see the general drift of this case, but what I can't understand is how you connected up the facts."

"Well," replied Thorndyke, "let us set out the argument and trace the connections. The starting-point was the aluminium case that Mr. Rabbage brought us. Those tubes of fleas and lice were clearly an abnormal phenomenon. They might, as you suggested, have belonged to a scientific collector; but that was not probable. The fleas were alive, and were meant to remain alive, as the perforated caps of the tubes proved! And the lice had merely died, as lice quickly do if they are not fed. They did not appear to have been killed. But against your view there were two very striking facts, one of which I fancy you did not observe. The fleas were not the common human flea; they were Asiatic rat-fleas."

"You are quite right," I admitted. "I did not notice that."

"Then," he continued, "there was the aniseed with which the parchment caps of the tubes were scented. Now aniseed is irresistible to rats. It is an infallible bait. But it is not specially attractive to fleas. What then was the purpose of the scent? The answer, fantastic as it was, had to be provisionally accepted because it was the only one that suggested itself. If one of these tubes had been exposed to rats—dropped down a rat-hole, for instance—it is certain that the rats would have gnawed off the parchment cap. Then the fleas would have been liberated, and as they were rat-fleas, they would have immediately fastened upon the rats.

The tubes, therefore, appeared to be an apparatus for disseminating rat-fleas.

“But why should anyone want to disseminate rat-fleas? That question at once brought into view another striking fact, Here, in these tubes, were rat-fleas and body-lice: both carriers of deadly disease. The rat-flea is a carrier of plague; the body-louse is a carrier of typhus. It was an impressive coincidence. It suggested that the dissemination of rat-fleas might be really the dissemination of plague; and if the lice were distributed, too, that might mean the distribution of typhus.

“And now consider the maps. The circles on them all marked old slum-areas tenanted by low-class aliens. But old slums abound in rats; and low-class aliens abound in body-lice. Here was another coincidence. Then there was the note-tablet bearing numbers associated with the letters a and b and plus and minus signs. The letters a and b might mean rat and louse or plague and typhus, and the plus and minus might mean a success or a failure to produce an outbreak of disease. That was merely speculative, but it was quite consistent.

“So far we were dealing with a hypothesis based on simple observation. But that hypothesis could be proved or disproved. The question was: Were these insects infected insects, or were they not? To settle this I took one flea from each of the four tubes and ‘sowed’ it on agar, with the result that from each flea I got a typical culture of plague bacillus, which I verified with Haffkine’s ‘Stalactite test.’ I also examined one louse from each of the two tubes, and in each case got a definite typhus reaction. So the insects were infected and the hypothesis was confirmed.

“The next thing was to find the owner of the tubes. Now the circles on the maps indicated some sort of activity, presumably connected with rats and carried on in these areas.

I visited those areas and got into conversation with the inhabitants on the subject of rats, rat-catchers, rat pits, sewer-men, and everything bearing on rats; and at length I heard of an exhibitor of performing rats. You know the rest. We found the man, we observe that all his rats, excepting the tame white ones, were black rats—the special plague-carrying species—and we found on this spot a dead rat, which I ascertained on examining the body, had died of plague. Finally there was Polton’s little book giving us the finger prints of the owner of the aluminium case. That completed the identification; and inquiries at the Local Government Board showed that cases of plague and typhus had occurred in the marked areas.”

“Had not the authorities taken any steps in the matter?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” he replied. “They had carried out an energetic rat campaign in the London Docks, the likeliest source of infection. Naturally, they would not think of a criminal lunatic industriously sowing plague broadcast.”

“Then how did you connect this man with the bank outrage?”

“I never did, very conclusively,” he replied. “It was mostly a matter of inference. You see, the two crimes were essentially similar. They were varieties of the same type. Both were cases of idiotic destructiveness, and the agent in each was evidently a moral imbecile who was a professed enemy of society. Such persons are rare in this country, and when they occur are usually foreigners, most commonly Russians, or East Europeans of some kind. The only actual clue was the date on Pilcher’s letter, the rather peculiar figures of which were extraordinarily like those on the maps and the note-tablet. Still, it was little more than a guess, though it happens to have turned out correct.”

“And how do you suppose this fellow avoided getting plague and typhus himself?”

“It was quite likely that he had had both. But he could easily avoid the typhus by keeping himself clean and his clothing disinfected; and as to the plague, he could have used Haffkine’s plague-prophylactic and given it to the woman. Clearly it would not have suited him to have a case of plague in the house and have the health officer inspecting the premises.”

That was the end of the case, unless I should include in the history a very handsome fee sent to my colleague by the President of the Local Government Board.

“I think we have earned it,” said Thorndyke; “and yet I am not sure that Mr. Rabbage is not entitled to a share.”

And in fact, when that benevolent person called a few days later to receive a slightly ambiguous report and tender his fee, he departed beaming, bearing a donation wherewith to endow an additional bed, cot, or basket, in the St. Francis Home of Rest.

END OF VOLUME 3