

# THE COMPLETE DR. THORNDYKE STORIES

Vol. 4

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 THE PUZZLE LOCK von 1925, rechts das der von THE MAGIC CASKET von 1927.



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# THE PUZZLE LOCK\*

## PART II

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\* First UK edition by Hodder & Stoughton, London 1925.



## Rex vs. Burnaby

It is a normal incident in general medical practice that the family doctor soon drifts into the position of a family friend. The Burnabys had been among my earliest patients, and mutual sympathies had quickly brought about the more intimate relationship. It was a pleasant household, pervaded by a quiet geniality and a particularly attractive homely, unaffected culture. It was an interesting household, too, for the disparity in age between the husband and wife made the domestic conditions a little unusual and invited speculative observation. And there were other matters, to be referred to presently.

Frank Burnaby was a somewhat delicate man of about fifty: quiet, rather shy, gentle, kindly, and singularly innocent and trustful. He held a post at the Records Office, and was full of quaint and curious lore derived from the ancient documents on which he worked: selections from which he would retail in the family circle with a picturesque imagination and a fund of quiet, dry humour that made them delightful to listen to. I have never met a more attractive man, or one whom I liked better or respected more.

Equally attractive, in an entirely different way, was his wife: an extremely charming and really beautiful woman of under thirty—little more than a girl, in fact: amiable, high-spirited and full of fun and frolic, but nevertheless an accomplished, cultivated woman with a strong interest in her husband's pursuits. They appeared to me an exceedingly happy and united couple deeply attached to one another and in perfect sympathy. There were four children—three boys and a girl—of Burnaby's by his first wife; and their devotion to their young stepmother spoke volumes for her care of them.

But there was a fly in the domestic ointment: at least, that was what I felt. There was another family friend, a youngish man named Cyril Parker. Not that I had anything against him, personally, but I was not quite happy about the relationship. He was a markedly good-looking

man, pleasant, witty, and extremely well informed; for he was a partner in a publishing house and acted as reader for the firm; whence it happened that he, like Mr. Burnaby, gathered stores of interesting matter from his professional reading. But I could not disguise from myself that his admiration and affection for Mrs. Burnaby were definitely inside the danger zone, and that the intimacy—on his side, at any rate—was growing rather ominously. On her side there seemed nothing more than frank, though very pronounced, friendship. But I looked at the relationship askance. She was a woman whom any man might have fallen in love with, and I did not like the expression that I sometimes detected in Parker's eyes when he was looking at her. Still, there was nothing in the conduct of either to which the slightest exception could have been taken or which in any way foreshadowed the terrible disaster which was so shortly to befall.

The starting-point of the tragedy was a comparatively trivial event. By much poring over crabbed manuscripts, Mr. Burnaby developed symptoms of eye-strain which caused me to send him to an oculist for an opinion and a prescription for suitable spectacles. On the evening of the day on which he had consulted the oculist, I received an urgent summons from Mrs. Burnaby, and, on arriving at the house, found her husband somewhat seriously ill. His symptoms were rather puzzling, for they corresponded to no known disease. His face was flushed, his temperature slightly raised, his pulse rapid, though the breathing was slow, his throat was excessively dry, and his pupils widely dilated. It was an extraordinary condition, resembling nothing within my knowledge excepting atropine poisoning.

"Has he been taking medicine of any kind?" I asked.

Mrs. Burnaby shook her head. "He never takes any drugs or medicine but what you prescribe; and it couldn't be anything that he has taken, because the attack came on quite soon after he came home, before he had either food or drink."

It was very mysterious and the patient himself could throw no light on the origin of the attack. While I was reflecting on the matter, I happened to glance at the mantelpiece, on which I noticed a drop labelled "The Eye Drops" and a prescription envelope. Opening the latter I found the oculist's prescription for the drops—a very weak solution of atropine sulphate.

"Has he had any of these drops?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Burnaby. "I dropped some into his eyes as soon as he came in; two drops in each eye, according to the directions."

It was very odd. The amount of atropine in those four drops was less than a hundredth of a grain; an impossibly small dose to produce the symptoms. Yet he had all the appearance of having taken a poisonous dose, which he obviously had not, since the drop-bottle was nearly full. I could make nothing of it. However, I treated it as a case of atropine poisoning; and as the treatment produced marked improvement, I went home, more mystified than ever.

When I called on the following morning, I learned that he was practically well, and had gone to his office. But that evening I had another urgent message, and on hurrying round to Burnaby's house, found him suffering from an attack similar to, but even more severe than, the one on the previous day. I immediately administered an injection of pilocarpine and other appropriate remedies, and had the satisfaction of seeing a rapid improvement in his condition. But whereas the efficacy of the treatment proved that the symptoms were really due to atropine, no atropine appeared to have been taken excepting the minute quantity contained in the eye-drops.

It was very mysterious. The most exhaustive inquiries failed to suggest any possible source of the poison excepting the drops; and as each attack had occurred a short time after the use of them, it was impossible to ignore the apparent connection, in spite of the absurdly minute dose. "I can only suppose," said I, addressing Mrs. Burnaby and Mr. Parker, who had called to make inquiries, "that Burnaby is the subject of an idiosyncrasy—that he is abnormally sensitive to this drug."

"Is that a known condition?" asked Parker.

"Oh, yes," I replied. "People vary enormously in the way in which they react to drugs. Some are so intolerant of particular drugs—iodine, for instance—that ordinary medicinal doses produce poisonous effects, while others have the most extraordinary tolerance. Christisori, in his ›Treatise on Poisons‹, gives a case of a man, unaccustomed to opium, who took nearly an ounce of laudanum without any effect—a dose that would have killed an ordinary man. These drugs are terrible pitfalls for the doctor who doesn't know his patient. Just think what might have happened to Burnaby if someone had given him a full medicinal dose of belladonna."

"Does belladonna have the same effect as atropine?" asked Mrs. Burnaby.

"It is the same," I replied. "Atropine is the active principle of belladonna."

"What a mercy," she exclaimed, "that we discovered this idiosyncrasy in time. I suppose he had better discontinue the drops?"

"Yes," I answered, "most emphatically; and I will write to Mr. Haines and let him know that the atropine is impracticable."

I accordingly wrote to the oculist, who was politely sceptical as to the connection between the drops and the attacks. However, Burnaby settled the matter by refusing point-blank to have any further dealings with atropine; and his decision was so far justified that, for the time being, the attacks did not recur.

A couple of months passed. The incident had, to a great extent, faded from my mind. But then it was revived in a way that not only filled me with astonishment but caused me very grave anxiety. I was just about to set out on my morning round when Burnaby's housemaid met me at my door, breathing quickly and carrying a note. It was from Mrs. Burnaby, begging me to call at once and telling me that her husband had been seized by an attack similar to the previous ones. I ran back for my emergency bag and then hurried round to the house, where I found Burnaby lying on a sofa, very flushed, rather alarmed, and exhibiting well-marked symptoms of atropine poisoning. The attack, however, was not a very severe one, and the application of the appropriate remedies soon produced a change for the better.

"Now, Burnaby," I said, as he sat up with a sigh of relief. "what have you been up to? Haven't been tinkering with those drops again?"

"No," he replied. "Why should I? Haines has finished with my eyes."

"Well, you've been taking something with atropine in it."

"I suppose I have, but I can't imagine what. I have had no medicine of any kind."

"No pills, lozenges, liniment, plaster, or ointment?"

"Nothing medicinal of any sort," he replied. "In fact, I have swallowed nothing to-day but my breakfast; and the attack came on directly after, though it was a simple enough meal, goodness knows—just a couple of pigeon's eggs and some toast and tea."

"Pigeon's eggs," said I, with a grin, "why not sparrow's?"

"Cyril sent them—as a joke, I think," Mrs. Burnaby explained (Cyril, of course, was Mr. Parker), "but I must say Frank enjoyed them. You see, Cyril has taken lately to keeping pigeons and rabbits and other edible beasts, and I think he has done it principally for Frank's sake, as you have ordered him a special diet. We are constantly getting things from Cyril now—pigeons and rabbits especially; and much younger than we can buy them at the shops."

"Yes," said Burnaby, "he is most generous. I should think he supplies more than half my diet. I hardly like to accept so much from him."

"It gives him pleasure to send these gifts," said Mrs. Burnaby; "but I wish it gave him pleasure to slaughter the creatures first. He always brings or sends them alive, and the cook hates killing them. As to me, I couldn't do it, though I deal with the corpses afterwards. I prepare nearly all Frank's food myself."

"Yes," said Burnaby, with a glance of deep affection at his wife, "Margaret is an artist in kickshaws and I consume the works of art. I can tell you, doctor, I live like a fighting cock."

This was all very well, but it was beside the question; which was, where did the atropine come from? If Burnaby had swallowed nothing but his breakfast, it would seem that the atropine must have been in that. I pointed this out.

"But you know, doctor," said Burnaby, "that isn't possible. We can write the eggs off. You can't get poison into an egg without making a hole in the shell, and these eggs were intact. And as to the bread and butter, and the tea, we all had the same, and none of the others seem any the worse."

"That isn't very conclusive," said I. "A dose of atropine that would be poisonous to you would probably have no appreciable effect on the others. But, of course, the real mystery is how on earth atropine could have got into any of the food."

"It couldn't," said Burnaby and that really was my own conviction. But it was an unsatisfactory conclusion, for it left the mystery unexplained; and when at length I took my leave, to continue my rounds of visits, it was with the uncomfortable feeling that I had failed to trace the origin of the danger or to secure my patient against its recurrence.

Nor was my uneasiness unjustified. Little more than a week had passed when a fresh summons brought me to Burnaby's house, full of bewilderment and apprehension. And indeed there was good cause for apprehension; for when I arrived, to find Burnaby lying speechless and sightless his blue eyes turned to blank discs of black, glittering with the unnatural "belladonna sparkle,"—when I felt his racing pulse and watched his vain efforts to swallow a sip of water,—I began to ask myself whether he was not beyond recall. The same question was asked mutely by the terrified eyes of his wife, who rose like a ghost from his bedside as I entered the room. But once more he responded to the remedies, though more slowly this time, and at the end of an hour I was relieved to see that the urgent danger was past, although he still remained very ill.

Meanwhile, inquiries failed utterly to elicit any explanation of the attack. The symptoms had set in shortly after dinner; a simple meal, consisting of a pigeon cooked en casserole by Mrs. Burnaby herself, vegetables and a light pudding which had been shared by the rest of the family, and a little Chablis from a bottle that I been unsealed and opened in the dining-room. Nothing else had been taken and no medicaments of any kind used. On the other hand, any doubts as to the nature of the attack were set at rest by a chemical test made by me and confirmed by the Clinical Research Association, Atropine was demonstrably present, though the amount was comparatively small. But its source remained an impenetrable mystery.

It was a profoundly disturbing state of affairs. The last attack had narrowly missed a fatal termination and the poison was still untraced. From the same unknown source a fresh charge might be delivered at any moment, and who could say what the result would be? Poor Burnaby was in a state of chronic terror and his wife began to look haggard and worn with constant anxiety and apprehension. Nor was I in much better case myself, for, whatever should befall, the responsibility was mine. I racked my brains for some possible explanation, but could think of none, though there were times when a horrible thought would creep into my mind, only to be indignantly cast out.

One evening a few days after the last attack, I received a visit from Burnaby's brother, a pathologist attached to one of the London hospitals, but not in practice. Very different was Dr. Burnaby from his gentle, amiable brother; a strong, resolute, energetic man and none too suave in manner. We were already acquainted, so no introductions were necessary, and he came to the point with characteristic directness.

"You can guess what I have come about, Jardine<sup>1</sup>—this atropine business. What is being done in the matter?"

"I don't know that anything is being done," I answered lamely. "I can make nothing of it."

"Waiting for the next attack and the inquest, h'm? Well, that won't do, you know. This affair has got to be stopped before it is too late. If you don't know where the poison comes from, somebody does. H'm! And it is time to find out who that somebody is. There aren't many to choose from. I am going there now to have a look round and make a

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<sup>1</sup> Der Ich-Erzähler ist also nicht Dr. Jervis, sondern Dr. Humphrey Jardine, der diese Rolle auch in dem 1914 erschienenen Roman »A Silent Witness« hat. B. L.



few inquiries. You'd better come with me."

"Are they expecting you?" I asked.

"No," he answered gruffly; "but I'm not a stranger and neither are you." I decided to go round with him, though I didn't much like his manner. This was evidently meant to be a surprise visit, and I had no great difficulty in guessing at what was in his mind. On the other hand, I was not sorry to share the responsibility with a man of his position and a relative of the patient. Accordingly, I set forth with him willingly enough; and it is significant of my state of mind at this time, that I took my emergency bag with me.

When we arrived Burnaby and his wife were just sitting down to dinner—the children took their evening meal by themselves—and they welcomed us with the ready hospitality that made this such a pleasant household. Dr. Burnaby's place was laid opposite mine, and I was faintly amused to note his eye furtively travelling over the table, evidently assessing each article of food as a possible vehicle of atropine. "If you had only let us know you were coming, Jim," said Mrs. Burnaby when the joint made its appearance, "we would have had something better than saddle of mutton. As it is, you must take pot-luck."

"Saddle of mutton is good enough for me," replied Dr. Burnaby. "But what on earth is that stuff that Frank has got?" he added, as Burnaby lifted the lid from a little casserole.

"That," she answered, "is a fricassee of rabbit. Such a tiny creature it was; a mere infant. Cook nearly wept at having to kill it."

"Kill it!" exclaimed the doctor; "do you buy your rabbits alive?"

"We didn't buy this one," she replied. "It was brought by Cyril—Mr. Parker, you know," she added hastily and with a slight flush, as she caught a grim glance of interrogation. "He sends quite a lot of poultry and rabbits and things for Frank from his little farm."

"Ha!" said the doctor with a reflective eye on the casserole. "H'm! Breeds them himself, hey? Whereabouts is his farm?"

"At Eltham. But it isn't really a farm. He just keeps rabbits and fowls and pigeons in a place at the back of his garden."

"Is your cook English?" Dr. Burnaby asked, glancing again at the casserole. "That affair of Frank's has rather a French look."

"Bless you, Jim," said Burnaby, "I am not dependent on mere cooks. I am a pampered gourmet. Margaret prepares most of my food with her own sacred hands. Cooks can't do this sort of thing"; and he helped himself afresh from the casserole.

Dr. Burnaby seemed to reflect profoundly upon this explanation. Then he abruptly changed the subject from cookery to the Lindisfarne Gospels and thereby set his brother's chin wagging to a new tune. For Burnaby's affections as a scholar were set on seventh- and eighth-century manuscripts and his knowledge of them was as great as his enthusiasm.

"Oh, get on with your dinner, Frank, you old windbag," exclaimed Mrs. Burnaby. "You are letting everything get cold."

"So I am, dear," he admitted, "but—I won't be a minute. I just want Jim to see those collotypes of the Durham Book. Excuse me." He sprang up from the table and darted into the adjoining library, whence he returned almost immediately carrying a small portfolio.

"These are the plates," he said, handing the portfolio to his brother. "Have a look at them while I dispose of the arrears."

He took up his knife and fork and made as if to resume his meal. Then he laid them down and leaned back in his chair. "I don't think I want any more, after all," he said.

The tone in which he spoke caused me to look at him critically; for my talk with his brother had made me a little nervous and apprehensive of further trouble. What I now saw was by no means reassuring. A slight flush and a trace of anxiety in his expression made me ask, with outward composure but inward alarm: "You are feeling quite fit, I hope, Burnaby?"

"Well, not so very," he replied. "My eyes are going a bit misty and my throat—" Here he worked his lips and swallowed as if with some effort. I rose hastily, and, catching a terrified glance from his wife, went to him and looked into his eyes. And thereupon my heart sank. For already his pupils were twice their natural size and the darkened eyes exhibited the too-familiar sparkle. I was sensible of a thrill of terror, and, as I looked into Burnaby's now distinctly alarmed face, his brother's ominous words echoed in my ears. Had I waited "for the next attack and the inquest"?

The symptoms, once started, developed apace. From moment to moment he grew worse, and the rapid enlargement of the pupils gave an alarming hint as to the intensity of the poisoning. I darted out into the hail for my bag, and as I re-entered, I saw him rise, groping blindly with his hands, until his wife, ashen-faced and trembling, took his arm and led him to the door.

"I had better give him a dose of pilocarpine at once," I said, getting out my hypodermic syringe and glancing at Dr. Burnaby, who watched me

with stony composure.

"Yes," he agreed, "and a little morphine, too! and he will probably need some stimulant. I won't come up; only be in the way."

I followed the patient up to the bedroom and administered the antidotes forthwith. Then, while he was getting partially undressed with his wife's help, I went downstairs in search of brandy and hot water. I was about to enter the dining-room when, through the partly-open door, I saw Dr. Burnaby standing by the fireplace with his open hand-bag—which he had fetched in from the hall—on the table before him, and in his hand a little Bohemian glass jar from the mantel piece. Involuntarily, I halted for a moment; and as I did so, he carefully deposited the little ornament in the bag and closed the latter, locking it with a small key which he then put in his pocket.

It was an excessively odd proceeding, but, of course, it was no concern of mine. Nevertheless, instead of entering the dining-room, I stole softly towards the kitchen and fetched the hot water myself. When I returned, the bag was back on the hall table and I found Dr. Burnaby grimly pacing up and down the dining room. He asked me a few questions while I was looking for the brandy, and then, somewhat to my surprise, proposed to come up and lend a hand with the patient.

On entering the bedroom, we found poor Burnaby lying half-undressed on the bed and in a very pitiable state; terrified, physically distressed and inclined to ramble mentally. His wife knelt by the bed, white-faced, red-eyed and evidently panic-stricken, though she was quite quiet and self-restrained. As we entered, she rose to make way for us, and while we were examining the patient's pulse and listening to his racing heart, she silently busied herself with the preparations for administering the stimulants.

"You don't think he is going to die, do you?" she whispered, as Dr. Burnaby handed me back my stethoscope.

"It is no use thinking," he replied dryly—and I thought rather callously—"we shall see"; and with this he turned his back to her and looked at his brother with a gloomy frown.

For more than an hour that question was an open one. From moment to moment I expected to feel the wildly-racing pulse flicker out; to hear the troubled breathing die away in an expiring rattle. From time to time we cautiously increased the antidotes and administered restoratives, but I must confess that I had little hope. Dr. Burnaby was undisguisedly pessimistic. And as the weary minutes dragged on, and I looked momentarily for the arrival of the dread messenger, there would keep stealing

into my mind a question that I hardly dared to entertain. What was the meaning of it all? Whence had the poison come? And why, in this household, had it found its way to Burnaby alone—the one inmate to whom it was specially deadly?

At last—at long last—there came a change; hardly perceptible at first, and viewed with little confidence. But after a time it became more pronounced; and then, quite rapidly, the symptoms began to clear up. The patient swallowed with ease, and great relish, a cup of coffee; the heart slowed down, the breathing became natural, and presently, as the morphine began to take effect, he sank into a doze which passed by degrees into a quiet sleep.

“I think he will do now,” said Dr. Burnaby, “so I won’t stay any longer. But it was a near thing, Jardine; most uncomfortably near.”

He walked to the door, where, as he went out, he turned and bowed stiffly to his sister-in-law. I followed him down the stairs, rather expecting him to revert to the subject of his visit to me. But he made no reference to it, nor, indeed, did he say anything until he stood on the doorstep with his bag in his hand. Then he made a somewhat cryptic remark: “Well, Jardine,” he said, “the Durham Book saved him. But for those collotypes, he would be a dead man.”; and with that he walked away, leaving me to interpret as best I could this decidedly obscure remark.

A quarter of an hour later, as Burnaby was peacefully asleep and apparently out of all danger, I took my own departure, and as soon as I was outside the house, I proceeded to put into execution a plan that had been forming in my mind during the last hour. There was some mystery in this case that was evidently beyond my powers to solve. But solved it had to be, if Burnaby’s life was to be saved, to say nothing of my own reputation; so I had decided to put the facts before my friend and former teacher, Dr. Thorndyke, and seek his advice, and if necessary, his assistance.

It was now past ten o’clock, but I determined to take my chance of finding him at his chambers, and accordingly, having found a taxi, I directed the driver to set me down at the gate of Inner Temple Lane. My former experience of Thorndyke’s habits led me to be hopeful, and my hopes were not unjustified on this occasion, for when I had mounted to the first pair landing of No. 5A King’s Bench Walk, and assaulted the knocker of the inner door, I was relieved to find him not only at home, but alone and disengaged. “It’s a deuce of a time to come knocking you up,” I said, as he shook my hand, “but I am in rather a hole, and the

matter is urgent, so—”

“So you paid me the compliment of treating me as a friend,” said he.

“Very proper of you. What is the nature of your difficulty?”

“Why, I’ve got a case of recurrent atropine poisoning and I can make absolutely nothing of it.”

Here I began to give a brief outline sketch of the facts, but after a minute or two he stopped me.

“It is of no use being sketchy, Jardine,” said he. “The night is young. Let us have a complete history of the case, with particulars of all the persons concerned and their mutual relations. And don’t spare detail.”

He seated himself with a notebook on his knee, and when he had lighted his pipe, I plunged into the narrative of the case, beginning with the eye-drop incident and finishing with the alarming events of the present evening.

He listened with close attention, refraining from interrupting me excepting occasionally to ask for a date, which he jotted down with a few other notes. When I had finished, he laid aside his notebook, and, as he knocked out his pipe, observed: “A very remarkable case, Jardine, and interesting by reason of the unusual nature of the poison.”

“Oh, hang the interest!” I exclaimed. “I am not a toxicologist. I am a general practitioner; and I want to know what the deuce I ought to do.”

“I think,” said he, “that your duty is perfectly obvious. You ought to communicate with the police, either alone or in conjunction with some member of the family.”

I looked at him in dismay. “But,” I faltered, “what have I got to tell the police?”

“What you have told me,” he replied; “which, put in a nutshell, amounts to this: Frank Burnaby has had three attacks of atropine poisoning, disregarding the eye-drops. Each attack has appeared to be associated with some article of food prepared by Mrs. Burnaby and supplied by Mr. Cyril Parker.”

“But, good God!” I exclaimed, “you don’t suspect Mrs. Burnaby?”

“I suspect nobody,” he replied. “It may not be criminal poisoning at all. But Mr. Burnaby has to be protected, and the case certainly needs investigation.”

“You don’t think I could make a few inquiries myself first?” I suggested. He shook his head. “The risk is too great,” he replied. “The man might die before you reached a conclusion; whereas a few inquiries made by the police would probably put a stop to the affair, unless the poisoning is in some inconceivable way inadvertent.”

That was what his advice amounted to, and I felt that he was right. But it put on me a horribly unpleasant duty; and as I wended homewards I tried to devise some means of mitigating its unpleasantness. Finally I decided to try to persuade Mrs. Burnaby to make a joint communication with me.

But the necessity never arose. When I made my morning visit, I found a taxicab drawn up opposite the door and the housemaid who admitted me looked as if she had seen a ghost.

"Why, what is the matter, Mabel?" I asked, as she ushered me funereally into the drawing-room.

She shook her head. "I don't know, sir. Something awful, I'm afraid. I'll tell them you are here." With this she shut the door and departed.

The housemaid's manner and the unusually formal reception filled me with vague forebodings. But even as I was wondering what could have happened, the question was answered by the entry of a tall man who looked like a guardsman in mufti.

"Dr. Jardine?" he asked; and as I nodded, he explained, presenting his card, "I am Detective Lane. I have been instructed to make some inquiries in respect of certain information which we have received. It is stated that Mr. Frank Burnaby is suffering from the effects of poison. So far as you know, is that true?"

"I hope he is recovered now," I replied, "but he was suffering last night from what appeared to be atropine poisoning."

"Have there been any previous attacks of the same kind?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes," I answered. "This was the fifth attack; but the first two were evidently due to some eye-drops that he had used."

"And in the case of the other three; have you any idea as to how the poison came to be taken? Whether it was in the food, for instance?"

"I have no idea, sergeant. I know nothing more than what I have told you; and, of course, I am not going to make any guesses. Is it admissible to ask who gave the information?"

"I am afraid not, sir," he replied. "But you will soon know. There is a definite charge against Mrs. Burnaby—I have just made the arrest—and we shall want your evidence for the prosecution."

I stared at him in utter consternation. "Do you mean," I gasped, "that you have arrested Mrs. Burnaby?"

"Yes," he replied; "on a charge of having administered poison to her husband."

I was absolutely thunderstruck. And yet, when I remembered Thorn-dyke's words and recalled my own dim and hastily-dismissed surmises, there was nothing so very surprising in this shocking turn of events.

"Could I have a few words with Mrs. Burnaby?" I asked.

"Not alone," he replied, "and better not at all. Still, if you have any business—"

"I have," said I; whereupon he led the way to the dining-room, where I found Mrs. Burnaby seated rigidly in a chair, pale as death, but quite calm though rather dazed. Opposite her a military-looking man sat stiffly by the table with an air of being unconscious of her presence, and he took no notice as I walked over to his prisoner and silently pressed her hand.

"I've come, Mrs. Burnaby," said I, "to ask if there is anything that you want me to do. Does Burnaby know about this horrible affair?"

"No," she answered. "You will have to tell him if he is fit to hear it; and if not, I want you to let my father know as soon as you can. That is all; and you had better go now, as we mustn't detain these gentlemen. Good-bye."

She shook my hand unemotionally, and when I had faltered a few words of vague encouragement and sympathy, I went out of the room, but waited in the hall to see the last of her.

The police officers were most polite and considerate. When she came out, they attended her in quite a deferential manner. As the sergeant was in the act of opening the street door, the bell rang; and when the door opened it disclosed Mr. Parker standing on threshold. He was about to address Mrs. Burnaby but she passed him with a slight bow, and descended the steps, preceded by the sergeant and followed by the detective. The former held the door of the cab open while she entered, when he entered also and shut the door. The detective took his seat beside the driver and the cab moved off.

"What is in the wind, Jardine?" Parker asked looking at me with a distinctly alarmed expression. "Those fellows look like plain-clothes policemen."

"They are," said I. "They have just arrest Mrs. Burnaby on a charge of having attempted to poison her husband."

I thought Parker would have fallen. As it was, he staggered to a hall chair and dropped on it in a state of collapse. "Good God!" he gasped. "What a frightful thing! But there can't possibly be any evidence—any real grounds for suspecting her. It must be just a wild guess. I wonder who started it."

On this subject I had pretty strong suspicions, but I did not mention them; and when I had seen Parker into the dining-room and explained matters a little further I went upstairs, bracing myself for my very disagreeable task.

Burnaby was quite recovered, though rather torpid from the effects of the morphine. But my news roused him most effectually. In a moment he was out of bed, hurriedly preparing to dress; and though his pale, set face told how deeply the catastrophe had shocked him, he was quite collected and had all his wits about him.

"It's of no use letting our emotions loose, doctor," said he, in reply to my expressions of sympathy. "Margaret is in a very dangerous position. You have only to consider what she is—a young, beautiful woman—and what I am, to realise that. We must act promptly. I shall go and see her father; he is a very capable lawyer; and we must get a first-class counsel."

This seemed to be an opportunity for mentioning Thorndyke's peculiar qualifications in a case of this kind, and I did so. Burnaby listened attentively, apparently not unimpressed; but he replied cautiously: "We shall have to leave the choice of the counsel to Harratt; but if you care, meanwhile, to consult with Dr. Thorndyke, you have my authority. I will tell Harratt."

On this I took my departure, not a little relieved at the way he had taken the evil tidings; and as soon as I had disposed of the more urgent part of my work, I betook myself to Thorndyke's chambers, just in time to catch him on his return from the Courts.

"Well, Jardine," he said, when I had brought the history up to date, "what is it that you want me to do?"

"I want you to do what you can to establish Mrs. Burnaby's innocence," I replied.

He looked at me reflectively for a few moments; then he said, quietly but rather significantly: "It is not my practice to give *ex parte* evidence. An expert witness cannot act as an advocate. If I investigate the evidence in this case, it will have to be at your risk, as representing the accused, since any fact, no matter how damaging, which is in the possession of the witness must be disclosed in accordance with the terms of the oath, to say nothing of the obvious duty of every person to further the ends of justice. Speaking as a lawyer, and taking the known facts at their face value, I do not advise you to employ me to investigate the case at large. You might find that you had merely strengthened the hand of the prosecution.



"But I will make a suggestion. There seems to me to be in this case a very curious and interesting possibility. Let me investigate that independently. If my inquiries yield a positive result, I will let you know and you can call me as a witness. If they yield a negative result, you had better leave me out of the case."

To this suggestion I necessarily agreed; but when I took my leave of Thorndyke I went away with a sense of discouragement and failure. His reference to "the face value of the known facts" clearly implied that those facts were adverse to the accused; while the "curious possibility" suggested nothing but a forlorn hope from which he had no great expectations.

I need not follow the weary business in detail. At the first hearing before the magistrate the police merely stated the charge and gave evidence of arrest, both they and the defence asking for a remand and neither apparently desiring to show their hand. Accordingly the case was adjourned for seven days, and as bail was refused, the prisoner was detained in custody.

During those seven dreary days I spent as much time as I could with Burnaby, and though I was filled with admiration of his fortitude and self his drawn and pallid face wrung my heart. In those few days he seemed to have changed into an old man. At his house I also met Mr. Harratt, Mrs. Burnaby's father, a fine, dignified man and a typical old lawyer; and it was unspeakably pathetic to see the father and the husband of the accused woman each trying to support the courage of the other while both were torn with anxiety and apprehension. On one occasion Mr. Parker was present and looked more haggard and depressed than either. But Mr. Harratt's manner towards him was so frigid and forbidding that he did not repeat his visit. At these meetings we discussed the case freely, which was a further affliction to me. For even I could not fail to see that any evidence that I could give directly supported the case for the prosecution.

So six of the seven days ran out, and all the time there was no word from Thorndyke. But on the evening of the sixth day I received a letter from him, curt and dry, but still giving out a ray of hope. This was the brief message: "I have gone into the question of which I spoke to you and consider that the point is worth raising. I have accordingly written to Mr. Harratt advising him to that effect."

It was a somewhat colourless communication. But I knew Thorndyke well enough to realise that his promises usually understated his intentions. And when, on the following morning, I met Mr. Harratt and

Burnaby at the court, something in their manner—a new vivacity and expectancy—suggested that Thorndyke had been more explicit in his communication to the lawyer. But, all the same, their anxiety, for all their outward courage, was enough to have touched a heart of stone.

The spectacle that that court presented when the case was called forms a tableau that is painted on my memory in indelible colours. The mingling of squalor and tragedy, of frivolity and dread solemnity—the grave magistrate on the bench, the stolid policemen, the busy, preoccupied lawyers, and the gibbering crowd of spectators, greedy for sensation, with eager eyes riveted on the figure in the dock—offered such a medley of contrasts as I hope never to look upon again.

As to the prisoner herself, her appearance brought my heart into my mouth. Rigid as a marble statue and nearly as void of colour, she stood in the dock, guarded by two constables, looking with stony bewilderment on the motley scene, outwardly calm, but with the calm of one who looks death in the face; and when the prosecuting counsel rose to open the case for the police, she looked at him as a victim on the scaffold might look upon the executioner.

As I listened to the brief opening address, my heart sank, though the counsel, Sir Harold Layton, K. C., presented his case with that scrupulous fairness to the accused that makes an English court of justice a thing without parallel in the world. But the mere facts, baldly stated without comment, were appalling. No persuasive rhetoric was needed to show that they led direct to the damning conclusion.

Frank Burnaby, an elderly man, married to a young and beautiful woman, had on three separate occasions had administered to him a certain deadly poison, to wit, atropine. It would be proved that he had suffered from the effects of that poison; that the symptoms followed the taking of certain articles of food of which he alone had partaken; that the said food did actually contain the said poison; and that the food which contained the poison was specially prepared for his sole consumption by his wife, the accused, with her own hands. No evidence was at present available as to how the accused obtained the poison or that she had any such poison in her possession, nor would any suggestion be offered as to the motive of the crime. But, on the evidence of the actual administration of the poison, he would ask that the prisoner be committed for trial. He then proceeded to call the witnesses, of whom I was naturally the first. When I had been sworn and given my description, the counsel asked a few questions which elicited the history of the case and which I need not repeat. He then continued: "Have you any doubt as to the

cause of Mr. Burnaby's symptoms?"

"No. They were certainly due to atropine poisoning."

"Has Mr. Burnaby any constitutional peculiarity in respect of atropine?"

"Yes. He is abnormally susceptible to the effects of atropine."

"Was this peculiar susceptibility known to the accused?"

"Yes. It was communicated to her by me."

"Was it known, so far as you are aware, to any other persons?"

"Mr. Parker was present when I told her, and Mr. Burnaby and his brother, Dr. Burnaby, were also informed."

"Is there any way, so far as you know, in which the accused could have obtained possession of atropine?"

"Only by having the oculist's prescription for the eye-drops made up."

"Do you know of any medium, other than the food, by which atropine might have been taken by Mr. Burnaby?"

"I do not," I replied; and this concluded my evidence. But as I stepped out of the witness-box, I reflected gloomily that every word that I had spoken was a rivet in the fetters of the silent figure in the dock.

The next witness was the cook. She testified that she had killed and skinned the rabbit and had then handed it to the accused, who made it into a fricassee and prepared it for the table. Witness took no part in the preparation and she was absent from the kitchen on one occasion for several minutes, leaving the accused there alone.

When the cook had concluded her evidence, the name of James Burnaby was called, and the doctor entered the witness-box, looking distinctly uncomfortable, but grim and resolute. The first few questions elicited the circumstances of his visit to his brother's house and of the sudden attack of illness. That illness he had at once recognised as acute atropine poisoning, and had assumed that the poison was in the specially prepared food.

"Did you take any measures to verify this opinion?" counsel asked.

"Yes. As soon as I was alone, I took part of the remainder of the rabbit and put it in a glass jar which I found on the mantelpiece and which I first rinsed out with water. Later, I carried the sample of food to Professor Berry, who analysed it in my presence and found it to contain atropine. He obtained from it a thirtieth of a grain of atropine sulphate."

"Is that a poisonous dose?"

"Not to an ordinary person, though it is considerably beyond the medicinal dose. But it would have been a poisonous dose to Frank Burnaby.

If he had swallowed this, in addition to what he had already taken, I feel no doubt that it would have killed him.”

This concluded the case for the prosecution, and a black case it undoubtedly looked. There was no cross-examination; and as Thorndyke had arrived some time previously and conferred with Mr. Harratt and his counsel, I concluded that the defence would take the form of a counter-attack by the raising of a fresh issue. And so it turned out. When Thorndyke entered the witness-box and had disposed of the preliminaries, the counsel for the defence “gave him his head.”

“You have made certain investigations in regard to this case, I believe?” Thorndyke assented, and the counsel continued: “I will not ask you specific questions, but will request you to describe your investigations and their result, and tell us what caused you to make them.”

“This case,” Thorndyke began, “was brought to my notice by Dr. Jardine, who gave me all the facts known to him. These facts were very remarkable, and, taken together, they suggested a possible explanation of the poisoning. There were four striking points in the case. First, there was the very unusual nature of the poison. Second, the abnormal susceptibility of Mr. Burnaby to this particular poison. Third, the fact that all the food in which the poison appeared to have been conveyed came from the same source: it was sent by Mr. Cyril Parker. Fourth, that food consisted of pigeon’s eggs, pigeon’s flesh, and rabbit’s flesh.”

“What is there remarkable about that?” the counsel asked.

“The remarkable point is that the pigeon and the rabbit have an extraordinary immunity to atropine. Most vegetable-feeding birds and animals are more or less immune to vegetable poisons. Many birds and animals are largely immune to atropine; but among birds the pigeon is exceptionally immune, while the rabbit is the most extreme instance among animals. A single rabbit can take without the slightest harm more than a hundred times the quantity of atropine that would kill a man; and rabbits habitually feed freely on the leaves and berries of the belladonna or deadly nightshade.”

“Does the deadly nightshade contain atropine?” the counsel asked.

“Yes. Atropine is the active principle of the belladonna plant and gives to it its poisonous properties.”

“And if an animal, such as a rabbit, were to feed on the nightshade plant, would its flesh be poisonous?”

“Yes. Cases of belladonna poisoning from eating rabbit have been recorded—by Firth and Bentley, for instance.”

“And you suspected that the poison in this case had been contained in the pigeon and the rabbit themselves?”

“Yes. It was a striking coincidence that the poisoning should follow the consumption of these two specially immune animals. But there was a further reason for connecting them. The symptoms were strictly proportionate to the probable amount of poison in each case. Thus the symptoms were only slight after eating the pigeon’s eggs. But the eggs of a poisoned pigeon could contain only a minute quantity of the poison. After eating the pigeon the symptoms were much more severe, and the body of a pigeon which had fed on belladonna would contain much more atropine than could be contained in an egg. Finally, after eating the rabbit, the symptoms were extremely violent; but a rabbit has the greatest immunity and is the most likely to have eaten large quantities of belladonna leaves.”

“Did you take any measures to put your theory to the test?”

“Yes. Last Monday I went to Eltham, where I had ascertained that Mr. Cyril Parker lives, and inspected his premises from the outside. At the end of his garden is a small paddock enclosed by a wall. Approaching this across a meadow and looking over the wall, I saw that the enclosure was provided with small fowl-houses, pigeon-cotes, and rabbit hutches. All these were open and their inmates were roaming about the paddock. On one side of the enclosure, by the wall was a dense mass of deadly nightshade plants, extending the whole length of the wall and about a couple of yards in width. At one part of this was a ring fence of wire netting, and inside it were five half-grown rabbits. There was a basket containing a small quantity of cabbage leaves and other green stuff, but as I watched, I saw the young rabbits browsing freely on the nightshade plants in preference to the food provided for them.

“On the following day I went to Eltham again taking with me an assistant who carried a young rabbit in a small hamper. We watched the paddock until the coast was clear. Then my assistant got over the wall and abstracted a young rabbit from inside the ring fence and handed it to me. He then took the rabbit from the hamper and dropped it inside the fence. As soon as we were clear of the meadow, we killed the captured rabbit—to prevent any possible elimination of any poison that it might have swallowed. On arriving in London, I at once took the dead rabbit to St. Margaret’s Hospital, where, in the chemical laboratory, and in the presence of Dr. Woodford, the Professor of Chemistry, I skinned it and prepared it as if for cooking by removing the viscera. I then separated the flesh from the bones and handed the former to Dr.

Woodford, who, in my presence, carried out an exhaustive chemical test for atropine. The result was that atropine was found to be present in all the muscles; and, on making a quantitative test, the muscles alone yielded no less than .93 grain."

"Is that a poisonous dose?" the counsel asked.

"Yes; it is a poisonous dose for a normal man. In the case of an abnormally susceptible person like Mr. Burnaby it would certainly be a fatal dose."

This completed Thorndyke's evidence. There was no cross and the magistrate put no questions. When Dr. Woodford had been called and had given confirmatory evidence, Mrs. Burnaby's counsel proceeded to address the bench. But the magistrate cut him short.

"There is really no case to argue," said he. "The evidence of the expert witnesses makes it perfectly clear that the poison was already in the food when it came into the hands of the accused. Consequently the charge against her of introducing the poison falls to the ground and the case must be dismissed. I am sure everyone will sympathise with the unfortunate lady who has been the victim of these extraordinary circumstances, and will rejoice, as I do, at the clearing up of the mystery. The prisoner is discharged."

It was a dramatic moment when, amidst the applause of the spectators, Mrs. Burnaby stepped down from the dock and clasped her husband's outstretched hand. But, overwhelmed as they both were by the sudden relief, I thought it best not to linger, but, after congratulations, to take myself off with Thorndyke. But one pleasant incident I witnessed before I went. Dr. Burnaby had been standing apart, evidently some what embarrassed, when suddenly Mrs. Burnaby ran to him and held out her hand.

"I suppose, Margaret," he said gruffly, "you think I'm an old beast?"

"Indeed I don't," she replied. "You acted quite properly, and I respect you for having the moral courage to do it. And don't forget, Jim, that your action has saved Frank's life. But for you, there would have been no Dr. Thorndyke; and but for Dr. Thorndyke, there would have been another poisoned rabbit."

"What do you make of this case?" I asked, as Thorndyke and I walked away from the court. "Do you suppose the poisoning was accidental?"

He shook his head. "No, Jardine," he replied. "There are too many coincidences. You notice that the poisoned animals did not appear until after Mr Parker had learned from you that Burnaby was abnormally

sensitive to atropine and could consequently be poisoned by an ordinary medicinal dose. Then the sending of the animals alive looks like a precaution divert suspicion from himself and confuse the issue. Again, that ring fence among the belladonna plants has a fishy look, and the plants themselves were not only abnormally numerous but many of them very young and looked as if they had been planted. Further, I happen to know that Parker's firm published, only last year, a book on toxicology in which the immunity of pigeons and rabbits was mentioned and which Parker probably read."

"Then do you believe that he intended to let Mrs. Burnaby—the woman with whom he was in love—bear the brunt of his crime? It seems incredibly villainous and cowardly."

"I do not," he replied. "I imagine that the rabbit that I captured, or one of the others, would have been sent to Burnaby in a few days' time. The cook would probably have prepared it for him and it would almost certainly have killed him; and his death would have been proof of Mrs. Burnaby's innocence. Suspicion would have been transferred to the cook. But I don't suppose any action will be taken against him, for it is practically certain that no jury would convict him on my evidence."

Thorndyke was right in his opinion. No proceedings were taken against Parker. But the house of the Burnabys knew him no more.

## A Mystery of the Sand-Hills

I have occasionally wondered how often Mystery and Romance present themselves to us ordinary men of affairs only to be passed by without recognition. More often, I suspect than most of us imagine. The uncanny tendency of my talented friend John Thorndyke to become involved in strange, mysterious and abnormal circumstances has almost become a joke against him. But yet, on reflection, I am disposed to think that his experiences have not differed essentially from those of other men, but that his extraordinary powers of observation and rapid inference have enabled him to detect abnormal elements in what, to ordinary men, appeared to be quite commonplace occurrences. Certainly this was so in the singular Roscoff case, in which, if I had been alone, I should assuredly have seen nothing to merit more than a passing attention.

It happened that on a certain summer morning—it was the fourteenth of August, to be exact—we were discussing this very subject as we walked across the golf-links from Sandwich towards the sea. I was spending a holiday in the old town with my wife, in order that she might paint the ancient streets, and we had induced Thorndyke to come down and stay with us for a few days. This was his last morning, and we had come forth betimes to stroll across the sand-hills to Shellness.

It was a solitary place in those days. When we came off the sand-hills on to the smooth, sandy beach, there was not a soul in sight, and our own footprints were the first to mark the firm strip of sand between high-water mark and the edge of the quiet surf.

We had walked a hundred yards or so when Thorndyke stopped and looked down at the dry sand above tide-marks and then along the wet beach.

“Would that be a shrimper?” he cogitated, referring to some impressions of bare feet in the sand. “If so, he couldn’t have come from Pegwell, for the River Stour bars the way. But he came out of the sea and



seems to have made straight for the sand-hills.”

“Then he probably was a shrimper,” said I, not deeply interested.

“Yet,” said Thorndyke, “it was an odd time for a shrimper to be at work.”

“What was an odd time?” I demanded. “When was he at work?”

“He came out of the sea at this place,” Thorndyke replied, glancing at his watch, “at about half-past eleven last night, or from that to twelve.”

“Good Lord, Thorndyke!” I exclaimed, “how on earth do you know that?”

“But it is obvious, Anstey<sup>2</sup>,” he replied. “It is now half-past nine, and it will be high-water at eleven, as we ascertained before we came out. Now, if you look at those footprints on the sand, you see that they stop short—or rather begin—about two-thirds of the distance from high-water mark to the edge of the surf. Since they are visible and distinct, they must have been made after last high-water. But since they do not extend to the water’s edge, they must have been made when the tide was going out; and the place where they begin is the place where the edge of the surf was when the footprints were made. But the place is, as we see, about an hour below the high-water mark. Therefore, when the man came out of the sea, the tide had been going down for an hour, roughly. As it is high-water at eleven this morning, it was high-water at about ten-forty last night; and as the man came out of the sea about an hour after high-water, he must have come out at, or about, eleven-forty. Isn’t that obvious?”

“Perfectly,” I replied, laughing. “It is as simple as sucking eggs when you think it out. But how the deuce do you manage always to spot these obvious things at a glance? Most men would have just glanced at those footprints and passed them without a second thought.”

“That”, he replied, “is a mere matter of habit; the habit of trying to extract the significance of simple appearances. It has become almost automatic with me.”

During our discussion we had been walking forward slowly, straying on to the edge of the sand-hills. Suddenly, in a hollow between the hills, my eye lighted upon a heap of clothes, apparently, to judge by their orderly disposal, those of a bather. Thorndyke also had observed them and we approached together and looked down on them curiously.

“Here is another problem for you,” said I. “Find the bather. I don’t see him anywhere.”

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<sup>2</sup> Hier ist also wieder Robert Anstey, K. C., der Ich-Erzähler. B. L.

"You won't find him here," said Thorndyke. "These clothes have been out all night. Do you see the little spider's web on the boots with a few dewdrops still clinging to it? There has been no dew forming for a good many hours. Let us have a look at the beach."

We strode out through the loose sand and stiff, reedy grass to the smooth beach, and here we could plainly see a line of prints of naked feet leading straight down to the sea, but ending abruptly about two-thirds of the way to the water's edge.

"This looks like our nocturnal shrimper," said I. "He seems to have gone into the sea here and come out at the other place. But if they are the same footprints, he must have forgotten to dress before he went home. It is a quaint affair."

"It is a most remarkable affair," Thorndyke agreed; "and if the footprints are not the same it will be still more inexplicable."

He produced from his pocket a small spring tape-measure with which he carefully took the lengths of two of the most distinct footprints and the length of the stride. Then we walked back along the beach to the other set of tracks, two of which he measured in the same manner.

"Apparently they are the same," he said, putting away his tape; "indeed, they could hardly be otherwise. But the mystery is, what has become of the man? He couldn't have gone away without his clothes, unless he is a lunatic, which his proceedings rather suggest. There is just the possibility that he went into the sea again and was drowned. Shall we walk along towards Shellness and see if we can find any further traces?"

We walked nearly half a mile along the beach, but the smooth surface of the sand was everywhere unbroken. At length we turned to retrace our steps; and at this moment I observed two men advancing across the sand-hills. By the time we had reached the mysterious heap of garments they were quite near, and, attracted no doubt by the intentness with which we were regarding the clothes, they altered their course to see what we were looking at. As they approached, I recognized one of them as a barrister named Hallett, a neighbour of mine in the Temple, whom I had already met in the town, and we exchanged greetings.

"What is the excitement?" he asked, looking at the heap of clothes and then glancing along the deserted beach; "and where is the owner of the togs? I don't see him anywhere."

"That is the problem," said I. "He seems to have disappeared."

"Gad!" exclaimed Hallett, "if he has gone home without his clothes, He'll create a sensation in the town! What?"

Here the other man, who carried a set of golf clubs, stooped over the clothes with a look of keen interest.

"I believe I recognize these things, Hallett; in fact, I am sure I do. That waistcoat, for instance. You must have noticed that waistcoat. I saw you playing with the chap a couple of days ago. Tall, clean-shaven, dark fellow. Temporary member, you know. What was his name? Popoff, or something like that?"

"Roscoff," said Hallett. "Yes, by Jove, I believe you are right. And now I come to think of it, he mentioned to me that he sometimes came up here for a swim. He said he particularly liked a paddle by moonlight, and I told him he was a fool to run the risk of bathing in a lonely place like this, especially at night."

"Well, that is what he seems to have done," said Thorndyke, "for these clothes have certainly been here all night, as you can see by that spider's web."

"Then he has come to grief, poor beggar!" said Hallett; "probably got carried away by the current. There is a devil of a tide here on the flood." He started to walk towards the beach, and the other man, dropping his clubs, followed.

"Yes," said Hallett, "that is what has happened. You can see his foot-prints plainly enough going down to the sea; but there are no tracks coming back."

"There are some tracks of bare feet coming out of the sea farther up the beach," said I, "which seem to be his."

Hallett shook his head. "They can't be his," he said, "for it is obvious that he never did come back. Probably they are the tracks of some shrimper. The question is, what are we to do! Better take his things to the dormy-house and then let the police know what has happened."

We went back and began to gather up the clothes, each of us taking one or two articles.

"You were right, Morris," said Hallett, as he picked up the shirt. "Here's his name, 'P. Roscoff', and I see it is on the vest and the shorts, too. And I recognize the stick now not that that matters, as the clothes are marked."

On our way across the links to the dormy-house mutual introductions took place. Morris was a London solicitor, and both he and Hallett knew Thorndyke by name.

"The coroner will have an expert witness," Hallett remarked as we entered the house. "Rather a waste in a simple case like this. We had better put the things in here."

He opened the door of a small room furnished with a good-sized table and a set of lockers, into one of which he inserted a key.

"Before we lock them up," said Thorndyke, "I suggest that we make and sign a list of them and of the contents of the pockets to put with them."

"Very well," agreed Hallett. "You know the ropes in these cases. I'll write down the descriptions, if you will call them out."

Thorndyke looked over the collection and first enumerated the articles: a tweed jacket and trousers, light, knitted wool waistcoat, black and yellow stripes, blue cotton shirt, net vest and shorts, marked in ink "P. Roscoff", brown merino socks, brown shoes, tweed cap, and a walking-stick—a mottled Malacca cane with a horn crooked handle. When Hallett had written down this list, Thorndyke laid the clothes on the table and began to empty the pockets, one at a time, dictating the descriptions of the articles to Hallett while Morris took them from him and laid them on a sheet of newspaper. In the jacket pockets were a handkerchief, marked "P. R."; a letter-case containing a few stamps, one or two hotel bills and local tradesmen's receipts, and some visiting cards inscribed "Mr. Peter Roscoff, Bell Hotel, Sandwich"; a leather cigarette-case, a 3B pencil fitted with a point-protector, and a fragment of what Thorndyke decided to be vine charcoal.

"That lot is not very illuminating," remarked Morris, peering into the pockets of the letter-case. "No letter or anything indicating his permanent address. However, that isn't our concern." He laid aside the letter-case, and picking up a pocket-knife that Thorndyke had just taken from the trousers pocket, examined it curiously. "Queer knife, that," he remarked. "steel blade—mighty sharp, too—nail file and an ivory blade. Silly arrangement, it seems. A paperknife is more convenient carried loose, and you don't want a handle to it."

"Perhaps it was meant for a fruit-knife," suggested Hallett, adding it to the list and glancing at a little heap of silver coins that Thorndyke had just laid down. "I wonder", he added, "what has made that money turn so black. Looks! as if he had been taking some medicine containing sulphur. What do you think, doctor?"

"It is quite a probable explanation," replied Thorndyke, "though we haven't the means of testing it. But you notice that this vesta-box from the other pocket is quite bright, which is rather against your theory."

He held out a little silver box bearing the engraved monogram "P. R.", the burnished surface of which contrasted strongly with the dull brownish-black of the coins. Hallett looked at it with an affirmative

grunt, and having entered it in his list and added a bunch of keys and a watch from the waistcoat pocket, laid down his pen.

"That's the lot, is it?" said he, rising and beginning to gather up the clothes. "My word! Look at the sand on the table! Isn't it astonishing how saturated with sand one's clothes become after a day on the links here? When I undress at night, the bathroom floor is like the bottom of a bird-cage. Shall I put the things in the locker now?"

"I think", said Thorndyke, "that, as I may have to give evidence, I should like to look them over before you put them away."

Hallett grinned. "There's going to be some expert evidence after all," he said. "Well, fire away, and let me know when you have finished. I am going to smoke a cigarette outside."

With this, he and Morris sauntered out, and I thought it best to go with them, though I was a little curious as to my colleague's object in examining these derelicts. However, my curiosity was not entirely baulked, for my friends went no farther than the little garden that surrounded the house, and from the place where we stood I was able to look in through the window and observe Thorndyke's proceedings.

Very methodical they were. First he laid on the table a sheet of newspaper and on this deposited the jacket, which he examined carefully all over, picking some small object off the inside near the front, and giving special attention to a thick smear of paint which I had noticed on the left cuff. Then, with his spring tape he measured the sleeves and other principal dimensions. Finally, holding the jacket upside down, he beat it gently with his stick, causing a shower of sand to fall on the paper. He then laid the jacket aside, and, taking from his pocket one or two seed envelopes (which I believe he always carried), very carefully shot the sand from the paper into one of them and wrote a few words on it—presumably the source of the sand—and similarly disposing of the small object that he had picked off the surface.

This rather odd procedure was repeated with the other garments—a fresh sheet of newspaper being used for each and with the socks, shoes, and cap. The latter he examined minutely, especially as to the inside, from which he picked out two or three small objects, which I could not see, but assumed to be hairs. Even the walking-stick was inspected and measured, and the articles from the pockets scrutinized afresh, particularly the curious pocket-knife, the ivory blade of which he examined on both sides through his lens.

Hallett and Morris glanced in at him from time to time with indulgent smiles, and the former remarked: "I like the hopeful enthusiasm of the

real pukka expert, and the way he refuses to admit the existence of the ordinary and commonplace. I wonder what he has found out from those things. But here he is. Well, doctor, what's the verdict? Was it temporary insanity or misadventure?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "The inquiry is adjourned pending the production of fresh evidence," he replied, adding: "I have folded the clothes up and put all the effects together in a paper parcel, excepting the stick."

When Hallett had deposited the derelicts in the locker, he came out and looked across the links with an air of indecision.

"I suppose," said he, "we ought to notify the police. I'll do that. When do you think the body is likely to wash up, and where?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Thorndyke. "The set of the current is towards the Thames, but the body might wash up anywhere along the coast. A case is recorded of a bather drowned off Brighton whose body came up six weeks later at Walton-on-the-Naze. But that was quite exceptional. I shall send the coroner and the Chief Constable a note with my address, and I should think you had better do the same. And that is all that we can do, until we get the summons for the inquest, if there ever is one."

To this we all agreed; and as the morning was now spent we walked back together across the links to the town, where we encountered my wife returning homeward with her sketching kit. This Thorndyke and I took possession of and having parted from Hallett and Morris opposite the Barbican, we made our way to our lodgings in quest of lunch. Naturally, the events of the morning were related to my wife and discussed by us all, but I noted that Thorndyke made no reference to his inspection of the clothes, and accordingly I said nothing about the matter before my wife; and no opportunity of opening the subject occurred until the evening, when I accompanied him to the station. Then, as we paced the platform while waiting for his train, I put my question: "By the way, did you extract any information from those garments? I saw you going through them very thoroughly."

"I got a suggestion from them," he replied, "but it is such an odd one that I hardly like to mention it. Taking the appearances at their face value, the suggestion was that the clothes were not all those of the same man. There seemed to be traces of two men, one of whom appeared to belong to this district, while the other would seem to have been associated with the eastern coast of Thanet between Ramsgate and Margate, and by preference, on the scale of probabilities, to Dumpton or Broadstairs."

"How on earth did you arrive at the localities?" I asked.

"Principally," he replied, "by the peculiarities of the sand which fell from the garments and which was not the same in all of them. You see, Anstey," he continued, "sand is analogous to dust. Both consist of minute fragments detached from larger masses; and just as, by examining microscopically the dust of a room, you can ascertain the colour and material of the carpets, curtains, furniture coverings, and other textiles, detached particles of which form the dust of that room, so, by examining sand, you can judge of the character of the cliffs, rocks, and other large masses that occur in the locality, fragments of which become ground off by the surf and incorporated in the sand of the beach. Some of the sand from these clothes is very characteristic and will probably be still more so when I examine it under the microscope."

"But", I objected, "isn't there a fallacy in that line of reasoning? Might not one man have worn the different garments at different times and in different places?"

"That is certainly a possibility that has to be borne in mind," he replied. "But here comes my train. We shall have to adjourn this discussion until you come back to the mill."

As a matter of fact, the discussion was never resumed, for, by the time that I came back to "the mill", the affair had faded from my mind, and the accumulations of grist monopolized my attention; and it is probable that it would have passed into complete oblivion but for the circumstance of its being revived in a very singular manner, which was as follows.

One afternoon about the middle of October my old friend, Mr. Brodribb, a well-known solicitor, called to give me some verbal instructions. When he had finished our business, he said: "I've got a client waiting outside, whom I am taking up to introduce to Thorndyke. You'd better come along with us."

"What is the nature of your client's case?" I asked.

"Hanged if I know," chuckled Brodribb. "He won't say. That's why I am taking him to our friend. I've never seen Thorndyke stumped yet, but I think this case will put the lid on him. Are you coming?"

"I am, most emphatically," said I, "if your client doesn't object."

"He's not going to be asked," said Brodribb. "He'll think you are part of the show. Here he is."

In my outer office we found a gentlemanly, middle-aged man to whom Brodribb introduced me, and whom he hustled down the stairs and up King's Bench Walk to Thorndyke's chambers. There we found my colleague earnestly studying a will with the aid of a watchmaker's eyeglass, and Brodribb opened the proceedings without ceremony.

"I've brought a client of mine, Mr. Capes, to see you, Thorndyke. He has a little problem that he wants you to solve."

Thorndyke bowed to the client and then asked: "What is the nature of the problem?"

"Ah!" said Brodribb, with a mischievous twinkle, "that's what you've got to find out. Mr. Capes is a somewhat reticent gentleman."

Thorndyke cast a quick look at the client and from him to the solicitor. It was not the first time that old Brodribb's high spirits had overflowed in the form of a "leg-pull", though Thorndyke had no more whole-hearted admirer than the shrewd, facetious old lawyer.

Mr. Capes smiled a deprecating smile. "It isn't quite so bad as that," he said. "But I really can't give you much information. It isn't mine to give. I am afraid of telling someone else's secrets, if I say very much."

"Of course you mustn't do that," said Thorndyke. "But, I suppose you can indicate in general terms the nature of your difficulty and the kind of help you want from us."

"I think I can," Mr. Capes replied. "At any rate, I will try. My difficulty is that a certain person with whom I wish to communicate has disappeared in what appears to me to be a rather remarkable manner. When I last heard from him, he was staying at a certain seaside resort and he stated in his letter that he was returning on the following day to his rooms in London. A few days later, I called at his rooms and found that he had not yet returned. But his luggage, which he had sent on independently, had arrived on the day which he had mentioned. So it is evident that he must have left his seaside lodgings. But from that day to this I have had no communication from him, and he has never returned to his rooms nor written to his landlady."

"About how long ago was this?" Thorndyke asked.

"It is just about two months since I heard from him."

"You don't wish to give the name of the seaside resort where he was staying?"

"I think I had better not," answered Mr. Capes. "There are circumstances—they don't concern me, but they do concern him very much—which seem to make it necessary for me to say as little as possible."

"And there is nothing further that you can tell us?"

"I am afraid not, excepting that, if I could get into communication with him, I could tell him of something very much to his advantage and which might prevent him from doing something which it would be much better that he should not do."



Thorndyke cogitated profoundly while Brodribb watched him with undisguised enjoyment. Presently my colleague looked up and addressed our secretive client.

"Did you ever play the game of 'Clump', Mr. Capes? It is a somewhat legal form of game in which one player asks questions of the others, who are required to answer 'yes' or 'no' in the proper witness-box style."

"I know the game," said Capes, looking a little puzzled, "but—"

"Shall we try a round or two?" asked Thorndyke, with an unmoved countenance. "You don't wish to make any statements, but if I ask you certain specific questions, will you answer 'yes or no'?"

Mr. Capes reflected awhile. At length he said: "I am afraid I can't commit myself to a promise. Still, if you like to ask a question or two, I will answer them if I can."

"Very well," said Thorndyke, "then, as a start, supposing I suggest that the date of the letter that you received was the thirteenth of August? What do you say? Yes or no?"

Mr. Capes sat bolt upright and stared at Thorndyke open-mouthed.

"How on earth did you guess that?" he exclaimed in an astonished tone. "It's most extraordinary! But you are right. It was dated the thirteenth."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "as we have fixed the time we will have a try at the place. What do you say if I suggest that the seaside resort was in the neighbourhood of Broadstairs?"

Mr. Capes was positively thunderstruck. As he sat gazing at Thorndyke he looked like amazement personified.

"But," he exclaimed, "you can't be guessing! You know! You know that he was at Broadstairs. And yet, how could you? I haven't even hinted at who he is."

"I have a certain man in my mind," said Thorndyke, "who may have disappeared from Broadstairs. Shall I suggest a few personal characteristics?"

Mr. Capes nodded eagerly and Thorndyke continued: "If I suggest, for instance, that he was an artist—a painter in oil"—Capes nodded again—"that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments?"

"Yes," said Capes. "Unnecessarily so in my opinion, and I am an artist myself. What else?"

"That he worked with his palette in his right hand and held his brush with his left?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Capes, half-rising from his chair; "and what was he like?"

"By gum," murmured Brodribb, "we haven't stumped him after all."

Evidently we had not, for he proceeded: "As to his physical characteristics, I suggest that he was a shortish man—about five feet seven—rather stout, fair hair, slightly bald and wearing a rather large and ragged moustache."

Mr. Capes was astounded—and so was I, for that matter—and for some moments there was a silence, broken only by old Brodribb, who sat chuckling softly and rubbing his hands. At length Mr. Capes said: "You have described him exactly, but I needn't tell you that. What I do not understand at all is how you knew that I was referring to this particular man, seeing that I mentioned no name. By the way, sir, may I ask when you saw him last?"

"I have no reason to suppose," replied Thorndyke, "that I have ever seen him at all"; an answer that reduced Mr. Capes to a state of stupefaction and brought our old friend Brodribb to the verge of apoplexy. "This man," Thorndyke continued, "is a purely hypothetical individual whom I have described from certain traces left by him. I have reason to believe that he left Broadstairs on the fourteenth of August and I have certain opinions as to what became of him thereafter. But a few more details would be useful, and I shall continue my interrogation. Now this man sent his luggage on separately. That suggests a possible intention of breaking his journey to London. What do you say?"

"I don't know," replied Capes, "but I think it probable."

"I suggest that he broke his journey for the purpose of holding an interview with some other person."

"I cannot say," answered Capes, "but if he did break his journey it would probably be for that purpose."

"And supposing that interview to have taken place, would it be likely to be an amicable interview?"

"I am afraid not. I suspect that my—er—acquaintance might have made certain proposals which would have been unacceptable, but which he might have been able to enforce. However, that is only surmise," Capes added hastily. "I really know nothing more than I have told you, except the missing man's name, and that I would rather not mention."

"It is not material," said Thorndyke, "at least, not at present. If it should become essential, I will let you know."

"M—yes," said Mr. Capes. "But you were saying that you had certain opinions as to what has become of this person."

"Yes," Thorndyke replied; "speculative opinions. But they will have to be verified. If they turn out to be correct—or incorrect either—I will let you know in the course of a few days. Has Mr. Brodribb your address?"

"He has; but you had better have it, too."

He produced his card, and, after an ineffectual effort to extract a statement from Thorndyke, took his departure.

The third act of this singular drama opened in the same setting as the first, for the following Sunday morning found my colleague and me following the path from Sandwich to the sea. But we were not alone this time. At our side marched Major Robertson, the eminent dog trainer, and behind him trotted one of his superlatively educated fox-hounds.

We came out on the shore at the same point as on the former occasion, and turning towards Shellness, walked along the smooth sand with a careful eye on the not very distinctive landmarks. At length Thorndyke halted.

"This is the place," said he. "I fixed it in my mind by that distant tree, which coincides with the chimney of that cottage on the marshes. The clothes lay in that hollow between the two big sand-hills."

We advanced to the spot, but, as a hollow is useless as a landmark, Thorndyke ascended the nearest sand-hill and stuck his stick in the summit and tied his handkerchief to the handle.

"That," he said, "will serve as a centre which we can keep in sight, and if we describe a series of gradually widening concentric circles round it, we shall cover the whole ground completely."

"How far do you propose to go?" asked the major.

We must be guided by the appearance of the ground," replied Thorndyke. "But the circumstances suggest that if there is anything buried, it can't be very far from where the clothes were laid. And it is pretty certain to be in a hollow."

The major nodded; and when he had attached a long leash to the dog's collar, we started, at first skirting the base of the sand-hill, and then, guided by our own footmarks in the loose sand, gradually increasing the distance from the high mound, above which Thorndyke's handkerchief fluttered in the light breeze. Thus we continued, walking slowly, keeping close to the previously made circle of footprints and watching the dog; who certainly did a vast amount of sniffing, but appeared to let his mind run unduly on the subject of rabbits.

In this way half an hour was consumed, and I was beginning to wonder whether we were going after all to draw a blank, when the dog's demeanour underwent a sudden change. At the moment we were crossing

a range of high sand-hills, covered with stiff, reedy grass and stunted gorse, and before us lay a deep hollow, naked of vegetation and presenting a bare, smooth surface of the characteristic greyish-yellow sand. On the side of the hill the dog checked, and, with upraised muzzle, began to sniff the air with a curiously suspicious expression, clearly unconnected with the rabbit question. On this, the major unfastened the leash, and the dog, left to his own devices, put his nose to the ground and began rapidly to cast to and fro, zig-zagging down the side of the hill and growing every moment more excited. In the same sinuous manner he proceeded across the hollow until he reached a spot near the middle; and here he came to a sudden stop and began to scratch up the sand with furious eagerness.

"It's a find, sure enough!" exclaimed the major, nearly as excited as his pupil; and, as he spoke, he ran down the hillside, followed by me and Thorndyke, who, as he reached the bottom, drew from his "poacher's pocket" a large fern-trowel in a leather sheath. It was not a very efficient digging implement, but it threw up the loose sand faster than the scratchings of the dog.

It was easy ground to excavate. Working at the spot that the dog had located, Thorndyke had soon hollowed out a small cavity some eighteen inches deep. Into the bottom of this he thrust the pointed blade of the big trowel. Then he paused and looked round at the major and me, who were craning eagerly over the little pit.

"There is something there," said he. "Feel the handle of the trowel."

I grasped the wooden handle, and, working it gently up and down, was aware of a definite but somewhat soft resistance. The major verified my observation, and then Thorndyke resumed his digging, widening the pit and working with increased caution. Ten minutes' more careful excavation brought into view a recognizable shape—a shoulder and upper arm; and following the lines of this, further diggings disclosed the form of a head and shoulders plainly discernable though still shrouded in sand. Finally, with the point of the trowel and a borrowed handkerchief—mine—the adhering sand was cleared away; and then, from the bottom of the deep, funnel-shaped hole, there looked up at us, with a most weird and horrible effect, the discoloured face of a man.

In that face, the passing weeks had wrought inevitable changes, on which I need not dwell. But the features were easily recognizable, and I could see at once that the man corresponded completely with Thorndyke's description. The cheeks were full; the hair on the temples was of a pale, yellowish brown; a straggling, fair moustache covered the

mouth; and, when the sand had been sufficiently cleared away, I could see a small, tonsure-like bald patch near the back of the crown. But I could see something more than this. On the left temple, just behind the eyebrow, was a ragged, shapeless wound such as might have been made by a hammer.

"That turns into certainty what we have already surmised," said Thorn-dyke, gently pressing the scalp around the wound. "It must have killed him instantly. The skull is smashed in like an egg-shell. And this is undoubtedly the weapon," he added, drawing out of the sand beside the body a big, hexagon-headed screw-bolt, "very prudently buried with the body. And that is all that really concerns us. We can leave the police to finish the disinterment; but you notice, Anstey, that the corpse is nude with the exception of the vest and probably the pants. The shirt has disappeared. Which is exactly what we should have expected."

Slowly, but with the feeling of something accomplished, we took our way back to the town, having collected Thorndyke's stick on the way. Presently, the major left us, to look up a friend at the club house on the links. As soon as we were alone, I put in a demand for an elucidation.

"I see the general trend of your investigations," said I "but I can't imagine how they yielded so much detail; as to the personal appearance of this man, for instance."

"The evidence in this case," he replied, "was analogous to circumstantial evidence. It depended on the cumulative effect of a number of facts, each separately inconclusive, but all pointing to the same conclusion. Shall I run over the data in their order and in accordance with their connections?"

I gave an emphatic affirmative, and he continued: "We begin, naturally, with the first fact, which is, of course, the most interesting and important; the fact which arrests attention, which shows that something has to be explained and possibly suggests a line of inquiry. You remember that I measured the footprints in the sand for comparison with the other footprints. Then I had the dimensions of the feet of the presumed bather. But as soon as I looked at the shoes which purported to be those of that bather, I felt a conviction that his feet would never go into them.

"Now, that was a very striking fact—if it really was a fact—and it came on top of another fact hardly less striking, The bather had gone into the sea; and at a considerable distance he had unquestionably come out again. Then, could be no possible doubt. In foot-measurement and length of stride the two sets of tracks were indetical; and there were no other tracks. That man had come ashore and he had remained ashore.

But yet he had not put on his clothes. He couldn't have gone away naked; but obviously he was not there. As a criminal lawyer, you must admit that there was *prima facie* evidence of something very abnormal and probably criminal.

On our way to the dormy-house, I carried the stick in the same hand as my own and noted that it was very little shorter. Therefore it was a tall man's stick. Apparently, then, the stick did not belong to the shoes, but to the man who had made the footprints. Then, when we came to the dormy-house, another striking fact presented itself. You remember that Hallett commented on the quantity of sand that fell from the clothes on to the table. I am astonished that he did not notice the very peculiar character of that sand. It was perfectly unlike the sand which would fall from his own clothes. The sand on the sand-hills is dune sand—wind-borne sand, or, as the legal term has it, æolian sand; and it is perfectly characteristic. As it has been carried by the wind, it is necessarily fine. The grains are small; and as the action of the wind sorts them out, they are extremely uniform in size. Moreover, by being continually blown about and rubbed together, they become rounded by mutual attrition. And then dune sand is nearly pure sand, composed of grains of silica unmingled with other substances.

"Beach sand is quite different. Much of it is half-formed, freshly broken down silica and is often very coarse; and, as I pointed out at the time, it is mixed with all sorts of foreign substances derived from masses in the neighbourhood. This particular sand was loaded with black and white particles, of which the white were mostly chalk, and the black particles of coal. Now there is very little chalk in the Shellness sand, as there are no cliffs quite near, and chalk rapidly disappears from sand by reason of its softness; and there is no coal."

"Where does the coal come from?" I asked.

"Principally from the Goodwins," he replied. "It is derived from the cargoes of colliers whose wrecks are embedded in those sands, and from the bunkers of wrecked steamers. This coal sinks down through the seventy odd feet of sand and at last works out at the bottom, where it drifts slowly across the floor of the sea in a north-westerly direction until some easterly gale throws it up on the Thanet shore between Ramsgate and Foreness Point. Most of it comes up at Dumpton and Broadstairs, there you may see the poor people, in the winter, gathering coal pebbles to feed their fires.

"This sand, then, almost certainly came from the Thanet coast; but the missing man, Roscoff, had been staying in Sandwich, playing golf on

the sand-hills. This was another striking discrepancy, and it made me decide to examine the clothes exhaustively, garment by garment. I did so; and this is what I found.

“The jacket, trousers, socks and shoes were those of a shortish, rather stout man, as shown by measurements, and the cap was his, since it was made of the same cloth as the jacket and trousers.

“The waistcoat, shirt, underclothes and stick were those of a tall man.

“The garments, socks and shoes of the short man were charged with Thanet beach sand, and contained no dune sand, excepting the cap, which might have fallen off on the sand-hills.

“The waistcoat was saturated with dune sand and contained no beach sand, and a little dune sand was obtained from the shirt and undergarments. That is to say, that the short man’s clothes contained beach sand only, while the tall man’s clothes contained only dune sand.

“The short man’s clothes were all unmarked; the tall man’s clothes were either marked or conspicuously recognizable, as the waistcoat and also the stick.

“The garments of the short man which had been left were those that could not have been worn by a tall man without attracting instant attention and the shoes could not have been put on at all; whereas the garments of the short man which had disappeared—the waistcoat, shirt and underclothes—were those that could have been worn by a tall man without attracting attention. The obvious suggestion was that the tall man had gone off in the short man’s shirt and waistcoat but otherwise in his own clothes.

“And now as to the personal characteristics of the short man. From the cap I obtained five hairs. They were all blond, and two of them were of the peculiar, atrophic, “point of exclamation” type that grow at the margin of a bald area. Therefore he was a fair man and partially bald. On the inside of the jacket, clinging to the rough tweed, I found a single long, thin, fair moustache hair, which suggested a long, soft moustache. The edge of the left cuff was thickly marked with oil-paint—not a single smear, but an accumulation such as a painter picks up when he reaches with his brush hand across a loaded palette. The suggestion—not very conclusive—was that he was an oil-painter and left-handed. But there was strong confirmation. There was an artist’s pencil—3B—and a stump of vine charcoal such as an oil-painter might carry. The silver coins in his pocket were blackened with sulphide as they would be if a piece of artist’s soft, vulcanized rubber has been in the pocket with them. And there was the pocket-knife. It contained a sharp steel pencil-blade, a

charcoal file and an ivory palette-blade; and that palette-blade had been used by a left-handed man.”

“How did you arrive at that?” I asked.

“By the bevels worn at the edges,” he replied. “An old palette-knife used by a right-handed man shows a bevel of wear on the under side of the left-hand edge and the upper side of the right-hand edge; in the case of a left handed man the wear shows on the under side of the right hand edge and the upper side of the left-hand edge. This being an ivory blade, showed the wear very distinctly and proved conclusively that the user was left-handed; and as an ivory palette-knife is used only by fastidiously careful painters for such pigments as the cadmiums, which might be discoloured by a steel blade, one was justified in assuing that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments.”

As I listened to Thorndyke’s exposition I was profoundly impressed. His conclusions, which had sounded like mere speculative guesses, were, I now realized, based upon an analysis of the evidence as careful and as impartial as the summing up of a judge. And these conclusions he had drawn instantaneously from the appearances of things that had been before my eyes all the time and from which I had learned nothing. “What do you suppose is the meaning of the affair?” I asked presently. “What was the motive of the murder?”

“We can only guess,” he replied. “But, interpreting Capes’ hints, I should suspect that our artist friend was a blackmailer; that he had come over here to squeeze Roscoff—perhaps not for the first time—and that his victim lured him out on the sand-hills for a private talk and then took the only effective means of ridding himself of his persecutor. That is my view of the case; but, of course, it is only surmise.”

Surmise as it was, however, it turned out to be literally correct. At the inquest Capes had to tell all that he knew, which was uncommonly little, though no one was able to add to it. The murdered man, Joseph Bertrand, had fastened on Roscoff and made a regular income by blackmailing him. That much Capes knew; and he knew that the victim had been in prison and that that was the secret. But who Roscoff was and what was his real name—for Roscoff was apparently a *nom de guerre*—he had no idea. So he could not help the police. The murderer had got clear away and there was no hint as to where to look for him; and so far as I know, nothing has ever been heard of him since.



## The Apparition of Burling Court

Thorndyke seldom took a formal holiday. He did not seem to need one. As he himself put it, "A holiday implies the exchange of a less pleasurable occupation for one more pleasurable. But there is no occupation more pleasurable than the practice of Medical Jurisprudence." Moreover, his work was less affected by terms and vacations than that of an ordinary barrister, and the Long Vacation often found him with his hands full. Even when he did appear to take a holiday the appearance tended to be misleading, and it was apt to turn out that his disappearance from his usual haunts was associated with a case of unusual interest at a distance.

Thus it was on the occasion when our old friend, Mr. Brodribb, of Lincoln's Inn, beguiled him into a fortnight's change at St. David's-at-Cliffe, a seaside hamlet on the Kentish coast. There was a case in the background, and a very curious case it turned out to be, though at first it appeared to me quite a commonplace affair; and the manner of its introduction was as follows.

One hot afternoon in the early part of the Long Vacation the old solicitor dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat. That, at least, was how he explained his visit; but my experience of Mr. Brodribb led me to suspect some ulterior purpose in the call, and as he sat by the open window, teacup in hand, looking, with his fine pink complexion, his silky white hair and his faultless "turn out," the very type of the courtly, old-fashioned lawyer, I waited expectantly for the matter of his visit to transpire. And, presently, out it came.

"I am going to take a little holiday down at St. David's," said he. "Just a quiet spell by the sea, you know. Delightful place. So quiet and restful and so breezy and fresh. Ever been there?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "I only just know the name."

"Well, why shouldn't you come down for a week or so? Both of you. I shall stay at Burling Court, the Lumleys' place. I can't invite you there as I'm only a guest, but I know of some comfortable rooms in the village that I could get for you. I wish you would come down, Thorndyke," he added after a pause. "I'm rather unhappy about young Lumley—I'm the family lawyer, you know, and so was my father and my grandfather, so I feel almost as if the Lumleys were my own kin—and I should like to have your advice and help."

"Why not have it now?" suggested Thorndyke.

"I will," he replied; "but I should like your help on the spot too. I'd like you to see Lumley have a talk with him and tell me what you think of him."

"What is amiss with him?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well," answered Brodribb, "it looks uncomfortably like insanity. He has delusions—sees apparitions and that sort of thing. And there is some insanity in the family. But I had better give you the facts in their natural order.

"About four months ago Giles Lumley of Burling Court died; and as he was a widower without issue, the estate passed to his nearest male relative, my present client, Frank Lumley, who was also the principal beneficiary under the will. At the time of Giles' death Frank was abroad, but a cousin of his, Lewis Price, was staying at the house with his wife as a more or less permanent guest; and as Price's circumstances were not very flourishing, and as he is the next heir to the estate, Frank—who is a bachelor—wrote to him at once telling him to look upon Burling Court as his home for as long as he pleased."

"That was extremely generous of him," I remarked

"Yes," Brodribb agreed; "Frank is a good fellow; a very high-minded gentleman and a very sweet man but a little queer—very queer just now. Well, Frank came back from abroad and took up his abode at the house; and for a time all went well. Then, one day, Price called on me and gave me some very unpleasant news. It seemed that Frank, who had always been rather neurotic and imaginative, had been interesting himself a good deal in psychical research and—and balderdash of that kind, you know. Well, there was no great harm in that, perhaps. But just lately he had taken to seeing visions and—what was worse—talking about them; so much so that Price got uneasy and privately invited a mental specialist down to lunch; and the specialist, having had a longish talk with Frank, Price confidentially that he (Frank) was obviously suffering from insane delusions. Thereupon Price called me and begged me

to see Frank myself and what ought to be done; so I made an occasion for him to come and see me at the office.”

“And what did you think of him?” asked Thorndyke.

“I was horrified—horrified,” said Mr. Brodribb. “I assure you, Thorn-dyke, that that poor young man sat in my office and talked like a stark lunatic. Quite quietly, you know. No excitement, though he was evidently anxious and unhappy. But there he sat gravely talking the damndest nonsense you ever heard.”

“As, for instance—?”

“Well, his infernal visions. Luminous birds flying about in the dark, and a human head suspended in mid air—upside down, too. But I had better give you his story as he told it. I made full shorthand notes as he was talking, and I’ve brought them with me, though I hardly need them.

“His trouble seems to have begun soon after he took up his quarters at Burling Court. Being a bookish sort of fellow, he started to go through his library systematically; and presently he came across a small manuscript book, which turned out to be a sort of family history, or rather a collection of episodes. It was rather a lurid little book, for it apparently dwelt chiefly on the family crime, the family spectre and the family madness.”

“Did you know about these heirlooms?” Thorndyke asked.

“No; it was the first I’d heard of ’em. Price knew there was some sort of family superstition, but he didn’t know what it was; and Giles knew about it—so Price tells me—but didn’t care to talk about it. He never mentioned it to me.”

“What is the nature of the tradition?” inquired Thorndyke.

“I’ll tell you,” said Brodribb, taking out his notes. “I’ve got it all down, and poor Frank reeled the stuff off as if he had learned it by heart. The book, which is dated 1819, was apparently written by a Walter Lumley and the story of the crime and the spook runs thus:

“About 1720 the property passed to a Gilbert Lumley, a naval officer, who then gave up the sea, married and settled down at Burling Court. A year or two later some trouble arose about his wife and a man named Glynn, a neighbouring squire. With or without cause, Lumley became violently jealous, and the end of it was that he lured Glynn to a large cavern in the cliffs and there murdered him. It was a most ferocious and vindictive crime. The cavern, which was then used by smugglers, had a beam across the roof bearing a tackle for hoisting out boat cargoes, and this tackle Lumley fastened to Glynn’s ankles—having first pinioned him—and hoisted him up so that he hung head downwards a foot or so

clear of the floor of the cave. And there he left him hanging until the rising tide flowed into the cave and drowned him.

“The very next day the murder was discovered, and as Lumley was the nearest justice of the peace, the discoverers reported to him and took him to the cave to the body. When he entered the cave the corpse was stilt hanging as he had left the living man, and a bat was flitting round and round the dead man’s head. He had the body taken down and carried to Glynn’s house and took the necessary measures for the inquest. Of course, everyone suspected him of the murder, but there was no evidence against him. The verdict was murder by some person unknown, and as Gilbert Lumley was not sensitive, everything seemed to have gone quite satisfactorily.

“But it hadn’t. One night, exactly a month after murder, Gilbert retired to his bedroom in the dark. He was in the act of feeling along the mantelpiece for the tinder-box, when he became aware of a dim light moving about the room. He turned round quickly and then s that it was a bat—a most uncanny and abnormal bat that seemed to give out a greenish ghostly light—flitting round and round his bed. On this, remembering the bat in the cavern, he rushed out of the room in the very devil of a fright. Presently he returned with one of the servants and a couple of candles; but the bat had disappeared.

“From that time onward, the luminous bat haunted Gilbert, appearing in dark rooms, on staircases and passages and corridors, until his nerves were all on end and he did not dare to move about the house at night without a candle or a lantern. But that was not the worst. Exactly two months after the murder the next stage of the haunting began. He had retired to his bedroom and was just about to get into bed when he remembered that he had left his watch in the little dressing-room that adjoined his chamber. With a candle in his hand he went to the dressing-room and flung open the door. And then he stopped dead and stood as if turned into stone; for, within a couple of yards of him, suspended in mid-air, was a man’s head hanging upside down.

“For some seconds he stood rooted to the spot, unable to move. Then he uttered a cry of horror and rushed back to his room and down to the hall. There was no doubt whose head it was, strange and horrible as it looked in that unnatural, inverted position; for he had seen it twice before in that very position hanging in the cavern. Evidently he had not got rid of Glynn.

“That night, and every night henceforward, he slept in his wife’s room. And all through the night he was conscious of a strange and dreadful

impulse to rise and go down to the shore; to steal into the cavern and wait for the flowing tide. He lay awake, fighting against the invisible power that seemed to be drawing him to destruction, and by the morning the horrid impulse began to weaken. But he went about in terror, not daring to go near the shore and afraid to trust himself alone.

"A month passed. The effect of the apparition grew daily weaker and an abundance of lights in the house protected him from the visitation of the bat. Then, exactly three months after the murder, he saw the head again. This time it was in the library, where he had gone to fetch a book. He was standing by the book shelves and had just taken out a volume, when, as he turned away, there the hideous thing was, hanging in hat awful, grotesque posture, chin upwards and the scanty hair dropping down like wet fringe. Gilbert dropped the book that he was holding and fled from the room with a shriek; and all that night invisible hands seemed to be plucking at him to draw him away to where he voices of the waves were reverberating in the cavern.

"This second visitation affected him profoundly. He could not shake off that sinister impulse to steal away to the shore. He was a broken man, the victim of an abiding terror, clinging for protection to the very servants, creeping abroad with shaking limbs and an apprehensive eye towards the sea. And ever in his ears was the murmur of the surf and the hollow echoes of the cavern.

"Already he had sought forgetfulness in drink; and sought it in vain. Now he took refuge in opiates. Every night, before retiring to the dreaded bed, he mingled laudanum with the brandy that brought him stupor if not repose. And brandy and opium began to leave their traces in the tremulous hand, the sallow cheek and the bloodshot eye. And so another month passed.

"As the day approached that would mark the fourth month, his terror of the visitation that he now anticipated reduced him to a state of utter prostration. Sleep—even drugged sleep—appeared that night to be out of the question, and he decided to sit up with his family, hoping by that means to escape the dreaded visitor. But it was a vain hope. Hour after hour he sat in his elbow chair by the fire, while his wife dozed in her chair opposite, until the clock in the hall struck twelve. He listened and counted the strokes of the bell, leaning back with his eyes closed. Half the weary night was gone. As the last stroke sounded and a deep silence fell on the house, he opened his eyes—and looked into the face of Glynn within a few inches of his own.

"For some moments he sat with dropped jaw and dilated eyes staring in

silent horror at this awful thing; then with an agonised screech he slid from his chair into a heap on the floor.

“At noon on the following day he was missed from the house. A search was made in the grounds and in the neighbourhood, but he was nowhere to be found. At last some one thought of the cavern, of which he had spoken in his wild mutterings and a party of searchers made their way thither. And there they found him when the tide went out, lying on the wet sand with the brown sea-tangle wreathed about his limbs and the laudanum bottle—now full of sea water—by his side.

“With the death of Gilbert Lumley it seemed that the murdered man’s spirit was appeased. During the life-time of Gilbert’s son, Thomas, the departed Glynn made no sign. But on his death and the succession of his son Arthur—then a middle-aged man—the visitations began again, and in the same order. At the end of the first month the luminous bat appeared; at the end of the second, the inverted head made its entry, and again at the third and the fourth months; and within twenty-four hours of the last visitation, the body of Arthur Lumley was found in the cavern. And so it has been from that time onward. One generation escapes untouched by the curse; but in the next, Glynn and the sea claim their own.”

“Is that true, so far as you know?” asked Thorndyke.

“I can’t say,” answered Brodribb. “I am now only quoting Walter Lumley’s infernal little book. But I remember that, in fact, Giles’ father was drowned. I understood that his boat capsized, but that may have been only a story to cover the suicide.

“Well now, I have given you the gruesome history from this book that poor Frank had the misfortune to find. You see that had had it all off by heart and had evidently read it again and again. Now I come to his own story, which he told me very quietly but with intense conviction and very evident forebodings.

“He found this damned book a few days after his arrival at Burling Court, and it was clear to him that, if the story was true, he was the next victim, since his predecessor, Giles, had been left in peace. And so it turned out. Exactly a month after his arrival, going up to his bedroom in the dark—no doubt expecting this apparition—as soon as he opened the door he saw a thing like a big glow-worm or firefly flitting round the room. It is evident that he was a good deal upset, for he rushed downstairs in a state of great agitation and fetched Price up to see it. But the strange thing was—though perhaps not so very strange, after all—that, although the thing was still there, flitting about the room, Price could

see nothing. However, he pulled up the blind—the window was wide open—and the bat flopped out and disappeared.

“During the next month the bat reappeared several times, in the bedroom, in corridors and once in a garret, when it flew out as Frank opened the door.”

“What was he doing in the garret?” asked Thorndyke.

“He went up to fetch an ancient coffin-stool that Mrs. Price had seen there and was telling him about. Well, this went on until the end of the second month. And then came the second act. It seems that by some infernal stupidity, he was occupying the bedroom that had been used by Gilbert. Now on this night, as soon as he had gone up, he must needs pay a visit to the little dressing-room, which is now known as ‘Gilbert’s cabin’—so he tells me, for I was not aware of it—and where Gilbert’s cutlass, telescope, quadrant and the old navigator’s watch are kept.”

“Did he take a light with him?” inquired Thorndyke.

“I think not. There is a gas jet in the corridor and presumably he lit that. Then he opened the door of the cabin; and immediately he saw, a few feet in front of him, a man’s head, upside down, apparently hanging in mid-air. It gave him a fearful shock—the more so, perhaps, because he half expected it—and, as before, he ran downstairs, all of a tremble. Price had gone to bed but Mrs. Price came up with him, and he showed her the horrible thing which was still hanging in the middle of the dark room.

“But Mrs. Price could see nothing. She assured him that it was all his imagination; and in proof of it, she walked into the room, right through the head, as it seemed, and when she had found the matches, she lit the gas. Of course, there was nothing whatever in the room.

“Another month passed. The bat appeared at intervals and kept poor Frank’s nerves in a state of constant tension. On the night of the appointed day, as you will anticipate, Frank went again to Gilbert’s cabin, drawn there by an attraction that one can quite understand. And there, of course, was the confounded head as before. That was a fortnight ago. So, you see, the affair is getting urgent. Either there is some truth in this weird story—which I don’t believe for a moment—or poor old Frank is ripe for the asylum. But in any case something will have to be done.”

“You spoke just now,” said Thorndyke, “of some insanity in the family. What does it amount to, leaving these apparitions out of the question?”

“Well, a cousin of Frank’s committed suicide in an asylum.”

“And Frank’s parents?”

"They were quite sane. The cousin was the son of Frank's mother's sister; and she was all right, too. But the boy's father had to be put away."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "the insanity doesn't seem to be in Frank's family at all, in a medical sense. Legal inheritance and physiological inheritance do not follow the same lines. If his mother's sister married a lunatic, he might inherit that lunatic's property, but he could not inherit his insanity. There was no blood relationship."

"No, that's true," Brodribb admitted, "though Frank certainly seems as mad as a hatter. But now, to come back to the holiday question, what do you say to a week or so at St. David's?"

Thorndyke looked at me interrogatively. "What says my learned friend?" he asked.

"I say: Let us put up the shutters and leave Polton in charge," I replied; and Thorndyke assented without a murmur.

Less than a week later, we were installed in the very comfortable rooms that Mr. Brodribb had found for us in the hamlet of St. David's, within five minutes' walk of the steep gap-way that led down to the beach. Thorndyke entered into the holiday with an enthusiasm that would have astonished the denizens of King Bench Walk. He explored the village, he examined the church, inside and out, he sampled all the footpaths with the aid of the Ordnance map, he foregathered with the fishermen on the beach and renewed his acquaintance with boat-craft, and he made a pilgrimage to the historic cavern—it was less than a mile along the shore—arid inspected its dark and chilly interior with the most lively curiosity.

We had not been at St. David's twenty-four hours before we made the acquaintance of Frank Lumley. Mr. Brodribb saw to that. For the old solicitor was profoundly anxious about his client—he took his responsibilities very seriously, did Mr. Brodribb. His "family" clients were to him as his own kin, and their interests his own interests—and his confidence in Thorndyke's wisdom was unbounded. We were very favourably impressed by the quiet, gentle, rather frail young man, and for my part, I found him, for a certifiable lunatic, a singularly reasonable and intelligent person. Indeed, apart from his delusions—or rather hallucinations—he seemed perfectly sane; for a somewhat eager interest in psychical and supernormal phenomena (of which he made no secret) is hardly enough to create a suspicion of a man's sanity.

But he was clearly uneasy about his own mental condition. He realised that the apparitions might be the products of a disordered brain, though



that not his own view of them; and he discussed them us in the most open and ingenuous manner.

"You don't think," Thorndyke suggested, "that these apparitions may possibly be natural appearances which you have misinterpreted or exaggerated in consequence of having read that very circumstantial story?"

Lumley shook his head emphatically. "It is impossible," said he. "How could I? Take the case of the bat. I have seen it on several occasions quite distinctly. It was obviously a bat; but yet it seemed full of a ghostly, greenish light like that of a glow-worm. If it was not what it appeared, what was it? And then the head. There it was, perfectly clear and solid and real, hanging in mid-air within three or four feet of me. I could have touched it if I had dared."

"What size did it appear?" asked Thorndyke.

Lumley reflected. "It was not quite life-size. I should say about two-thirds the size of an ordinary head."

"Should you recognise the face if you saw it again?"

"I can't say," replied Lumley. "You see, it was upside down. I haven't a very clear picture of it—I mean as to what the face would have been like the right way up."

"Was the room quite dark on both occasions?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, quite. The gas jet in the corridor is just above the door and does not any light into the room."

"And what is there opposite the door?"

"There is a small window, but that is usually kept shuttered nowadays. Under the window is a small folding dressing-table that belonged to Gilbert Lumley. He had it made when he came home from sea."

Thus Lumley was quite lucid and coherent in his answers. His manner was perfectly sane; it was only the matter that was abnormal. Of the reality of the apparitions he had not the slightest doubt, and he never varied in the smallest degree in his description of their appearance. The fact that they had been invisible both to Mr. Price and his wife he explained by pointing out that the curse applied only to the direct descendants of Gilbert Lumley, and to those only in alternate generations. After one of our conversations, Thorndyke expressed a wish to see the little manuscript book that had been the cause of all the trouble—or at least had been the forerunner; and Lumley promised to bring it to our rooms on the following afternoon. But then came an interruption to our holiday, not entirely unexpected; an urgent telegram from one of our solicitor friends asking consultation on an important and intricate

case that had just been put into his hands, and making it necessary for us to go up to town by an early train on the following morning.

We sent a note to Brodribb, telling him that we should be away from St. David's for perhaps a day or two, and on our way to the station he overtook us.

"I am sorry you have had to break your holiday," he said; "but I hope you will be back before Thursday."

"Why Thursday, in particular?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Because Thursday is the day on which that damned head is due to make its third appearance. It will be an anxious time. Frank hasn't said anything, but I know his nerves are strung up to concert pitch."

"You must watch him," said Thorndyke. "Don't let him out of your sight if you can help it."

"That's all very well," said Brodribb, "but he isn't a child, and I am not his keeper. He is the master of the house and I am just his guest. I can't follow him about if he wants to be alone."

"You mustn't stand on politeness, Brodribb," rejoined Thorndyke. "It will be a critical time and you must keep him in sight."

"I shall do my best," Brodribb said anxiously, "but I do hope you will be back by then."

He accompanied us dejectedly to the platform and stayed with us until our train came in. Suddenly, just as we were entering our carriage, he thrust his hand into his pocket.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, "I had nearly forgotten this book. Frank asked me to give it to you." As he spoke, he drew out a little rusty calf-bound volume and handed it to Thorndyke. "You can look through it at your leisure," said he, "and if you think it best to chuck the infernal thing out of the window, do so. I suspect poor Frank is none the better for conning it over perpetually as he does."

I thought there was a good deal of reason in Brodribb's opinion. If Lumley's illusions were, as I suspected, the result of suggestion produced by reading the narrative, that suggestion would certainly tend to be reinforced by conning it over and over again. But the old lawyer's proposal was hardly practicable.

As soon as the train had fairly started, Thorndyke proceeded to inspect the little volume; and his manner of doing so was highly characteristic. An ordinary person would have opened the book and looked through the contents, probably seeking out at once the sinister history of Gilbert Lumley.

Not so Thorndyke. His inspection began at the very beginning and proceeded systematically to deal with every fact that the book had to disclose. First he made an exhaustive examination of the cover; scrutinised the corners; inspected the bottom edges and compared them with the top edges; and compared the top and bottom head-caps. Then he brought out his lens and examined the tooling, which was simple in character and worked in "blind"—i. e. not gilt. He also inspected the head-bands through the glass, and then he turned his attention to the interior. He looked carefully at both end-papers, he opened the sections and examined the sewing-thread, he held the leaves up to the light and tested the paper by eye and by touch and he viewed the writing in several places through his lens. Finally he handed the book and the lens to me without remark.

It was a quaint little volume, with a curiously antique air, though it was but a century old. The cover was of rusty calf, a good deal rubbed, but not in bad condition; for the joints were perfectly sound; but then it had probably had comparatively little use. The paper—a laid paper with very distinct wire-lines but no watermark—had turned with age to a pale, creamy buff; the writing had faded to a warm brown, but was easily legible and very clearly and carefully written. Having noted these points, I turned over the leaves until I came to the story of Gilbert Lumley and the ill-fated Glynn, which I read through attentively, observing that Mr. Brodribb's notes had given the whole substance of the narrative with singular completeness.

"This story," I said, as I handed the book back to Thorndyke, "strikes me as rather unreal and unconvincing. One doesn't see how Walter Lumley got his information."

"No," agreed Thorndyke. "It is on the plane of fiction. The narrator speaks in the manner of a novelist with complete knowledge of events and actions which were apparently known only to the actors."

"Do you think it possible that Walter Lumley was simply romancing?"

"I think it quite possible, and in fact very probable that the whole narrative is fictitious," he replied. "We shall have to go into that question later on. For the present, I suppose, we had better give our attention to the case that we have in hand at the moment."

The little volume was accordingly put away, and for the rest of the journey our conversation was occupied with the matter of the consultation that formed our immediate business. As this, however, had no connection with the present history, I need make no further reference to it beyond stating that it kept us both busy for three days and that we

finished with it on the evening of the third.

"Do you propose to go down to St. David's to-night or to-morrow?" I asked, as we let ourselves into our chambers.

"To-night," replied Thorndyke. "This is Thursday, you know, and Brodribb was anxious that we should be back some time to-day. I have sent him a telegram saying that we shall go down by the train that arrives about ten o'clock. So if he wants us, he can meet us at the station or send a message."

"I wonder," said I, "if the apparition of Glynn's head will make its expected visitation to-night."

"It probably will if there is an opportunity," Thorndyke replied. "But I hope that Brodribb will manage to prevent the opportunity from occurring. And, talking of Lumley, as we have an hour to spare, we may as well finish our inspection of his book. I snipped off a corner of one of the leaves and gave it to Polton to boil up in weak caustic soda. It will be ready for examination by now."

"You don't suspect that the book has been faked, do you?" said I.

"I view that book with the deepest suspicion," he replied, opening a drawer and producing the little volume. "Just look at it, Jervis. Look at the cover, for instance."

"Well," I said, turning the book over in my hand, "the cover looks ancient enough to me; typical old, rusty calf with a century's wear on it."

"Oh, there's no doubt that it is old calf," said he; "just the sort of leather that you could skin off the cover of an old quarto or folio. But don't you see that the signs of wear are all in the wrong places? How does a book wear in use? Well, first there are the bottom edges, which rub on the shelf. Then the corners, which are the thinnest leather and the most exposed. Then the top head-cap, which the finger hooks into in pulling the book from the shelf. Then the joint or hinge, which wears through from frequent opening and shutting. The sides get the least wear of all. But in this book, the bottom edges, the corners, the top head-cap and the joints are perfectly sound. They are not more worn than the sides; and the tooling is modern in character. It looks quite fresh and the tool-marks are impressed on the marks of wear instead of being themselves worn. The appearances suggest to me a new binding with old leather."

"Then look at the paper. It professes to be discoloured by age. But the discoloration of the leaves of an old book occurs principally at the edges, where the paper has become oxidised by exposure to the air. The leaves of this book are equally discoloured all over. To me they suggest a bath of weak tea rather than old age."

“Again, there is the writing. Its appearance is that of faded writing done with the old-fashioned writing ink—made with iron sulphate and oak-galls. But it doesn’t look quite the right colour. However, we can easily test that. If it is old iron-gall ink, a drop of ammonium sulphide will turn it black. Let us take the book up to the laboratory and try it—and we had better have a “control” to compare it with.”

He ran his eye along the book-shelves and took down a rusty-looking volume of Humphry Clinker, the end-paper of which bore several brown and faded signatures.

“Here is a signature dated 1803,” said he. “That will be near enough”; and with the two books in his hand he led the way upstairs to the laboratory. Here he took down the ammonium sulphide bottle, and dipping up a little of the liquid in a fine glass tube, opened the cover of Humphry Clinker and carefully deposited a tiny drop on the figure 3 in the date. Almost immediately the ghostly brown began to darken until it at length became jet black. Then, in the same way, he opened Walter Lumley’s manuscript book and on the 9 of the date, 1819, he deposited a drop of the solution. But this time there was no darkening of the pale brown writing; on the contrary, it faded rapidly to a faint and muddy violet.

“It is not an iron ink,” said Thorndyke, “and it looks suspiciously like an aniline brown. But let us see what the paper is made of. Have you boiled up that fragment, Polton?”

“Yes, sir,” answered our laboratory assistant, “and I’ve washed the soda out of it, so it’s all ready.”

He produced a labelled test-tube containing a tiny corner of paper floating in water, which he carefully emptied into a large watch-glass. From this Thorndyke transferred the little pulpy fragment to a microscope slide and, with a pair of mounted needles, broke it up into its constituent fibres. Then he dropped on it a drop of aniline stain, removed the surplus with blotting-paper, added a drop of glycerine and put on it a large cover-slip.

“There, Jervis,” said he, handing me the slide, “let us have your opinion on Walter Lumley’s paper.”

I placed the slide on the stage of the microscope and proceeded to inspect the specimen. But no exhaustive examination was necessary. The first glance settled the matter.

“It is nearly all wood,” I said. “Mechanical wood fibre, with some esparto, a little cotton and a few linen fibres.”

"Then," said Thorndyke, "it is a modern paper. Mechanical wood-pulp—prepared by Keller's process—was first used in paper-making in 1840. 'Chemical wood-pulp' came in later; and esparto was not used until 1860. So we can say with confidence that this paper was not made until more than twenty years after the date that is written on it. Probably it is of quite recent manufacture."

"In that case," said I, "this book is a counterfeit—presumably fraudulent."

"Yes. In effect it is a forgery."

"But that seems to suggest a conspiracy."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed; "especially if it is considered in conjunction with the apparitions. The suggestion is that this book was prepared for the purpose of inducing a state of mind favourable to the acceptance of supernatural appearances. The obvious inference is that the apparitions themselves were an imposture produced for fraudulent purposes. But it is time for us to go."

We shook hands with Polton, and, having collected our suit-cases from the sitting-room, set forth for the station.

During the journey down I reflected on the new turn that Frank Lumley's affairs had taken. Apparently, Brodribb had done his client an injustice. Lumley was not so mad as the old lawyer had supposed. He was merely credulous and highly suggestible. The "hallucinations" were real phenomena which he had simply misinterpreted. But who was behind these sham illusions? And what was it all about? I tried to open the question with Thorndyke; but though he was willing to discuss the sham manuscript book and the technique of its production, he would commit himself to nothing further.

On our arrival at St. David's, Thorndyke looked up and down the platform and again up the station approach. "No sign of Brodribb or any messenger," he remarked "so we may assume that all is well at Burling Court up to the present. Let us hope that Brodribb's presence has had an inhibitory effect on the apparitions."

Nevertheless, it was evident that he was not quite easy in his mind. During supper he appeared watchful and preoccupied, and when, after the meal, he proposed a stroll down to the beach, he left word with our landlady as to where he was to be found if he should be wanted.

It was about a quarter to eleven when we arrived at the shore, and the tide was beginning to run out. The beach was deserted with the exception of a couple of fishermen who had apparently come in with the tide and who were making their boat secure for the before going

home. Thorndyke approached them, addressing the older fisherman, remarked: "That is a big, powerful boat. Pretty fast, too, isn't she?"

"Ay, sir," was the reply; "fast and weatherly, she is. What we calls a galley-punt. Built at Deal for the hovelling trade—salvage, you know, sir—but there ain't no hovelling nowadays, not to speak of."

"Are you going out to-morrow?" asked Thorndyke.

"Not as I knows of, sir. Was you thinking of a bit of fishing?"

"If you are free," said Thorndyke, "I should like to charter the boat for to-morrow. I don't know what time I shall be able to start, but if you will stand by ready to put off at once when I come down we can count the waiting as sailing."

"Very well, sir," said the fisherman; "the boat's yours for the day to-morrow. Any time after six, or earlier, if you like, if you come down here you'll find me and my mate standing by with a stock of bait and the boat ready to push off."

"That will do admirably," said Thorndyke; and the morrow's programme being thus settled, we wished the fishermen good-night and walked slowly back to our lodgings, where, after a final pipe, we turned in.

On the following morning, just as we were finishing a rather leisurely breakfast, we saw from our window our friend Mr. Brodribb hurrying down the street towards our house. I ran out and opened the door, and as he entered I conducted him into our sitting-room. From his anxious and flustered manner it was obvious that something had gone wrong, and his first words confirmed the sinister impression.

"I'm afraid we're in for trouble, Thorndyke," said he. "Frank is missing."

"Since when?" asked Thorndyke.

"Since about eight o'clock this morning. He is nowhere about the house and he hasn't had any breakfast."

"When was he last seen?" Thorndyke asked. "And where?"

"About eight o'clock, in the breakfast-room. Apparently he went in there to say "good-bye" to the Prices—they have gone on a visit for the day to Folkestone and were having an early breakfast so as to catch the eight-thirty train. But he didn't have breakfast with them. He just went in and wished them a pleasant journey and then it appears that he went out for a stroll in the grounds. When I came down to breakfast at half-past eight, the Prices had gone and Frank hadn't come in. The maid sounded the gong, and as Frank still did not appear, she went out into the grounds to look for him; and presently I went out myself. But he wasn't there and he wasn't anywhere in the house. I don't like the

look of it at all. He is usually very regular and punctual at meals. What do you think we had better do, Thorndyke?"

My colleague looked at his watch and rang the bell.

"I think, Brodribb," said he, "that we must act on the obvious probabilities and provide against the one great danger that is known to us. Mrs. Robinson," he added, addressing the landlady, who, had answered the bell in person, "can you let us have a jug of strong coffee at once?"

Mrs. Robinson could, and bustled away to prepare it, while Thorndyke produced from a cupboard a large vacuum flask.

"I don't quite follow you, Thorndyke," said Mr. Brodribb. "What probabilities and what danger do you mean?"

"I mean that, up to the present, Frank Lumley has exactly reproduced in his experiences and his actions the experiences and actions of Gilbert Lumley as set forth in Walter Lumley's narrative. The overwhelming probability is that he will continue to reproduce the story of Gilbert to the end. He probably saw the apparition for the third time last night, and is even now preparing for the final act."

"Good God!" gasped Brodribb. "What a fool I am! You mean the cave? But we can never get there now. It will be high water in an hour and the beach at St. David's Head will be covered already. Unless we can get a boat," he added despairingly.

"We have got a boat," said Thorndyke. "I chartered one last night."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Brodribb. "But you always think of everything—though I don't know what you want that coffee for."

"We may not want it at all," said Thorndyke, as he poured the coffee, which the landlady had just brought, into the vacuum flask, "but on the other hand we may."

He deposited the flask in a hand-bag, in which I observed a small emergency-case, and then turned to Brodribb.

"We had better get down to the beach now," said he.

As we emerged from the bottom of the gap-way we saw our friends of the previous night laying a double line of planks across the beach from the boat to the margin of the surf; for the long galley-punt, with her load of ballast, was too heavy, over the shingle. They had just got the last plank laid as we reached the boat, and as they observed us they came running back with half a dozen of their mates.

"Jump aboard, gentlemen," said our skipper, with a slightly dubious eye on Mr. Brodribb—for the boat's gunwale was a good four feet above the beach. "We'll have her afloat in a jiffy."



We climbed in and hauled Mr. Brodribb in after us. The tall mast was already stepped—against the middle thwart in the odd fashion of galley-punts—and the great sail was hooked to the traveller and the tack-hook ready for hoisting. The party of boatmen gathered round and each took a tenacious hold of gunwale or thole. The skipper gave time with a jovial “Yo-ho!” his mates joined in with a responsive howl and heaved as one man. The great boat moved forward, and gathering way, slid swiftly along the greased planks towards the edge of the surf. Then her nose splashed into the sea; the skipper and his mate sprang in over the transom; the tall lug-sail soared up the mast and filled and the skipper let the rudder slide down its pintles and grasped the tiller.

“Did you want to go anywheres in particklar?” he inquired.

“We want to make for the big cave round St. David’s Head,” said Thorndyke, “and we want to get there well before high water.”

“We’ll do that easy enough, sir,” said the skipper “with this breeze. ’Tis but about a mile and we’ve got three-quarters of an hour to do it in.”

He took a pull at the main sheet and, putting the helm down, brought the boat on a course parallel to the coast. Quietly but swiftly the water slipped past, one after another fresh headlands opened out till, in about a quarter of an hour, we were abreast of St. David’s Head with the sinister black shape of the cavern in full view over the port bow. Shortly afterwards the sail was lowered and our crew, reinforced by Thorndyke and me, took to the oars, pulling straight towards the shore with the cavern directly ahead.

As the boat grounded on the beach Thorndyke Brodribb and I sprang out and hurried across the sand and shingle to the gloomy and forbidding hole in white cliff. At first, coming out of the bright sunlight we seemed to be plunged in absolute darkness, and groped our way insecurely over the heaps of slippery sea-tangle that littered the floor. Presently our eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, and we could trace faintly the narrow, tunnel-like passage with its slimy green and the jagged roof nearly black with age. At the farther end it grew higher; and here I could see the small, dark bodies of bats hanging from the roof and clinging to the walls, and one or two fluttering blindly and noiselessly like large moths in the hollows of the vault above. But it was not the bats that engrossed my attention. Far away, at the extreme end, I could dimly discern the prostrate figure of a man lying motionless on a patch of smooth sand; a dreadful shape that seemed to sound the final note of tragedy to which the darkness, the clammy chill of the cavern and the ghostly forms of the bats had been a fitting prelude.

"My God!" gasped Brodribb, "we're too late!" He broke into a shambling run and Thorndyke and I darted on ahead. The man was Frank Lumley, of course, and a glance at him gave us at least a ray of hope. He was lying in an easy posture with closed eyes and was still breathing, though his respiration was shallow and slow. Beside him on the sand lay a little bottle and near it a cork. I picked up the former and read on the label "Laudanum: Poison" and a local druggist's name and address. But it was empty save for a few drops, the appearance and smell of which confirmed the label.

Thorndyke, who had been examining the unconscious man's eyes with a little electric lamp, glanced at the bottle.

"Well," said he, "we know the worst. That is a two-drachm phial, so if he took the lot his condition is not hopeless."

As he spoke he opened the hand-bag, and taking out the emergency-case, produced from it a hypodermic syringe and a tiny bottle of atropine solution. I drew up Lumley's sleeve while the syringe was filled and Thorndyke then administered the injection.

"It is opium poisoning, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes," was the answer. "His pupils are like pin points; but his pulse is not so bad. I think we can safely move him down to the boat."

Thereupon we lifted him, and with Brodribb supporting his feet, we moved in melancholy procession down the cave. Already the waves were lapping the beach at the entrance and even trickling in amongst the seaweed; and the boat, following the rising tide, had her bows within the cavern. The two fishermen, who were steadying the boat with their oars, greeted our appearance, carrying the body, with exclamations of astonishment. But they asked no questions, simply taking the unconscious man from us and laying him gently on the grating in the stern-sheets.

"Why, 'tis Mr. Lumley!" exclaimed the skipper.

"Yes," said Thorndyke; and having given them a few words of explanation, he added: "I look to you to keep this affair to yourselves."

To this the two men agreed heartily, and the boat having been pushed off and the sail hoisted, the skipper asked: "Do we sail straight back, sir?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "but we won't land yet. Stand on and off opposite the gap-way."

Already, as a result of the movement, the patient stupor appeared less profound. And now Thorndyke took definite measures to rouse him, shaking him gently and constantly changing his position. Presently

Lumley drew a deep sighing breath, and opened his eyes for a moment. Then Thorndyke sat him up, and producing the vacuum-flask, made him swallow a few teaspoonful of coffee. This procedure was continued for over an hour while the boat cruised up and down opposite the landing-place half a mile or so from the shore. Constantly our patient relapsed into stuporous sleep, only to be roused again and given a sip of coffee.

At length he recovered so far as to be able to sit up—lurching from side to side as the boat rolled—and drowsily answer questions spoken loudly in his ears. A quarter of an hour later, as he still continued to improve, Thorndyke ordered the skipper to bring the boat to the landing-place. “I think he could walk now,” said he, “and the exercise will rouse him more completely.”

The boat was accordingly beached and Lumley assisted to climb out; and though at first he staggered as if he would fall, after a few paces he was able to walk fairly steadily, supported on either side by me and Thorndyke. The effort of ascending the steep gap-way revived him further; and by the time we reached the gate of Burling Court—half a mile across the fields—he was almost able to stand alone.

But even when he had arrived home he was not allowed to rest, earnestly as he begged to be left in peace. First Thorndyke insisted on his taking a light meal, and then proceeded to question him as to the events of the previous night.

“I presume, Lumley,” said he, “that you saw the apparition of Glynn’s head?”

“Yes. After Mr. Brodribb had seen me to bed, I got up and went to Gilbert’s cabin. Something seemed to draw me to it. And as soon as I opened the door, there was the head hanging in the air within three feet of me. Then I knew that Glynn was calling me, and—well, you know the rest.”

“I understand,” said Thorndyke. “But now I want you to come to Gilbert’s cabin with me and show me exactly where you were and where the head was.”

Lumley was profoundly reluctant and tried to postpone the demonstration. But Thorndyke would listen to no refusal, and at last Lumley rose wearily and conducted his tormentor up the stairs, followed by Brodribb and me.

We went first to Lumley’s bedroom and from that into a corridor, into which some other bedrooms opened. The corridor was dimly lighted by a single window, and when Thorndyke had drawn the thick curtain over

this, the place was almost completely dark. At one end of the corridor was the small, narrow door of the "cabin," over which was a gas bracket. Thorndyke lighted the gas and opened the door and we then saw that the room was in total darkness, its only window being closely shuttered and the curtains drawn. Thorndyke struck a match and lit the gas and we then looked curiously about the little room.

It was a quaint little apartment, to which its antique furniture and contents gave an old-world air. An ancient hanger, quadrant and spy-glass hung on the wall, a large, dropsical-looking watch, inscribed "*Thomas Tompion, Londini fecit*," reposed on a little velvet cushion in the middle of a small, black mahogany table by the window, and a couple of Cromwellian chairs stood against the wall. Thorndyke looked curiously at the table, which was raised on wooden blocks, and Lumley explained: "That was Gilbert's dressing-table. He had it made for his cabin on board ship."

"Indeed," said Thorndyke. "Then Gilbert was a rather up-to-date gentleman. There wasn't much mahogany furniture before 1720. Let us have a look at the interior arrangements."

He lifted the watch, and having placed it on a chair, raised the lid of the table, disclosing a small wash basin, a little squat ewer and other toilet appliances. The table lid, which was held upright by a brass strut, held a rather large dressing-mirror enclosed in a projecting case.

"I wonder," said I, "why the table was stood on those blocks."

"Apparently," said Thorndyke, "for the purpose of bringing the mirror to the eye-level of a person standing up."

The answer gave Brodribb an idea. "I suppose, Frank," said he, "it was not your own reflection in the mirror that you saw?"

"How could it be?" demanded Lumley. "The head was upside down, and besides, it was quite near to me."

"No, that's true," said Brodribb; and turning away from the table he picked up the old navigator's watch "A queer old timepiece, this," he remarked.

"Yes," said Lumley; "but it's beautifully made. Let me show you the inside."

He took off the outer case and opened the inner one, exhibiting the delicate workmanship of the interior to Brodribb and me, while Thorndyke continued to pore over the inner fittings of the table. Suddenly my colleague said: "Just go outside, you three, and shut the door. I want to try an experiment."

Obediently we all filed out and closed the door, waiting expectantly in the corridor. In a couple of minutes Thorndyke came out and before he shut the door I noticed that the little room was now in darkness. He walked us a short distance down the corridor and then, halting, said: "Now, Lumley, I want you to go into the cabin and tell us what you see." Lumley appeared a little reluctant to go in alone, but eventually he walked towards the cabin and opened the door. Instantly he uttered a cry of horror, and closing the door, ran back to us, trembling, agitated, wild-eyed.

"It is there now!" he exclaimed. "I saw it distinctly."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Now you go and look, Brodribb."

Mr. Brodribb showed no eagerness. With very obvious trepidation he advanced to the door and threw it open with a jerk. Then, with a sharp exclamation, he slammed it to, and came hurrying back, his usually pink complexion paled down to a delicate mauve.

"Horrible! Horrible!" he exclaimed. "What the devil is it, Thorndyke?"

A sudden suspicion flashed into my mind. I strode forward, and turning the handle of the door, pulled it open. And then I was not surprised that Brodribb had been startled. Within a yard of my face, clear, distinct and solid, was an inverted head, floating in mid-air in the pitch-dark room. Of course, being prepared for it, I saw at a glance what it was; recognised my own features, strangely and horribly altered as they were by their inverted position. But even now that I knew what it was, the thing had a most appalling, uncanny aspect.

"Now," said Thorndyke, "let us go in and explode the mystery. Just stand outside the door, Jervis, while I demonstrate."

He produced a sheet of white paper from his pocket, and smoothing it out, let our two friends into the room. "First," said he, holding the paper out flat at the eye-level, "you see on this paper a picture of Dr. Jervis's head upside down."

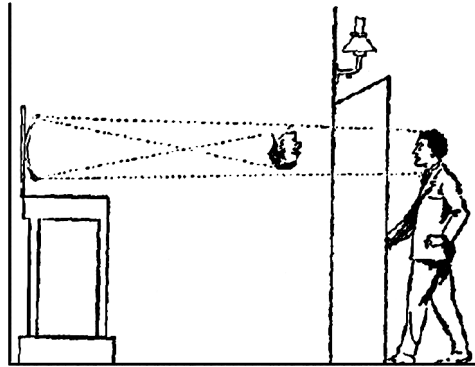
"So there is," said Brodribb; "like a magic-lantern picture."

"Exactly like," agreed Thorndyke; "and of exactly the same nature. Now let us see how it is produced."

He struck a match and lit the gas; and instantly all our eyes turned towards the open dressing-table.

"But that is not the same mirror that we saw just now," said Brodribb.

"No," replied Thorndyke. "The frame is reversible on a sliding hinge and I have turned it round. On one side is the ordinary flat looking-glass which you saw before; on the other is this concave shaving-mirror. You observe that, if you stand close to it, you see your face the right way



THE APPARITION OF BURLING COURT

up and magnified; if you go back to the door, you see your head upside down and smaller."

"But," objected Lumley, "the head looked quite solid and seemed to be right out in the room."

"So it was, and is still. But the effect of reality is destroyed by the fact that you can now see the frame of the mirror enclosing the image, so that the head appears to be in the mirror. But in the dark, you could only see the image. The mirror was invisible."

Brodrigg reflected on this explanation. Presently he said: "I don't think I quite understand it now."

Thorndyke took a pencil from his pocket and began to draw a diagram on the sheet of paper that he still held.

"The figure that you see in an ordinary flat looking glass," he explained, "is what is called a 'virtual image.' It appears to be behind the mirror, but of course it is not there. It is an optical illusion. But the image from a concave mirror is in front of the mirror and is a real image like that of a magic-lantern or a camera, and, like them, inverted. This diagram will explain matters. Here is Lumley standing at the open door of the room. His figure is well lighted by the gas over the door (which, however, throws no light into the room) and is clearly reflected by the mirror, which throws forward a bright inverted image. But, as the room is dark and the mirror invisible, he sees only the image, which looks like—and in fact is—a real object standing in mid-air."

"But why did I see only the head?" asked Lumley.

"Because the head occupied the whole of the mirror. If the mirror had been large enough you would have seen the full-length figure."

Lumley reflected for a moment. "It almost looks if this had been arranged," he said at length.

"Of course it has been arranged," said Thorndyke "and very cleverly arranged, too. And now let us go and see if anything else has been arranged. Which is Mr. Price's room?"

"He has three rooms, which open out of this corridor," said Lumley; and he conducted us to a door at the farther end, which Thorndyke tried and found locked.

"It is a case for the smoker's companion," said he, producing from his pocket an instrument that went by that name, but which looked suspiciously like a lock-pick. At any rate, after one or two trials—which Mr Brodribb watched with an appreciative smile—the bolt shot back and the door opened.

We entered what was evidently the bedroom, around which Thorndyke cast a rapid glance and then asked: "What are the other rooms?"

"I think he uses them to tinker in," said Lumley, "but I don't quite know what he does in them. All three rooms communicate."

We advanced to the door of communication and, finding it unlocked, passed through into the next room. Here, on a large table by the window, was a litter of various tools and appliances.

"What is that thing with the wooden screws?" Brodribb asked.

"A bookbinder's sewing-press," replied Thorndyke. "And here are some boxes of finishing tools. Let us look over them."

He took up the boxes one after the other and inspected the ends of the tools—brass stamps for impressing the ornaments on book covers. Presently he lifted out two, a leaf and a flower. Then he produced from his coat pocket the little manuscript book, and laying it on the table, picked up from the floor a little fragment of leather. Placing this also on the table, he pressed two of the tools on it, leaving a clear impression of a leaf and a flower. Finally he laid the scrap of leather on the book, when it was obvious that the leaf and flower were identical replicas of the leaves and flowers which formed the decoration of the book cover.

"This is very curious," said Lumley. "They seem to be exactly alike."

"They are exactly alike," said Thorndyke. "I affirm that the tooling on that book was done with these tools, and the leaves sewn on that press."

"But the book is a hundred years old," objected Lumley.

Thorndyke shook his head. "The leather is old," said he, "but the book is new. We have tested the paper and found it to be of recent manufacture. But now let us see what is in that little cupboard. There seem to be some bottles there."

He ran his eye along the shelves, crowded with bottles and jars of varnish, glair, oil, cement and other material.

"Here," he said, taking down a small bottle of dark-coloured powder, "is some aniline brown. That probably produced the ancient and faded writing. But this is more illuminating—in more senses than one." He picked out a little, wide-mouthed bottle labelled "Radium Paint for the hands and figures of luminous watches."

"Ha!" exclaimed Brodribb; "a very illuminating discovery, as you say."

"And that," said Thorndyke, looking keenly round the room, "seems to be all there is here. Shall we take a glance at the third room?"

We passed through the communicating doorway and found ourselves in a small apartment practically unfurnished and littered with trunks, bags and various lumber. As we stood looking about us, Thorndyke sniffed suspiciously.

"I seem to detect a sort of mousy odour," said he, glancing round inquisitively. "Do you notice it, Jervis?"

I did; and with the obvious idea in my mind began I to prowl round the room in search of the source. Suddenly my eye lighted on a smallish box, in the top of which a number of gimlet-holes had been bored. I raised the lid and peered in. The interior was covered with filth and on the bottom lay a dead bat.

We all stood for a few seconds looking in silence at the little corpse. Then Thorndyke closed the box and tucked it under his arm.

"This completes the case, I think," said he. "What time does Price return?"

"He is expected home about seven o'clock," said Lumley. Then he added with a troubled expression: "I don't understand all this. What does it mean?"

"It is very simple," replied Thorndyke. "You have a sham ancient book containing an evidently fabulous story of supernatural events; and you have a series of appliances and arrangements for producing illusions which seem to repeat those events. The book was planted where it was certain to be found and read, and the illusions began after it was known that it actually had been read. It is a conspiracy."

"But why?" demanded Lumley. "What was the object?"

"My dear Frank," said Brodribb, "you seem forget that Price is the next of kin and the heir to your estate on your death."

Lumley's eyes filled. He seemed overcome with grief and disgust. "It is incredible," he murmured huskily. "The baseness of it is beyond belief."



Price and his wife arrived home at about seven o'clock. A meal had been prepared for them, and when they had finished, a servant was sent in to ask Mr. Price to speak with Mr. Brodribb in the study. There we all awaited him, Lumley being present by his own wish; and on the table were deposited the little book, the scrap of leather, the two finishing tools, the pot of radium paint and the box containing the dead bat. Presently Price entered, accompanied by his wife; and at the sight of the objects on the table they both turned deathly pale. Mr. Brodribb placed chairs for them, and when they were seated he began in a dry, stern voice: "I have sent for you, Mr. Price, to give you certain information. These two gentlemen, Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis, are eminent criminal lawyers whom I have commissioned to make investigations and to advise me in this matter. Their investigations have disclosed the existence of a forged manuscript, a dead bat, a pot of luminous paint and a concave mirror. I need not enlarge on those discoveries. My intention is to prosecute you and your wife for conspiracy to procure the suicide of Mr. Frank Lumley. But, at Mr. Lumley's request, I have consented to delay the proceedings for forty-eight hours. During that period you will be at liberty to act as you think best."

For some seconds there was a tense silence. The two crestfallen conspirators sat with their eyes fixed on the floor, and Mrs. Price choked down a half-hysterical sob. Then they rose; and Price, without looking at any of us, said in a low voice: "Very well. Then I suppose we had better clear out."

"And the best thing, too," remarked Brodribb, when they had gone; "for I doubt if we could have carried our bluff into court."

On the wall of our sitting-room in the Temple there hang, to this day, two keys. One is that of the postern gate of Burling Court, and the other belongs to the suite of rooms that were once occupied by Mr. Lewis Price; and they hang there, by Frank Lumley's wish, as a token that Burling Court is a country home to which we have access at all hours and seasons as tenants in virtue of an inalienable right.

## The Mysterious Visitor

“So,” said Thorndyke, looking at me reflectively, “you are a full-blown medical practitioner with a practice of your own. How the years slip by! It seems but the other day that you were a student, gaping at me from the front bench of the lecture theatre.”

“Did I gape?” I<sup>3</sup> asked incredulously.

“I use the word metaphorically,” said he, “to denote ostentatious attention. You always took my lecture very seriously. May I ask if you have ever found them of use in your practice?”

“I can’t say that I have ever had any very thrilling medico-legal experiences since that extraordinary cremation case that you investigated—the case of Septimus Maddock, you know. But that reminds me that there is a little matter that I meant to speak to you about. It is of no interest, but I just wanted your advice, though it even my business, strictly speaking. It concerns a patient of mine, a man named Crofton, who has disappeared rather unaccountably.”

“And do you call that a case of no medico-legal interest?” demanded Thorndyke.

“Oh, there’s nothing in it. He just went away for a holiday and he hasn’t communicated with his friends very recently. That is all. What makes me a little uneasy is that there is a departure from his usual habits—he is generally a fairly regular correspondent—that seems a little significant in view of his personality. He is markedly neurotic and his family history is by means what one would wish.”

“That is an admirable thumb-nail sketch, Jardine,” said Thorndyke “but it lacks detail. Let us have a full-size picture.”

“Very well,” said I, “but you mustn’t let me bore you. To begin with Crofton: he is a nervous, anxious, worrying sort of fellow, everlastingly fussing about money affairs, and latterly this tendency has been getting

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<sup>3</sup> Der Ich-Erzähler ist wieder Dr. Jardine wie in “Rex vs. Burnaby”. B. L.

worse. He fairly got the jumps about his financial position; felt that he was steadily drifting into bankruptcy and couldn't get that out of his mind. It was all bunkum. I am more or less a friend of the family, and I know that there was nothing to worry about. Mrs. Crofton assured me that, although they were a trifle hard up, they could rub along quite safely.

"As he seemed to be getting the hump worse and worse, I advised him to go away for a change and stay in a boarding-house where he would see some fresh faces. Instead of that, he elected to go down to a bungalow that he has at Seasalter, near Whitstable, and lets out in the season. He proposed to stay by himself and spend his time in sea-bathing and country walks. I wasn't very keen on this, for solitude was the last thing that he wanted. There was a strong family history of melancholia and some unpleasant rumours of suicide. I didn't like his being alone at all. However, another friend of the family, Mrs. Crofton's brother in fact, a chap named Ambrose, offered to go down and spend a week-end with him to give him a start, and afterwards to run down for an afternoon whenever he was able. So off he went with Ambrose on Friday, the sixteenth of June, and for a time all went well. He seemed to be improving in health and spirits and wrote to his wife regularly two or three times a week. Ambrose went down as often as he could to cheer him up, and the last time brought back the news that Crofton thought of moving on to Margate for a further change. So, of course, he didn't go down to the bungalow again.

"Well, in due course, a letter came from Margate; it had been written at the bungalow, but the postmark was Margate and bore the same date—the sixteenth of July—as the letter itself. I have it with me. Mrs. Crofton sent it for me to see and I haven't returned it yet. But there is nothing of interest in it beyond the statement that he was going on to Margate by the next train and would write again when he had found rooms there. That was the last that was heard of him. He never wrote and nothing is known of his movements excepting that he left Seasalter and arrived at Margate. This is the letter."

I handed it to Thorndyke, who glanced at the mark and then laid it on the table for examination later. "Have any inquiries been made?" he asked.

"Yes. His photograph has been sent to the Margate police, but, of course—well, you know what Margate like in July. Thousands of strangers coming and going every day. It is hopeless to look for him in that crowd and it is quite possible that he isn't there now. But his disap-

pearance is most inopportune, for a big legacy hats just fallen in, and, naturally, Mrs. Crofton is frantically anxious to let him know. It is a matter of about thirty thousand pounds."

"Was this legacy expected?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. The Croftons knew nothing about it. They didn't know that the old lady—Miss Shuler—had made a will or that she had very much to leave; and they didn't know that she was likely to die, or even that she was ill. Which is rather odd; for she was ill for a month or two and, as she suffered from a malignant abdominal tumour, it was known that she couldn't recover."

"When did she die?"

"On the thirteenth of July."

Thorndyke raised his eyebrows. "Just three days before the date of this letter," he remarked; "so that if he should never reappear, this letter will be the sole evidence that he survived her. It is an important document. It may come to represent a value of thirty thousand pounds."

"It isn't so important as it looks," said I. "Miss Shuler's will provides that if Crofton should die before the estatrix, the legacy should go to his wife. So whether he is alive or not, the legacy is quite safe. But we must hope that he is alive, though I must confess to some little anxiety on his account."

Thorndyke reflected a while on this statement. Presently he asked: "Do you know if Crofton has made a will?"

"Yes, he has," I replied; "quite recently. I was one of the witnesses and I read it through at Crofton's request. It was full of the usual legal verbiage, but it might have been stated in a dozen words. He leaves practically everything to his wife, but instead of saying so it enumerates the property item by item."

"It was drafted, I suppose, by the solicitor?"

"Yes; another friend of the family named Jobson, and he is the executor and residuary legatee."

Thorndyke nodded and again became deeply reflective. Still meditating, he took up the letter, and as he inspected it, I watched him curiously and not without a certain secret amusement. First he looked over the envelope, back and front. Then he took from his pocket powerful Codrington lens and with this examined the flap and the postmark. Next, he drew out the letter, held it up to the light, then read it through and finally examined various parts of the writing through his lens. "Well," I asked, with an irreverent grin, "I should think you have extracted the last grain of meaning from it."

He smiled as he put away his lens and handed the letter back to me.

"As this may have to be produced in proof of survival," said he, "it had better be put in a place of safety. I notice that he speaks of returning later to the bungalow. I take it that it has been ascertained that he did not return there?"

"I don't think so. You see, they have been waiting for him to write. You think that some one ought—"

I paused; for it began to be borne in on me that Thorndyke was taking a somewhat gloomy view of the case.

"My dear Jardine," said he, "I am merely following your own suggestion. Here is a man with an inherited tendency to melancholia and suicide who has suddenly disappeared. He went away from an empty house and announced his intention of returning to it later. As that house is the only known locality in which he could be sought, it is obvious that it ought to have been examined. And even if he never came back there, the house might contain some clues to his present whereabouts."

This last sentence put an idea into my mind which I was a little shy of broaching. What was a clue to Thorndyke might be perfectly meaningless to an ordinary person. I recalled his amazing interpretations of most commonplace facts in the mysterious Maddock case and the idea took fuller possession. At length I said tentatively: "I would go down myself if I felt competent. To-morrow is Saturday, and I could get a colleague to look after my practice; there isn't much doing just now. But when you speak of clues, and when I remember what duffer I was last time—I wish it were possible for you to have a look at the place."

To my surprise, he assented almost with enthusiasm.

"Why not?" said he. "It is a week-end. We can put up at the bungalow, I suppose, and have a little gipsy holiday. And there are undoubtedly points of interest in the case. Let us go down to-morrow. We can lunch in the train and have the afternoon before us. You had better get a key from Mrs. Crofton, or, if she hasn't got one, an authority to visit the house. We may want that if we have to enter without a key. And we go alone, of course."

I assented joyfully. Not that I had any expectations as to what we might learn from our inspection. But something in Thorndyke's manner gave me the impression that he had extracted from my account of the case some significance that was not apparent to me.

The bungalow stood on a space of rough ground a little way behind the sea-wall, along which we walked towards it from Whitstable, passing

on our way a ship-builder's yard and a slipway, on which a collier brigantine was hauled up for repairs. There were one or two other bungalows adjacent, but a considerable distance apart, and we looked at them as we approached to make out the names painted on the gates.

"That will probably be the one," said Thorndyke, indicating a small building enclosed within a wooden fence and provided, like the others, with a bathing hut just above high-water mark. Its solitary, deserted aspect and lowered blinds supported his opinion, and when we reached the gate, the name »Middlewick« painted on it settled the matter.

"The next question is," said I, "how the deuce we are going to get in? The gate is locked, and there is no bell. Is it worth while to hammer at the fence?"

"I wouldn't do that," replied Thorndyke. "The place is pretty certainly empty or the gate wouldn't be locked. We shall have to climb over unless there is a back gate unlocked, so the less noise we make the better."

We walked round the enclosure, but there was no other gate, nor was there any tree or other cover to disguise our rather suspicious proceedings.

"There's no help for it, Jardine," said Thorndyke, "so here goes."

He put his green canvas suit-case on the ground, grasped the top of the fence with both hands and went over like a harlequin. I picked up the case and handed it over to him, and, having taken a quick glance round, followed my leader.

"Well," I said, "here we are. And now, how are we to get into the house?"

"We shall have to pick a lock if there is no door open, or else go in by a window. Let us take a look round."—We walked round the house to the back door, but found it not only locked, but bolted top and bottom, as Thorndyke ascertained with his knifeblade. The windows were all casements and all fastened with their catches.

"The front door will be the best," said Thorndyke. "It can't be bolted unless he got out by the chimney and I think my 'smoker's companion' will be able to cope with an ordinary door-lock. It looked like a common builder's fitting."

As he spoke, we returned to the front of the house and he produced the 'smoker's companion' from his pocket (I don't know what kind of smoker it was designed to accompany). The lock was apparently a simple affair, for the second trial with the 'companion' shot back the bolt, and when I turned the handle, the door opened. As a precaution, I called out to inquire if there was anybody within, and then, as there

was no answer, we entered, walking straight into the living-room, as there was no hall or lobby.

A couple of paces from the threshold we halted to look round the room, and on me the aspect of the place produced a vague sense of discomfort. Though it was early in a bright afternoon, the room was almost completely dark, for not only were the blinds lowered, but the curtains were drawn as well.

"It looks," said I, peering about the dim and gloomy apartment with sun-dazzled eyes, "as if he had gone away at night. He wouldn't have drawn the curtains in the daytime."

"One would think not," Thorndyke agreed; "but it doesn't follow."

He stepped to the front window and drawing back the curtains pulled up the blind, revealing a half-curtain of green serge over the lower part of the window. As the bright daylight flooded the room, he stood with his back to the window looking about with deep attention, letting his eyes travel slowly over the walls, the furniture, and especially the floor. Presently he stooped to pick up a short match-end which lay just under the table opposite the door, and as he looked at it thoughtfully, he pointed to a couple of spots of candle grease on the linoleum near the table. Then he glanced at the mantelpiece and from that to an ash-bowl on the table.

"These are only trifling discrepancies," said he, "but they are worth noting. You see," he continued in response to my look of inquiry, "that this room is severely trim and orderly. Everything seems to be in place. The match-box, for instance, has its fixed receptacle above the mantelpiece, and there is a bowl for the burnt matches, regularly used, as its contents show. Yet there is a burnt match thrown on the floor, although the bowl is on the table quite handy. And the match, you notice, is not of the same kind as those in the box over the mantelpiece, which is a large Bryant and May, or as the burnt matches in the bowl which have evidently come from it. But if you look in the bowl," he continued, picking it up, "you will see two burnt matches of this same kind—apparently the small size Bryant and May—one burnt quite short and one only half burnt. The suggestion is fairly obvious, but, as I say, there is a slight discrepancy."

"I don't know," said I, "that either the suggestion or the discrepancy is very obvious to me."

He walked over to the mantelpiece and took the match box from its case.

"You see," said he, opening it, "that this box is nearly full. It has an appointed place and it was in that place. We find a small match, burnt right out, under the table opposite the door, and two more in the bowl under the hanging lamp. A reasonable inference is that some one came in in the dark and struck a match as he entered. That match must have come from a box that he brought with him in his pocket. It burned out and he struck another, which also burned out while he was raising the chimney of the lamp, and he struck a third to light the lamp. But if that person was Crofton, why did he need to strike a match to light the room when the match-box was in its usual place; and why did he throw the match-end on the floor?"

"You mean that the suggestion is that the person was not Crofton ; and I think you are right. Crofton doesn't carry matches in his pocket. He uses wax vestas and carries them in a silver case."

"It might possibly have been Ambrose," Thorndyke suggested.

"I don't think so," said I. "Ambrose uses a petrol lighter."

Thorndyke nodded. "There may be nothing in it," said he, "but it offers a suggestion. Shall we look over the rest of the premises?"

He paused for a moment to glance at a small key board on the wall on which one or two keys were hanging, each distinguished by a little ivory label and by the name written underneath the peg; then he opened a door in the corner of the room. As this led into the kitchen, I closed it and opened an adjoining one which gave access to a bedroom.

"This is probably the extra bedroom," he remarked as we entered. "The blinds have not been drawn down, and there is a general air of trimness that suggests the tidy up of an unoccupied room. And the bed looks if it had been out of use."

After an attentive look round, he returned to the living room and crossed to the remaining door. As he opened it, we looked into a nearly dark room, both the windows being covered by thick serge curtains.

"Well," he observed, when he had drawn back the curtains and raised the blinds, "there is nothing painfully tidy here. That is a very roughly-made bed, and the blanket is outside the counterpane."

He looked critically about the room and especially the bedside table.

"Here are some more discrepancies," said he. "There are two candlesticks, in one of which the candle has burned itself right out, leaving a fragment of wick. There are five burnt matches in it, two large ones from the box by its side and three small ones, of which two are mere stumps. The second candle is very much guttered, and I think"—he lifted it out of the socket—"yes, it has been used out of the candlestick."



You see that the grease has run down right to the bottom and there is a distinct impression of a thumb—apparently a left thumb—made while the grease was warm. Then you notice the mark on the table of a tumbler which had contained some liquid that was not water, but there is no tumbler. However, it may be an old mark, though it looks fresh.”

“It is hardly like Crofton to leave an old mark on the table,” said I. “He is a regular old maid. We had better see if the tumbler is in the kitchen.”

“Yes,” agreed Thorndyke. “But I wonder what he was doing with that candle. Apparently he took it out-of-doors, as there is a spot on the floor of the living-room; and you see that there are one or two spots on the floor here.” He walked over to a chest of drawers near the door and was looking into a drawer which he had pulled out, and which I could see was full of clothes, when I observed a faint smile spreading over his face. “Come round here, Jardine,” he said in a low voice, “and take a peep through the crack of the door.”

I walked round, and, applying my eye to the crack, looked across the living-room at the end window. Above the half-curtain I could distinguish the unmistakable top of a constabulary helmet.

“Listen,” said Thorndyke. “They are in force.”

As he spoke, there came from the neighbourhood of the kitchen a furtive scraping sound, suggestive of a pocket knife persuading a window-catch. It was followed by the sound of an opening window and then of a stealthy entry. Finally, the kitchen door opened softly, some one tip-toed across the living-room and a burly police-sergeant appeared, framed in the bedroom doorway.

“Good afternoon, sergeant,” said Thorndyke, with a genial smile.

“Yes, that’s all very well,” was the response, “but the question is, who might you be, and what might you be doing in this house?”

Thorndyke briefly explained our business, and, when, we had presented our cards and Mrs. Crofton’s written authority, the sergeant’s professional stiffness vanished like magic.

“It’s all right, Tomkins,” he sang out to an invisible myrmidon. “You had better shut the window and go out by the front door. You must excuse me, gentlemen,” he added; “but the tenant of the next bungalow cycled down and gave us the tip. He watched you through his glasses and saw you pick the front-door lock. It did look a bit queer, you must admit.”

Thorndyke admitted it freely with a faint chuckle, and we walked across the living-room to the kitchen. Here, the sergeant’s presence seemed to inhibit comments, but I noticed that my colleague cast a significant glance at a frying-pan that rested on a Primus stove. The congealed fat

in it presented another "discrepancy"; for I could hardly imagine the fastidious Crofton going away and leaving it in that condition.

Noting that there was no unwashed tumbler in evidence, I followed my friend back to the living-room, where he paused with his eye on the key-board.

"Well," remarked the sergeant, "if he ever did come back here, it's pretty clear that he isn't here now. You've been all over the premises, I think?"

"All excepting the bathing-hut," replied Thorndyke; and, as he spoke, he lifted the key so labelled from its hook.

The sergeant laughed softly. "He's not very likely to have taken up quarters there," said he. "Still, there's nothing like being thorough. But you notice that the key of the front door and that of the gate have both been taken away, so we can assume that he has taken himself away too."

"That is a reasonable inference," Thorndyke admitted; "but we may as well make our survey complete."

With this he led the way out into the garden and to the gate, where he unblushingly produced the 'smoker's companion' and insinuated its prongs into the keyhole.

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed the sergeant as the lock clicked and the gate opened. "That's a funny sort of tool; and you seem quite handy with it, too. Might I have a look at it?"

He looked at it so very long and attentively, when Thorndyke handed it to him, that I suspected him of an intention to infringe the patent. By the time he had finished his inspection we were at the bottom of the bank below the sea-wall and Thorndyke had inserted the key into the lock of the bathing-hut. As the sergeant returned the 'companion' Thorndyke took it and pocketed it then he turned the key and pushed the door open; and the officer started back with a shout of amazement.

It was certainly a grim spectacle that we looked in on. The hut was a small building about six feet square, devoid of any furniture or fittings, excepting one or two pegs high up the wall. The single, unglazed window was closely shuttered, and on the bare floor in the farther corner a man was sitting, leaning back into the corner, with his head dropped forward on his breast. The man was undoubtedly Arthur Crofton. That much I could say with certainty, notwithstanding the horrible changes wrought by death and the lapse of time. "But," I added when I had identified the body, "I should have said that he had been dead more than a fortnight. He must have come straight back from Margate and done this. And that will probably be the missing tumbler," I concluded, pointing to one that stood on the floor close to the right hand of the corpse.

"No doubt," replied Thorndyke, somewhat abstractedly. He had been looking critically about the interior of the hut, and now remarked: "I wonder why he did not shoot the bolt instead of locking himself in; and what has become of the key? He must have taken it out of the lock and put it in his pocket."

He looked interrogatively at the sergeant, who having no option but to take the hint, advanced with an expression of horrified disgust and proceeded very gingerly to explore the dead man's clothing.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at length, "here we are." He drew from the waistcoat pocket a key with a small ivory label attached to it. "Yes, this is the one. You see, it is marked 'Bathing-hut'."

He handed it to Thorndyke, who looked at it attentively, and even with an appearance of surprise, and then, producing an indelible pencil from his pocket, wrote on the label, "Found on body."

"The first thing," said he, "is to ascertain it fits the lock."

"Why, it must," said the sergeant, "if he locked himself in with it."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke agreed, "but that is the point. It doesn't look quite similar to the other one."

He drew out the key which we had brought from the house and gave it to me to hold. Then he tried the key from the dead man's pocket; but it not only did not fit, it would not even enter the keyhole.

The sceptical indifference faded suddenly from the sergeant's face. He took the key from Thorndyke, having tried it with the same result, stood up and stared, round-eyed, at my colleague.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "This is a facer! It's the wrong key!"

"There may be another key on the body," said Thorndyke. "It isn't likely, but, you had better make sure."

The sergeant showed no reluctance this time. He searched the dead man's pockets thoroughly and produced a bunch of keys. But they were all quite small keys, none of them in the least resembling that of the hut door. Nor, I noticed, did they include those of the bungalow door or the garden gate. Once more the officer drew himself up and stared at Thorndyke.

"There's something rather fishy about this affair," said he.

"There is," Thorndyke agreed. "The door was certainly locked; and as it was not locked from within, it must have been locked from without. Then that key—the wrong key—was presumably placed in the dead man's pocket by some other person. And there are some other suspicious facts. A tumbler has disappeared from the bedside table, and there is a tumbler here. You notice one or two spots of candle-grease

on the floor here, and it looks as if a candle had been stood in that corner near the door. There is no candle here now; but in the bedroom there is a candle which has been carried without a candle stick and which, by the way, bears an excellent impression of a thumb. The first thing to do will be to take the deceased's finger-prints. Would you mind fetching my case from the bedroom, Jardine?"

I ran back to the house (not unobserved by the gentleman in the next bungalow) and, catching up the case, carried it down to the hut. When I arrived there I found Thorndyke holding the tumbler delicately in his gloved left hand while he examined it against the light with the aid of his lens. He handed the latter to me and observed.

"If you look at this carefully, Jardine, you will see a very interesting thing. There are the prints of two different thumbs—both left hands, and therefore of different persons. You will remember that the tumbler stood by the right hand of the body and that the table, which bore the mark of a tumbler, was at the left-hand side of the bed."

When I had examined the thumb-prints he placed the tumbler carefully on the floor and opened his "research-case," which was fitted as a sort of portable laboratory. From this he took a little brass box containing an ink-tube, a tiny roller and some small cards, and, using the box-lid as an inking plate, he proceeded methodically to take the dead man's finger-prints, writing the particulars on each card.

"I don't quite see what you want with Crofton's finger-prints," said I. "The other man's would be more to the point."

"Undoubtedly," Thorndyke replied. "But we have to prove that they are another man's—that they are not Crofton's. And there is that print on the candle. That is a very important point to settle; and as we have finished here, we had better go and settle it at once."

He closed his case, and, taking up the tumbler with his gloved hand, led the way back to the house, the sergeant following when he had locked the door. We proceeded directly to the bedroom, where Thorndyke took the candle from its socket and, with the aid of his lens, compared it carefully with the two thumb-prints on the card, and then with the tumbler.

"It is perfectly clear," said he. "This is a mark of a left thumb. It is totally unlike Crofton's and it appears to be identical with the strange thumb-print on the tumbler. From which it seems to follow that the stranger took the candle from this room to the hut and brought it back. But he probably blew it out before leaving the house and lit it again in the hut."

The sergeant and I examined the cards, the candle and the tumbler, and then the former asked: "I suppose you have no idea whose thumb-print that might be? You don't know, for instance, of anyone who might have had any motive for making away with Mr. Crofton?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is rather a question for the coroner's jury."

"So it is," the sergeant agreed. "But there won't be much question about their verdict. It is a pretty clear case of wilful murder."

To this Thorndyke made no reply excepting to give some directions as to the safe-keeping of the candle and tumbler; and our proposed "gipsy holiday" being now evidently impossible, we took our leave of the sergeant—who already had our cards—and wended back to the station.

"I suppose," said I, "we shall have to break the news to Mrs. Crofton."

"That is hardly our business," he replied. "We can leave that to the solicitor or to Ambrose. If you know the lawyer's address, you might send him a telegram, arranging a meeting at eight o'clock to-night. Give no particulars. Just say "Crofton found," but mark the telegram "urgent" so that he will keep the appointment."

On reaching the station, I sent off the telegram, and very soon afterwards the London train was signalled. It turned out to be a slow train, which gave us ample time to discuss the case and me ample time for reflection. And, in fact, I reflected a good deal; for there was a rather uncomfortable question in my mind—the very question that the sergeant had raised and that Thorndyke had obviously evaded. Was there anyone who might have had a motive for making away with Crofton? It was an awkward question when one remembered the great legacy that had just fallen in and the terms of Miss Shuler's will; which expressly provided that, if Crofton died before his wife, the legacy should go to her. Now, Ambrose was the wife's brother; and Ambrose had been in the bungalow alone with Crofton, and nobody else was known to have been there at all. I meditated on these facts uncomfortably and would have liked to put the case to Thorndyke; but his reticence, his evasion of the sergeant's question and his decision to communicate with the solicitor rather than with the family showed pretty clearly what was in his mind and that he did not wish to discuss the matter.

Promptly at eight o'clock, having dined at a restaurant, we presented ourselves at the solicitor's house and were shown into the study, where we found Mr. Jobson seated at a writing-table. He looked at Thorndyke with some surprise, and when the introductions had been made, said

somewhat dryly: "We may take it that Dr. Thorndyke is in some way connected with our rather confidential business?"

"Certainly," I replied. "That is why he is here."

Jobson nodded. "And how is Crofton?" he asked, "and where did you dig him up?"

"I am sorry to say," I replied, "that he is dead. It is a dreadful affair. We found his body locked in the bathing-hut. He was sitting in a corner with a tumbler on the floor by his side."

"Horrible ! horrible!" exclaimed the solicitor. "He ought never to have gone there alone. I said so at the time. And it is most unfortunate on account of the insurance, though that is not a large amount. Still the suicide clause, you know—"

"I doubt whether the insurance will be affected," said Thorndyke. "The coroner's finding will almost certainly be wilful murder."

Jobson was thunderstruck. In a moment his face grew livid and he gazed at Thorndyke with an expression of horrified amazement.

"Murder!" he repeated incredulously. "But you said he was locked in the hut. Surely that is clear proof of suicide."

"He hadn't locked himself in, you know. There was no key inside."

"Ah!" The solicitor spoke almost in a tone relief. "But, perhaps—did you examine his pockets?"

"Yes; and we found a key labelled 'Bathing hut.' But it was the wrong key. It wouldn't go into the lock. There is no doubt whatever that the door was locked from the outside."

"Good God!" exclaimed Jobson, in a faint voice. "It does look suspicious. But still, I can't believe—It seems quite incredible."

"That may be," said Thorndyke, "but it is all perfectly clear. There is evidence that a stranger entered the bungalow at night and that the affair took place in the bedroom. From thence the stranger carried the body down to the hut and he also took a tumbler and a candle from the bedside table. By the light of the candle—which was stood on the floor of the hut in a corner—he arranged the body, having put into its pocket a key from the board in the living-room. Then he locked the hut, went back to the house, put the key on its peg and the candle in its candlestick. Then he locked up the house and the garden gate and took the keys away with him."

The solicitor listened to this recital in speechless amazement. At length he asked: "How long ago do you suppose this happened?"

"Apparently on the night of the fifteenth of this month," was the reply.

"But," objected Jobson, "he wrote home on the sixteenth."

"He wrote," said Thorndyke, "on the sixth. Somebody put a one in front of the six and posted the letter at Margate on the sixteenth. I shall give evidence to that effect at the inquest."

I was becoming somewhat mystified. Thorndyke's dry, stern manner—so different from his usual suavity—and the solicitor's uncalled-for agitation, seemed to hint at something more than met the eye. I watched Jobson as he lit a cigarette—with a small Bryant and May match, which he threw on the floor—and listened expectantly for his next question. At length he asked: "Was there any sort of—er—clue as to who this stranger might be?"

"The man who will be charged with the murder? Oh, yes. The police have the means of identifying him with absolute certainty."

"That is, if they can find him," said Jobson.

"Naturally. But when all the very remarkable facts have transpired at the inquest, that individual will probably come pretty clearly into view." Jobson continued to smoke furiously with his eyes fixed on the floor, as if he were thinking hard. Presently he asked, without looking up: "Supposing they do find this man. What then? What evidence is there that he murdered Crofton?"

"You mean direct evidence?" said Thorndyke. "I can't say, as I did not examine the body; but the circumstantial evidence that I have given you would be enough to convict unless there were some convincing explanation other than murder. And I may say," he added, "that if the suspected person has a plausible explanation to offer, he would be well advised to produce it before he is charged. A voluntary statement has a good deal more weight than the same statement made by a prisoner in answer to a charge."

There was an interval of silence, in which I looked bewilderment from Thorndyke's stern visage to the pale face of the solicitor. At length the latter rose abruptly and, after one or two quick strides up and down the room, halted by the fireplace, and, still avoiding Thorndyke's eye, said, somewhat brusquely, though in a low, husky voice: "I will tell you how it happened. I went down to Seasalter, as you said, on the night of the fifteenth, on the chance of finding Crofton at the bungalow. I wanted to tell him of Miss Shuler's death and of the provisions her will."

"You had some private information on that subject, I presume?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. My cousin was her solicitor and he kept me informed about the will."

"And about the state of her health?"

"Yes. Well, when I arrived at the bungalow, it was in darkness. The gate and the front door were unlocked, so I entered, calling out Crofton's name. As no one answered, I struck a match and lit the lamp. Then I went into the bedroom and struck a match there; and by its light I could see Crofton lying on the bed, quite still. I spoke to him, but he did not answer or move. Then I lighted a candle on his table; and now I could see what I had already guessed, that he was dead, and that he had been dead some time—probably more than a week.

"It was an awful shock to find a dead man in this solitary house, and my first impulse was to rush out and give the alarm. But when I went into the living-room, I happened to see a letter lying on writing-table and noticed that it was in his own hand and addressed to his wife. Unfortunately, I had the curiosity to take it out of the unsealed envelope and read it. It was dated the sixth and stated his intention of going to Margate for a time and then coming back to the bungalow.

"Now, the reading of that letter exposed me to an enormous temptation. By simply putting a one in front of the six and thus altering the date from the sixth to the sixteenth and posting the letter at Margate, I stood to gain thirty thousand pounds. I saw that at a glance. But I did not decide immediately to do it. I pulled down the blinds, drew the curtains and locked up the house while I thought it over. There seemed to be practically no risk, unless someone should come to the bungalow and notice that the state of the body did not agree with the altered date on the letter. I went back and looked at the dead man. There was a burnt-out candle by his side and a tumbler containing the dried-up remains of some brown liquid. He had evidently poisoned himself. Then it occurred to me that, if I put the body and the tumbler in some place where they were not likely to be found for some time, the discrepancy between the condition of the body and the date of the letter would not be noticed.

"For some time I could think of no suitable place, but at last I remembered the bathing-hut. No one would look there for him. If they came to the bungalow and didn't find him there, they would merely conclude that he had not come back from Margate. I took the candle and the key from the key-board and went down to the hut; but there was a key in the door already, so I brought the other key back and put it in Crofton's pocket, never dreaming that it might not be the duplicate. Of course, I ought to have tried it in the door.

"Well, you know the rest. I took the body down about two in the morn-



ing, locked up the hut, brought away the key and hung it on the board, took the counterpane off the bed, as it had some marks on it, and remade the bed with the blanket outside. In the morning I took the train to Margate, posted the letter, after altering the date, and threw the gate-key and that of the front door into the sea.

"That is what really happened. You may not believe me; but I think you will as you have seen the body and will realise that I had no motive for killing Crofton before the fifteenth, whereas Crofton evidently died before that date."

"I would not say 'evidently,'" said Thorndyke; "but, as the date of his death is the vital point in your defence, you would be wise to notify the coroner of the importance of the issue."

*R. A. F.*

"I don't understand this case," I said, as we walked homewards (I was spending the evening with Thorndyke). "You seemed to smell a rat from the very first. And I don't see how you spotted Jobson. It is a mystery to me."

"It wouldn't be if you were a lawyer," he replied. "The case against Jobson was contained in what you told me at our first interview. You yourself commented on the peculiarity of the will that he drafted for Crofton. The intention of the latter was to leave all his property to his wife. But instead of saying so, the will specified each item of property, and appointed a residuary legatee, which was Jobson himself. This might have appeared like mere legal verbiage; but when Miss Shuler's legacy was announced, the transaction took on a rather different aspect. For this legacy was not among the items specified in the will. Therefore it did not go to Mrs. Crofton. It would be included in the residue of the estate and would go to the residuary legatee."

"The deuce it would!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly; until Crofton revoked his will or made a fresh one. This was rather suspicious. It suggested that Jobson had private information as to Miss Shuler's will and had drafted Crofton's will in accordance with it; and as she died of malignant disease, her doctor must have known for some time that she was dying and it looked as if Jobson had information on that point, too. Now the position of affairs that you described to me was this: "Crofton, a possible suicide, had disappeared, and had made no fresh will.

"Miss Shuler died on the thirteenth, leaving thirty thousand pounds to Crofton, if he survived her, or if he did not, then to Mrs. Crofton. The important question then was whether Crofton was alive or dead; and if

he was dead, whether he had died before or after the thirteenth. For if he died before the thirteenth the legacy went to Mrs. Crofton, but if he died after that date the legacy went to Jobson.

"Then you showed me that extraordinarily opportune letter dated the sixteenth. Now, seeing that that date was worth thirty thousand pounds to Jobson, I naturally scrutinised it narrowly. The letter was written with ordinary blue-black ink. But this ink, even in the open, takes about a fortnight to blacken completely. In a closed envelope it takes considerably longer. On examining this date through a lens, the one was very perceptibly bluer than the six. It had therefore been added later. But for what reason? And by whom?

"The only possible reason was that Crofton was dead and had died before the thirteenth. The only person who had any motive for making the alteration was Jobson. Therefore, when we started for Seasalter I already felt sure that Crofton was dead and that the letter had been posted at Margate by Jobson. I had further no doubt that Crofton's body was concealed somewhere on the premises of the bungalow. All that I had to do was to verify those conclusions."

"Then you believe that Jobson has told us the truth?"

"Yes. But I suspect that he went down there with the deliberate intention of making away with Crofton before he could make a fresh will. The finding of Crofton's body must have been a fearful disappointment, but I must admit that he showed considerable resource in dealing with the situation; and he failed only by the merest chance. I think his defence against the murder charge will be admitted; but, of course, it will involve plea of guilty to the charge of fraud in connection with the legacy."

Thorndyke's forecast turned out to be correct. Jobson was acquitted of the murder of Arthur Crofton, but is at present "doing time" in respect of the forged letter and the rest of his too-ingenuous scheme.

# THE MAGIC CASKET\*

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## The Magic Casket

It was in the near neighbourhood of King's Road, Chelsea, that chance, aided by Thorndyke's sharp and observant eyes, introduced us to the dramatic story of the Magic Casket. Not that there was anything strikingly dramatic in the opening phase of the affair, nor even in the story of the casket itself. It was Thorndyke who added the dramatic touch, and most of the magic, too; and I record the affair principally as an illustration of his extraordinary capacity for producing odd items of out-of-the-way knowledge and instantly applying them in the most unexpected manner.

Eight o'clock had struck on a misty November night when we turned out of the main road, and, leaving behind the glare of the shop windows, plunged into the maze of dark and narrow streets to the north. The abrupt change impressed us both, and Thorndyke proceeded to moralise on it in his pleasant, reflective fashion.

"London is an inexhaustible place," he mused. "Its variety is infinite. A minute ago we walked in a glare of light, jostled by a multitude. And now look at this little street. It is as dim as a tunnel, and we have got it absolutely to ourselves. Anything might happen in a place like this."

Suddenly he stopped. We were, at the moment, passing a small church or chapel, the west door of which was enclosed in an open porch; and as my observant friend stepped into the latter and stooped, I perceived in the deep shadow against the wall, the object which had evidently caught his eye.

"What is it?" I asked, following him in.

"It is a handbag," he replied; "and the question is, what is it doing here?" He tried the church door, which was obviously locked, and coming out, looked at the windows.

"There are no lights in the church," said he; "the place is locked up, and there is nobody in sight. Apparently the bag is derelict. Shall we have a look at it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he picked it up and brought it out into the mitigated darkness of the street, where we proceeded to inspect it. But at the first glance it told its own tale; for it had evidently been locked, and it bore unmistakable traces of having been forced open.

"It isn't empty," said Thorndyke. "I think we had better see what is in it. Just catch hold while I get a light."

He handed me the bag while he felt in his pocket for the tiny electric lamp which he made a habit of carrying, and an excellent habit it is. I held the mouth of the bag open while he illuminated the interior, which we then saw to be occupied by several objects neatly wrapped in brown paper. One of these Thorndyke lifted out, and untying the string and removing the paper, displayed a Chinese stoneware jar. Attached to it was a label, bearing the stamp of the Victoria and Albert Museum, on which was written:

*Miss Mabel Bonnet,  
168 Willow Walk, Fulham Road, W.*

"That tells us all that we want to know," said Thorndyke, re-wrapping the jar and tenderly replacing it in the bag. "We can't do wrong in delivering the things to their owner, especially as the bag itself is evidently her property, too," and he pointed to the gilt initials, "M. B.," stamped on the morocco.

It took us but a few minutes to reach the Fulham Road, but we then had to walk nearly a mile along that thoroughfare before we arrived at Willow Walk—to which an obliging shopkeeper had directed us—and, naturally, No. 168 was at the farther end.

As we turned into the quiet street we almost collided with two men, who were walking at a rapid pace, but both looking back over their shoulders. I noticed that they were both Japanese—well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking men—but I gave them little attention, being interested, rather, in what they were looking at. This was a taxicab which was dimly visible by the light of a street lamp at the farther end of the "Walk," and from which four persons had just alighted. Two of these had hurried ahead to knock at a door, while the other two walked very slowly across the pavement and up the steps to the threshold. Almost immediately the door was opened; two of the shadowy figures entered, and the other two returned slowly to the cab and as we came nearer, I could see that these latter were policemen in uniform. I had just time to note this fact when they both got into the cab and were forthwith spirited away.

"Looks like a street accident of some kind," I remarked; and then, as I glanced at the number of the house we were passing, I added: "Now, I wonder if that house happens to be—yes, by Jove! it is. It is 168! Things have been happening, and this bag of ours is one of the *dramatis personae*."

The response to our knock was by no means prompt. I was, in fact, in the act of raising my hand to the knocker to repeat the summons when the door opened and revealed an elderly servant-maid, who regarded us inquiringly, and, as I thought, with something approaching alarm.

"Does Miss Mabel Bonney live here?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "but I am afraid you can't see her just now, unless it is something urgent. She is rather upset, and particularly engaged at present."

"There is no occasion whatever to disturb her," said Thorndyke. "We have merely called to restore this bag, which seemed to have been lost," and with this he held it out towards her. She grasped it eagerly with a cry of surprise, and as the mouth fell open, she peered into it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "they don't seem to have taken anything, after all, Where did you find it, sir?"

"In the porch of a church in Spelton Street," Thorndyke replied, and was turning away when the servant said earnestly: "Would you kindly give me your name and address, sir? Miss Bonney will wish to write and thank you."

"There is really no need," said he; but she interrupted anxiously: "If you would be so kind, sir. Miss Bonney will be so vexed if she is unable to thank you; and besides, she may want to ask you some questions about it."

"That is true," said Thorndyke (who was restrained only by good manners from asking one or two questions, himself). He produced his card-case, and having handed one of his cards to the maid, wished her "good-evening" and retired.

"That bag had evidently been pinched," I remarked, as we walked back towards the Fulham Road.

"Evidently," he agreed, and was about to enlarge on the matter when our attention was attracted to a taxi, which was approaching from the direction of the main road. A man's head was thrust out of the window, and as the vehicle passed a street lamp, I observed that the head appertained to an elderly gentleman with very white hair and a very fresh face.

"Did you see who that was?" Thorndyke asked.

"It looked like old Brodribb," I replied.

"It did; very much. I wonder where he is of to."

He turned and followed, with a speculative eye, the receding taxi, which presently swept alongside the kerb and stopped, apparently opposite the house from we had just come. As the vehicle came to rest, the door flew open and the passenger shot out like an elderly, but agile, Jack-in-the-box, and bounced up the steps.

"That is Brodribb's knock, sure enough," said I, as the old-fashioned flourish reverberated up the quiet street. "I have heard it too often on our own knocker to mistake it. But we had better not let him see us watching him."

As we went once more on our way, I took a sly glance, now and again, at my friend, noting with a certain malicious enjoyment his profoundly cogitative air. I knew quite well what was happening in his mind for his mind reacted to observed facts in an invariable manner. And here was a group of related facts: the bag, stolen, but deposited intact; the museum label; the injured or sick person—probably Miss Bonney, herself—brought home under police escort; and the arrival, post-haste, of the old lawyer; a significant group of facts. And there was Thorndyke, under my amused and attentive observation, fitting them together in various combinations to see what general conclusion emerged. Apparently my own mental state was equally clear to him, for he remarked, presently, as if response to an unspoken comment: "Well, I expect we shall know all about it before many days have passed if Brodribb sees my card, as he most probably will. Here comes an omnibus that will suit us. Shall we hop on?"

He stood at the kerb and raised his stick; and as the accommodation on the omnibus was such that our seats were separated, there was no opportunity to pursue the subject further, even if there had been anything to discuss.

But Thorndyke's prediction was justified sooner than I had expected. For we had not long finished our supper, and had not yet closed the "oak," when there was heard a mighty flourish on the knocker of our inner door.

"Brodribb, by Jingo!" I exclaimed, and hurried across the room to let him in.

"No, Jervis," he said as I invited him to enter, "I am not coming in. Don't want to disturb you at this time of night. I've just called to make an appointment for to-morrow with a client."

"Is the client's name Bonney?" I asked.



He started and gazed at me in astonishment. "Gad, Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you are getting as bad as Thorndyke. How the deuce did you know that she was my client?"

"Never mind how I know. It is our business to know everything in these chambers. But if your appointment concerns Miss Mabel Bonney, for the Lord's sake come in and give Thorndyke a chance of a night's rest. At present, he is on broken bottles, as Mr. Bumble would express it."

On this persuasion, Mr. Brodribb entered, nothing loath—very much the reverse, in fact—and having bestowed a jovial greeting on Thorndyke, glanced approvingly round the room.

"Ha!" said he, "you look very cosy. If you are really sure I am not—"

I cut him short by propelling him gently towards the fire, beside which I deposited him in an easy chair, while Thorndyke pressed the electric bell which rang up in the laboratory.

"Well," said Brodribb, spreading himself out comfortably before the fire like a handsome old Tom-cat, "if you are going to let me give you a few particulars—but perhaps you would rather that I should not talk shop?"

"Now you know perfectly well, Brodribb," said Thorndyke, "that 'shop' is the breath of life to us all. Let us have those particulars."

Brodribb sighed contentedly and placed his toes on the fender (and at this moment the door opened softly and Polton looked into the room. He took a single, understanding glance at our visitor, and withdrew, shutting the door without a sound).

"I am glad," pursued Brodribb, "to have this opportunity of a preliminary chat, because there are certain things that one can say better when the client is not present; and I am deeply interested in Bonney's affairs. The crisis in those affairs which has brought me here is of quite recent date—in fact, it dates from this evening. But I know your partiality for having events related in their proper sequence, so I will leave today's happenings for the moment and tell you the story—the whole of which is material to the case—from the beginning."

Here there was a slight interruption, due to Polton's noiseless entry with a tray on which was a decanter, a biscuit box, and three port glasses. This he deposited, on a small table, which he placed within convenient reach of our guest. Then, with a glance of altruistic satisfaction at our old friend, he stole out like a benevolent ghost.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Brodribb, beaming on the decanter, "this is really too bad. You ought not to indulge me in this way."

"My dear Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, "you are a benefactor to us. You give us a pretext for taking a glass of port. We can't drink alone, you know."

"I should, if I had a cellar like yours," chuckled Brodribb, sniffing ecstatically at his glass. He took a sip, with his eyes closed, savoured it solemnly, shook his head, and set the glass down on the table.

"To return to our case," he resumed; "Miss Bonney is the daughter of a solicitor, Harold Bonney—you may remember him. He had offices in Bedford Row; and there, one morning, a client came to him and asked him to take care of some property while he, the said client, ran over to Paris, where he had some urgent business. The property in question was a collection of pearls of most unusual size and value, forming a great necklace, which had been unstrung for the sake of portability. It is not clear where they came from, but as the transaction occurred soon after the Russian Revolution, we may make a guess. At any rate, there they were, packed loosely in a leather bag, the string of which was sealed with the owner's seal.

"Bonney seems to have been rather casual about the affair. He gave the client a receipt for the bag, stating the nature of the contents, which he had not seen, and deposited it, in the client's presence, in the safe in his private office. Perhaps he intended to take it to the bank or transfer it to his strong-room, but it is evident that he did neither; for his managing clerk, who kept the second key of the strong-room—without which the room could not be opened—knew nothing of the transaction. When he went home at about seven o'clock, he left Bonney hard at work in his office, and there is no doubt that the pearls were still in the safe.

"That night, at about a quarter to nine, it happened that a couple of C. I. D. officers were walking up Bedford Row when they saw three men come out of one of the houses. Two of them turned up towards Theobald's Road, but the third came south, towards them. As he passed them, they both recognised him as a Japanese named Uyenishi, who was believed to be a member of a cosmopolitan gang and whom the police were keeping under observation. Naturally, their suspicions were aroused. The first two men had hurried round the corner and were out of sight; and when they turned to look after Uyenishi, he had mended his pace considerably and was looking back at them. Thereupon one of the officers, named Barker, decided to follow the Jap, while the other, Holt, reconnoitred the premises.

"Now, as soon as Barker turned, the Japanese broke into a run. It was just such a night as this dark and, slightly foggy. In order to keep his

man in sight, he had to run, too; and he found that he had a sprinter to deal with. From the bottom of Bedford Row, Uyenishi darted across and shot down Hand Court like a lamp-lighter. Barker followed, but at the Holborn end his man was nowhere to be seen. However, he presently learned from a man at a shop door that the fugitive had run past and turned up Brownlow Street, so off he went again in pursuit. But when he got to the top of the street, back in Bedford Row, he was done. There was no sign of the man, and no one about from whom he could make inquiries. All he could do was to cross the road and walk up Bedford Row to see if Holt had made any discoveries.

“As he was trying to identify the house, his colleague came out on to the doorstep and beckoned him in and this was the story that he told. He had recognised the house by the big lamp-standard; and as the place was all dark, he had gone into the entry and tried the office door. Finding it unlocked, he had entered the clerks’ office, lit the gas, and tried the door of the private office, but found it locked. He knocked at it, but getting no answer, had a good look round the clerk’s office; and there, presently, on the floor in a dark corner, he found a key. This he tried in the door of the private office, and finding that it fitted, turned it and opened the door. As he did so, the light from the outer office fell on the body of a man lying on the floor just inside.

“A moment’s inspection showed that the man had been murdered—first knocked on the head and then finished with a knife. Examination of the pockets showed that the dead man was Harold Bonney, and also that no robbery from the person seemed to have been committed. Nor was there any sign of any other kind of robbery. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, and the safe had not been broken into, though that was not very conclusive, as the safe key was in the dead man’s pocket. However, a murder had been committed, and obviously Uyenishi was either the murderer or an accessory; so Holt had, at once, rung up Scotland Yard on the office telephone, giving all the particulars.

“I may say at once that Uyenishi disappeared completely and at once. He never went to his lodgings at Limehouse, for the police were there before he could have arrived. A lively hue and cry was kept up. Photographs of the wanted man were posted outside every police-station, and a watch was set at all the ports. But he was never found. He must have got away at once on some outward-bound tramp from the Thames. And there we will leave him for the moment.

“At first it was thought that nothing had been stolen, since the man-aging clerk could not discover that any thing was missing. But a few

days later the client returned from Paris, and presenting his receipt, asked for his pearls. But the pearls had vanished. Clearly they had been the object of the crime. The robbers must have known about them and traced them to the office. Of course the safe had been opened with its own key, which was then replaced in the dead man's pocket.

"Now, I was poor Bonney's executor, and in that capacity I denied his liability in respect of the pearls on the ground that he was a gratuitous bailee—there being no evidence that any consideration had been demanded—and that being murdered cannot be construed as negligence. But Miss Mabel, who was practically the sole legatee, insisted on accepting liability. She said that the pearls could have been secured in the bank or the strong-room, and that she was morally, if not legally, liable for their loss; and she insisted on handing to the owner the full amount at which he valued them. It was a wildly foolish proceeding, for he would certainly have accepted half the sum. But still I take my hat off to a person—man or woman—who can accept poverty in preference to a broken covenant"; and here Brodribb, being in fact that sort of person himself, had to be consoled with a replenished glass.

"And mind you," he resumed, "when I speak of poverty, I wish to be taken literally. The estimated value of those pearls was fifty thousand pounds—if you can imagine anyone out of Bedlam giving such a sum for a parcel of trash like that; and when poor Mabel Bonney had paid it, she was left with the prospect of having to spread her butter mighty thin for the rest of her life. As a matter of fact, she has had to sell one after another of her little treasures to pay just her current expenses, and I'm hanged if I can see how she is going to carry on when she has sold the last of them. But there, I mustn't take up your time with her private troubles. Let us return to our muttons.

"First, as to the pearls. They were never traced, and it seems probable that they were never disposed of. For, you see, pearls are different from any other kind of gems. You can cut up a big diamond, but you can't cut up a big pearl. And the great value of this necklace was due not only to the size, the perfect shape and 'orient' of the separate pearls, but to the fact that the whole set was perfectly matched. To break up the necklace was to destroy a good part of its value.

"And now as to our friend Uyenishi. He disappeared, as I have said; but he reappeared at Los Angeles, in custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder. He was taken red-handed and was duly convicted and sentenced to death; but for some reason—or more probably, for no reason, as we should think—the sentence was commuted to imprison-

ment for life. Under these circumstances, the English police naturally took no action, especially as they really had no evidence against him.

“Now Uyenishi was, by trade, a metal-worker; a maker of those pretty trifles that are so dear to the artistic Japanese, and when he was in prison he was allowed to set up a little workshop and practise his trade on a small scale. Among other things that he made was a little casket in the form of a seated figure, which he said he wanted to give to his brother as a keepsake. I don’t know whether any permission was granted for him to make this gift, but that is of no consequence; for Uyenishi got influenza and was carried off in a few days by pneumonia; and the prison authorities learned that his brother had been killed, a week or two previously, in a shooting affair at San Francisco. So the casket remained on their hands.

“About this time, Miss Bonney was invited to accompany an American lady on a visit to California, and accepted gratefully. While she was there she paid a visit to the prison to inquire whether Uyenishi had ever made any kind of statement concerning the missing pearls. Here she heard of Uyenishi’s recent death; and the governor of the prison, as he could not give her any information, handed over to her the casket as a sort of memento. This transaction came to the knowledge of the press, and—well, you know what the Californian press is like. There were ‘some comments,’ as they would say, and quite an assortment of Japanese, of shady antecedents, applied to the prison to have the casket ‘restored’ to them as Uyenishi’s heirs. Then Miss Bonney’s rooms at the hotel were raided by burglars—but the casket was in the hotel strong-room—and Miss Bonney and her hostess were shadowed by various undesirables in such a disturbing fashion that the two ladies became alarmed and secretly made their way to New York. But there another burglary occurred, with the same unsuccessful result, and the shadowing began again. Finally, Miss Bonney, feeling that her presence was a danger to her friend, decided to return to England, and managed to get on board the ship without letting her departure be known in advance.

“But even in England she has not been left in peace. She has had an uncomfortable feeling of being watched and attended, and has seemed to be constantly meeting Japanese men in the streets, especially in the vicinity of her house. Of course, all the fuss is about this infernal casket; and when she told me what was happening, I promptly popped the thing in my pocket and took it, to my office, where I stowed it in the strong-room. And there, of course, it ought to have remained. but it didn’t. One day Miss Bonney told me that she was sending some small things to a loan exhibition of oriental works of art at the South

Kensington Museum, and she wished to include the casket. I urged her strongly to do nothing of the kind, but she persisted; and the end of it was that we went to the museum together, with her pottery and stuff in a handbag and the casket in my pocket.

“It was a most imprudent thing to do, for there the beastly casket was, for several months, exposed in a glass case for anyone to see, with her name on the label; and what was worse, full particulars of the origin of the thing. However, nothing happened while it was there—the museum is not an easy place to steal from—and all went well until it was time to remove the things after the close of the exhibition. Now, to-day was the appointed day, and, as on the previous occasion, she and I went to the museum together. But the unfortunate thing is that we didn’t come away together. Her other exhibits were all pottery, and these were dealt with first, so that she had her handbag packed and was ready to go before they had begun on the metal work cases. As we were not going the same way, it didn’t seem necessary for her to wait; so she went off with her bag and I stayed behind until the casket was released, when I put it in my pocket and went borne, where I locked the thing up again in the strong-room.

“It was about seven when I got borne. A little after eight I heard the telephone ring down in the office, and down I went, cursing the untimely ringer, who turned out to be a policeman at St. George’s Hospital. He said he had found Miss Bonney lying unconscious in the street and had taken her to the hospital, where she had been detained for a while, but she was now recovered and he was taking her home. She would like me, if possible, to go and see her at once. Well, of course, I set off forthwith and got to her house a few minutes after her arrival, and just after you had left.

“She was a good deal upset, so I didn’t worry her with many questions, but she gave me a short account of her misadventure, which amounted to this: She had started to walk home from the museum along the Brompton Road, and she was passing down a quiet street between that and Fulham Road when she heard soft footsteps behind her. The next moment, a scarf or shawl was thrown over her head and drawn tightly round her neck. At the same moment, the bag was snatched from her hand. That is all that she remembers, for she was half and so terrified that she fainted, and knew no more until she found herself in a cab with two policemen who were taking her to the hospital.

“Now it is obvious that her assailants were in search of that damned casket, for the bag had been broken open and searched, but nothing

taken or damaged; which suggests the Japanese again, for a British thief would have smashed the crockery. I found your card there, and I put it to Miss Bonney that we had better ask you to help us—I told her all about you—and she agreed emphatically. So that is why I am here, drinking your port and robbing you of your night's rest."

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"Whatever you think best," was the cheerful reply. "In the first place, this nuisance must be put a stop to—this shadowing and hanging about. But apart from that, you must see that there is something queer about this accursed casket. The beastly thing is of no intrinsic value. The museum man turned up his nose at it. But it evidently has some extrinsic value, and no small value either. If it is good enough for these devils to follow it all the way from the States, as they seem to have done, it is good enough for us to try to find out what its value is. That is where you come in. I propose to bring Miss Bonney to see you tomorrow, and I will bring the infernal casket, too. Then you will ask her a few questions, take a look at the casket—through the microscope, if necessary—and tell us all about it in your usual necromantic way."

Thorndyke laughed as he refilled our friend's glass. "If faith will move mountains, Brodribb," said he, "you ought to have been a civil engineer. But it is certainly a rather intriguing problem."

"Ha!" exclaimed the old solicitor; "then it's all right. I've known you a good many years, but I've never known you to be stumped; and you are not going to be stumped now. What time shall I bring her? Afternoon or evening would suit her best."

"Very well," replied Thorndyke; "bring her to tea—say, five o'clock. How will that do?"

"Excellently; and here's good luck to the adventure." He drained his glass, and the decanter being now empty, he rose, shook our hands warmly, and took his departure in high spirits.

It was with a very lively interest that I looked forward to the prospective visit. Like Thorndyke, I found the case rather intriguing. For it was quite clear, as our shrewd old friend had said, that there was something more than met the eye in the matter of this casket.

Hence, on the following afternoon, when, on the stroke of five, footsteps became audible on our stairs, I awaited the arrival of our new client with keen curiosity, both as to herself and her mysterious property.

To tell the truth, the lady was better worth looking at than the casket. At the first glance, I was strongly prepossessed in her favour, and so, I think, was Thorndyke. Not that she was a beauty, though comely



enough. But she was an example of a type that seems to be growing rarer; quiet, gentle, soft-spoken, and a lady to her finger-tips; a little sad-faced and care worn, with a streak or two of white in her prettily-disposed black hair, though she could not have been much over thirty-five. Altogether a very gracious and winning personality.

When we had been presented to her by Brodribb—who treated her as if she had been a royal personage and had enthroned her in the most comfortable easy-chair—, we inquired as to her health, and were duly thanked for the salvage of the bag. Then Polton brought in the tray, with an air that seemed to demand an escort of choristers; the tea was poured out, and the informal proceedings began.

She had not, however, much to tell; for she had not seen her assailants, and the essential facts of the case had been fully presented in Brodribb's excellent summary. After a very few questions, therefore, we came to the next stage; which was introduced by Brodribb's taking from his pocket a small parcel which he proceeded to open.

"There," said he, "that is the *fons et origo mali*. Not much to look at, I think you will agree." He set the object down on the table and glared at it malevolently, while Thorndyke and I regarded it with a more impersonal interest. It was not much to look at. Just an ordinary Japanese casket in the form of a squat, shapeless figure with a silly little grinning face, of which the head and shoulders opened on a hinge; a pleasant enough object, with its quiet, warm colouring, but certainly not a masterpiece of art.

Thorndyke picked it up and turned it over slowly for preliminary inspection; then he went on to examine it detail by detail, watched closely, in his turn, by Brodribb and me. Slowly and methodically, his eye—fortified by a watchmaker's eyeglass—travelled over every part of the exterior. Then he opened it, and I having examined the inside of the lid, scrutinised the bottom from within, long and attentively. Finally, he turned the casket upside down and examined the bottom from without, giving to it the longest and most rigorous inspection of all—which puzzled me somewhat, for the bottom was absolutely plain at length, he passed the casket and the eyeglass to me without comment.

"Well," said Brodribb, "what is the verdict?"

"It is of no value as a work of art," replied Thorndyke. "The body and lid are just castings of common white metal—an antimony alloy, I should say. The bronze colour is lacquer."

"So the museum man remarked." said Brodribb.



"But," continued Thorndyke, "there is one very odd thing about it. The only piece of fine metal in it is in the part which matters least. The bottom is a separate plate of the alloy known to the Japanese as Shakudo—an alloy of copper and gold."

"Yes," said Brodribb, "the museum man noted that, too, and couldn't make out why it had been put there."

"Then," Thorndyke continued, "there is another anomalous feature; the inside of the bottom is covered with elaborate decoration—just the place where decoration is most inappropriate, since it would be covered up by the contents of the casket. And, again, this decoration is etched; not engraved or chased. But etching is a very unusual process for this purpose, if it is ever used at all by Japanese metal-workers. My impression is that it is not; for it is most unsuitable for decorative purposes. That is all that I observe, so far."

"And what do you infer from your observations?" Brodribb asked.

"I should like to think the matter over," was the reply. "There is an obvious anomaly, which must have some significance. But I won't embark on speculative opinions at this stage. I should like, however, to take one or two photographs of the casket, for reference; but that will occupy some time. You will hardly want to wait so long."

"No," said Brodribb. "But Miss Bonney is coming with me to my office to go over some documents and discuss a little business. When we have finished, I will come back and fetch the confounded thing."

"There is no need for that," replied Thorndyke. "As soon as I have done what is necessary, I will bring it up to your place."

To this arrangement Brodribb agreed readily, and he and his client prepared to depart. I rose, too, and as I happened to have a call to make in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, I asked permission to walk with them.

As we came out into King's Bench Walk I noticed a smallish, gentlemanly-looking man who had just passed our entry and now turned in at the one next door; and by the light of the lamp in the entry he looked to me like a Japanese. I thought Miss Bonney had observed him, too, but she made no remark, and neither did I. But, passing up Inner Temple Lane, we nearly overtook two other men, who—though I got but a back view of them and the light was feeble enough—aroused my suspicions by their neat, small figures. As we approached, they quickened their pace, and one of them looked back over his shoulder; and then my suspicions were confirmed, for it was an unmistakable Japanese face that looked round at us. Miss Bonney saw that I had observed the men, for she

remarked, as they turned sharply at the Cloisters and entered Pump Court: "You see, I am still haunted by Japanese."

"I noticed them," said Brodribb. "They are probably law students. But we may as well be companionable"; and with this, he, too, headed for Pump Court.

We followed our oriental friends across the Lane into Fountain Court, and through that and Devereux Court out to Temple Bar, where we parted from them; they turning westward and we crossing to Bell Yard, up which we walked, entering New Square by the Carey Street gate. At Brodribb's doorway we halted and looked back, but no one was in sight. I accordingly went my way, promising to return anon to hear Thorndyke's report, and the lawyer and his client disappeared through the portal.

My business occupied me longer than I had expected, I but nevertheless, when I arrived at Brodribb's premises—where he lived in chambers over his office—Thorndyke had not yet made his appearance. A quarter of an hour later, however, we heard his brisk step on the stairs, and as Brodribb threw the door open, he entered and produced the casket from his pocket.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking it from him and locking it, for the time being, in a drawer, "has the oracle spoken; and if so, what did he say?"

"Oracles," replied Thorndyke, "have a way of being more concise than explicit. Before I attempt to interpret the message, I should like to view the scene of the escape; to see if there was any intelligible reason why this man Uyenishi should have returned up Brownlow Street into what must have been the danger zone. I think that is a material question."

"Then," said Brodribb, with evident eagerness, "let us all walk up and have a look at the confounded place. It is quite close by."

We all agreed instantly, two of us, at least, being on the tip-toe of expectation. For Thorndyke, who habitually understated his results, had virtually admitted that the casket had told him something; and as we walked up the Square to the gate in Lincoln's Inn Fields, I watched him furtively, trying to gather from his im passive face a hint as to what the something amounted to, and wondering how the movements of the fugitive bore on the solution of the mystery. Brodribb was similarly occupied, and as we crossed from Great Turnstile and took our way up Brownlow Street, I could see that his excitement was approaching bursting-point.

At the top of the street Thorndyke paused and looked up and down the rather dismal thoroughfare which forms a continuation of Bedford Row

and bears its name. Then he crossed to the paved island surrounding the pump which stands in the middle of the road, and from thence surveyed the entrances to Brownlow Street and Hand Court; and then he turned and looked thoughtfully at the pump.

"A quaint old survivor, this," he remarked, tapping the iron shell with his knuckles. "There is a similar one, you may remember, in Queen Square, and another at Aldgate. But that is still in use."

"Yes," Brodribb assented, almost dancing with impatience and inwardly damning the pump, as I could see, "I've noticed it."

"I suppose," Thorndyke proceeded, in a reflective tone, "they had to remove the handle. But it was rather a pity."

"Perhaps it was," growled Brodribb, whose complexion was rapidly developing affinities to that of a pickled cabbage, "but what the d—"

Here he broke off short and glared silently at Thorndyke, who had raised his arm and squeezed his hand into the opening once occupied by the handle. He groped in the interior with an expression of placid interest, and presently reported: "The barrel is still there, and so, apparently, is the plunger"—(Here I heard Brodribb mutter huskily, "Damn the barrel and the plunger too!") "but my hand is rather large for the exploration. Would you, Miss Bonney, mind slipping your hand in and telling me if I am right?"

We all gazed at Thorndyke in dismay, but in a moment Miss Bonney recovered from her astonishment, and with a deprecating smile, half shy, half amused, she slipped off her glove, and reaching up—it was rather high for her—inserted her hand into the narrow slit. Brodribb glared at her and gobbled like a turkey-cock, and I watched her with a sudden suspicion that something was going to happen. Nor was I mistaken. For, as I looked, the shy, puzzled smile faded from her face and was succeeded by an expression of incredulous astonishment. Slowly she withdrew her hand, and as it came out of the slit it dragged something after it. I started forward, and by the light of the lamp above the pump I could see that the object was a leather bag secured by a string from which hung a broken seal.

"It can't be!" she gasped as, with trembling fingers, she untied the string. Then, as she peered into the open mouth, she uttered a little cry. "It is! It is! It is the necklace!"

Brodribb was speechless with amazement. So was I; and I was still gazing open-mouthed at the bag in Miss Bonney's hands when I felt Thorndyke touch my arm. I turned quickly and found him offering me

an automatic pistol. "Stand by, Jervis," he said quietly, looking towards Gray's Inn.

I looked in the same direction, and then perceived three men stealing round the corner from Jockey's Fields. Brodribb saw them, too, and snatching the bag of pearls from his client's hands, buttoned it into his breast pocket and placed himself before its owner, grasping his stick with a war-like air. The three men filed along the pavement until they were opposite us, when they turned simultaneously and bore down on the pump, each man, as I noticed, holding his right hand behind him. In a moment, Thorndyke's hand, grasping a pistol, flew up—as did mine, also—and he called out sharply: "Stop! If any man moves a hand, I fire." The challenge brought them up short, evidently unprepared for this kind of reception. What would have happened next it is impossible to guess. But at this moment a police whistle sounded and two constables ran out from Hand Court. The whistle was instantly echoed from the direction of Warwick Court, whence two more constabulary figures appeared through the postern gate of Gray's Inn. Our three attendants hesitated but for an instant. Then, with one accord, they turned tail and flew like the wind round into Jockey's Fields, with the whole posse of constables close on their heels.

"Remarkable coincidence," said Brodribb, "that those policemen should happen to be on the look-out. Or isn't it a coincidence?"

"I telephoned to the station superintendent before I started," replied Thorndyke, "warning him of a possible breach of the peace at this spot." Brodribb chuckled. "You're a wonderful man, Thorndyke. You think of everything. I wonder if the police will catch those fellows."

"It is no concern of ours," replied Thorndyke. "We've got the pearls, and that finishes the business. There will be no more shadowing, in any case."

Miss Bonney heaved a comfortable little sigh and glanced gratefully at Thorndyke. "You can have no idea what a relief that is!" she exclaimed; "to say nothing of the treasure-trove."

We waited some time, but as neither the fugitives nor the constables reappeared, we presently made our way back down Brownlow Street. And there it was that Brodribb had an inspiration.

"I'll tell you what," said he. "I will just pop these things in my strong-room—they will be perfectly safe there until the bank opens to-morrow—and then we'll go and have a nice little dinner. I'll pay the piper."

"Indeed you won't!" exclaimed Miss Bonney. "This is my thanksgiving festival, and the benevolent wizard shall be the guest of the evening."

“Very well, my dear,” agreed Brodribb. “I will pay and charge it to the estate. But I stipulate that the benevolent wizard shall tell us exactly what the oracle said. That is essential to the preservation of my sanity.”

“You shall have his *ipsissima verba*,” Thorndyke promised; and the resolution was carried, *nem. con.*<sup>1</sup>

An hour and a half later we were seated around a table in a private room of a café to which Mr. Brodribb had conducted us. I may not divulge its whereabouts, though I may, perhaps, hint that we approached it by way of Wardour Street. At any rate, we had dined, even to the fulfilment of Brodribb’s ideal, and coffee and liqueurs furnished a sort of gastronomic doxology. Brodribb had lighted a cigar and Thorndyke had produced a vicious-looking little black cheroot, which he regarded fondly and then returned to its abiding-place as unsuited to the present company.

“Now,” said Brodribb, watching Thorndyke fill his pipe (as understudy of the cheroot aforesaid), “we are waiting to hear the words of the oracle.”

“You shall hear them,” Thorndyke replied. “There were only five of them. But first, there are certain introductory matters to be disposed of. The solution of this problem is based on two well-known physical facts, one metallurgical and the other optical.”

“Ha!” said Brodribb. “But you must temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know, Thorndyke. Miss Bonney and I are not scientists.”

“I will put the matter quite simply, but you must have the facts. The first relates to the properties of malleable metals—excepting iron and steel—and especially of copper and its alloys. If a plate of such metal or alloy—say, bronze, for instance—is made red-hot and quenched in water, it becomes quite soft and flexible—the reverse of what happens in the case of iron. Now, if such a plate of softened metal be placed on a steel anvil and hammered, it becomes extremely hard and brittle.”

“I follow that,” said Brodribb.

“Then see what follows. If, instead of hammering the soft plate, you put on it the edge of a blunt chisel and strike on that chisel a sharp blow, you produce an indented line. Now the plate remains soft; but the metal forming the indented line has been hammered and has become hard. There is now a line of hard metal on the soft plate. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly,” replied Brodribb; and Thorndyke accordingly continued: “The second fact is this: If a beam of light falls on a polished surface

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<sup>1</sup> Abkürzung für lat. *nemine contradicente* = ohne Widerspruch.

which reflects it, and if that surface is turned through a given angle, the beam of light is deflected through double that angle."

"H'm!" grunted Brodribb. "Yes. No doubt. I hope we are not going to get into any deeper waters, Thorndyke."

"We are not," replied the latter, smiling urbanely. "We are now going to consider the application of these facts. Have you ever seen a Japanese magic mirror?"

"Never; nor even heard of such a thing."

"They are bronze mirrors, just like the ancient Greek or Etruscan mirrors—which are probably 'magic' mirrors, too. A typical specimen consists of a circular or oval plate of bronze, highly polished on the face and decorated on the back with chased ornament—commonly a dragon or some such device—and furnished with a handle. The ornament is, as I have said, chased; that is to say, it is executed in indented lines made with chasing tools, which are, in effect, small chisels, more or less blunt, which are struck with a chasing-hammer.

"Now these mirrors have a very singular property. Although the face is perfectly plain, as a mirror should be, yet, if a beam of sunlight is caught on it and reflected, say, on to a white wall, the round or oval patch of light on the wall is not a plain light patch. It shows quite clearly the ornament on the back of the mirror."

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Bonney.

"It sounds quite incredible." I said.

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And yet the explanation is quite simple. Professor Sylvanus Thompson pointed it out years ago. It is based on the facts which I have just stated to you. The artist who makes one of these mirrors begins, naturally, by annealing the metal until it is quite soft. Then he chases the design on the back, and this design then shows slightly on the face. But he now grinds the face perfectly flat with fine emery and water so that the traces of the design are complete obliterated. Finally, he polishes the face with rouge on a soft buff.

"But now observe that wherever the chasing-tool has made a line, the metal is hardened right through, so that the design is in hard metal on a soft matrix. But the hardened metal resists the wear of the polishing buffer more than the soft metal does. The result is that the act of polishing causes the design to appear in faint relief on the face. Its projection is infinitesimal—less than the hundred-thousandth of an inch—and totally invisible to the eye. But, minute as it is, owing to the optical law which I mentioned—which, in effect, doubles the projection—it is enough to influence the reflection of light. As a consequence, every

chased line appears on the patch of light as a dark line with a bright border, and so the whole design is visible. I think that is quite clear.”

“Perfectly clear,” Miss Bonney and Brodribb agreed.

“But now,” pursued Thorndyke, “before we come to the casket, there is a very curious corollary which I must mention. Supposing our artist, having finished the mirror, should proceed with a scraper to erase the design from the back; and on the blank, scraped surface to etch a new design. The process of etching does not harden the metal, so the new design does not appear on the reflection. But the old design would. For although it was invisible on the face and had been erased from the back, it would still exist in the substance of the metal and continue to influence the reflection. The odd result would be that the design which would be visible in the patch of light on the wall would be a different one from that on the back of the mirror.

“No doubt, you see what I am leading up to. But I will take the investigation of the casket as it actually occurred. It was obvious, at once, that the value of the thing was extrinsic. It had no intrinsic value, either in material or workmanship. What could that value be? The clear suggestion was that the casket was the vehicle of some secret message or information. It had been made by Uyenishi, who had almost certainly had possession of the missing pearls, and who had been so closely pursued that he never had an opportunity to communicate with his confederates. It was to be given to a man who was almost certainly one of those confederates; and, since the pearls had never been traced, there was a distinct probability that the (presumed) message referred to some hiding-place in which Uyenishi had concealed them during his flight, and where they were probably still hidden.

“With these considerations in my mind, I examined the casket, and this was what I found. The thing, itself, was a common white-metal casting, made presentable by means of lacquer. But the white metal bottom had been cut out and replaced by a plate of fine bronze—Shakudo. The inside of this was covered with an etched design, which immediately aroused my suspicions. Turning it over, I saw that the outside of the bottom was not only smooth and polished; it was a true mirror. It gave a perfectly undistorted reflection of my face. At once, I suspected that the mirror held the secret; that the message, whatever it was, had been chased on the back, had then been scraped away and an etched design worked on it to hide the traces of the scraper.

“As soon as you were gone, I took the casket up to the laboratory and threw a strong beam of parallel light from a condenser on the bottom,

catching the reflection on a sheet of white paper. The result was just what I had expected. On the bright oval patch on the paper could be seen the shadowy, but quite distinct, forms of five words in the Japanese character.

"I was in somewhat of a dilemma, for I have no knowledge of Japanese, whereas the circumstances were such as to make it rather unsafe to employ a translator. However, as I do just know the Japanese characters and possess a Japanese dictionary, I determined to make an attempt to fudge out the words myself. If I failed, I could then look for a discreet translator.

"However, it proved to be easier than I had expected, for the words were detached; they did not form a sentence, and so involved no questions of grammar. I spelt out the first word and then looked it up in the dictionary. The translation was 'pearls.' This looked hopeful, and I went on to the next, of which the translation was 'pump.' The third word floored me. It seemed to be 'jokkis,' or 'jokkish,' but there was no such word in the dictionary; so I turned to the next word, hoping that it would explain its predecessor. And it did. The fourth word was 'fields,' and the last word was evidently 'London.' So the entire group read 'Pearls, Pump, Jokkis, Fields, London.'

"Now, there is no pump, so far as I know, in Jockey Fields, but there is one in Bedford Row close to the corner of the Fields, and exactly opposite the end of Brownlow Street. And by Mr. Brodribb's account, Uyenishi, in his flight, ran down Hand Court and returned up Brownlow Street, as if he were making for the pump. As the latter is disused and the handle-hole is high up, well out of the way of children, it offers quite a good temporary hiding-place, and I had no doubt that the bag of pearls had been poked into it and was probably there still. I was tempted to go at once and explore; but I was anxious that the discovery should be made by Miss Bonney, herself, and I did not dare to make a preliminary exploration for fear of being shadowed. If I had found the treasure I should have had to take it and give it to her; which would have been a flat ending to the adventure. So I had to dissemble and be the occasion of much smothered objurgation on the part of my friend Brodribb. And that is the whole story of my interview with the oracle."

Our mantelpiece is becoming a veritable museum of trophies of victory, the gifts of grateful clients. Among them is a squat, shapeless figure of a Japanese gentleman of the old school, with a silly grinning little face—The Magic Casket. But its possession is no longer a menace. Its sting has been drawn; its magic is exploded; its secret is exposed, and its glory



departed.

## The Content's of a Mare's Nest

“It is very unsatisfactory,” said Mr. Stalker, of the *GRIFFIN LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY*, at the close of a consultation on a doubtful claim. “I suppose we shall have to pay up.”

“I am sure you will,” said Thorndyke. “The death was properly certified, the deceased is buried, and you have not a single fact with which to support an application for further inquiry.”

“No,” Stalker agreed. “But I am not satisfied. I don’t believe that doctor really knew what she died from. I wish cremation were more usual.”

“So, I have no doubt, has many a poisoner,” Thorndyke remarked dryly. Stalker laughed, but stuck to his point. “I know you don’t agree,” said he, “but from our point of view it is much more satisfactory to know that the extra precautions have been taken. In a cremation case, you have not to depend on the mere death certificate; you have the cause of death verified by an independent authority, and it is difficult to see how any miscarriage can occur.”

Thorndyke shook his head. “It is a delusion, Stalker. You can’t provide in advance for unknown contingencies. In practice, your special precautions degenerate into mere formalities. If the circumstances of a death appear normal, the independent authority will certify; if they appear abnormal, you won’t get a certificate at all. And if suspicion arises only after the cremation has taken place, it can neither be confirmed nor rebutted.”

“My point is,” said Stalker, “that the searching examination would lead to discovery of a crime before cremation.”

“That is the intention,” Thorndyke admitted. “But no examination, short of an exhaustive *post-mortem*, would make it safe to destroy a body so that no reconsideration of the cause of death would be possible.”

Stalker smiled as he picked up his hat. “Well,” he said, “to a cobbler there is nothing like leather, and I suppose that to a toxicologist there

is nothing like an exhumation," and with this parting shot he took his leave.

We had not seen the last of him, however. In the course of the same week he looked in to consult us on a fresh matter.

"A rather queer case has turned up," said he. "I don't know that we are deeply concerned in it, but we should like to have your opinion as to how we stand. The position is this: Eighteen months ago, a man named Ingle insured with us for fifteen hundred pounds, and he was then accepted as a first-class life. He has recently died—apparently from heart failure, the heart being described as fatty and dilated—and his wife, Sibyl, who is the sole legatee and executrix, has claimed payment.

But just as we were making arrangements to pay, a *caveat* has been entered by a certain Margaret Ingle, who declares that she is the wife of the deceased and claims the estate as next-of-kin. She states that the alleged wife, Sibyl, is a widow named Huggard who contracted a bigamous marriage with the deceased, knowing that he had a wife living."

"An interesting situation," commented Thorndyke, "but, as you say, it doesn't particularly concern you. It is a matter for the Probate Court."

"Yes," agreed Stalker. "But that is not all. Margaret Ingle not only charges the other woman with bigamy; she accuses her of having made away with the deceased."

"On what grounds?"

"Well, the reasons she gives are rather shadowy. She states that Sibyl's husband, James Huggard, died under suspicious circumstances—there seems to have been some suspicion that he had been poisoned—and she asserts that Ingle was a healthy, sound man and could not have died from the causes alleged."

"There is some reason in that," said Thorndyke, "if he was really a first-class life only eighteen months ago. As to the first husband, Huggard, we should want some particulars: as to whether there was an inquest what was the alleged cause of death, and what grounds there were for suspecting that he had been poisoned. If there really were any suspicious circumstances, it would be advisable to apply to the Home Office for an order to exhume the body of Ingle and verify the cause of death."

Stalker smiled somewhat sheepishly. "Unfortunately," said he, "that is not possible. Ingle was cremated."

"Ah!" said Thorndyke, "that is, as you say, unfortunate. It clearly increases the suspicion of poisoning, but destroys the means of verifying that suspicion."

"I should tell you," said Stalker," that the cremation was in accordance with the provisions of the will."

"That is not very material," replied Thorndyke. "In fact, it rather accentuates the suspicious aspect of the case; for the knowledge that the death of the deceased would be followed by cremation might act as a further inducement to get rid of him by poison. There were two death certificates, of course?"

"Yes. The confirmatory certificate was given by Dr. Halbury, of Wimpole Street. The medical attendant was a Dr. Barber, of Howland Street. The deceased lived in Stock-Orchard Crescent, Holloway."

"A good distance from Howland Street," Thorndyke remarked. "Do you know if Halbury made a *post-mortem*? I don't suppose he did."

"No, he didn't," replied Stalker.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "his certificate is worthless. You can't tell whether a man has died from heart failure by looking at his dead body. He must have just accepted the opinion of the medical attendant. Do I understand that you want me to look into this case?"

"If you will. It is not really our concern whether or not the man was poisoned, though I suppose we should have a claim on the estate of the murderer. But we should like you to investigate the case; though how the deuce you are going to do it, I don't quite see."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "However, we must get into touch with the doctors who signed the certificates, and possibly they may be able to clear the whole matter up."

"Of course," said I, "there is the other body—that of Huggard—which might be exhumed—unless he was cremated, too."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke; "and for the purposes of the criminal law, evidence of poisoning in that case would be sufficient. But it would hardly help the *GRIFFIN COMPANY*, which is concerned exclusively with Ingle deceased. Can you let us have a *précis* of the facts relating to this case, Stalker?"

"I have brought one with me," was the reply; "a short statement, giving names, addresses, dates, and other particulars. Here it is"; and he handed Thorndyke a sheet of paper bearing a tabulated statement.

When Stalker had gone Thorndyke glanced rapidly through the *précis* and then looked at his watch. "If we make our way to Wimpole Street at once," said he, "we ought to catch Halbury. That is obviously the first thing to do. He signed the 'C' certificate, and we shall be able to judge from what he tells us whether there is any possibility of foul play. Shall we start now?"

As I assented, he slipped the précis in his pocket and we set forth. At the top of Middle Temple Lane we chartered a taxi by which we were shortly deposited at Dr. Halbury's door and a few minutes later were ushered into his consulting room, and found him shovelling a pile of letters into the waste-paper basket.

"How d'ye do?" he said briskly, holding out his hand. "I'm up to my eyes in arrears, you see. Just back from my holiday. What can I do for you?"

"We have called," said Thorndyke, "about a man named Ingle."

"Ingle—Ingle," repeated Halbury. "Now, let me see—"

"Stock-Orchard Crescent, Holloway," Thorndyke explained.

"Oh, yes. I remember him. Well, how is he?"

"He's dead," replied Thorndyke.

"Is he really?" exclaimed Halbury. "Now that shows how careful one should be in one's judgments. I half suspected that fellow of malingering. He was supposed to have a dilated heart, but I couldn't make out any appreciable dilatation. There was excited, irregular action. That was all. I had a suspicion that he had been dosing himself with trinitrine. Reminded me of the cases of cordite chewing that I used to meet with in South Africa. So he's dead, after all. Well, it's queer. Do you know what the exact cause of death was?"

"Failure of a dilated heart is the cause stated on the certificates—the body was cremated; and the 'C' Certificate was signed by you."

"By me!" exclaimed the physician. "Nonsense! It's a mistake. I signed a certificate for a Friendly Society. Ingle brought it here for me to sign—but I didn't even know he was dead. Besides, I went away for my holiday a few days after I saw the man and only came back yesterday. What makes you think I signed the death certificate?"

Thorndyke produced Stalker's précis and handed it to Halbury, who read out his own name and address with a puzzled frown. "This is an extraordinary affair," said he. "It will have to be looked into."

"It will, indeed," assented Thorndyke; "especially as a suspicion of poisoning has been raised."

"Ha!" exclaimed Halbury. "Then it was trinitrine, you may depend. But I suspected him unjustly. It was somebody else who was dosing him; perhaps that sly-looking baggage of a wife of his. Is anyone in particular suspected?"

"Yes. The accusation, such as it is, is against the wife."

"H'm. Probably a true bill. But she's done us. Artful devil. You can't get much evidence out of an urnful of ashes. Still, somebody has forged

my signature. I suppose that is what the hussy wanted that certificate for—to get a specimen of my handwriting. I see the ‘B’ certificate was signed by a man named Meeking. Who’s he? It was Barber who called me in for an opinion.”

“I must find out who he is,” replied Thorndyke. “Possibly Dr. Barber will know. I shall go and call on him now.”

“Yes,” said Dr. Halbury, shaking hands as we rose to depart, “you ought to see Barber. He knows the history of the case, at any rate.”

From Wimpole Street we steered a course for Howland Street, and here we had the good fortune to arrive just as Dr. Barber’s car drew up at the door. Thorndyke introduced himself and me, and then introduced the subject of his visit, but said nothing, at first, about our call on Dr. Halbury.

“Ingle,” repeated Dr. Barber. “Oh, yes, I remember him. And you say he is dead. Well, I’m rather surprised. I didn’t regard his condition as serious.”

“Was his heart dilated?” Thorndyke asked.

“Not appreciably. I found nothing organic; no valvular disease. It was more like a tobacco heart. But it’s odd that Meeking didn’t mention the matter to me—he was my locum, you know. I handed the case over to him when I went on my holiday. And you say he signed the death certificate?”

“Yes; and the ‘B’ certificate for cremation, too.”

“Very odd,” said Dr. Barber. “Just come in and let us have a look at the day book.”

We followed him into the consulting room, and there, while he was turning over the leaves of the day book, I ran my eye along the shelf over the writing-table from which he had taken it; on which I observed the usual collection of case books and books of certificates and notification forms, including the book of death certificates.

“Yes,” said Dr. Barber, “here we are; ‘Ingle, Mr., Stock-Orchard Crescent.’ The last visit was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, and Meeking seems to have given some sort of certificate. Wonder if he used a printed form.” He took down two of the books and turned over the counterfoils.

“Here we are,” he said presently; “‘Ingle, Jonathan, 4 September. Now recovered and able to resume duties.’ That doesn’t look like dying, does it? Still, we may as well make sure.”

He reached down the book of death certificates and began to glance through the most recent entries.

"No," he said, turning over the leaves, "there doesn't seem to be—Hullo! What's this? Two blank counterfoils; and about the date, too; between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of September. Extraordinary! Meeking is such a careful, reliable man."

He turned back to the day book and read through the fortnight's entries. Then he looked up with an anxious frown.

"I can't make this out," he said. "There is no record of any patient having died in that period."

"Where is Dr. Meeking at present?" I asked.

"Somewhere in the South Atlantic," replied Barber. "He left here three weeks ago to take up a post on a Royal Mail Boat. So he couldn't have signed the certificate in any case."

That was all that Dr. Barber had to tell us, and a few minutes later we took our departure.

"This case looks pretty fishy," I remarked, as we turned down Tottenham Court Road.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "There is evidently something radically wrong. And what strikes me especially is the cleverness of the fraud; the knowledge and judgment and foresight that are displayed."

"She took pretty considerable risks," I observed.

"Yes, but only the risks that were unavoidable. Everything that could be foreseen has been provided for. All the formalities have been complied with—in appearance. And you must notice, Jervis, that the scheme did actually succeed. The cremation has taken place. Nothing but the incalculable accident of the appearance of the real Mrs. Ingle, and her vague and apparently groundless suspicions, prevented the success from being final. If she had not come on the scene, no questions would ever have been asked."

"No," I agreed. "The discovery of the plot is a matter of sheer bad luck. But what do you suppose has really happened?"

Thorndyke shook his head.

"It is very difficult to say. The mechanism of the affair is obvious enough, but the motives and purpose are rather incomprehensible. The illness was apparently a sham, the symptoms being produced by nitro-glycerine or some similar heart poison. The doctors were called in, partly for the sake of appearances and partly to get specimens of their handwriting. The fact that both the doctors happened to be away from home and one of them at sea at the time when verbal questions might have been asked—by the undertaker, for instance—suggests that this had been ascertained in advance. The death certificate forms were

pretty certainly stolen by the woman when she was left alone in Barber's consulting-room, and, of course, the cremation certificates could be obtained on application to the crematorium authorities. That is all plain sailing. The mystery is, what is it all about? Barber or Meeking would almost certainly have given a death certificate, although the death was unexpected, and I don't suppose Halbury would have refused to confirm it. They would have assumed that their diagnosis had been at fault."

"Do you think it could have been suicide, or an inadvertent overdose of trinitrine?"

"Hardly. If it was suicide, it was deliberate, for the purpose of getting the insurance money for the woman, unless there was some further motive behind. And the cremation, with all its fuss and formalities, is against suicide; while the careful preparation seems to exclude inadvertent poisoning. Then, what was the motive for the sham illness except as a preparation for an abnormal death?"

"That is true," said I. "But if you reject suicide, isn't it rather remarkable that the victim should have provided for his own cremation?"

"We don't know that he did," replied Thorndyke. "There is a suggestion of a capable forger in this business. It is quite possible that the will itself is a forgery."

"So it is!" I exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of that."

"You see," continued Thorndyke, "the appearances suggest that cremation was a necessary part of the programme; otherwise these extraordinary risks would not have been taken. The woman was sole executrix and could have ignored the cremation clause. But if the cremation was necessary, why was it necessary? The suggestion is that there was something suspicious in the appearance of the body; something that the doctors would certainly have observed or that would have been discovered if an exhumation had taken place."

"You mean some injury or visible signs of poisoning?"

"I mean something discoverable by examination even after burial."

"But what about the undertaker? Wouldn't he have noticed anything palpably abnormal?"

"An excellent suggestion, Jervis. We must see the undertaker. We have his address: Kentish Town Road—a long way from deceased's house, by the way. We had better get on a bus and go there now."

A yellow omnibus was approaching as he spoke. We hailed it and sprang on, continuing our discussion as we were borne northward.



Mr. Burrell, the undertaker, was a pensive-looking, profoundly civil man who was evidently in a small way, for he combined with his funeral functions general carpentry and cabinet making. He was perfectly willing to give any required information, but he seemed to have very little to give.

"I never really saw the deceased gentleman," he said in reply to Thorn-dyke's cautious inquiries. "When I took the measurements, the corpse was covered with a sheet; and as Mrs. Ingle was in the room, I made the business as short as possible."

"You didn't put the body in the coffin, then?"

"No. I left the coffin at the house, but Mrs. Ingle said that she and the deceased gentleman's brother would lay the body in it."

"But didn't you see the corpse when you screwed the coffin-lid down?"

"I didn't screw it down. When I got there it was screwed down already. Mrs. Ingle said they had to close up the coffin, and I dare say it was necessary. The weather was rather warm; and I noticed a strong smell of formalin."

"Well," I said, as we walked back down the Kentish Town Road, "we haven't got much more forward."

"I wouldn't say that," replied Thorndyke. "We have a further instance of the extraordinary adroitness with which this scheme was carried out; and we have confirmation of our suspicion that there was something unusual in the appearance of the body. It is evident that this woman did not dare to let even the undertaker see it. But one can hardly help admiring the combination of daring and caution, the boldness with which these risks were taken, and the care and judgment with which they were provided against. And again I point out that the risks were justified by the result. The secret of that man's death appears to have been made secure for all time."

It certainly looked as if the mystery with which we were concerned were beyond the reach of investigation. Of course, the woman could be prosecuted for having forged the death certificates, to say nothing of the charge of bigamy. But that was no concern of ours or Stalker's. Jonathan Ingle was dead, and no one could say how he died.

On our arrival at our chambers we found a telegram that had just arrived, announcing that Stalker would call on us in the evening; and as this seemed to suggest that he had some fresh information we looked forward to his visit with considerable interest. Punctually at six o'clock he made his appearance and at once opened the subject.

"There are some new developments in this Ingle case," said he. "In the first place, the woman, Huggard, has bolted. I went to the house to make a few inquiries and found the police in possession. They had come to arrest her on the bigamy charge, but she had got wind of their intentions and cleared out. They made a search of the premises, but I don't think they found anything of interest except a number of rifle cartridges; and I don't know that they are of much interest either, for she could hardly have shot him with a rifle."

"What kind of cartridges were they?" Thorndyke asked.

Stalker put his hand in his pocket.

"The inspector let me have one to show you," said he; and he laid on the table a military cartridge of the pattern of some twenty years ago. Thorndyke picked it up, and taking from a drawer a pair of pliers drew the bullet out of the case and inserted into the latter a pair of dissecting forceps. When he withdrew the forceps, their points grasped one or two short strings of what looked like cat-gut.

"Cordite!" said I. "So Halbury was probably right, and this is how she got her supply." Then, as Stalker looked at me inquiringly, I gave him a short account of the results of our investigations.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "the plot thickens. This juggling with the death certificates seems to connect itself with another kind of juggling that I came to tell you about. You know that Ingle was Secretary and Treasurer to a company that bought and sold land for building estates. Well, I called at their office after I left you and had a little talk with the chairman. From him I learned that Ingle had practically complete control of the financial affairs of the company, that he received and paid all moneys and kept the books. Of late, however, some of the directors have had a suspicion that all was not well with the finances, and at last it was decided to have the affairs of the company thoroughly overhauled by a firm of chartered accountants. This decision was communicated to Ingle, and a couple of days later a letter arrived from his wife saying that he had had a severe heart attack and asking that the audit of the books might be postponed until he recovered and was able to attend at the office."

"And was it postponed?" I asked.

"No," replied Stalker. "The accountants were asked to get to work at once, which they did; with the result that they discovered a number of discrepancies in the books and a sum of about three thousand pounds unaccounted for. It isn't quite obvious how the frauds were carried out,

but it is suspected that some of the returned cheques are fakes with forged endorsements."

"Did the company communicate with Ingle on the subject?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. They had a further letter from Mrs. Ingle—that is, Huggard—saying that Ingle's condition was very serious; so they decided to wait until he had recovered. Then, of course, came the announcement of his death, on which the matter was postponed pending the probate of the will. I suppose a claim will be made on the estate, but as the executrix has absconded, the affair has become rather complicated."

"You were saying," said Thorndyke, "that the fraudulent death certificates seem to be connected with these frauds on the company. What kind of connection do you assume?"

"I assume—or at least, suggest," replied Stalker, "that this was a case of suicide. The man, Ingle, saw that his frauds were discovered, or were going to be, and that he was in for a long term of penal servitude, so he just made away with himself. And I think that if the murder charge could be dropped, Mrs. Huggard might be induced to come forward and give evidence as to the suicide."

Thorndyke shook his head.

"The murder charge couldn't be dropped," said he. "if it was suicide, Huggard was certainly an accessory; and in law, an accessory to suicide is an accessory to murder. But, in fact, no official charge of murder has been made, and at present there are no means of sustaining such a charge. The identity of the ashes might be assumed to be that stated in the cremation order, but the difficulty is the cause of death. Ingle was admittedly ill. He was attended for heart disease by three doctors. There is no evidence that he did not die from that illness."

"But the illness was due to cordite poisoning," said I, "That is what we believe. But no one could swear to it. And we certainly could not swear that he died from cordite poisoning."

"Then," said Stalker, "apparently there is no means of finding out whether his death was due to natural causes, suicide, or murder?"

"There is only one chance," replied Thorndyke. "It is just barely possible that the cause of death might be ascertainable by an examination of the ashes."

"That doesn't seem very hopeful," said I. "Cordite poisoning would certainly leave no trace."

"We mustn't assume that he died from cordite poisoning," said Thorndyke. "Probably he did not. That may have masked the action of a

less obvious poison, or death might have been produced by some new agent."

"But," I objected, "how many poisons are there that could be detected in the ashes? No organic poison would leave any traces, nor would metallic poisons such as mercury, antimony, or arsenic."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "But there are other metallic poisons which could be easily recovered from the ashes; lead, tin, gold, and silver, for instance. But it is useless to discuss speculative probabilities. The only chance that we have of obtaining any new facts is by an examination of the ashes. It seems infinitely improbable that we shall learn anything from it, but there is the bare possibility and we ought not to leave it untried."

Neither Stalker nor I made any further remark, but I could see that the same thought was in both our minds. It was not often that Thorndyke was "gravelled"; but apparently the resourceful Mrs. Huggard had set him a problem that was beyond even his powers. When an investigator of crime is reduced to the necessity of examining a potful of ashes in the wild hope of ascertaining from them how the deceased met his death, one may assume that he is at the very end of his tether. It is a forlorn hope indeed.

Nevertheless, Thorndyke seemed to view the matter quite cheerfully, his only anxiety being lest the Home Secretary should refuse to make the order authorising the examination. And this anxiety was dispelled a day or two later by the arrival of a letter giving the necessary authority, and informing him that a Dr. Hemming—known to us both as an expert pathologist—had been deputed to be present at the examination and to confer with him as to the necessity for a chemical analysis.

On the appointed day Dr. Hemming called at our chambers and we set forth together for Liverpool Street; and as we drove thither it became evident to me that his view of our mission was very similar to my own. For, though he talked freely enough, and on professional topics, he maintained a most discreet silence on the subject of the forthcoming inspection; indeed, the first reference to the subject was made by Thorndyke himself just as the train was approaching Corfield, where the crematorium was situated.

"I presume," said he, "you have made all necessary arrangements, Hemming?"

"Yes," was the reply. "The superintendent will meet us and will conduct us to the catacombs, and there, in our presence, will take the casket from its niche in the columbarium and have it conveyed to the office, where

the examination will be made. I thought it best to use these formalities, though, as the casket is sealed and bears the name of the deceased, there is not much point in them."

"No," said Thorndyke, "but I think you were right. It would be easy to challenge the identity of a mass of ashes if all precautions were not taken, seeing that the ashes themselves are unidentifiable."

"That was what I felt," said Hemming; and then, as the train slowed down, he added: "This is our station, and that gentleman on the platform, I suspect, is the superintendent."

The surmise turned out to be correct; but the cemetery official was not the only one present bearing that title; for as we were mutually introducing ourselves, a familiar tall figure approached up the platform from the rear of the train—our old friend Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"I don't wish to intrude," said he, as he joined the group and was presented by Thorndyke to the strangers, "but we were notified by the Home Office that an investigation was to be made, so I thought I would be on the spot to pick up any crumbs of information that you may drop. Of course, I am not asking to be present at the examination."

"You may as well be present as an additional witness to the removal of the urn," said Thorndyke; and Miller accordingly joined the party, which now made its way from the station to the cemetery.

The catacombs were in a long, low arcaded building at the end of the pleasantly-wooded grounds, and on our way thither we passed the crematorium, a smallish, church-like edifice with a perforated chimney-shaft partly concealed by the low spire. Entering the catacombs, we were conducted to the "columbarium," the walls of which were occupied by a multitude of niches or pigeon-holes, each niche accommodating a terra-cotta urn or casket. The superintendent proceeded to near the end of the gallery, where he halted, and opening the register, which he had brought with him, read out a number and the name "Jonathan Ingle," and then led us to a niche bearing that number and name, in which reposed a square casket, on which was inscribed the name and date of death. When we had verified these particulars, the casket was tenderly lifted from its place by two attendants, who carried it to a well-lighted room at the end of the building, where a large table by a window had been covered with white paper. Having placed the casket on the table, the attendants retired, and the superintendent then broke the seals and removed the cover.

For a while we all stood looking in at the contents of the casket without

speaking; and I found myself contrasting them with what would have been revealed by the lifting of a coffin-lid. Truly corruption had put on incorruption. The mass of snow-white, coral-like fragments, delicate, fragile, and lace-like in texture, so far from being repulsive in aspect, were almost attractive. I ran my eye, with an anatomist's curiosity, over these dazzling remnants of what had lately been a man, half-unconsciously seeking to identify and give a name to particular fragments, and a little surprised at the difficulty of determining that this or that irregularly-shaped white object was a part of any one of the bones with which I had thought myself so familiar.

Presently Hemming looked up at Thorndyke and asked: "Do you observe anything abnormal in the appearance of these ashes? I don't."

"Perhaps," replied Thorndyke, "we had better turn them out on to the table, so that we can see the whole of them."

This was done very gently, and then Thorndyke proceeded to spread out the heap, touching the fragments with the utmost delicacy—for they were extremely fragile and brittle—until the whole collection was visible.

"Well," said Hemming, when we had once more looked them over critically, "what do you say? I can see no trace of any foreign substance. Can you?"

"No," replied Thorndyke. "And there are some other things that I can't see. For instance, the medical referee reported that the proposer had a good set of sound teeth. Where are they? I have not seen a single fragment of a tooth. Yet teeth are far more resistant to fire than bones, especially the enamel caps."

Hemming ran a searching glance over the mass of fragments and looked up with a perplexed frown.

"I certainly can't see any sign of teeth," he admitted; "and it is rather curious, as you say. Does the fact suggest any particular significance to you?"

By way of reply, Thorndyke delicately picked up a flat fragment and silently held it out towards us. I looked at it and said nothing; for a very strange suspicion was beginning to creep into my mind.

"A piece of a rib," said Hemming. "Very odd that it should have broken across so cleanly. It might have been cut with a saw."

Thorndyke laid it down and picked up another, larger fragment, which I had already noticed.

"Here is another example," said he, handing it to our colleague.

"Yes," agreed Hemming. "It is really rather extraordinary. It looks exactly as if it had been sawn across."

"It does," agreed Thorndyke. "What bone should you say it is?"

"That is what I was just asking myself," replied Hemming, looking at the fragment with a sort of half-vexed smile. "It seems ridiculous that a competent anatomist should be in any doubt with as large a portion as this, but really I can't confidently give it a name. The shape seems to me to suggest a tibia, but of course it is much too small. Is it the upper end of the ulna?"

"I should say no," answered Thorndyke. Then he picked out another of the larger fragments, and handing it to Hemming, asked him to name it.

Our friend began to look somewhat worried.

"It is an extraordinary thing, you know," said he, "but I can't tell you what bone it is part of. It is clearly the shaft of a long bone, but I'm hanged if I can say which. It is too big for a metatarsal and too small for any of the main limb bones. It reminds one of a diminutive thigh bone."

"It does," agreed Thorndyke "very strongly." While Hemming had been speaking he had picked out four more large fragments, and these he now laid in a row with the one that had seemed to resemble a tibia in shape. Placed thus together, the five fragments bore an obvious resemblance.

"Now," said he, "look at these. There are five of them. They are parts of limb bones, and the bones of which they are parts were evidently exactly alike, excepting that three were apparently from the left side and two from the right. Now, you know, Hemming, a man has only four limbs and of those only two contain similar bones. Then two of them show distinct traces of what looks like a saw-cut."

Hemming gazed at the row of fragments with a frown of deep cogitation.

"It is very mysterious," he said. "And looking at them in a row they strike me as curiously like tibia in shape; not in size."

"The size," said Thorndyke, "is about that of a sheep's tibia."

"A sheep's?" exclaimed Hemming, staring in amazement, first at the calcined bones and then at my colleague.

"Yes; the upper half, sawn across in the middle of the shank."

Hemming was thunderstruck. "It is an astounding affair!" he exclaimed. "You mean to suggest—"

"I suggest," said Thorndyke, "that there is not a sign of a human bone in the whole collection. But there are very evident traces of at least five legs of mutton."

For a few moments there was a profound silence, broken only by a murmur of astonishment from the cemetery official and a low chuckle from Superintendent Miller, who had been listening with absorbed interest. At length Hemming spoke.

"Then, apparently, there was no corpse in the coffin at all?"

"No," answered Thorndyke. "The weight was made up, and the ashes furnished, by joints of butcher's meat. I dare say, if we go over the ashes carefully, we shall be able to judge what they were. But it is hardly necessary. The presence of five legs of mutton and the absence of a single recognisable fragment of a human skeleton, together with the forged certificates, gives us a pretty I conclusive case. The rest, I think we can leave to Superintendent Miller."

*R. A. F.*

"I take it, Thorndyke," said I, as the train moved out of the station, "that you came here expecting to find what you did find?"

"Yes," he replied. "It seemed to me the only possibility, having regard to all the known facts."

"When did it first occur to you?"

"It occurred to me as a possibility as soon as we discovered that the cremation certificates had been forged; but it was the undertaker's statement that seemed to clench the matter."

"But he distinctly stated that he measured the body."

"True. But there was nothing to show that it was a dead body. What was perfectly clear was that there was something that must on no account be seen; and when Stalker told us of the embezzlement we had a body of evidence that could point to only one conclusion. Just consider that evidence.

"Here we had a death, preceded by an obviously sham illness and followed by cremation with forged certificates. Now, what was it that had happened? There were four possible hypotheses. Normal death, suicide, murder, and fictitious death. Which of these hypotheses fitted the facts?

"Normal death was apparently excluded by the forged certificates.

"The theory of suicide did not account for the facts. It did not agree with the careful, elaborate preparation. And why the forged certificates? If



Ingle had really died, Meeking would have certified the death. And why the cremation? There was no purpose in taking those enormous risks.

"The theory of murder was unthinkable. These certificates were almost certainly forged by Ingle himself, who we know was a practised forger. But the idea of the victim arranging for his own cremation is an absurdity.

"There remained only the theory of fictitious death; and that theory fitted all the facts perfectly. First, as to the motive. Ingle had committed a felony. He had to disappear. But what kind of disappearance could be so effectual as death and cremation? Both the prosecutors and the police would forthwith write him off and forget him. Then there was the bigamy—a criminal offence in itself. But death would not only wipe that off; after 'death' he could marry Huggard regularly under another name, and he would have shaken off his deserted wife for ever. And he stood to gain fifteen hundred pounds from the Insurance Company. Then see how this theory explained the other facts. A fictitious death made necessary a fictitious illness. It necessitated the forged certificates, since there was no corpse. It made cremation highly desirable; for suspicion might easily have arisen, and then the exhumation of a coffin containing a dummy would have exploded the fraud. But successful cremation would cover up the fraud for ever. It explained the concealment of the corpse from the undertaker, and it even explained the smell of formalin which he noticed."

"How did it?" I asked.

"Consider, Jervis," he replied. "The dummy in this coffin had to be a dummy of flesh and bone which would yield the correct kind of ash. Joints of butcher's meat would fulfil the conditions. But the quantity required would be from a hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds. Now Ingle could not go to the butcher and order a whole sheep to be sent the day before the funeral. The joints would have to be bought gradually and stored. But the storage of meat in warm weather calls for some kind of preservative; and formalin is highly effective, as it leaves no trace after burning.

"So you see that the theory of fictitious death agreed with all the known circumstances, whereas the alternative theories presented inexplicable discrepancies and contradictions. Logically, it was the only possible theory, and, as you have seen, experiment proved it to be the true one."

As he concluded, Dr. Hemming took his pipe from his mouth and laughed softly.

"When I came down to-day," said he, "I had all the facts which you had

communicated to the Home Office, and I was absolutely convinced that we were coming to examine a mare's nest. And yet, now I have heard your exposition, the whole thing looks perfectly obvious."

"That is usually the case with Thorndyke's conclusions," said I. "They are perfectly obvious—when you have heard the explanation."

Within a week of our expedition, Ingle was in the hands of the police. The apparent success of the cremation adventure had misled him to a sense of such complete security that he had neglected to cover his tracks, and he had accordingly fallen an easy prey to our friend Superintendent Miller. The police were highly gratified, and so were the directors of the *GRIFFIN LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY*.

## The Stalking Horse

As Thorndyke and I descended the stairs of the foot bridge at Densford Junction we became aware that something unusual had happened. The platform was nearly deserted save at one point, where a small but dense crowd had collected around the open door of a first-class compartment of the down train; heads were thrust out of the windows of the other coaches, and at intervals doors opened and inquisitive passengers ran along to join the crowd, from which an excited porter detached himself just as we reached the platform.

"You'd better go for Dr. Pooke first," the station-master called after him. On this, Thorndyke stepped forward.

"My friend and I," said he, "are medical men. Can we be of any service until the local doctor arrives?"

"I'm very much afraid not, sir," was the reply, "but you'll see." He cleared a way for us and we approached the open door.

At the first glance there appeared to be nothing to account for the awe-stricken expression with which the bystanders peered into the carriage and gazed at its solitary occupant. For the motionless figure that sat huddled in the corner seat, chin on breast, might have been a sleeping man. But it was not. The waxen pallor of the face and the strange, image-like immobility forbade the hope of any awakening.

"It looks almost as if he had passed away in his sleep," said the station when we had concluded our brief examination and ascertained certainly that the man was dead. "Do you think it was a heart attack, sir?"

Thorndyke shook his head and touched with his finger a depressed spot on the dead man's waistcoat. When he withdrew his finger it was smeared with blood.

"Good God!" the official gasped, in a horrified whisper. "The man has been murdered!" He stared incredulously at the corpse for a few moments and then turned and sprang out of the compartment, shutting

the door behind him, and we heard him giving orders for the coach to be separated and shunted into the siding.

"This is a gruesome affair, Jervis," my colleague said as he sat down on the seat opposite the dead man and cast a searching glance round the compartment. "I wonder who this poor fellow was and what was the object of the murder? It looks almost too determined, for a common robbery; and, in fact, the body does not appear to have been robbed." Here he stooped suddenly to pick up one or two minute fragments of glass which seemed to have been trodden into the carpet, and which he examined closely in the palm of his hand. I leaned over and looked at the fragments, and we agreed that they were portions of the bulb of an electric torch or flash-lamp.

"The significance of these—if they have any," said Thorndyke, "we can consider later. But if they are recent, it would appear that the metal part of the bulb has been picked up and taken away. That might be an important fact. But, on the other hand, the fragments may have been here some time and have no connection with the tragedy; though you notice that they were lying opposite the body and opposite the seat which the murderer must have occupied when the crime was committed."

As he was speaking, the uncoupled coach began slowly to move towards the siding, and we both stooped to make a further search for the remainder of the lamp-bulb. And then, almost at the same moment, we perceived two objects lying under the opposite seat—the seat occupied by the dead man. One was a small pocket-handkerchief, the other a sheet of notepaper.

"This," said I, as I picked up the former, "accounts for the strong smell of scent in the compartment."

"Possibly," Thorndyke agreed, "though you will notice that the odour does not come principally from the handkerchief, but from the back cushion of the corner seat. But here is something more distinctive—a most incriminating piece of evidence, unless it can be answered by an undeniable alibi." He held out to me a sheet of letter paper, both pages of which were covered with writing in bright blue ink, done with a Hectograph or some similar duplicator. It was evidently a circular letter, for it bore the printed heading, "Women's Emancipation League, 16 Barnabas Square, S.W.," and the contents appeared to refer to a "militant demonstration" planned for the near future.

"It is dated the day before yesterday," commented Thorndyke, "so that it might have been lying here for twenty-four hours, though that is obviously improbable; and as this is neither the first sheet nor the last,

there are—or have been—at least two more sheets. The police will have something to start on, at any rate.”

He laid the letter on the seat and explored both of the hat-racks, taking down the dead man’s hat, gloves, and umbrella, and noting in the hat the initials “F. B.” He had just replaced them when voices became audible outside, and the station-master climbed up on the foot-board and opened the door to admit two men, one of whom I assumed to be a doctor, the other being a police inspector.

“The station-master tells me that this is a case of homicide,” said the former, addressing us jointly.

“That is what the appearances suggest,” replied Thorndyke. “There is a bullet wound, inflicted apparently at quite short range—the waistcoat is perceptibly singed—and we have found no weapon in the compartment.”

The doctor stepped past us and proceeded to make a rapid examination of the body.

“Yes,” he said, “I agree with you. The position of the wound and the posture of the body both suggest that death was practically instantaneous. If it had been suicide, the pistol would have been in the hand or on the floor. There is no clue to the identity of the murderer, I suppose?”

“We found these on the floor under the dead man’s seat,” replied Thorndyke, indicating the letter and the handkerchief; “and there is some glass trodden into the carpet—apparently the remains of an electric flash-lamp.”

The inspector pounced on the handkerchief and the letter, and having scrutinised the former vainly in search of name or initials, turned to the letter.

“Why, this is a suffragist’s letter!” he exclaimed. “But it can’t have anything to do with this affair. They are mischievous beggars, but they don’t do this sort of thing.” Nevertheless, he carefully bestowed both articles in a massive wallet, and approaching the corpse, remarked: “We may as well see who he is while we are waiting for the stretcher.”

With a matter-of-fact air, which seemed somewhat to shock the station-master, he unbuttoned the coat of the passive figure in the corner and thrust his hand into the breast pocket, drawing out a letter-case which he opened, and from which he extracted a visiting card. As he glanced at it, his face suddenly took on an expression of amazement.

“God!” he exclaimed in a startled tone. “Who do you think he is, doctor? He is Mr. Francis Burnham!”

The doctor looked at him with an interrogative frown. "Burnham—Burnham," he repeated. "Let me see, now—"

"Don't you know? The anti-suffrage man. Surely—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the doctor. "Of course I remember him. The arch-enemy of the suffrage movement and—yes, of course." The doctor's brisk speech changed abruptly into a hesitating mumble. Like the inspector, he had suddenly "seen a great light"; and again, like the officer, his perception had begotten a sudden reticence.

Thorndyke glanced at his watch. "Our train is a minute overdue," said he. "We ought to get back to the platform." Taking a card from his case, he handed it to the inspector, who looked at it and slightly raised his eyebrows.

"I don't think my evidence will be of much value," said he; "but, of course, I am at your service if you want it." With this and a bow to the doctor and the station-master, he climbed down to the ground; and when I had given the inspector my card, I followed, and we made our way to the platform.

The case was not long in developing. That very evening, as Thorndyke and I were smoking our after-dinner pipes by the fire, a hurried step was heard on the stair and was followed by a peremptory knock on our door. The visitor was a man of about thirty, with a clean-shaved face, an intense and rather neurotic expression, and a restless, excited manner. He introduced himself by the name of Cadmus Bawley, and thereby, in effect, indicated the purpose of his visit.

"You know me by name, I expect," he said, speaking rapidly and with a sharp, emphatic manner, "and probably you can guess what I have come about. You have seen the evening paper, of course?"

"I have not," replied Thorndyke.

"Well," said Mr. Bawley, "you know about the murder of the man Burnham, because I see that you were present at the discovery; and you know that part of a circular letter from our League was found in the compartment. Perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that Miss Isabel Dalby has been arrested and charged with the murder."

"Indeed!" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. It's an infamous affair! A national disgrace!" exclaimed Bawley, banging the table with his fist. "A manifest plot of the enemies of social reform to get rid of a high-minded, noble-hearted lady whose championship of this great cause they are unable to combat by fair means in the open. And it is a wild absurdity, too. As to the fellow, Burnham, I can't pretend to feel any regret—"

"May I suggest"—Thorndyke interrupted somewhat stiffly—"that the expression of personal sentiments is neither helpful nor discreet? My methods of defence—if that is what you have come about—are based on demonstration rather than rhetoric. Could you give us the plain facts?"

Mr. Cadmus Bawley looked unmistakably sulky, but after a short pause, he began his recital in a somewhat lower key.

"The bald facts," he said, "are these: This after noon, at half-past two, Miss Dalby took the train from King's Cross to Holmwood. This is the train that stops at Densford Junction and is the one in which Burnham travelled. She took a first-class ticket and occupied a compartment for ladies only, of which she was the only occupant. She got out at Holmwood and went straight to the house of our Vice-President, Miss Carleigh—who has been confined to her room for some days—and stayed there about an hour. She came back by the four-fifteen train, and I met her at the station—King's Cross—at a quarter to five. We had tea at a restaurant opposite the station, and over our tea we discussed the plans for the next demonstration, and arranged the rendezvous and the most convenient routes for retreat and dispersal when the police should arrive. This involved the making of sketch plans, and these Miss Dalby drew on a sheet of paper that she took from her pocket, and which happened to be part of the circular letter referring to the raid. After tea we walked together down Gray's Inn Road and parted at Theobald's Road, I going on to the head-quarters and she to her rooms in Queen Square. On her arrival home, she found two detectives waiting outside her house, and then—and then, in short, she was arrested, like a common criminal, and taken to the police station, where she was searched and the remainder of the circular letter found in her pocket. Then she was formally charged with the murder of the man Burnham, and she was graciously permitted to send a telegram to head-quarters. It arrived just after I got there, and, of course, I at once went to the police station. The police refused to accept bail, but they allowed me to see her to make arrangements for the defence."

"Does Miss Dalby offer any suggestion," asked Thorndyke, "as to how a sheet of her letter came to be in the compartment with the murdered man?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Mr. Bawley. "I had forgotten that. It wasn't her letter at all. She destroyed her copy of the letter as soon as she had read it."

"Then," inquired Thorndyke, "how came the letter to be in her pocket?"

"Ah," replied Bawley, "that is the mystery. She thinks someone must have slipped it into her pocket to throw suspicion on her."

"Did she seem surprised to find it in her pocket when you were having tea together?"

"No. She had forgotten having destroyed her copy. She only remembered it when I told her that the sheet had been found in Burnham's carriage."

"Can she produce the fragments of the destroyed letter?"

"No, she can't. Unfortunately she burned it."

"Do these circular letters bear any distinguishing mark? Are they addressed to members by name?"

"Only on the envelopes. The letters are all alike. They are run off a duplicator. Of course, if you don't believe the story—"

"I am not judging the case," interrupted Thorndyke; "I am simply collecting the facts. What do you want me to do?"

"If you feel that you could undertake the defence, I should like you to do so. We shall employ the solicitors to the League, Bird & Marshall, but I know they will be willing and glad to act with you."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "I will investigate the case and consult with your solicitors. By the way, do the police know about the sheet of the letter on which the plans were drawn?"

"No. I thought it best to say nothing about that, and I have told Miss Dalby not to mention it."

"That is just as well," said Thorndyke. "Have you the sheet with the plan on it?"

"I haven't it about me," was the reply. "It is in my desk at my chambers."

"You had better let me have it to look at," said Thorndyke.

"You can have it if you want it, of course," said Bawley, "but it won't help you. The letters are all alike, as I have told you."

"I should like to see it, nevertheless," said Thorndyke; "and perhaps you could give me some account of Mr. Burnham. What do you know about him?"

Mr. Bawley shut his lips tightly, and his face took on an expression of vindictiveness verging on malignity.

"All I know about Burnham," he said, "is that he was a fool and a ruffian. He was not only an enemy of the great reform that our League stands for; he was a treacherous enemy—violent, crafty, and indefatigably active. I can only regard his death as a blessing to mankind."

"May I ask," said Thorndyke, "if any members of your League have ever publicly threatened to take personal measures against him?"



"Yes," snapped Bawley. "Several of us—including myself—have threatened to give him the hiding that he deserved. But a hiding is a different thing from murder, you know."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed somewhat dryly; then he asked: "Do you know anything about Mr. Burnham's occupation and habits?"

"He was a sort of manager of the London and Suburban Bank. His job was to supervise the suburban branches, and his habit was to visit them in rotation. He was probably going to the branch at Holmwood when he was killed. That is all I can tell you about him."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke; and as our visitor rose to depart he continued: "Then I will look into the case and arrange with your solicitors to have Miss Dalby properly represented at the inquest; and I shall be glad to have that sheet of the letter as soon as you can send or leave it."

"Very well," said Bawley, "though, as I have told you, it won't be of any use to you. It is only a duplicated circular."

"Possibly," Thorndyke assented. "But the other sheets will be produced in Court, so I may as well have an opportunity of examining it beforehand."

For some minutes after our client had gone Thorndyke remained silent and reflective, copying his rough notes into his pocket-book and apparently amplifying and arranging them. Presently he looked up at me with an unspoken question in his eyes.

"It is a queer case," said I. "The circumstantial evidence seems to be strongly against Miss Dalby, but it is manifestly improbable that she murdered the man."

"It seems so," he agreed. "But the case will be decided on the evidence; and the evidence will be considered by a judge, not by a Home Secretary. You notice the importance of Burnham's destination?"

"Yes. He was evidently dead when the train arrived at Holmwood. But it isn't clear how long he had been dead."

"The evidence," said Thorndyke, "points strongly to the tunnel between Cawden and Holmwood as the place where the murder was committed. You will remember that the up-express passed our train in the tunnel. If the adjoining compartments were empty, the sound of a pistol shot would be completely drowned by the noise of the express thundering past. Then you will remember the fragments of the electric bulb that we picked up, and that there was no light on in the carriage. That is rather significant. It not only suggests that the crime was committed in the dark, but there is a distinct suggestion of preparation—arrangement

and premeditation. It suggests that the murderer knew what the circumstances would be and provided for them.”

“Yes; and that is rather a point against our client. But I don’t quite see what you expect to get out of that sheet of the letter. It is the presence of the letter, rather than its matter, that constitutes the evidence against Miss Dalby.”

“I don’t expect to learn anything from it,” replied Thorndyke; “but the letter will be the prosecution’s trump card, and it is always well to know in advance exactly what cards your opponent holds. It is a mere matter of routine to examine everything, relevant or irrelevant.”

The inquest was to be held at Densford on the third day after the discovery of the body. But in the interval certain new facts had come to light. One was that the deceased was conveying to the Holmwood branch of the bank a sum of three thousand pounds, of which one thousand was in gold and the remainder in Bank of England notes, the whole being contained in a leather handbag. This bag had been found, empty, in a ditch by the side of the road which led from the station to the house of Miss Carleigh, the Vice-President of the Women’s Emancipation League. It was further stated that the ticket-collector at Holmwood had noticed that Miss Dalby—whom he knew by sight—was carrying a bag of the kind described when she passed the barrier, and that when she returned, about an hour later, she had no bag with her. On the other hand, Miss Carleigh had stated that the bag which Miss Dalby brought to her house was her (Miss Carleigh’s) property, and she had produced it for the inspection of the police. So that already there was some conflict of evidence, with a balance distinctly against Miss Dalby.

“There is no denying,” said Thorndyke, as we discussed the case at the breakfast table on the morning of the inquest, “that the circumstantial evidence is formidably complete and consistent, while the rebutting evidence is of the feeblest. Miss Dalby’s statement that the letter had been put into her pocket by some unknown person will hardly be taken seriously, and even Miss Carleigh’s statement with reference to the bag will not carry much weight unless she can furnish corroboration.”

“Nevertheless,” said I, “the general probabilities are entirely in favour of the accused. It is grossly improbable that a lady like Miss Dalby would commit a robbery with murder of this cold-blooded, deliberate type.”

“That may be,” Thorndyke retorted, “but a jury has to find in accordance with the evidence.”

“By the way,” said I, “did Bawley ever send you that sheet of the letter that you asked for?”

"No, confound him! But I have sent Polton round to get it from him, so that I can look it over carefully in the train. Which reminds me that I can't get down in time for the opening of the inquest. You had better travel with the solicitors and see the shorthand writers started. I shall have to come down by a later train."

Half an hour later, just as I was about to start, a familiar step was heard on the stair, and then our laboratory assistant, Polton, let himself in with his key.

"Just caught him, sir, as he was starting for the station," he said, with a satisfied, crinkly smile, laying an envelope on the table, and added, "Lord! how he did swear!"

Thorndyke chuckled, and having thanked his assistant, opened the envelope and handed it to me. It contained a single sheet of letter-paper, exactly similar to the one that we had found in the railway carriage, excepting that the writing filled one side and a quarter only, and, since it concluded with the signature "Letitia Humboe, President," it was evidently the last sheet. There was no water-mark nor anything, so far as I could see, to distinguish it from the dozens of other impressions that had been run off on the duplicator with it, excepting the roughly-pencilled plan on the blank side of the sheet.

"Well," I said as I put on my hat and walked towards the door, "I suspect that Bawley was right. You won't get much help from this to support Miss Dalby's rather improbable statement." And Thorndyke agreed that appearances were not very promising.

The scene in the coffee-room of "The Plough" Inn at Densford was one with which I was familiar enough. The quiet, business-like coroner, the half-embarrassed jurors, the local police and witnesses and the spectators, penned up at one end of the room, were all well-known characters. The unusual feature was the handsome, distinguished-looking young lady who sat on a plain Windsor chair between two inscrutable policemen, watched intently by Mr. Cadmus Bawley. Miss Dalby was pale and obviously agitated, but quiet, resolute, and somewhat defiant in manner. She greeted me with a pleasant smile when I introduced myself, and hoped that I and my colleague would have no difficulty in disposing of "this grotesque and horrible accusation."

I need not describe the proceedings in detail. Evidence of the identity of the deceased having been taken, Dr. Pooke deposed that death was due to a wound of the heart produced by a spherical bullet, apparently fired from a small, smooth-bore pistol at very short range. The wound was in his opinion not self-inflicted. The coroner then produced the sheet

of the circular letter found in the carriage, and I was called to testify to the finding of it. The next witness was Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department, who produced the two sheets of the letter which were taken from Miss Dalby's pocket when she was arrested. These he handed to the coroner for comparison with the one found in the carriage with the body of deceased.

"There appear," said the coroner, after placing the three sheets together, "to be one or more sheets missing. The two you have handed me are sheets one and three, and the one found in the railway carriage is sheet two."

"Yes," the witness agreed, "sheet four is missing, but I have a photograph of it. Here is a set of the complete letter," and he laid four unmounted prints on the table.

The coroner examined them with a puzzled frown. "May I ask," he said, "how you obtained these photographs?"

"They are not photographs of the copy that you have," the witness explained, "but of another copy of the same letter which we intercepted in the post. That letter was addressed to a stationer's shop to be called for. We have considered it necessary to keep ourselves informed of the contents of these circulars, so that we can take the necessary precautions; and as the envelopes are marked with the badge and are invariably addressed in blue ink, it is not difficult to identify them."

"I see," said the coroner, glaring stonily at Mr. Bawley, who had accompanied the superintendent's statement with audible and unfavourable comments. "Is that the whole of your evidence? Thank you. Then, if there is no cross-examination, I will call the next witness. Mr. Bernard Parsons."

Mr. Parsons was the general manager of the London and Suburban Bank, and he deposed that deceased was, on the day when he met his death, travelling to Holmwood to visit and inspect the new local branch of the bank, and that he was taking thither the sum of three thousand pounds, of which one thousand was in gold and the remainder in Bank of England notes—mostly five-pound notes. He carried the notes and specie in a strong leather handbag.

"Can you say if either of these is the bag that he carried?" the coroner asked, indicating two largish, black leather bags that his officer had placed on the table.

Mr. Parsons promptly pointed to the larger of the two, which was smeared externally with mud. The coroner noted the answer and then

asked: "Did anyone besides yourself know that deceased was making this visit?"

"Many persons must have known," was the reply. "Deceased visited the various branches in a fixed order. He came to Holmwood on the second Tuesday in the month."

"And would it be known that he had this great sum of money with him?"

"The actual amount would not be generally known, but he usually took with him supplies of specie and notes—sometimes very large sums—and this would be known to many of the bank staff, and probably to a good many persons outside. The Holmwood Branch consumes a good deal of specie, as most of the customers pay in cheques and draw out cash for local use."

This was the substance of Mr. Parsons' evidence, and when he sat down the ticket-collector was called. That official identified Miss Dalby as one of the passengers by the train in which the body of deceased was found. She was carrying a bag when she passed the barrier. He could not identify either of the bags, but both were similar to the one that she was carrying. She returned about an hour later and caught an up-train, and he noticed that she was then not carrying a bag. He could not say whether any of the other passengers was carrying a bag. There were very few first-class passengers by that train, but a large number of third-class—mostly fruit-pickers—and they made a dense crowd at the barrier so that he did not notice individual passengers particularly. He noticed Miss Dalby because he knew her by sight, as she often came to Holmwood with other suffragist ladies. He did not see which carriage Miss Dalby came from, and he did not see any first-class compartment with an open door.

The coroner noted down this evidence with thoughtful deliberation, and I was considering whether there were any questions that it would be advisable to ask the witness when I felt a light touch on my shoulder, and looking up perceived a constable holding out a telegram. Observing that it was addressed to "Dr. Jervis, Plough Inn, Densford," I nodded to the constable, and taking the envelope from him, opened it and unfolded the paper. The telegram was from Thorndyke, in the simple code that he had devised for our private use. I was able to decode it without referring to the key—which each of us always carried in his pocket—and it then read: "I am starting for Folkestone *in re* Burnham deceased. Follow immediately and bring Miller, if you can, for possible arrest. Meet me on pier near Ostend boat. Thorndyke."

Accustomed as I was to my colleague's inveterate habit of acting in the least expected manner, I must confess that I gazed at the decoded message in absolute stupefaction. I had been totally unaware of the faintest clue beyond the obvious evidence to which I had been listening, and behold! here was Thorndyke with an entirely fresh case, apparently cut-and-dried, and the unsuspected criminal in the hollow of his hand. It was astounding.

Unconsciously I raised my eyes—and met those of Superintendent Miller, fixed on me with devouring curiosity. I held up the telegram and beckoned, and immediately he tip-toed across and took a seat by my side. I laid the decoded telegram before him, and when he had glanced through it, I asked in a whisper: "Well, what do you say?"

By way of reply, he whisked out a time-table, conned it eagerly for a few minutes, and then held it towards me with his thumb-nail on the words "Densford Junction."

"There's a fast train up in seven minutes," he whispered hoarsely. "Get the coroner to excuse us and let your solicitors carry on for you."

A brief, and rather vague, explanation secured the assent of the coroner—since we had both given our evidence—and the less willing agreement of my clients. In another minute the superintendent and I were heading for the station, which we reached just as the train swept up alongside the platform.

"This is a queer start," said Miller, as the train moved out of the station; "but, Lord! there is never any calculating Dr. Thorndyke's moves. Did you know that he had anything up his sleeve?"

"No; but then one never does know. He is as close as an oyster. He never shows his hand until he can play a trump card. But it is possible that he has struck a fresh clue since I left."

"Well," rejoined Miller, "we shall know when we get to the other end. And I don't mind telling you that it will be a great relief to me, if we can drop this charge against Miss Dalby."

From time to time during the journey to London, and from thence to Folkestone, the superintendent reverted to Thorndyke's mysterious proceedings. But it was useless to speculate. We had not a single fact to guide us; and when, at last, the train ran into Folkestone Central Station we were as much in the dark as when we started.

Assuming that Thorndyke would have made any necessary arrangements for assistance from the local police, we chartered a cab and proceeded direct to the end of Rendez-vous Street—a curiously appropriate destination, by the way. Here we alighted in order that we might

make our appearance at the meeting-place as inconspicuously as possible, and, walking towards the harbour, perceived Thorndyke waiting on the quay, ostensibly watching the loading of a barge, and putting in their case a pair of prismatic binoculars with which he had apparently observed our arrival.

"I am glad you have come, Miller," he said, shaking the superintendent's hand. "I can't make any promises, but I have no doubt that it is a case for you even if it doesn't turn out all that I hope and expect. The ›Cornflower‹ is our ship, and we had better go on board separately in case our friends are keeping a look-out. I have arranged matters with the captain, and the local superintendent has got some plain-clothes men on the pier."

With this we separated. Thorndyke went on in advance, and Miller and I followed at a discreet interval.

As I descended the gangway a minute or so after Miller, a steward approached me, and having asked my name requested me to follow him, when he conducted me to the purser's office, in which I found Thorndyke and Miller in conversation with the purser.

"The gentlemen you are inquiring for," said the latter, "are in the smoking-room playing cards with another passenger. I have put a tarpaulin over one of the ports, in case you want to have a look at them without being seen."

"Perhaps you had better make a preliminary inspection, Miller," said Thorndyke. "You may know some of them."

To this suggestion the superintendent agreed, and forthwith went off with the purser, leaving me and Thorndyke alone. I at once took the opportunity to demand an explanation. "I take it that you struck some new evidence after I left you?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "And none too soon, as you see. I don't quite know what it will amount to, but I think we have secured the defence, at any rate, and that is really all that we are concerned with. The positive aspects of the case are the business of the police. But here comes Miller, looking very pleased with himself, and with the purser."

The superintendent, however, was not only pleased; he was also not a little puzzled.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "this is a quaint affair. We have got two of the leading lights of the suffrage movement in there. One is Jameson, the secretary of the Women's Emancipation League, the other is Pinder, their chief bobbery-monger. Then there are two men named Dorman

and Spiller, both of them swell crooks, I am certain, though we have never been able to fix anything on them. The fifth man I don't know."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "My repertoire includes only four. And now we will proceed to sort them out. Could we have a few words with Mr. Thorpe—in here, if you don't mind."

"Certainly," replied the purser "I'll go and fetch him." He bustled away in the direction of the smoking-room, whence he presently reappeared, accompanied by a tall, lean man who wore large bi-focal spectacles of the old-fashioned, split-lens type, and was smoking a cigar. As the newcomer approached down the alley-way, it was evident that he was nervous and uneasy, though he maintained a certain jaunty swagger that accorded ill with a pronounced, habitual stoop. As he entered the cabin, however, and became aware of the portentous group of strangers, the swagger broke down completely; suddenly his face became ashen and haggard, and he peered through his great spectacles from one to the others, with an expression of undisguisable terror.

"Mr. Thorpe?" queried Thorndyke; and the superintendent murmured: "Alias Pinder."

"Yes," was the reply, in a husky undertone. "What can I do for you?"

Thorndyke turned to the superintendent. "I charge this man," said he, "with having murdered Francis Burnham in the train between London and Holmwood."

The superintendent was visibly astonished, but not more so than the accused, on whom Thorndyke's statement produced the most singular effect. In a moment, his terror seemed to drop from him; the colour returned to his face, the haggard expression of which gave place to one of obvious relief.

Miller stood up, and addressing the accused, began "It is my duty to caution you—" but the other interrupted: "Caution your grandmother! You are talking a parcel of dam' nonsense. I was in Birmingham when the murder was committed. I can prove it, easily."

The superintendent was somewhat taken aback, for the accused spoke with a confidence that carried conviction.

"In that case," said Thorndyke, "you can probably explain how a letter belonging to you came to be found in the carriage with the murdered man."

"Belonging to me!" exclaimed Thorpe. "What the deuce do you mean? That letter belonged to Miss Dalby. The rest of it was found in her pocket."



"Precisely," said Thorndyke. "One sheet had been placed in the railway carriage and the remainder in Miss Dalby's pocket to fix suspicion on her. But it was your letter, and the inference is that you disposed of it in that manner for the purpose that I have stated."

"But," persisted Thorpe, with visibly-growing uneasiness, "this was a duplicated circular. You couldn't tell one copy from another."

"Mr. Pinder," said Thorndyke, in an impressively quiet tone, "if I tell you that I ascertained from that letter that you had taken a passage on this ship in the name of Thorpe, you will probably understand what I mean."

Apparently he did understand, for, once more, the colour faded from his face and he sat down heavily on a locker, fixing on Thorndyke a look of undisguised dismay. Thus he sat for some moments, motionless and silent, apparently thinking hard.

Suddenly he started up. "My God!" he exclaimed, "I see now what has happened. The infernal scoundrel! First he put it on to Miss Dalby, and now he has put it on to me. Now I understand why he looked so startled when I ran against him."

"What do you mean?" asked Thorndyke.

"I'll tell you," replied Pinder. "As I move about a good deal—and for other reasons—I used to have my suffrage letters sent to a stationer's shop in Barlow Street—"

"I know," interrupted the superintendent; "Bedall's. I used to look them over and take photographs of them." He grinned craftily as he made this statement, and, rather to my surprise, the accused grinned too. A little later I understood that grin.

"Well," continued Pinder, "I used to collect these letters pretty regularly. But this last letter was delivered while I was away at Birmingham. Before I came back I met a man who gave me certain—er—instructions—you know what they were," he added, addressing Thorndyke—"so I did not need the letter. But, of course, I couldn't leave it there uncollected, so when I got back to London, I called for it. That was two days ago. To my astonishment Miss Bedall declared that I had collected it three days previously. I assured her that I was not in London on that day, but she was positive that I had called. 'I remember clearly,' she said, 'giving you the letter myself.' Well, there was no arguing. Evidently she had given the letter to the wrong person—she is very near-sighted, I should say, judging by the way she holds things against her nose—but how it happened I couldn't understand. But I think I understand now. There is one person only in the world who knew that I had my letters addressed there: a sort of pal of mine named Payne. He happened to be with me

one evening when I called to collect my letters. Now, Payne chanced to be a good deal like me—at least he is tall and thin and stoops a bit; but he does not wear spectacles. He tried on my spectacles once for a joke, and then he really looked extremely like me. He looked in a mirror and remarked on the resemblance himself. Now, Payne did not belong to the Women's League, and I suggest that he took advantage of this resemblance to get possession of this letter. He got a pair of spectacles like mine and personated me at the shop."

"Why should he want to get possession of that letter?" Miller demanded.

"To plant it as he has planted it," replied Pinder. "and set the police on a false trail."

"This sounds pretty thin," said Miller. "You are accusing this man of having murdered Mr. Burnham. What grounds have you for this accusation?"

"My grounds," replied Pinder, "are, first, that he stole this letter which has been found, obviously planted; and, second, that he had a grudge against Burnham and knew all about his movements."

"Indeed!" said Miller, with suddenly increased interest. "Then who and what is this man Payne?"

"Why," replied Pinder, "until a month ago, he was assistant cashier at the Streatham branch of the bank. Then Burnham came down and hoofed him out without an hour's notice. I don't know what for, but I can guess."

"Do you happen to know where Payne is at this moment?"

"Yes, I do. He is on this ship, in the smoking-room—only he is Mr. Shenstone now. And mighty sick he was when he found me on board."

The superintendent looked at Thorndyke. "What do you think about it, doctor?" he asked.

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that we had better have Mr. Shenstone in here and ask him a few questions. Would you see if you can get him to come here?" he added, addressing the purser, who had been listening with ecstatic enjoyment.

"I'll get him to come along all right," replied the purser, evidently scenting a new act in this enthralling drama; and away he bustled, all agog. In less than a minute we saw him returning down the alley-way, with a tall, thin man, who, at a distance, was certainly a good deal like Pinder, though the resemblance diminished as he approached. He, too, was obviously agitated, and seemed to be plying the purser with questions.

But when he came opposite the door of the cabin he stopped dead and seemed disposed to shrink back.

"Is that the man?" Thorndyke demanded sharply and rather loudly, springing to his feet as he spoke.

The effect of the question was electrical. As Thorndyke rose, the newcomer turned, and, violently thrusting the purser aside, raced madly down the alley-way and out on to the deck.

"Stop that man!" roared Miller, darting out in pursuit; and at the shout a couple of loitering deck-hands headed the fugitive off from the gang-way. Following, I saw the terrified man swerving this way and that across the littered deck to avoid the seamen, who joined in the pursuit; I saw him make a sudden frantic burst for a baggage-slide springing from a bollard up to the bulwark-rail. Then his foot must have tripped on a lashing, for he staggered for a moment, flung out his arms with a wild shriek, and plunged headlong into the space between the ship's side and the quay wall.

In an instant the whole ship was in an uproar. An officer and two hands sprang to the rail with ropes and a boathook, while others manned the cargo derrick and lowered a rope with a running bowline between the ship and the quay.

"He's gone under," a hoarse voice proclaimed from below; "but I can see him jammed against the side."

There were a couple of minutes of sickening suspense. Then the voice from below was heard again. "Heave up!"

The derrick-engine rattled, the taut rope came up slowly, and at length out of that horrid gulf arose a limp and dripping shape that, as it cleared the bulwark, was swung inboard and let down gently on the deck. Thorndyke and I stooped over him. But it was a dead man's face that we looked into; and a tinge of blood on the lips told the rest of the tale. "Cover him up," said the superintendent. "He's out of our jurisdiction now. But what's going on there?"

Following his look, I perceived a small scattered crowd of men all running furiously along the quay towards the town. Some of them I judged to be the late inmates of the smoking-room and some plain-clothes men. The only figure that I recognised was that of Mr. Pinder, and he was already growing small in the distance.

"The local police will have to deal with them," said Miller. Then turning to the purser, he asked: "What baggage had this man?"

"Only two cabin trunks," was the reply. "They are both in his state-room."

To the state-room we followed the purser, when Miller had possessed himself of the dead man's keys, and the two trunks were hoisted on to the bunk and opened. Each trunk contained a large cash-box, and each cash-box contained five hundred pounds in gold and a big bundle of notes. The latter Miller examined closely, checking their numbers by a column of entries in his pocket-book.

"Yes," he reported at length; "it's a true bill. These are the notes that were stolen from Mr. Burnham. And now I will have a look at the baggage of those other four sportsmen."

This being no affair of ours, Thorndyke and I went ashore and slowly made our way towards the town. But presently the superintendent overtook us in high glee, with the news that he had discovered what appeared to be the accumulated 'swag' of a gang of swell burglars for whom he had been for some months vainly on the look-out.

"How was it done?" repeated Thorndyke in reply to Miller's question, as we sat at a retired table in the »Lord Warden« Hotel. "Well, it was really very simple. I am afraid I shall disappoint you if you expect anything ingenious and recondite. Of course, it was obvious that Miss Dalby had not committed this atrocious murder and robbery; and it was profoundly improbable that this extremely incriminating letter had been dropped accidentally. That being so, it was almost certain that the letter had been 'planted,' as Pinder expressed it. But that was a mere opinion that helped us not at all. The actual solution turned upon a simple chemical fact with which I happened to be acquainted; which is this: that all the basic coal-tar dyes, and especially methylene blue, dye oxycellulose without requiring a mordant, but do not react in this way on cellulose. Now, good paper is practically pure cellulose; and if you dip a sheet of such paper into certain oxidising liquids, such as a solution of potassium chlorate with a slight excess of hydrochloric acid, the paper is converted into oxycellulose. But if instead of immersing the paper, you write on it with a quill or glass pen dipped in the solution, only the part which has been touched by the pen is changed into oxycellulose. No change is visible to the eye: but if a sheet of paper written on with this colourless fluid is dipped in a solution of, say, methylene blue, the invisible writing immediately becomes visible. The oxycellulose takes up the blue dye.

"Now, when I picked up that sheet of the letter in the railway carriage and noted that the ink used appeared to be methylene blue, this fact was recalled to my mind. Then, on looking at it closely, I seemed to detect a certain slight spottiness in the writing. There were points on

some of the letters that were a little deeper in colour than the rest; and it occurred to me that it was possible that these circulars might be used to transmit secret messages of a less innocent kind than those that met the unaided eye, just as these political societies might form an excellent cover for the operations of criminal associations. But if the circulars had been so used, it is evident that the secret writing would not be on all the circulars. The prepared sheets would be used only for the circulars that were to be sent to particular persons, and in those cases the secret writing would probably be in the nature of a personal communication, either to a particular individual or to a small group. The possible presence of a secret message thus became of vital evidential importance; for if it could be shown that this letter was addressed to some person other than Miss Dalby, that would dispose of the only evidence connecting her with the crime.

"It happened, most fortunately, that I was able to get possession of the final sheet of this letter—"

"Of course it did," growled Miller, with a sour smile.

"It reached me," continued Thorndyke, "only after Dr. Jarvis had started for Densford. The greater part of one side was blank, excepting for a rough plan drawn in pencil, and this blank side I laid down on a sheet of glass and wetted the written side with a small wad of cotton-wool dipped in distilled water. Of course, the blue writing began to run and dissolve out; and then, very faintly, some other writing began to show through in reverse. I turned the paper over, and now the new writing, though faint, was quite legible, and became more so when I wiped the blue-stained cotton-wool over it a few times. A solution of methylene blue would have made it still plainer, but I used water only, as I judged that the blue writing was intended to furnish the dye for development. Here is the final result."

He drew from his pocket a letter-case, from which he extracted a folded paper which he opened and laid on the table. It was stained a faint blue, through which the original writing could be seen, dim and blurred, while the secret message, though very pale, was quite sharp and clear. And this was the message: "... so although we are not actually blown on, the position is getting risky and it's time for us to hop. I have booked passages for the four of us to Ostend by the ›Cornflower‹, which sails on Friday evening next (20<sup>th</sup>). The names of the four illustrious passengers are, Walsh (that's me), Grubb (Dorman), Jenkins (Spiller) and Thorpe (that's you). Get those names well into your canister—better make a note of them—and turn up in good time on Friday."

“Well,” said Miller, as he handed back the letter, “we can’t know everything—unless we are Dr. Thorndyke. But there’s one thing I do know.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“I know why that fellow Pinder grinned when I told him that I had photographed his confounded letters.”

## The Naturalist at Law

A hush had fallen on the court as the coroner concluded his brief introductory statement and the first witness took up his position by the long table. The usual preliminary questions elicited that Simon Moffet, the witness aforesaid, was fifty-eight years of age, that he followed the calling of a shepherd and that he was engaged in supervising the flocks that fed upon the low-lying meadows adjoining the little town of Bantree in Buckinghamshire.

"Tell us how you came to discover the body," said the coroner.

"Twas on Wednesday morning, about half-past five," Moffet began. "I was getting the sheep through the gate into the big meadow by Reed's farm, when I happened to look down the dyke, and then I noticed a boot sticking up out of the water. Seemed to me as if there was a foot in it by the way it stuck up, so as soon as all the sheep was in, I shut the gate and walked down the dyke to have a look at un. When I got close I see the toe of another boot just alongside. Looks a bit queer, I thinks, but I couldn't see anything more, 'cause the duck-weed is that thick as it looks as if you could walk on it. Howsoever, I clears away the weed with my stick, and then I see 'twas a dead man. Give me a rare turn, it did. He was a-layin' at the bottom of the ditch with his head near the middle and his feet up close to the bank. Just then young Harry Walker comes along the cart-track on his way to work, so I shows him the body and sends him back to the town for to give notice at the police station."

"And is that all you know about the affair?"

"Ay. Later on I see the sergeant come along with a man wheelin' the stretcher, and I showed him where the body was and helped to pull it out and load it on the stretcher. And that's all I know about it."

On this the witness was dismissed and his place taken by a shrewd-looking, business-like police sergeant, who deposed as follows: "Last Wednesday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, at 6.15 a.m., I received information from Henry Walker that a dead body was lying in the ditch by the cart-track

leading from Ponder's Road to Reed's farm. I proceeded there forthwith, accompanied by Police-Constable Ketchum, and taking with us a wheeled stretcher. On the track I was met by the last witness, who conducted me to the place where the body was lying and where I found it in the position that he has described; but we had to clear away the duck-weed before we could see it distinctly. I examined the bank carefully, but could see no trace of footprints, as the grass grows thickly right down to the water's edge. There were no signs of a struggle or any disturbance on the bank. With the aid of Moffet and Ketchum, I drew the body out and placed it on the stretcher. I could not see any injuries or marks of violence on the body or anything unusual about it. I conveyed it to the mortuary, and with Constable Ketchum's assistance removed the clothing and emptied the pockets, putting the contents of each pocket in a separate envelope and writing the description on each. In a letter-case from the coat pocket were some visiting cards bearing the name and address of Mr. Cyrus Pedley, of 21 Hawtrey Mansions, Kensington, and a letter signed Wilfred Pedley, apparently from deceased's brother. Acting on instructions, I communicated with him and served a summons to attend this inquest."

"With regard to the ditch in which you found the body," said the coroner, "can you tell us how deep it is?"

"Yes; I measured it with Moffet's crook and a tape measure. In the deepest part, where the body was lying, it is four feet two inches deep. From there it slopes up pretty sharply to the bank."

"So far as you can judge, if a grown man fell into the ditch by accident, would he have any difficulty in getting out?"

"None at all, I should say, if he were sober and in ordinary health. A man of medium height, standing in the middle at the deepest part, would have his head and shoulders out of water; and the sides are not too steep to climb up easily, especially with the grass and rushes on the bank to lay hold of."

"You say there were no signs of disturbance on the bank. Were there any in the ditch itself?"

"None that I could see. But, of course, signs of disturbance soon disappear in water. The duck-weed drifts about as the wind drives it, and there are creatures moving about on the bottom. I noticed that deceased had some weed grasped in one hand."

This concluded the sergeant's evidence, and as he retired, the name of Dr. Albert Parton was called. The new witness was a young man of



grave and professional aspect, who gave his evidence with an extreme regard for clearness and accuracy.

"I have made an examination of the body of the deceased," he began, after the usual preliminaries. "It is that of a healthy man of about forty-five. I first saw it about two hours after it was found. It had then been dead from twelve to fifteen hours. Later I made a complete examination. I found no injuries, marks of violence or any definite bruises, and no signs of disease."

"Did you ascertain the cause of death?" the coroner asked.

"Yes. The cause of death was drowning."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure. The lungs contained a quantity of water and duck-weed, and there was more than a quart of water mixed with duck-weed and water-weed in the stomach. That is a clear proof of death by drowning. The water in the lungs was the immediate cause of death, by making breathing impossible, and as the water and weed in the stomach must have been swallowed, they furnish conclusive evidence that deceased was alive when he fell into the water."

"The water and weed could not have got into the stomach after death?"

"No, that is quite impossible. They must have been swallowed when the head of the deceased was just below the surface; and the water must have been drawn into the lungs by spasmodic efforts to breathe when the mouth was under water."

"Did you find any signs indicating that deceased might have been intoxicated?"

"No. I examined the water from the stomach very carefully with that question in view, but there was no trace of alcohol—or, indeed, of anything else. It was simple ditch-water. As the point is important I have preserved it, and—" here the witness produced a paper parcel which he unfastened, revealing a large glass jar containing about a quart of water plentifully sprinkled with duck-weed. This he presented to the coroner, who waved it away hastily and indicated the jury; to whom it was then offered and summarily rejected with emphatic head-shakes. Finally it came to rest on the table by the place where I was sitting with my colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, and our client, Mr. Wilfred Pedley. I glanced at it with faint interest, noting how the duck-weed plants had risen to the surface and floated, each with its tassel of roots hanging down into the water, and how a couple of tiny, flat shells, like miniature ammonites, had sunk and lay on the bottom of the jar. Thorndyke also glanced at it; indeed, he did more than glance, for he drew the jar towards him and

examined its contents in the systematic way in which it was his habit to examine everything. Meanwhile the coroner asked: "Did you find anything abnormal or unusual, or anything that could throw light on how deceased came to be in the water?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply. "I found simply that deceased met his death by drowning."

Here, as the witness seemed to have finished his evidence, Thorndyke interposed.

"The witness states, sir, there were no definite bruises. Does he mean that there were any marks that might have been bruises?"

The coroner glanced at Dr. Parton, who replied: "There was a faint mark on the outside of the right arm, just above the elbow, which had somewhat the appearance of a bruise, as if the deceased had been struck with a stick. But it was very indistinct. I shouldn't like to swear that it was a bruise at all."

This concluded the doctor's evidence, and when he had retired, the name of our client, Wilfred Pedley, was called. He rose, and having taken the oath and given his name and address, deposed: "I have viewed the body of deceased. It is that of my brother, Cyrus Pedley, who is forty-three years of age. The last time I saw deceased alive was on Tuesday morning, the day before the body was found."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his manner or state of mind?"

The witness hesitated but at length replied: "Yes. He seemed anxious and depressed. He had been in low spirits for some time past, but on this occasion he seemed more so than usual."

"Had you any reason to suspect that he might contemplate taking his life?"

"No," the witness replied, emphatically, "and I do not believe that he would, under any circumstances, have contemplated suicide."

"Have you any special reason for that belief?"

"Yes. Deceased was a highly conscientious man and he was in my debt. He had occasion to borrow two thousand pounds from me, and the debt was secured by an insurance on his life. If he had committed suicide that insurance would be invalidated and the debt would remain unpaid. From my knowledge of him, I feel certain that he would not have done such a thing."

The coroner nodded gravely, and then asked: "What was deceased's occupation?"

"He was employed in some way by the Foreign Office, I don't know in what capacity. I know very little about his affairs."

"Do you know if he had any money worries or any troubles or embarrassments of any kind?"

"I have never heard of any; but deceased was a very reticent man. He lived alone in his flat, taking his meals at his club, and no one knew—at least, I did not—how he spent his time or what was the state of his finances. He was not married, and I am his only near relative."

"And as to deceased's habits. Was he ever addicted to taking more stimulants than was good for him?"

"Never," the witness replied emphatically. "He was a most temperate and abstemious man."

"Was he subject to fits of any kind, or fainting attacks?"

"I have never heard that he was."

"Can you account for his being in this solitary place at this time—apparently about eight o'clock at night?"

"I cannot. It is a complete mystery to me. I know of no one with whom either of us was acquainted in this district. I had never heard of the place until I got the summons to the inquest."

This was the sum of our client's evidence, and, so far, things did not look very favourable from our point of view—we were retained on the insurance question, to rebut, if possible, the suggestion of suicide. However, the coroner was a discreet man, and having regard to the obscurity of the case—and perhaps to the interests involved—summed up in favour of an open verdict; and the jury, taking a similar view, found that deceased met his death by drowning, but under what circumstances there was no evidence to show.

"Well," I said, as the court rose, "that leaves it to the insurance people to make out a case of suicide if they can. I think you are fairly safe, Mr. Pedley. There is no positive evidence."

"No," our client replied. "But it isn't only the money I am thinking of. It would be some consolation to me for the loss of my poor brother if I had some idea how he met with his death, and could feel sure that it was an unavoidable misadventure. And for my own satisfaction—leaving the insurance out of the question—I should like to have definite proof that it was not suicide."

He looked half-questioningly at Thorndyke, who nodded gravely. "Yes," the latter agreed, "the suggestion of suicide ought to be disposed of if possible, both for legal and sentimental reasons. How far away is the mortuary?"

"A couple of minutes' walk," replied Mr. Pedley. "Did you wish to inspect the body?"

"If it is permissible," replied Thorndyke; "and then I propose to have a look at the place where the body was found."

"In that case," our client said, "I will go down to the Station Hotel and wait for you. We may as well travel up to town together, and you can then tell me if you have seen any further light on the mystery."

As soon as he was gone, Dr. Parton advanced, tying the string of the parcel which once more enclosed the jar of ditch-water.

"I heard you say, sir, that you would like to inspect the body," said he. "If you like, I will show you the way to the mortuary. The sergeant will let us in, won't you, sergeant? This gentleman is a doctor as well as a lawyer."

"Bless you, sir," said the sergeant, "I know who Dr. Thorndyke is, and I shall feel it an honour to show him anything he wishes to see."

Accordingly we set forth together, Dr. Parton and Thorndyke leading the way.

"The coroner and the jury didn't seem to appreciate my exhibit," the former remarked with a faint grin, tapping the parcel as he spoke.

"No," Thorndyke agreed; "and it is hardly reasonable to expect a layman to share our own matter-of-fact outlook. But you were quite right to produce the specimen. That ditch-water furnishes conclusive evidence on a vitally material question. Further, I would advise you to preserve that jar for the present, well covered and under lock and key."

Parton looked surprised. "Why?" he asked. "The inquest is over and the verdict pronounced."

"Yes, but it was an open verdict, and an open verdict leaves the case in the air. The inquest has thrown no light on the question as to how Cyrus Pedley came by his death."

"There doesn't seem to me much mystery about it," said the doctor. "Here is a man found drowned in a shallow ditch which he could easily have got out of if he had fallen in by accident. He was not drunk. Apparently he was not in a fit of any kind. There are no marks of violence and no signs of a struggle, and the man is known to have been in an extremely depressed state of mind. It looks like a clear case of suicide, though I admit that the jury were quite right, in the absence of direct evidence."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "it will be my duty to contest that view if the insurance company dispute the claim on those grounds."

"I can't think what you will have to offer in answer to the suggestion of suicide," said Parton.

“Neither can I, at present,” replied Thorndyke “But the case doesn’t look to me quite so simple as it does to you.”

“You think it possible that an analysis of the contents of this jar may be called for?”

“That is a possibility,” replied Thorndyke. “But I mean that the case is obscure, and that some further inquiry into the circumstances of this man’s death is by no means unlikely.”

“Then,” said Parton, “I will certainly follow your advice and lock up this precious jar. But here we are at the mortuary. Is there anything in particular that you want to see?”

“I want to see all that there is to see,” Thorndyke replied. “The evidence has been vague enough so far. Shall we begin with that bruise or mark that you mentioned?”

Dr. Parton advanced to the grim, shrouded figure that lay on the slate-topped table, like some solemn effigy on an altar tomb, and drew back the sheet that covered it. We all approached, stepping softly, and stood beside the table, looking down with a certain awesome curiosity at the still, waxen figure that, but a few hours since, had been a living man like ourselves. The body was that of a good-looking, middle-aged man with a refined, intelligent face—slightly disfigured by a scar on the cheek—now set in the calm, reposeful expression that one so usually finds on the faces of the drowned; with drowsy, half-closed eyes and slightly parted lips that revealed a considerable gap in the upper front teeth.

Thorndyke stood awhile looking down on the dead man with a curious questioning expression. Then his eye travelled over the body, from the placid face to the marble-like torso and the hand which, though now relaxed, still lightly grasped a tuft of water-weed. The latter Thorndyke gently disengaged from the limp hand, and, after a glance at the dark green, feathery fronds, laid it down and stooped to examine the right arm at the spot above the elbow that Parton had spoken of.

“Yes,” he said, “I think I should call it a bruise, though it is very faint. As you say, it might have been produced by a blow with a stick or rod. I notice that there are some teeth missing. Presumably he wore a plate?”

“Yes,” replied Parton; “a smallish gold plate with four teeth on it—at least, so his brother told me. Of course, it fell out when he was in the water, but it hasn’t been found; in fact, it hasn’t been looked for.”

Thorndyke nodded and then turned to the sergeant. “Could I see what you found in the pockets?” he asked.

The sergeant complied readily, and my colleague watched his orderly procedure with evident approval. The collection of envelopes was pro-

duced from an attaché-case and conveyed to a side table, where the sergeant emptied out the contents of each into a little heap, opposite which he placed the appropriate envelope with its written description. Thorndyke ran his eye over the collection—which was commonplace enough—until he came to the tobacco pouch, from which protruded the corner of a scrap of crumpled paper. This he drew forth and smoothed out the creases, when it was seen to be a railway receipt for an excess fare.

“Seems to have lost his ticket or travelled without one,” the sergeant remarked. “But not on this line.”

“No,” agreed Thorndyke. “It is the Tilbury and Southend line. But you notice the date. It is the 18<sup>th</sup>; and the body was found on the morning of Wednesday, the 19<sup>th</sup>. So it would appear that he must have come into this neighbourhood in the evening; and that he must have come either by way of London or by a very complicated cross-country route. I wonder what brought him here.”

He produced his notebook and was beginning to copy the receipt when the sergeant said: “You had better take the paper, sir. It is of no use to us now, and it isn’t very easy to make out.”

Thorndyke thanked the officer, and, handing me the paper, asked: “What do you make of it, Jervis?”

I scrutinised the little crumpled scrap and deciphered with difficulty the hurried scrawl, scribbled with a hard, ill-sharpened pencil.

“It seems to read ‘Ldn to C. B.’ or ‘S. B.’, ‘Hlt’—that is some ‘Halt,’ I presume. But the amount, 4.9, is clear enough, and that will give us a clue if we want one.” I returned the paper to Thorndyke, who bestowed it in his pocket-book and then remarked: “I don’t see any keys.”

“No, sir,” replied the sergeant, “there aren’t any. Rather queer, that, for he must have had at least a latch key. They must have fallen out into the water.”

“That is possible,” said Thorndyke, “but it would be worth while to make sure. Is there anyone who could show us the place where the body was found?”

“I will walk up there with you myself, sir, with pleasure,” said the sergeant, hastily repacking the envelopes. “It is only a quarter of an hour’s walk from here.”

“That is very good of you, sergeant,” my colleague responded; “and as we seem to have seen everything here, I propose that we start at once. You are not coming with us, Parton?”

"No," the doctor replied. "I have finished with the case and I have got my work to do." He shook hands with us heartily and watched us—with some curiosity, I think—as we set forth in company with the sergeant. His curiosity did not seem to me to be unjustified. In fact, I shared it. The presence of the police officer precluded discussion, but as we took our way out of the town I found myself speculating curiously on my colleague's proceedings. To me, suicide was written plainly on every detail of the case. Of course, we did not wish to take that view, but what other was possible? Had Thorndyke some alternative theory? Or was he merely, according to his invariable custom, making an impartial survey of everything, no matter how apparently trivial, in the hope of lighting on some new and informative fact?

The temporary absence of the sergeant, who had stopped to speak to a constable on duty, enabled me to put the question: "Is this expedition intended to clear up anything in particular?"

"No," he replied, "excepting the keys, which ought to be found. But you must see for yourself that this is not a straightforward case. That man did not come all this way merely to drown himself in a ditch. I am quite in the dark at present, so there is nothing for it but to examine everything with our own eyes and see if there is anything that has been overlooked that may throw some light on either the motive or the circumstances. It is always desirable to examine the scene of a crime or a tragedy."

Here the return of the sergeant put a stop to the discussion and we proceeded on our way in silence. Already we had passed out of the town, and we now turned out of the main road into a lane or by-road, bordered by meadows and orchards and enclosed by rather high hedgerows.

"This is Ponder's Road," said the sergeant. "It leads to Renham, a couple of miles farther on, where it joins the Aylesbury Road. The cart track is on the left a little way along."

A few minutes later we came to our turning, a narrow and rather muddy lane, the entrance to which was shaded by a grove of tall elms. Passing through this shady avenue, we came out on a grass-covered track, broken by deep wagon-ruts and bordered on each side by a ditch, beyond which was a wide expanse of marshy meadows.

"This is the place," said the sergeant, halting by the side of the right-hand ditch and indicating a spot where the rushes had been flattened down. "It was just as you see it now, only the feet were just visible sticking out of the duck-weed, which had drifted back after Moffet had disturbed it."

We stood awhile looking at the ditch, with its thick mantle of bright green, spotted with innumerable small dark objects and showing here and there a faint track where a water-vole had swum across.

"Those little dark objects are water-snails, I suppose," said I, by way of making some kind of remark.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke; "the common Amber shell, I think—*Succinea putris*." He reached out his stick and fished up a sample of the duck-weed, on which one or two of the snails were crawling. "Yes," he repeated. "*Succinea putris* it is; a queer little left handed shell, with the spire, as you see, all lop-sided. They have a habit of swarming in this extraordinary way. You notice that the ditch is covered with them."

I had already observed this, but it hardly seemed to be worth commenting on under the present circumstances—which was apparently the sergeant's view also, for he looked at Thorndyke with some surprise, which developed into impatience when my colleague proceeded further to expand on the subject of natural history.

"These water-weeds," he observed, "are very remarkable plants in their various ways. Look at this duck-weed, for instance. Just a little green oval disc with a single root hanging down into the water, like a tiny umbrella with a long handle; and yet it is a complete plant, and a flowering plant, too." He picked a specimen off the end of his stick and held it up by its root to exhibit its umbrella-like form; and as he did so, he looked in my face with an expression that I felt to be somehow significant; but of which I could not extract the meaning. But there was no difficulty in interpreting the expression on the sergeant's face. He had come here on business and he wanted to "cut the cackle and get to the hosses."

"Well, sergeant," said Thorndyke, "there isn't much to see, but I think we ought to have a look for those keys. He must have had keys of some kind, if only a latchkey; and they must be in this ditch."

The sergeant was not enthusiastic. "I've no doubt you are right, sir," said he; "but I don't see that we should be much forrader if we found them. However, we may as well have a look, only I can't stay more than a few minutes. I've got my work to do at the station."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "let us get to work at once. We had better hook out the weed and look it over; and if the keys are not in that, we must try to expose the bottom where the body was lying. You must tell us if we are working in the right place."

With this he began, with the crooked handle of his stick, to rake up the tangle of weed that covered the bottom of the ditch and drag the



detached masses ashore, piling them on the bank and carefully looking them through to see if the keys should chance to be entangled in their meshes. In this work I took my part under the sergeant's direction, raking in load after load of the delicate, stringy weed, on the pale green ribbon-like leaves of which multitudes of the water-snails were creeping; and sorting over each batch in hopeless and fruitless search for the missing keys. In about ten minutes we had removed the entire weedy covering from the bottom of the ditch over an area of from eight to nine feet—the place which, according to the sergeant, the body had occupied; and as the duck-weed had been caught by the tangled masses of water-weed that we had dragged ashore, we now had an uninterrupted view of the cleared space save for the clouds of mud that we had stirred up.

"We must give the mud a few minutes to settle," said Thorndyke.

"Yes," the sergeant agreed, "it will take some time; and as it doesn't really concern me now that the inquest is over, I think I will get back to the station if you will excuse me."

Thorndyke excused him very willingly, I think, though politely and with many thanks for his help. When he had gone I remarked, "I am inclined to agree with the sergeant. If we find the keys we shan't be much forrader."

"We shall know that he had them with him," he replied. "Though, of course, if we don't find them, that will not prove that they are not here. Still, I think we should try to settle the question."

His answer left me quite unconvinced; but the care with which he searched the ditch and sorted out the weed left me in no doubt that, to him, the matter seemed to be of some importance. However, nothing came of the search. If the keys were there they were buried in the mud, and eventually we had to give up the search and make our way back towards the station.

As we passed out of the lane into Ponder's Road, Thorndyke stopped at the entrance, under the trees, by a little triangle of turf which marked the beginning of the lane, and looked down at the muddy ground.

"Here is quite an interesting thing, Jervis," he remarked, "which shows us how standardised objects tend to develop an individual character. These are the tracks of a car, or more probably a tradesman's van, which was fitted with Barlow tyres. Now there must be thousands of vans fitted with these tyres; they are the favourite type for light covered vans, and when new they are all alike and indistinguishable. Yet this tyre—of the off hind wheel—has acquired a character which would enable one to

pick it out with certainty from ten thousand others. First, you see, there is a deep cut in the tyre at an angle of forty-five, then a kidney-shaped 'Blakey' has stuck in the outer tyre without puncturing the inner; and finally some adhesive object—perhaps a lump of pitch from a newly-mended road—has become fixed on just behind the 'Blakey.' Now, if we make a rough sketch of those three marks and indicate their distance apart, thus"—here he made a rapid sketch in his notebook, and wrote in the intervals in inches—"we have the means of swearing to the identity of a vehicle which we have never seen."

"And which," I added, "had for some reason swerved over to the wrong side of the road. Yes, I should say that tyre is certainly unique. But surely most tyres are identifiable when they have been in use for some time."

"Exactly," he replied. "That was my point. The standardised thing is devoid of character only when it is new."

It was not a very subtle point, and as it was fairly obvious I made no comment, but presently reverted to the case of Pedley deceased.

"I don't quite see why you are taking all this trouble. The insurance claim is not likely to be contested. No one can prove that it was a case of suicide, though I should think no one will feel any doubt that it was, at least that is my own feeling."

Thorndyke looked at me with an expression of reproach.

"I am afraid that my learned friend has not been making very good use of his eyes," said he. "He has allowed his attention to be distracted by superficial appearances."

"You don't think that it was suicide, then?" I asked, considerably taken aback.

"It isn't a question of thinking," he replied. "It was certainly not suicide. There are the plainest indications of homicide; and, of course, in the particular circumstances, homicide means murder."

I was thunderstruck. In my own mind I had dismissed the case somewhat contemptuously as a mere commonplace suicide. As my friend had truly said, I had accepted the obvious appearances and let them mislead me, whereas Thorndyke had followed his golden rule of accepting nothing and observing everything. But what was it that he had observed? I knew that it was useless to ask, but still I ventured on a tentative question.

"When did you come to the conclusion that it was a case of homicide?"

"As soon as I had had a good look at the place where the body was found," he replied promptly.

This did not help me much, for I had given very little attention to anything but the search for the keys. The absence of those keys was, of course, a suspicious fact, if it was a fact. But we had not proved their absence; we had only failed to find them.

"What do you propose to do next?" I asked.

"Evidently," he answered, "there are two things to be done. One is to test the murder theory—to look for more evidence for or against it; the other is to identify the murderer, if possible. But really the two problems are one, since they involve the questions 'Who had a motive for killing Cyrus Pedley?' and 'Who had the opportunity and the means?'"

Our discussion brought us to the station, where, outside the hotel, we found Mr. Pedley waiting for us.

"I am glad you have come," said he. "I was beginning to fear that we should lose this train. I suppose there is no new light on this mysterious affair?"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "Rather there is a new problem. No keys were found in your brother's pockets, and we have failed to find them in the ditch; though, of course, they may be there."

"They must be," said Pedley. "They must have fallen out of his pocket and got buried in the mud, unless he lost them previously, which is most unlikely. It is a pity, though. We shall have to break open his cabinets and drawers, which he would have hated. He was very fastidious about his furniture."

"You will have to break into his flat, too," said I.

"No," he replied, "I shan't have to do that. I have a duplicate of his latchkey. He had a spare bedroom which he let me use if I wanted to stay in town." As he spoke, he produced his key-bunch and exhibited a small Chubb latchkey. "I wish we had the others, though," he added.

Here the up-train was heard approaching and we hurried on to the platform, selecting an empty first-class compartment as it drew up. As soon as the train had started, Thorndyke began his inquiries, to which I listened attentively.

"You said that your brother had been anxious and depressed lately. Was there anything inure than this? Any nervousness or foreboding?"

"Well yes," replied Pedley. "Looking back, I seem to see that the possibility of death was in his mind. A week or two ago he brought his will to me to see if it was quite satisfactory to me as the principal beneficiary and he handed to me his last receipt for the insurance premium. That looks a little suggestive."

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And as to his occupation and his associates, what do you know about them?"

"His private friends are mostly my own, but of his official associates I know nothing. He was connected with the Foreign Office; but in what capacity I don't know at all. He was extremely reticent on the subject. I only know that he travelled about a good deal, presumably on official business."

This was not very illuminating, but it was all our client had to tell; and the conversation languished somewhat until the train drew up at Marylebone, when Thorndyke said, as if by an after-thought: "You have your brother's latchkey. How would it be if we just took a glance at the flat? Have you time now?"

"I will make time," was the reply, "if you want to see the flat. I don't see what you could learn from inspecting it; but that is your affair. I am in your hands."

"I should like to look round the rooms," Thorndyke answered; and as our client assented, we approached a taxi-cab and entered while Pedley gave the driver the necessary directions. A quarter of an hour later we drew up opposite a tall block of buildings, and Mr. Pedley, having paid off the cab, led the way to the lift.

The dead man's flat was on the third floor, and, like the others, was distinguished only by the number on the door. Mr. Pedley inserted the key into the latch, and having opened the door, preceded us across the small lobby into the sitting-room.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as he entered, "this solves your problem." As he spoke, he pointed to the table, on which lay a small bunch of keys, including a latch key similar to the one that he had shown us. "But," he continued, "it is rather extraordinary. It just shows what a very disturbed state his mind must have been in."

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, looking critically about the room; "and as the latchkey is there, it raises the question whether the keys may have been out of his possession. Do you know what the various locked receptacles contain?"

"I know pretty well what is in the bureau; but as to the cupboard above it, I have never seen it open and don't know what he kept in it. I always assumed that he reserved it for his official papers. I will just see if anything seems to have been disturbed."

He unlocked and opened the flap of the old-fashioned bureau and pulled out the small drawers one after the other, examining the contents of each. Then he opened each of the larger drawers and turned over the

various articles in them. As he closed the last one, he reported "Everything seems to be in order—cheque-book, insurance policy, a few share certificates, and so on. Nothing seems to have been touched. Now we will try the cupboard, though I don't suppose its contents would be of much interest to anyone but himself. I wonder which is the key."

He looked at the keyhole and made a selection from the bunch, but it was evidently the wrong key. He tried another and yet another with a like result, until he had exhausted the resources of the bunch.

"It is very remarkable," he said. "None of these keys seems to fit. I wonder if he kept this particular key locked up or hidden. It wasn't in the bureau. Will you try what you can do?"

He handed the bunch to Thorndyke, who tried all the keys in succession with the same result. None of them was the key belonging to the lock. At length, having tried them all, he inserted one and turned it as far as it would go. Then he gave a sharp pull; and immediately the door came open.

"Why, it was unlocked after all!" exclaimed Mr. Pedley. "And there is nothing in it. That is why there was no key on the bunch. Apparently he didn't use the cupboard."

Thorndyke looked critically at the single vacant shelf, drawing his finger along it in two places and inspecting his finger-tips. Then he turned his attention to the lock, which was of the kind that is screwed on the inside of the door, leaving the bolt partly exposed. He took the bolt in his fingers and pushed it out and then in again; and by the way it moved I could see that the spring was broken. On this he made no comment, but remarked "The cupboard has been in use pretty lately. You can see the trace of a largish volume—possibly a box-file—on the shelf. There is hardly any dust there whereas the rest of the shelf is fairly thickly coated. However, that does not carry us very far; and the appearance of the rooms is otherwise quite normal."

"Quite," agreed Pedley. "But why shouldn't it be? You didn't suspect—" "I was merely testing the suggestion offered by the absence of the keys," said Thorndyke. "By the way, have you communicated with the Foreign Office?"

"No," was the reply, "but I suppose I ought to. What had I better say to them?"

"I should merely state the facts in the first instance. But you can, if you like, say that I definitely reject the idea of suicide."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Pedley. "Can I give any reasons for your opinion?"

"Not in the first place," replied Thorndyke. "I will consider the case and let you have a reasoned report in a day or two, which you can show to the Foreign Office and also to the insurance company."

Mr. Pedley looked as if he would have liked to ask some further questions, but as Thorndyke now made his way to the door, he followed in silence, pocketing the keys as we went out. He accompanied us down to the entry and there we left him, setting forth in the direction of South Kensington Station.

"It looked to me," said I, as soon as we were out of ear-shot, "as if that lock had been forced. What do you think?"

"Well," he answered, "locks get broken in ordinary use, but taking all the facts together, I think you are right. There are too many coincidences for reasonable probability. First, this man leaves his keys, including his latchkey, on the table, which is an extraordinary thing to do. On that very occasion, he is found dead under inexplicable circumstances. Then, of all the locks in his rooms, the one which happens to be broken is the one of which the key is not on the bunch. That is a very suspicious group of facts."

"It is," I agreed. "And if there is, as you say—though I can't imagine on what grounds—evidence of foul play, that makes it still more suspicious. But what is the next move? Have you anything in view?"

"The next move," he replied, "is to clear up the mystery of the dead man's movements on the day of his death. The railway receipt shows that on that day he travelled down somewhere into Essex. From that place, he took a long, cross-country journey of which the destination was a ditch by a lonely meadow in Buckinghamshire. The questions that we have to answer are, What was he doing in Essex? Why did he make that strange journey? Did he make it alone? and, if not, Who accompanied him?"

"Now, obviously, the first thing to do is to locate that place in Essex; and when we have done that, to go down there and see if we can pick up any traces of the dead man."

"That sounds like a pretty vague quest," said I; "but if we fail, the police may be able to find out some thing. By the way, we want a new Bradshaw<sup>2</sup>."

"An excellent suggestion, Jervis," said he. "I will get one as we go into the station."

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<sup>2</sup> 1839–1961 das Kursbuch der britischen Eisenbahn(en). B. L.

A few minutes later, as we sat on a bench waiting for our train, he passed to me the open copy of Bradshaw, with the crumpled railway receipt.

"You see," said he, "it was apparently 'G. B. Hlt.,' and the fare from London was four and ninepence. Here is *Great Buntingfield Halt*, the fare to which is four and ninepence. That must be the place. At any rate, we will give it a trial. May I take it that you are coming to lend a hand? I shall start in good time tomorrow morning."

I assented emphatically. Never had I been more completely in the dark than I was in this case, and seldom had I known Thorndyke to be more positive and confident. Obviously, he had something up his sleeve; and I was racked with curiosity as to what that some thing was.

On the following morning we made a fairly early start, and half-past ten found us seated in the train, looking out across a dreary waste of marshes, with the estuary of the Thames a mile or so distant. For the first time in my recollection Thorndyke had come unprovided with his inevitable "research case," but I noted that he had furnished himself with a botanist's vasculum—or tin collecting-case—and that his pocket bulged as if he had some other appliances concealed about his person. Also that he carried a walking-stick that was strange to me.

"This will be our destination, I think," he said, as the train slowed down; and sure enough it presently came to rest beside a little makeshift platform on which was displayed the name "Great Buntingfield Halt." We were the only passengers to alight, and the guard, having noted the fact, blew his whistle and dismissed the little station with a contemptuous wave of his flag.

Thorndyke lingered on the platform after the train had gone, taking a general survey of the country. Half a mile away to the north a small village was visible; while to the south the marshes stretched away to the river, their bare expanse unbroken save by a solitary building whose unredeemed hideousness proclaimed it a factory of some kind. Presently the station-master approached deferentially, and as we proffered our tickets, Thorndyke remarked: "You don't seem overburdened with traffic here."

"No, sir. You're right," was the emphatic reply. "'Tis a dead-alive place. Excepting the people at the Golomite Works and one now and then from the village, no one uses the halt. You're the first strangers I've seen for more than a month."

"Indeed," said Thorndyke. "But I think you are forgetting one. An acquaintance of mine came here last Tuesday—and by the same token, he hadn't got a ticket and had to pay his fare."

"Oh, I remember," the station-master replied. "You mean a gentleman with a scar on his cheek. But I don't count him as a stranger. He has been here before; I think he is connected with the works, as he always goes up their road."

"Do you happen to remember what time he came back?" Thorndyke asked.

"He didn't come back at all," was the reply. "I am sure of that, because I work the halt and level crossing by myself. I remember thinking it queer that he didn't come back, because the ticket that he had lost was a return. He must have gone back in the van belonging to the works—that one that you see coming towards the crossing."

As he spoke, he pointed to a van that was approaching down the factory road—a small covered van with the name "Golomite Works" painted, not on the cover, but on a board that was attached to it. The station-master walked towards the crossing to open the gates, and we followed; and when the van had passed, Thorndyke wished our friend "Good morning," and led the way along the road, looking about him with lively interest and rather with the air of one looking for something in particular.

We had covered about two-thirds of the distance to the factory when the road approached a wide ditch; and from the attention with which my friend regarded it, I suspected that this was the something for which he had been looking. It was, however, quite unapproachable, for it was bordered by a wide expanse of soft mud thickly covered with rushes and trodden deeply by cattle. Nevertheless, Thorndyke followed its margin, still looking about him keenly, until, about a couple of hundred yards from the factory, I observed a small decayed wooden staging or quay, apparently the remains of a vanished footbridge. Here Thorndyke halted and unbuttoning his coat, began to empty out his pockets, producing first the vasculum, then a small case containing three wide-mouthed bottles—both of which he deposited on the ground—and finally a sort of miniature landing-net, which he proceeded to screw on to the ferrule of his stick.

"I take it," said I, "that these proceedings are a blind to cover some sort of observations."

"Not at all," he replied. "We are engaged in the study of pond and ditch natural history, and a most fascinating and instructive study it is. The variety of forms is endless. This ditch, you observe, like the one at Bantree, is covered with a dense growth of duck-weed: but whereas that ditch was swarming with *succinea* here there is not a single *succinea* to



be seen.”

I grunted a sulkily assent, and watched suspiciously as he filled the bottles with water from the ditch and then made a preliminary sweep with his net.

“Here is a trial sample,” said he, holding the loaded net towards me. “Duck-weed, horn-weed, *Planorbis nautilus*, but no *succinea*. What do you think of it, Jervis?”

I looked distastefully at the repulsive mess, but yet with attention, for I realised that there was a meaning in his question. And then, suddenly, my attention sharpened. I picked out of the net a strand of dark green, plummy weed and examined it. “So this is horn-weed,” I said. “Then it was a piece of horn-weed that Cyrus Pedley held grasped in his hand; and now I come to think of it, I don’t remember seeing any horn-weed in the ditch at Bantree.”

He nodded approvingly. “There wasn’t any,” said he.

“And these little ammonite-like shells are just like those that I noticed at the bottom of Dr. Parton’s jar. But I don’t remember seeing any in the Bantree ditch.”

“There were none there,” said he. “And the duck-weed?”

“Oh, well,” I replied, “duck-weed is duck-weed, and there’s an end of it.” He chuckled aloud at my answer, and quoting:

“A primrose by the river’s brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,”

bestowed a part of the catch in the vasculum, then turned once more to the ditch and began to ply his net vigorously, emptying out each netful on the grass, looking it over quickly and then making a fresh sweep, dragging the net each time through the mud at the bottom. I watched him now with a new and very lively interest; for enlightenment was dawning, mingled with some self-contempt and much speculation as to how Thorndyke had got his start in this case.

But I was not the only interested watcher. At one of the windows of the factory I presently observed a man who seemed to be looking our way. After a few seconds’ inspection he disappeared, to reappear almost immediately with a pair of field-glasses, through which he took a long look at us. Then he disappeared again, but in less than a minute I saw him emerge from a side door and advance hurriedly towards us.

“We are going to have a notice of ejectment served on us, I fancy,” said I.

Thorndyke glanced quickly at the approaching stranger but continued to ply his net, working, as I noticed, methodically from left to right. When the man came within fifty yards he hailed us with a brusque inquiry as to what our business was. I went forward to meet him and, if possible, to detain him in conversation; but this plan failed, for he ignored me and bore straight down on Thorndyke.

"Now, then," said he, "what's the game? What are you doing here?"

Thorndyke was in the act of raising his net from the water, but he now suddenly let it fall to the bottom of the ditch while he turned to confront the stranger.

"I take it that you have some reason for asking," said he.

"Yes, I have," the other replied angrily and with a slight foreign accent that agreed with his appearance—he looked like a Slav of some sort. "This is private land. It belongs to the factory. I am the manager."

"The land is not enclosed," Thorndyke remarked.

"I tell you the land is private land," the fellow retorted excitedly. "You have no business here. I want to know what you are doing."

"My good sir," said Thorndyke, "there is no need to excite yourself. My friend and I are just collecting botanical and other specimens."

"How do I know that?" the manager demanded. He looked round suspiciously and his eye lighted on the vasculum. "What have you got in that thing?" he asked.

"Let him see what is in it," said Thorndyke, with a significant look at me.

Interpreting this as an instruction to occupy the man's attention for a few moments, I picked up the vasculum and placed myself so that he must turn his back to Thorndyke to look into it. I fumbled awhile with the catch, but at length opened the case and began to pick out the weed strand by strand. As soon as the stranger's back was turned Thorndyke raised his net and quickly picked out of it something which he slipped into his pocket. Then he advanced towards us, sorting out the contents of his net as he came.

"Well," he said, "you see we are just harmless naturalists. By the way, what did you think we were looking for?"

"Never mind what I thought," the other replied fiercely. "This is private land. You have no business here, and you have got to clear out."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "As you please. There are plenty of other ditches." He took the vasculum and the case of bottles, and having

put them in his pocket, unscrewed his net, wished the stranger "Good-morning," and turned back towards the station. The man stood watching us until we were near the level crossing, when he, too, turned back and retired to the factory.

"I saw you take something out of the net," said I. "What was it?"

He glanced back to make sure that the manager was out of sight. Then he put his hand in his pocket, drew it out closed, and suddenly opened it. In his palm lay a small gold dental plate with four teeth on it.

"My word!" I exclaimed; "this clinches the matter with a vengeance. That is certainly Cyrus Pedley's plate. It corresponds exactly to the description."

"Yes," he replied, "it is practically a certainty. Of course, it will have to be identified by the dentist who made it. But it is a foregone conclusion."

I reflected as we walked towards the station on the singular sureness with which Thorndyke had followed what was to me an invisible trail. Presently I said "What is puzzling me is how you got your start in this case. What gave you the first hint that it was homicide and not suicide or misadventure?"

"It was the old story, Jervis," he replied; "just a matter of observing and remembering apparently trivial details. Here, by the way, is a case in point."

He stopped and looked down at a set of tracks in the soft, earth road—apparently those of the van which we had seen cross the line. I followed the direction of his glance and saw the clear impression of a Blakey's protector, preceded by that of a gash in the tyre and followed by that of a projecting lump.

"But this is astounding!" I exclaimed. "It is almost certainly the same track that we saw in Ponder's Road."

"Yes," he agreed. "I noticed it as we came along." He brought out his spring-tape and notebook, and handing the latter to me, stooped and measured the distances between the three impressions. I wrote them down as he called them out, and then we compared them with the note made in Ponder's Road. The measurements were identical, as were the relative positions of the impressions.

"This is an important piece of evidence," said he. "I wish we were able to take casts, but the notes will be pretty conclusive. And now," he continued as we resumed our progress towards the station, "to return to your question. Parton's evidence at the inquest proved that Cyrus Pedley was drowned in water which contained duck-weed. He produced a specimen and we both saw it. We saw the duck-weed in it and also two

*Planorbis* shells. The presence of those two shells proved that the water in which he was drowned must have swarmed with them. We saw the body, and observed that one hand grasped a wisp of horn-weed. Then we went to view the ditch and we examined it. That was when I got, not a mere hint, but a crucial and conclusive fact. The ditch was covered with duck-weed, as we expected. But it was the wrong duck-weed."

"The wrong duck-weed!" I exclaimed. "Why, how many kinds of duck-weed are there?"

"There are four British species," he replied. "The Greater Duck-weed, the Lesser Duck-weed, the Thick Duck-weed, and the Ivy-leaved Duck-weed. Now the specimens in Parton's jar I noticed were the Greater Duck-weed, which is easily distinguished by its roots, which are multiple and form a sort of tassel. But the duck-weed on the Bantree ditch was the Lesser Duck weed, which is smaller than the other, but is especially distinguished by having only a single root. It is impossible to mistake one for the other.

"Here, then, was practically conclusive evidence of murder. Cyrus Pedley had been drowned in a pond or ditch. But not in the ditch in which his body was found. Therefore his dead body had been conveyed from some other place and put into this ditch. Such a proceeding furnishes *prima facie* evidence of murder. But as soon as the question was raised, there was an abundance of confirmatory evidence. There was no horn-weed or *Planorbis* shells in the ditch, but there were swarms of *succinea*, some of which would inevitably have been swallowed with the water. There was an obscure linear pressure mark on the arm of the dead man, just above the elbow: such a mark as might be made by a cord if a man were pinioned to render him helpless. Then the body would have had to be conveyed to this place in some kind of vehicle; and we found the traces of what appeared to be a motor-van, which had approached the cart-track on the wrong side of the road, as if to pull up there. It was a very conclusive mass of evidence; but it would have been useless but for the extraordinarily lucky chance that poor Pedley had lost his railway ticket and preserved the receipt; by which we were able to ascertain where he was on the day of his death and in what locality the murder was probably committed. But that is not the only way in which Fortune has favoured us. The station-master's information was, and will be, invaluable. Then it was most fortunate for us that there was only one ditch on the factory land; and that that ditch was accessible at only one point, which must have been the place where Pedley was drowned."

"The duck-weed in this ditch is, of course, the Greater Duck-weed?"

"Yes. I have taken some specimens as well as the horn-weed and shells."

He opened the vasculum and picked out one of the tiny plants, exhibiting the characteristic tassel of roots.

"I shall write to Parton and tell him to preserve the jar and the horn-weed if it has not been thrown away. But the duck-weed alone, produced in evidence, would be proof enough that Pedley was not drowned in the Bantree ditch; and the dental plate will show where he was drowned."

"Are you going to pursue the case any farther?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "I shall call at Scotland Yard on my way home and report what I have learned and what I can prove in court. Then I shall have finished with the case. The rest is for the police, and I imagine they won't have much difficulty. The circumstances seem to tell their own story. Pedley was employed by the Foreign Office, probably on some kind of secret service. I imagine that he discovered the existence of a gang of evil-doers—probably foreign revolutionaries, of whom we may assume that our friend the manager of the factory is one; that he contrived to associate himself with them and to visit the factory occasionally to ascertain what was made there besides Golomite—if Golomite is not itself an illicit product. Then I assume that he was discovered to be a spy, that he was lured down here; that he was pinioned and drowned some time on Tuesday night and his body put into the van and conveyed to a place miles away from the scene of his death, where it was deposited in a ditch apparently identical in character with that in which he was drowned. It was an extremely ingenious and well-thought-out plan. It seemed to have provided for every kind of inquiry, and it very narrowly missed being successful."

"Yes," I agreed. "But it didn't provide for Dr. John Thorndyke."

"It didn't provide for a searching examination of all the details," he replied; "and no criminal plan that I have ever met has done so. The completeness of the scheme is limited by the knowledge of the schemers, and, in practice, there is always something overlooked. In this case, the criminals were unlearned in the natural history of ditches."

Thorndyke's theory of the crime turned out to be substantially correct. The Golomite Works proved to be a factory where high explosives were made by a gang of cosmopolitan revolutionaries who were all known to the police. But the work of the latter was simplified by a detailed report which the dead man had deposited at his bank and which was discovered in time to enable the police to raid the factory and secure

the whole gang. When once they were under lock and key, further information was forthcoming; for a charge of murder against them jointly soon produced King's Evidence sufficient to procure a conviction of the three actual perpetrators of the murder.

## Mr. Ponting's Alibi

**T**horndyke looked doubtfully at the pleasant-faced athletic-looking clergyman who had just come in, bearing Mr. Brodribb's card as an explanatory credential.

"I don't quite see," said he, "why Mr. Brodribb sent you to me. It seems to be a purely legal matter which he could have dealt with himself, at least as well as I can."

"He appeared to think otherwise," said the clergyman. ("The Revd. Charles Meade" was written on the card.)

"At any rate," he added with a persuasive smile, "here I am, and I hope you are not going to send me away."

"I shouldn't offer that affront to my old friend Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, smiling in return; "so we may as well get to business, which, in the first place, involves the setting out of all the particulars. Let us begin with the lady who is the subject of the threats of which you spoke."

"Her name," said Mr. Meade, "is Miss Millicent Fawcett. She is a person of independent means, which she employs in works of charity. She was formerly a hospital sister, and she does a certain amount of voluntary work in the parish as a sort of district nurse. She has been a very valuable help to me and we have been close friends for several years; and I may add, as a very material fact, that she has consented to marry me in about two months' time. So that, you see, I am properly entitled to act on her behalf."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke. "You are an interested party. And now, as to the threats. What do they amount to?"

"That," replied Meade, "I can't tell you. I gathered quite by chance, from some words that she dropped, that she had been threatened. But she was unwilling to say more on the subject, as she did not take the matter seriously. She is not at all nervous. However, I told her I was taking advice; and I hope you will be able to extract more details from her. For my own part, I am decidedly uneasy."

"And as to the person or persons who have uttered the threats. Who are they? and out of what circumstances have the threats arisen?"

"The person is a certain William Ponting, who is Miss Fawcett's step-brother—if that is the right term. Her father married, as his second wife, a Mrs. Ponting, a widow with one son. This is the son. His mother died before Mr. Fawcett, and the latter, when he died, left his daughter, Millicent, sole heir to his property. That has always been a grievance to Ponting. But now he has another. Miss Fawcett made a will some years ago by which the bulk of her rather considerable property is left to two cousins, Frederick and James Barnett, the sons of her father's sister. A comparatively small amount goes to Ponting. When he heard this he was furious. He demanded a portion at least equal to the others, and has continued to make this demand from time to time. In fact, he has been extremely troublesome, and appears to be getting still more so. I gathered that the threats were due to her refusal to alter the will."

"But," said I, "doesn't he realise that her marriage will render that will null and void?"

"Apparently not," replied Meade; "nor, to tell the truth, did I realise it myself. Will she have to make a new will?"

"Certainly," I replied. "And as that new will may be expected to be still less favourable to him, that will presumably be a further grievance."

"One doesn't understand," said Thorndyke, "why he should excite himself so much about her will. What are their respective ages?"

"Miss Fawcett is thirty-six and Ponting is about forty."

"And what kind of man is he?" Thorndyke asked.

"A very unpleasant kind of man, I am sorry to say. Morose, rude, and violent-tempered. A spendthrift and a cadger. He has had quite a lot of money from Miss Fawcett—loans, which, of course, are never repaid. And he is none too industrious, though he has a regular job on the staff of a weekly paper. But he seems to be always in debt."

"We may as well note his address," said Thorndyke.

"He lives in a small flat in Bloomsbury—alone now, since he quarrelled with the man who used to share it with him. The address is 12 Borneo House, Devonshire Street."

"What sort of terms is he on with the cousins, his rivals?"

"No sort of terms now," replied Meade. "They used to be great friends. So much so that he took his present flat to be near them—they live in the adjoining flat, number 12 Sumatra House. But since the trouble about the wills he is hardly on speaking terms with them."

"They live together, then?"



"Yes, Frederick and his wife and James, who is unmarried. They are rather a queer lot, too. Frederick is a singer on the variety stage, and James accompanies him on various instruments. But they are both sporting characters of a kind, especially James, who does a bit on the turf and engages in other odd activities. Of course, their musical habits are a grievance to Ponting. He is constantly making complaints of their disturbing him at his work."

Mr. Meade paused and looked wistfully at Thorndyke, who was making full notes of the conversation.

"Well," said the latter, "we seem to have got all the facts excepting the most important—the nature of the threats. What do you want us to do?"

"I want you to see Miss Fawcett—with me, if possible—and induce her to give you such details as would enable you to put a stop to the nuisance. You couldn't come to-night, I suppose? It is a beast of a night, but I would take you there in a taxi—it is only to Tooting Bec. What do you say?" he added eagerly, as Thorndyke made no objection. "We are sure to find her in, because her maid is away on a visit to her home and she is alone in the house."

Thorndyke looked reflectively at his watch.

"Half-past eight," he remarked, "and half an hour to get there. These threats are probably nothing but ill-temper. But we don't know. There may be some thing more serious behind them; and, in law as in medicine, prevention is better than a post-mortem. What do you say, Jervis?"

What could I say? I would much sooner have sat by the fire with a book than turn out into the murk of a November night. But I felt it necessary, especially as Thorndyke had evidently made up his mind. Accordingly I made a virtue of necessity; and a couple of minutes later we had exchanged the cosy room for the chilly darkness of Inner Temple Lane, up which the gratified parson was speeding ahead to capture a taxi. At the top of the Lane we perceived him giving elaborate instructions to a taxi-driver as he held the door of the cab open; and Thorndyke, having carefully disposed of his research-case—which, to my secret amusement, he had caught up, from mere force of habit, as we started—took his seat, and Meade and I followed.

As the taxi trundled smoothly along the dark streets, Mr. Meade filled in the details of his previous sketch, and, in a simple, manly, unaffected way dilated upon his good fortune and the pleasant future that lay before him. It was not, perhaps, a romantic marriage, he admitted; but Miss Fawcett and he had been faithful friends for years, and faithful friends they would remain till death did them part. So he ran on, now

gleefully, now with a note of anxiety, and we listened by no means unsympathetically, until at last the cab drew up at a small, unpretentious house, standing in its own little grounds in a quiet suburban road.

"She is at home, you see," observed Meade, pointing to a lighted ground-floor window. He directed the taxi-driver to wait for the return journey, and striding up the path, delivered a characteristic knock at the door. As this brought no response, he knocked again and rang the bell. But still there was no answer, though twice I thought I heard the sound of a bolt being either drawn or shot softly. Again Mr. Meade plied the knocker more vigorously, and pressed the push of the bell, which we could hear ringing loudly within.

"This is very strange," said Meade, in an anxious tone, keeping his thumb pressed on the bell-push. "She can't have gone out and left the electric light on. What had we better do?"

"We had better enter without more delay," Thorndyke replied. "There were certainly sounds from within. Is there a side gate?"

Meade ran off towards the side of the house, and Thorndyke and I glanced at the lighted window, which was slightly open at the top.

"Looks a bit queer," I remarked, listening at the letter-box.

Thorndyke assented gravely, and at this moment Meade returned, breathing hard.

"The side gate is bolted inside," said he; and at this I recalled the stealthy sound of the bolt that I had heard. "What is to be done?"

Without replying, Thorndyke handed me his research-case, stepped across to the window, sprang up on the sill, drew down the upper sash and disappeared between the curtains into the room. A moment later the street door opened and Meade and I entered the hall. We glanced through the open doorway into the lighted room, and I noticed a heap of needlework thrown hastily on the dining-table. Then Meade switched on the hall light, and Thorndyke walked quickly past him to the half-open door of the next room. Before entering, he reached in and switched on the light; and as he stepped into the room he partly closed the door behind him.

"Don't come in here, Meade!" he called out. But the parson's eye, like my own, had seen something before the door closed: a great, dark stain on the carpet just within the threshold. Regardless of the admonition, he pushed the door open and darted into the room. Following him, I saw him rush forward, fling his arms up wildly, and with a dreadful, strangled cry, sink upon his knees beside a low couch on which a woman was lying.

"Merciful God!" he gasped. "She is dead! Is she dead, doctor? Can nothing be done?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "Nothing," he said in a low voice. "She is dead."

Poor Meade knelt by the couch, his hands clutching at his hair and his eyes riveted on the dead face, the very embodiment of horror and despair.

"God Almighty!" he exclaimed in the same strangled undertone. "How frightful! Poor, poor Millie! Dear, sweet friend!" Then suddenly—almost savagely—he turned to Thorndyke. "But it can't be, doctor! It is impossible—unbelievable. That, I mean!" and he pointed to the dead woman's right hand, which held an open razor.

Our poor friend had spoken my own thought. It was incredible that this refined, pious lady should have inflicted those savage wounds, that gaped scarlet beneath the waxen face. There, indeed, was the razor lying in her hand. But what was its testimony worth? My heart rejected it; but yet, unwillingly, I noted that the wounds seemed to support it; for they had been made from left to right, as they would have been if self-inflicted.

"It is hard to believe," said Thorndyke, "but there is only one alternative. Someone should acquaint the police at once."

"I will go," exclaimed Meade, starting up. "I know the way and the cab is there." He looked once more with infinite pity and affection at the dead woman. "Poor, sweet girl!" he murmured. "If we can do no more for you, we can defend your memory from calumny and call upon the God of Justice to right the innocent and punish the guilty."

With these words and a mute farewell to his dead friend, he hurried from the room, and immediately afterwards we heard the street door close.

As he went out, Thorndyke's manner changed abruptly. He had been deeply moved—as who would not have been—by this awful tragedy that had in a moment shattered the happiness of the genial, kindly parson. Now he turned to me with a face set and stern. "This is an abominable affair, Jervis," he said in an ominously quiet voice.

"You reject the suggestion of suicide, then?" said I, with a feeling of relief that surprised me.

"Absolutely," he replied. "Murder shouts at us from everything that meets our eye. Look at this poor woman, in her trim nurse's dress, with her unfinished needlework lying on the table in the next room and that preposterous razor loose in her limp hand. Look at the savage

wounds. Four of them, and the first one mortal. The great bloodstain by the door, the great bloodstain on her dress from the neck to the feet. The gashed collar, the cap-string cut right through. Note that the bleeding had practically ceased when she lay down. That is a group of visible facts that is utterly inconsistent with the idea of suicide. But we are wasting time. Let us search the premises thoroughly. The murderer has pretty certainly got away, but as he was in the house when we arrived, any traces will be quite fresh."

As he spoke he took his electric lamp from the research-case and walked to the door.

"We can examine this room later," he said, "but we had better look over the house. If you will stay by the stairs and watch the front and back doors, I will look through the upper rooms."

He ran lightly up the stairs while I kept watch below, but he was absent less than a couple of minutes.

"There is no one there," he reported, "and as there is no basement we will just look at this floor and then examine the grounds."

After a rapid inspection of the ground-floor rooms, including the kitchen, we went out by the back door, which was unbolted, and inspected the grounds. These consisted of a largish garden with a small orchard at the side. In the former we could discover no traces of any kind, but at the end of the path that crossed the orchard we came on a possible clue. The orchard was enclosed by a five-foot fence, the top of which bristled with hooked nails; and at the point opposite to the path, Thorndyke's lantern brought into view one or two wisps of cloth caught on the hooks.

"Someone has been over here," said Thorndyke, "but as this is an orchard, there is nothing remarkable in the fact. However, there is no fruit on the trees now, and the cloth looks fairly fresh. There are two kinds, you notice: a dark blue and a black and white mixture of some kind."

"Corresponding, probably, to the coat and trousers," I suggested.

"Possibly," he agreed, taking from his pocket a couple of the little seed-envelopes of which he always carried a supply. Very delicately he picked the tiny wisps of cloth from the hooks and bestowed each kind in a separate envelope. Having pocketed these, he leaned over the fence and threw the light of his lamp along the narrow lane or alley that divided the orchard from the adjoining premises. It was ungravelled and covered with a growth of rank grass, which suggested that it was little frequented. But immediately below was a small patch of bare earth, and

on this was a very distinct impression of a foot, covering several less distinct prints.

"Several people have been over here at different times," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed. "But that sharp foot print belongs to the last one over, and he is our concern. We had better not confuse the issues by getting over ourselves. We will mark the spot and explore from the other end." He laid his handkerchief over the top of the fence and we then went back to the house.

"You are going to take a plaster cast, I suppose?" said I; and as he assented, I fetched the research-case from the drawing-room. Then we fixed the catch of the front-door latch and went out, drawing the door to after us.

We found the entrance to the alley about sixty yards from the gate, and entering it, walked slowly forwards, scanning the ground as we went. But the bright lamplight showed nothing more than the vague marks of trampling feet on the grass until we came to the spot marked by the handkerchief on the fence.

"It is a pity," I remarked, "that this footprint has obliterated the others."

"On the other hand," he replied, "this one, which is the one that interests us, is remarkably clear and characteristic: a circular heel and a rubber sole of a recognisable pattern mended with a patch of cement paste. It is a footprint that could be identified beyond a doubt."

As he was speaking, he took from the research-case the water-bottle, plaster-tin, rubber mixing-bowl and spoon, and a piece of canvas with which to "reinforce" the cast. Rapidly, he mixed a bowlful—extra thick, so that it should set quickly and hard—dipped the canvas into it, poured the remainder into the footprint, and laid the canvas on it.

"I will get you to stay here, Jervis," said he, "until the plaster has set. I want to examine the body rather more thoroughly before the police arrive, particularly the back."

"Why the back?" I asked.

"Did not the appearance of the body suggest to you the advisability of examining the back?" he asked, and then, without waiting for a reply, he went off, leaving the inspection-lamp with me.

His words gave me matter for profound thought during my short vigil. I recalled the appearance of the dead woman very vividly—indeed, I am not likely ever to forget it—and I strove to connect that appearance with his desire to examine the back of the corpse. But there seemed to be no connection at all. The visible injuries were in front, and I had seen nothing to suggest the existence of any others. From time to time I

tested the condition of the plaster, impatient to rejoin my colleague but fearful of cracking the thin cast by raising it prematurely. At length the plaster seemed to be hard enough, and trusting to the strength of the canvas, I prised cautiously at the edge, when, to my relief, the brittle plate came up safely and I lifted it clear. Wrapping it carefully in some spare rag, I packed it in the research-case, and then, taking this and the lantern, made my way back to the house.

When I had let down the catch and closed the front door, I went to the drawing-room, where I found Thorndyke stooping over the dark stain at the threshold and scanning the floor as if in search of something. I reported the completion of the cast and then asked him what he was looking for.

"I am looking for a button," he replied. "There is one missing from the back; the one to which the collar was fastened."

"Is it of any importance?" I asked.

"It is important to ascertain when and where it became detached," he replied. "Let us have the inspection-lamp."

I gave him the lamp, which he placed on the floor, turning it so that its beam of light travelled along the surface. Stooping to follow the light, I scrutinised the floor minutely but in vain.

"It may not be here at all," said I; but at that moment the bright gleam, penetrating the darkness under a cabinet, struck a small object close to the wall. In a moment I had thrown myself prone on the carpet, and reaching under the cabinet, brought forth a largish mother-of-pearl button.

"You notice," said Thorndyke, as he examined it, "that the cabinet is near the window, at the opposite end of the room to the couch. But we had better see that it is the right button."

He walked slowly towards the couch, still stooping and searching the floor with the light. The corpse, I noticed, had been turned on its side, exposing the back and the displaced collar. Through the strained button-hole of the latter Thorndyke passed the button without difficulty.

"Yes," he said, "that is where it came from. You will notice that there is a similar one in front. By the way," he continued, bringing the lamp close to the surface of the grey serge dress, "I picked off one or two hairs—animal hairs; cat and dog they looked like. Here are one or two more. Will you hold the lamp while I take them off?"

"They are probably from some pets of hers," I remarked, as he picked them off with his forceps and deposited them in one of the invaluable

seed-envelopes. "Spinsters are a good deal addicted to pets, especially cats and dogs."

"Possibly," he replied. "But I could see none in front, where you would expect to find them, and there seem to be none on the carpet. Now let us replace the body as we found it and just have a look at our material before the police arrive. I expected them here before this."

We turned the body back into its original position, and taking the research-case and the lamp, went into the dining-room. Here Thorndyke rapidly set up the little travelling microscope, and bringing forth the seed-envelopes, began to prepare slides from the contents of some while I prepared the others. There was time only for a very hasty examination, which Thorndyke made as soon as the specimens were mounted.

"The clothing," he reported, with his eye at the microscope, "is woollen in both cases. Fairly good quality. The one a blue serge, apparently indigo dyed; the other a mixture of black and white, no other colour. Probably a fine tabby or a small shepherd's plaid."

"Serge coat and shepherd's plaid trousers," I suggested. "Now see what the hairs are." I handed him the slide, on which I had roughly mounted the collection in oil of lavender, and he placed it on the stage.

"There are three different kinds of hairs here," he reported, after a rapid inspection. "Some are obviously from a cat—a smoky Persian. Others are long, rather fine tawny hairs from a dog. Probably a Pekinese. But there are two that I can't quite place. They look like monkey's hairs, but they are a very unusual colour. There is a perceptible greenish tint, which is extremely uncommon in mammalian hairs. But I hear the taxi approaching. We need not be expansive to the local police as to what we have observed. This will probably be a case for the C. I. D."

I went out into the hall and opened the door as Meade came up the path, followed by two men; and as the latter came into the light, I was astonished to recognise in one of them our old friend, Detective-Superintendent Miller, the other being, apparently, the station superintendent.

"We have kept Mr. Meade a long time," said Miller, "but we knew you were here, so the time wouldn't be wasted. Thought it best to get a full statement before we inspected the premises. How do, doctor?" he added, shaking hands with Thorndyke. "Glad to see you here. I suppose you have got all the facts. I understood so from Mr. Meade."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "we have all the antecedents of the case, and we arrived within a few minutes of the death of the deceased."

"Ha!" exclaimed Miller. "Did you? And I expect you have formed an opinion on the question as to whether the injuries were self-inflicted?"

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that it would be best to act on the assumption that they were not—and to act promptly."

"Precisely," Miller agreed emphatically. "You mean that we had better find out at once where a certain person was at—What time did you arrive here?"

"It was two minutes to nine when the taxi stopped," replied Thorndyke; "and, as it is now only twenty-five minutes to ten, we have good time if Mr. Meade can spare us the taxi. I have the address."

"The taxi is waiting for you," said Mr. Meade, "and the man has been paid for both journeys. I shall stay here in case the superintendent wants anything." He shook our hands warmly, and as we bade him farewell and noted the dazed, despairing expression and lines of grief that had already eaten into the face that had been so blithe and hopeful, we both thought bitterly of the few fatal minutes that had made us too late to save the wreckage of his life.

We were just turning away when Thorndyke paused and again faced the clergyman. "Can you tell me," he asked, "whether Miss Fawcett had any pets? Cats, dogs, or other animals?"

Meade looked at him in surprise, and Superintendent Miller seemed to prick up his ears. But the former answered simply: "No. She was not very fond of animals; she reserved her affections for men and women."

Thorndyke nodded gravely, and picking up the research-case walked slowly out of the room, Miller and I following.

As soon as the address had been given to the driver and we had taken our seats in the taxi, the superintendent opened the examination-in-chief.

"I see you have got your box of magic with you, doctor," he said, cocking his eye at the research-case. "Any luck?"

"We have secured a very distinctive footprint," replied Thorndyke, "but it may have no connection with the case."

"I hope it has," said Miller. "A good cast of a footprint which you can let the jury compare with the boot is first-class evidence." He took the cast, which I had produced from the research-case, and turning it over tenderly and gloatingly, exclaimed: "Beautiful! beautiful! Absolutely distinctive! There can't be another exactly like it in the world. It is as good as a fingerprint. For the Lord's sake take care of it. It means a conviction if we can find the boot."



The superintendent's efforts to engage Thorndyke in discussion were not very successful, and the conversational brunt was borne by me. For we both knew my colleague too well to interrupt him if he was disposed to be meditative. And such was now his disposition. Looking at him as he sat in his corner, silent but obviously wrapped in thought, I knew that he was mentally sorting out the data and testing the hypotheses that they yielded.

"Here we are," said Miller, opening the door as the taxi stopped. "Now what are we going to say? Shall I tell him who I am?"

"I expect you will have to," replied Thorndyke, "if you want him to let us in."

"Very well," said Miller. "But I shall let you do the talking, because I don't know what you have got up your sleeve."

Thorndyke's prediction was verified literally. In response to the third knock, with an obbligate accompaniment on the bell, wrathful footsteps—I had no idea footsteps could be so expressive—advanced rapidly along the lobby, the door was wrenched open—but only for a few inches—and an angry, hairy face appeared in the opening.

"Now then," the hairy person demanded, "what the deuce do you want?"

"Are you Mr. William Ponting?" the superintendent inquired.

"What the devil is that to do with you?" was the genial answer—in the Scottish mode.

"We have business," Miller began persuasively.

"So have I," the presumable Ponting replied, "and mine won't wait."

"But our business is very important," Miller urged.

"So is mine," snapped Ponting, and would have shut the door but for Miller's obstructing foot, at which he kicked viciously, but with unsatisfactory results, as he was shod in light slippers, whereas the superintendent's boots were of constabulary solidity.

"Now, look here," said Miller, dropping his conciliatory manner very completely, "you'd better stop this nonsense. I am a police officer, and I am going to come in"; and with this he inserted a massive shoulder and pushed the door open.

"Police officer, are you?" said Ponting. "And what might your business be with me?"

"That is what I have been waiting to tell you," said Miller. "But we don't want to do our talking here."

"Very well," growled Ponting. "Come in. But understand that I am busy. I've been interrupted enough this evening."

He led the way into a rather barely furnished room with a wide bay-window in which was a table fitted with a writing-slope and lighted by an electric standard lamp. A litter of manuscript explained the nature of his business and his unwillingness to receive casual visitors. He sulkily placed three chairs, and then, seating himself, glowered at Thorndyke and me.

"Are they police officers, too?" he demanded.

"No," replied Miller, "they are medical gentlemen. Perhaps you had better explain the matter, doctor," he added, addressing Thorndyke, who thereupon opened the proceedings.

"We have called," said he, "to inform you that Miss Millicent Fawcett died suddenly this evening."

"The devil!" exclaimed Ponting. "That's sudden with a vengeance. What time did this happen?"

"About a quarter to nine."

"Extraordinary!" muttered Ponting. "I saw her only the day before yesterday, and she seemed quite well then. What did she die of?"

"The appearances," replied Thorndyke, "suggest suicide."

"Suicide!" gasped Ponting. "Impossible! I can't believe it. Do you mean to tell me she poisoned herself?"

"No," said Thorndyke, "it was not poison. Death was caused by injuries to the throat inflicted with a razor."

"Good God!" exclaimed Ponting. "What a horrible thing! But," he added, after a pause, "I can't believe she did it herself, and I don't. Why should she commit suicide? She was quite happy, and she was just going to be married to that mealy-faced parson. And a razor, too! How do you suppose she came by a razor? Women don't shave. They smoke and drink and swear, but they haven't taken to shaving yet. I don't believe it. Do you?"

He glared ferociously at the superintendent who replied: "I am not sure that I do. There's a good deal in what you've just said, and the same objections had occurred to us. But you see, if she didn't do it herself, someone else must have done it, and we should like to find out who that someone is. So we begin by ascertaining where any possible persons may have been at a quarter to nine this evening."

Ponting smiled like an infuriated cat. "So you think me a possible person, do you?" said he.

"Everyone is a possible person," Miller replied blandly, "especially when he is known to have uttered threats."

The reply sobered Ponting considerably. For a few moments he sat, looking reflectively at the superintendent; then, in comparatively quiet tones, he said: "I have been working here since six o'clock. You can see the stuff for yourself, and I can prove that it has been written since six."

The superintendent nodded, but made no comment, and Ponting gazed at him fixedly, evidently thinking hard. Suddenly he broke into a harsh laugh.

"What is the joke?" Miller inquired stolidly.

"The joke is that I have got another alibi—a very complete one. There are compensations in every evil. I told you I had been interrupted in my work already this evening. It was those fools next door, the Barnetts—cousins of mine. They are musicians, save the mark! Variety stage, you know. Funny songs and jokes for mental defectives. Well, they practise their infernal ditties in their rooms, and the row comes into mine, and an accursed nuisance it is. However, they have agreed not to practise on Thursdays and Fridays—my busy nights—and usually they don't. But to-night, just as I was in the thick of my writing, I suddenly heard the most unholy din; that idiot, Fred Barnett, bawling one of his imbecile songs—'When the pigs their wings have folded,' and balderdash of that sort—and the other donkey accompanying him on the clarinet, if you please! I stuck it for a minute or two. Then I rushed round to their flat and raised Cain with the bell and knocker. Mrs. Fred opened the door, and I told her what I thought of it. Of course she was very apologetic, said they had forgotten that it was Thursday and promised that he would make her husband stop. And I suppose she did, for by the time I got back to my rooms the row had ceased. I could have punched the whole lot of them into a jelly, but it was all for the best as it turns out."

"What time was it when you went round there?" asked Miller.

"About five minutes past nine," replied Ponting. The church bell had struck nine when the row began."

"Hm!" grunted Miller, glancing at Thorndyke. "Well, that is all we wanted to know, so we need not keep you from your work any longer."

He rose, and being let out with great alacrity, stumped down the stairs, followed by Thorndyke and me. As we came out into the street, he turned to us with a deeply disappointed expression.

"Well," he exclaimed, "this is a suck-in. I was in hopes that we had pounced on our quarry before he had got time to clear away the traces. And now we've got it all to do. You can't get round an alibi of that sort."

I glanced at Thorndyke to see how he was taking this unexpected check. He was evidently puzzled, and I could see by the expression of concentration in his face that he was trying over the facts and inferences in new combinations to meet this new position. Probably he had noticed, as I had, that Ponting was wearing a tweed suit, and that therefore the shreds of clothing from the fence could not be his unless he had changed. But the alibi put him definitely out of the picture, and, as Miller had said, we now had nothing to give us a lead.

Suddenly Thorndyke came out of his reverie and addressed the superintendent.

"We had better put this alibi on the basis of ascertained fact. It ought to be verified at once. At present we have only Ponting's unsupported statement."

"It isn't likely that he would risk telling a lie," Miller replied gloomily.

"A man who is under suspicion of murder will risk a good deal," Thorndyke retorted, "especially if he is guilty. I think we ought to see Mrs. Barnett before there is any opportunity of collusion."

"There has been time for collusion already," said Miller. "Still, you are quite right, and I see there is a light in their sitting-room, if that is it, next to Ponting's. Let us go up and settle the matter now. I shall leave you to examine the witness and say what you think it best to say."

We entered the building and ascended the stairs to the Barnetts' flat, where Miller rang the bell and executed a double knock. After a short interval the door was opened and a woman looked out at us inquisitively.

"Are you Mrs. Frederick Barnett?" Thorndyke inquired. The woman admitted her identity in a tone of some surprise, and Thorndyke explained: "We have called to make a few inquiries concerning your neighbour, Mr. Ponting, and also about certain matters relating to your family. I am afraid it is a rather unseasonable hour for a visit, but as the affair is of some importance and time is an object, I hope you will overlook that."

Mrs. Barnett listened to this explanation with a puzzled and rather suspicious air. After a few moments' hesitation, she said: "I think you had better see my husband, if you will wait here a moment I will go and tell him." With this, she pushed the door to, without actually closing it, and we heard her retire along the lobby, presumably to the sitting-room. For, during the short colloquy, I had observed a door at the end of the lobby, partly open, through which I could see the end of a table covered with a red cloth.

The "moment" extended to a full minute, and the superintendent began to show signs of impatience.

"I don't see why you didn't ask her the simple question straight out," he said, and the same question had occurred to me. But at this point footsteps were heard approaching, the door opened, and a man confronted us, holding the door open with his left hand, his right being wrapped in a handkerchief. He looked suspiciously from one to the other of us, and asked stiffly: "What is it that you want to know? And would you mind telling me who you are?"

"My name is Thorndyke," was the reply. "I am the legal adviser of the Reverend Charles Meade, and these two gentlemen are interested parties. I want to know what you can tell me of Mr. Ponting's recent movements—to-day, for instance. When did you last see him?"

The man appeared to be about to refuse any conversation, but suddenly altered his mind, reflected for a few moments, and then replied: "I saw him from my window at his—they are bay-windows—about half-past eight. But my wife saw him later than that. If you will come in she can tell you the time exactly." He led the way along the lobby with an obviously puzzled air. But he was not more puzzled than I, or than Miller, to judge by the bewildered glance that the superintendent cast at me, as he followed our host along the lobby. I was still meditating on Thorndyke's curiously indirect methods when the sitting-room door was opened; and then I got a minor surprise of another kind. When I had last looked into the room, the table had been covered by a red cloth. It was now bare; and when we entered the room I saw that the red cover had been thrown over a side table, on which was some bulky and angular object. Apparently it had been thought desirable to conceal that object, whatever it was, and as we took our seats beside the bare table, my mind was busy with conjectures as to what that object could be.

Mr. Barnett repeated Thorndyke's question to his wife, adding: "I think it must have been a little after nine when Ponting came round. What do you say?"

"Yes," she replied, "it would be, for I heard it strike nine just before you began your practice, and he came a few minutes after."

"You see," Barnett explained, "I am a singer, and my brother, here, accompanies me on various instruments, and of course we have to practise. But we don't practise on the nights when Ponting is busy—Thursdays and Fridays—as he said that the music disturbed him. To-night, however, we made a little mistake. I happen to have got a new song

that I am anxious to get ready—it has an illustrative accompaniment on the clarinet, which my brother will play. We were so much taken up with the new song that we all forgot what day of the week it was, and started to have a good practice. But before we had got through the first verse, Ponting came round, battering at the door like a madman. My wife went out and pacified him, and of course we shut down for the evening.”

While Mr. Barnett was giving his explanation, I looked about the room with vague curiosity. Somehow—I cannot tell exactly how—I was sensible of something queer in the atmosphere of this place; of a certain indefinite sense of tension. Mrs. Barnett looked pale and flurried. Her husband, in spite of his volubility, seemed ill at ease, and the brother, who sat huddled in an easy-chair, nursing a dark-coloured Persian cat, stared into the fire, and neither moved nor spoke. And again I looked at the red table-cloth and wondered what it covered.

“By the way,” said Barnett, after a brief pause, “what is the point of these inquiries of yours? About Ponting, I mean. What does it matter to you where he was this evening?”

As he spoke, he produced a pipe and tobacco-pouch. and proceeded to fill the former, holding it in his bandaged right hand and filling it with his left. The facility with which he did this suggested that he was left-handed, an inference that was confirmed by the ease with which he struck the match with his left hand, and by the fact that he wore a wrist-watch on his right wrist.

“Your question is a perfectly natural one,” said Thorndyke. “The answer to it is that a very terrible thing has happened. Miss Millicent Fawcett, who is, I think, a connection of yours, met her death this evening under circumstances of grave suspicion. She died, either by her own hand or by the hand of a murderer, a few minutes before nine o’clock. Hence it has become necessary to ascertain the whereabouts at that time of any persons on whom suspicion might reasonably fall.”

“Good God!” exclaimed Barnett. “What a shocking thing!”

The exclamation was followed by a deep silence, amidst which I could hear the barking of a dog in an adjacent room, the unmistakable sharp, treble yelp of a Pekinese. And again I seemed to be aware of a strange sense of tension in the occupants of this room. On hearing Thorndyke’s answer, Mrs. Barnett had turned deadly pale and let her head fall forward on her hand. Her husband had sunk on to a chair, and he, too, looked pale and deeply shocked, while the brother continued to stare silently into the fire.

At this moment Thorndyke astonished me by an exhibition of what seemed—under the tragic circumstances—the most outrageous bad manners and bad taste. Rising from his chair with his eyes fixed on a print which hung on the wall above the red-covered table, he said: “That looks like one of Cameron’s etchings,” and forthwith stepped across the room to examine it, resting his hand, as he leaned forward, on the object covered by the cloth.

“Mind where you are putting your hand, sir!” Fred Barnett called out, springing to his feet.

Thorndyke looked down at his hand, and deliberately raising a corner of the cloth, looked under. “There is no harm done,” he remarked quietly, letting the cloth drop; and with another glance at the print, he went back to his chair.

Once more a deep silence fell upon the room, and I had a vague feeling that the tension had increased. Mrs. Barnett was as white as a ghost and seemed to catch at her breath. Her husband watched her with a wild, angry expression and smoked furiously, while the superintendent—also conscious of something abnormal in the atmosphere of the room—looked furtively from the woman to the man and from him to Thorndyke.

Yet again in the silence the shrill barking of the Pekinese dog broke out, and somehow that sound connected itself in my mind with the Persian cat that dozed on the knees of the immovable man by the fire. I looked at the cat and at the man, and even as I looked, I was startled by a most extraordinary apparition. Above the man’s shoulder, slowly rose a little round head like the head of a diminutive, greenish-brown man. Higher and higher the tiny monkey raised itself, resting on its little hands to peer at the strangers. Then, with sudden coyness, like a shy baby, it popped down out of sight.

I was thunderstruck. The cat and the dog I had noted merely as a curious coincidence. But the monkey—and such an unusual monkey, too—put coincidences out of the question. I stared at the man in positive stupefaction. Somehow that man was connected with that unforgettable figure lying upon the couch miles away. But how? When that deed of horror was doing, he had been here in this very room. Yet, in some way, he had been concerned in it. And suddenly a suspicion dawned upon me that Thorndyke was waiting for the actual perpetrator to arrive.

“It is a most ghastly affair,” Barnett repeated presently in a husky voice. Then, after a pause, he asked: “Is there any sort of evidence as to whether she killed herself or was killed by somebody else?”

"I think that my friend, here, Detective-Superintendent Miller, has decided that she was murdered." He looked at the bewildered superintendent, who replied with an inarticulate grunt.

"And is there any clue as to who the—the murderer may be? You spoke of suspected persons just now."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "there is an excellent clue, if it can only be followed up. We found a most unmistakable footprint; and what is more, we took a plaster cast of it. Would you like to see the cast?"

Without waiting for a reply, he opened the research-case and took out the cast, which he placed in my hands.

"Just take it round and show it to them," he said.

The superintendent had witnessed Thorndyke's amazing proceedings with an astonishment that left him speechless. But now he sprang to his feet, and, as I walked round the table, he pressed beside me to guard the precious cast from possible injury. I laid it carefully down on the table, and as the light fell on it obliquely, it presented a most striking appearance—that of a snow-white boot-sole on which the unshapely patch, the circular heel, and the marks of wear were clearly visible.

The three spectators gathered round, as near as the superintendent would let them approach, and I observed them closely, assuming that this incomprehensible move of Thorndyke's was a device to catch one or more of them off their guard. Fred Barnett looked at the cast stolidly enough, though his face had gone several shades paler, but Mrs. Barnett stared at it with starting eyeballs and dropped jaw—the very picture of horror and dismay. As to James Barnett, whom I now saw clearly for the first time, he stood behind the woman with a singularly scared and haggard face, and his eyes riveted on the white boot-sole. And now I could see that he wore a suit of blue serge and that the front both of his coat and waistcoat were thickly covered with the shed hairs of his pets. There was something very uncanny about this group of persons gathered around that accusing footprint, all as still and rigid as statues and none uttering a sound. But something still more uncanny followed. Suddenly the deep silence of the room was shattered by the shrill notes of a clarinet, and a brassy voice burst forth:

"When the pigs their wings have folded  
And the cows are in their nest—"

We all spun round in amazement, and at the first glance the mystery of the crime was solved. There stood Thorndyke with the red table-cover at his feet, and at his side, on the small table, a massively-constructed



phonograph of the kind used in offices for dictating letters, but fitted with a convoluted metal horn in place of the rubber ear-tubes.

A moment of astonished silence was succeeded by a wild confusion. Mrs. Barnett uttered a piercing shriek and fell back on to a chair, her husband broke away and rushed at Thorndyke, who instantly gripped his wrist and pinioned him, while the superintendent, taking in the situation at a glance, fastened on the unresisting James and forced him down into a chair. I ran round, and having stopped the machine—for the preposterous song was hideously incongruous with the tragedy that was enacting—went to Thorndyke's assistance and helped him to remove his prisoner from the neighbourhood of the instrument.

"Superintendent Miller," said Thorndyke, still maintaining a hold on his squirming captive, "I believe you are a justice of the peace?"

"Yes," was the reply, "*ex officio*."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I accuse these three persons of being concerned in the murder of Miss Millicent Fawcett; Frederick Barnett as the principal who actually committed the murder, James Barnett as having aided him by holding the arms of the deceased, and Mrs. Barnett as an accessory before the fact in that she worked this phonograph for the purpose of establishing a false alibi."

"I knew nothing about it!" Mrs. Barnett shrieked hysterically. "They never told me why they wanted me to work the thing."

"We can't go into that now," said Miller. "You will be able to make your defence at the proper time and place. Can one of you go for assistance or must I blow my whistle?"

"You had better go, Jervis," said Thorndyke. "I can hold this man until reinforcements arrive. Send a constable up and then go on to the station. And leave the outer door ajar."

I followed these directions, and having found the police station, presently returned to the flat with four constables and a sergeant in two taxis.

When the prisoners had been removed, together with the three animals—the latter in charge of a zoophilist constable—we searched the bedrooms. Frederick Barnett had changed his clothing completely, but in a locked drawer—the lock of which Thorndyke picked neatly, to the superintendent's undisguised admiration—we found the discarded garments, including a pair of torn shepherd's plaid trousers, covered with blood stains, and a new, empty razor-case. These things, together with the wax cylinder of the phonograph, Miller made up into a neat parcel and took away with him.

"Of course," said I, as we walked homewards, "the general drift of this case is quite obvious. But it seemed to me that you went to the Barnetts' flat with a definite purpose already formed, and with a definite suspicion in your mind. Now, I don't see how you came to suspect the Barnetts."

"I think you will," he replied, "if you will recall the incidents in their order from the beginning, including poor Meade's preliminary statement. To begin with the appearances of the body: the suggestion of suicide was transparently false. To say nothing of its incongruity with the character and circumstances of the deceased and the very unlikely weapon used, there were the gashed collar and the cut cap-string. As you know, it is a well-established rule that suicides do not damage their clothing. A man who cuts his own throat doesn't cut his collar. He takes it off. He removes all obstructions. Naturally, for he wishes to complete the act as easily and quickly as possible, and he has time for preparation. But the murderer must take things as he finds them and execute his purpose as best he can.

"But further; the wounds were inflicted near the door, but the body was on the couch at the other end of the room. We saw, from the absence of bleeding, that she was dying—in fact, apparently dead—when she lay down. She must therefore have been carried to the couch after the wounds were inflicted.

"Then there were the blood-stains. They were all in front, and the blood had run down vertically. Then she must have been standing upright while the blood was flowing. Now there were four wounds, and the first one was mortal, it divided the common carotid artery and the great veins. On receiving that wound she would ordinarily have fallen down. But she did not fall, or there would have been a blood-stain across the neck. Why did she not fall? The obvious suggestion was that someone was holding her up. This suggestion was confirmed by the absence of cuts on her hands—which would certainly have been cut if someone had not been holding them. It was further confirmed by the rough crumpling of the collar at the back: so rough that the button was torn off. And we found that button near the door.

"Further, there were the animal hairs. They were on the back only. There were none on the front—where they would have been if derived from the animals—or anywhere else. And we learned that she kept no animals. All these appearances pointed to the presence of two persons, one of whom stood behind her and held her arms while the other stood in front and committed the murder. The cloth on the fence supported

this view, being probably derived from two different pairs of trousers. The character of the wounds made it nearly certain that the murderer was left-handed.

"While we were returning in the cab, I reflected on these facts and considered the case generally. First, what was the motive? There was nothing to suggest robbery, nor was it in the least like a robber's crime. What other motive could there be? Well, here was a comparatively rich woman who had made a will in favour of certain persons, and she was going to be married. On her marriage the will would automatically become void, and she was not likely to make another will so favourable to those persons. Here, then, was a possible motive, and that motive applied to Ponting, who had actually uttered threats and was obviously suspect.

"But, apart from those threats, Ponting was not the principal suspect, for he benefited only slightly under the will. The chief beneficiaries were the Barnetts, and Miss Fawcett's death would benefit them, not only by securing the validity of the will, but by setting the will into immediate operation. And there were two of them. They therefore fitted the circumstances better than Ponting did. And when we came to interview Ponting, he went straight out of the picture. His manuscript would probably have cleared him—with his editor's confirmation. But the other alibi was conclusive.

"What instantly struck me, however, was that Ponting's alibi was also an alibi for the Barnetts. But there was this difference: Ponting had been seen; the Barnetts had only been heard. Now, it has often occurred to me that a very effective false alibi could be worked with a gramophone or a phonograph—especially with one on which one can make one's own records. This idea now recurred to me; and at once it was supported by the appearance of an arranged effect. Ponting was known to be at work. It was practically certain that a blast of 'music' would bring him out. Then he would be available, if necessary, as a witness to prove an alibi. It seemed to be worth while to investigate.

"When we came to the flat we encountered a man with an injured hand—the right, it would have been more striking if it had been his left. But it presently turns out that he is left-handed; which is still more striking as a coincidence. This man is extraordinarily ready to answer questions which most persons would have refused to answer at all. Those answers contain the alibi.

"Then there was the incident of the table—I think you noticed it. That cover was on the large table when we arrived, but it was taken off and

thrown over something, evidently to conceal it. But I need not pursue the details. When I had seen the cat, heard the dog, and then seen the monkey, I determined to see what was under the table-cover; and finding that it was a phonograph with the cylinder record still on the drum, I decided to 'go Nap' and chance making a mistake. For until we had tried the record, the alibi remained. If it had failed, I should have advised Miller to hold a boot parade. Fortunately we struck the right record and completed the case."

Mrs. Barnett's defence was accepted by the magistrate and the charge against her was dismissed. The other two were committed for trial, and in due course paid the extreme penalty. "Yet another illustration," was Thorndyke's comment, "of the folly of that kind of criminal who won't let well alone, and who will create false clues. If the Barnetts had not laid down those false tracks, they would probably never have been suspected. It was their clever alibi that led us straight to their door."

## Pandora's Box

“I see our friend, S. Chapman, is still a defaulter,” said I, as I ran my eye over the “personal” column of *THE TIMES*.

Thorndyke looked up interrogatively.

“Chapman?” he repeated; “let me see, who is he?”

“The man with the box. I read you the advertisement the other day. Here it is again. ‘If the box left in the luggage-room by S. Chapman is not claimed within a week from this date, it will be sold to defray expenses. —Alexander Butt, »Red Lion« Hotel, Stoke Varley, Kent.’ That sounds like an ultimatum; but it has been appearing at intervals for the last month. As the first notice expired about three weeks ago, the question is, why doesn’t Mr. Butt sell the box and have done with it?”

“He may have some qualms as to the legality of the proceeding,” said Thorndyke. “It would be interesting to know what expenses he refers to and what is the value of the box.”

The latter question was resolved a day or two later by the appearance in our chambers of an agitated gentleman, who gave his name as George Chapman. After apologising for his unannounced visit he explained: “I have come to you on the advice of my solicitor and on behalf of my brother, Samuel, who has become involved in a most extraordinary and horrible set of complications. At present he is in custody of the police charged with an atrocious murder.”

“That is certainly a rather serious complication,” Thorndyke observed dryly. “Perhaps you had better give us an account of the circumstances—the whole set of circumstances, from the beginning.”

“I will,” said Mr. Chapman, “without any reservations. The only question is, which is the beginning? There are the business and the domestic affairs. Perhaps I had better begin with the business concerns. My brother was a sort of travelling agent for a firm of manufacturing jewellers. He held a stock of the goods, which he used as samples for large orders, but in the case of small retailers he actually supplied the goods

himself. When travelling, he usually carried his stock in a small Gladstone bag, but he kept the bulk of it in a safe in his house, and he used to go home at week-ends, or oftener, to replenish his travelling stock. Now, about two months ago he left home on a trip, but instead of taking a selection of his goods, he took the entire stock in a largish wooden box, leaving the safe empty. What he meant to do I don't know, and that's the fact. I offer no opinion. The circumstances were peculiar, as you will hear presently, and his proceedings were peculiar; for he went down to Stoke Varley—a village not far from Folkestone—put up at the »Red Lion,« and deposited his box in the luggage-room that is kept for the use of commercial travellers; and then, after staying there for a few days, came up to London to make some arrangements for selling or letting his house—which, it seems, he had decided to leave. He came up in the evening, and the very next morning the first of his adventures befell, and a very alarming one it was.

“It appears that, as he was walking down a quiet street, he saw a lady's purse lying on the pavement. Naturally he picked it up, and as it contained nothing to show the name or address of the owner, he put it in his pocket, intending to hand it in at a police station. Shortly after this, he got into an omnibus, and a well-dressed woman entered at the same time and sat down next to him. Just as the conductor was coming in to collect the fares, the woman began to search her pocket excitedly, and then, turning to my brother, called on him loudly to return her purse. Of course, he said that he knew nothing about her purse, whereupon she roundly accused him of having picked her pocket, declaring to the conductor that she had felt him take out her purse, and demanding that the omnibus should be stopped and a policeman fetched. At this moment a policeman was seen on the pavement. The conductor stopped the omnibus and hailed the constable, who came, and having examined the floor of the vehicle without finding the missing purse, and taken the conductor's name and number, took my brother into custody and conducted him and the woman to the police station. Here the inspector took down from the woman a description of the stolen purse and its contents, which my brother, to his utter dismay, recognised as that of the purse which he had picked up and which was still in his pocket. Immediately, he gave the inspector an account of the incident and produced the purse; but it is hardly necessary to say that the inspector refused to take his explanation seriously.

“Then my brother did a thing which was natural enough, but which did

not help him. Seeing that he was practically certain to be convicted—for there was really no answer to the charge—he gave a false name and refused his address. He was then locked up in a cell for the night, and the next morning was brought before the magistrate, who, having heard the evidence of the woman and the inspector and having listened without comment to my brother's story, committed him for trial at the Central Criminal Court, and refused bail. He was then removed to Brixton, where he was detained for nearly a month, pending the opening of the sessions.

"At length the day of his trial drew near. But it was then found that the woman who had accused him had left her lodgings and could not be traced. As there was no one to prosecute, and as the disappearance of the woman put a rather new light upon my brother's story, the case against him was allowed to drop, and he was released.

"He went home by train, and at the station he bought a copy of *THE TIMES* to read on the way. Before opening it he chanced to run his eye over the 'personal' column, and there his attention was arrested by his own name in an advertisement—"

"Relating to a box?" said I.

"Precisely. Then you have seen it. Well, considering the value of the contents of that box, he was naturally rather anxious. At once he sent off a telegram saying that he would call on the following day before noon to claim the box and pay what was owing. And he did so. Yesterday morning he took an early train down to Stoke Varley and went straight to the »Red Lion.« On his arrival he was asked to step into the coffee-room, which he did; and there he found three police officers, who forthwith arrested him on a charge of murder. But before going into the particular that charge I had better give you an account of his domestic affairs on which this incredible and horrible accusation turns.

"My brother, I am sorry to say, was living with a woman who was not his wife. He had originally intended to marry her, but his association with her—which lasted over several years—did not encourage that intention. She was a terrible woman, and she led him a terrible life. Her temper was ungovernable; and when she had taken too much to drink—which was a pretty frequent occurrence—she was not only noisy and quarrelsome, but physically violent as well. Her antecedents were disreputable—she had been connected with the seamy side of the music-hall stage; her associations were disreputable; she brought questionable women to my brother's house; she consorted with men of doubtful character, and her relations with them were equally doubtful. Indeed,

with one of them, a man named Gamble, I should say that her relations were not doubtful at all, though I understand he was a married man.

“Well, my brother put up with her for years, living a life that cut him off from all decent society. But at last his patience gave way (and I may add that he made the acquaintance of a very desirable lady, who was willing to condone his past and marry him if he could secure a possible future). After a particularly outrageous scene, he ordered the woman—Rebecca Mings was her name—out of the house and declared their relationship at an end.

“But she refused to be shaken off. She kept possession of the street-door key, and she returned again and again, and made a public scandal. The last time she created such an uproar when the door was bolted against her that a crowd collected in the street and my brother was forced to let her in. She stayed with him some hours, alone in the house—for the only servant he had was a daily girl who left at three o’clock—and went away quite quietly about ten at night. But, although a good many people saw her go into the house, no one but my brother seems to have seen her leave it; a most disastrous circumstance, for, from the moment when she left the house, no one ever saw her again. She did not go to her lodgings that night. She disappeared utterly—until—but I must go back now to the »Red Lion« at Stoke Varley.

“When my brother was arrested on the charge of having murdered Rebecca Mings, certain particulars were given to him; and when I went down there in response to a telegram, I gathered some more. The circumstances are these: About a fortnight after my brother had left to come to London, some of the ‘commercial’ who used the luggage-room complained of an unpleasant odour in it, which was presently traced to my brother’s box. As that box appeared to have been abandoned, the landlord became suspicious, and communicated with the police. They telephoned to the London police, who found my brother’s house shut up and his whereabouts unknown. Thereupon the local police broke open the box and found in it a woman’s left arm and a quantity of blood-stained clothing. On which they caused the advertisement to be put in *The Times*, and meanwhile they made certain inquiries. It appeared that my brother had spent part of his time at Stoke Varley fishing in the little river. On learning this, the police proceeded to dredge the river, and presently they brought up a right arm—apparently the fellow of the one found in the box—and a leg divided into three parts, evidently a woman’s. Now, as to the arm found in the box, there could be no question about its identity, for it bore a very distinct tattooed inscription consisting of the initials R. M. above a heart transfixed by an arrow,



with the initials J.B. underneath. A few inquiries elicited the fact that the woman, Rebecca Mings, who had disappeared, bore such a tattooed mark on her left arm and certain persons who had known her, having been sworn to secrecy, were shown the arm, and recognised the mark without hesitation. Further inquiries showed that Rebecca Mings was last seen alive entering my brother's house, as I have described; and on this information the police broke into the house and searched it."

"Do you know if they found anything?" Thorndyke asked.

"I don't," replied Chapman, "but I infer that they did. The police at Stoke Varley were very courteous and kind, but they declined to give any particulars about the visit to the house. However, we shall hear at the inquest if they made any discoveries."

"And is that all that you have to tell us?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes," was the reply, "and enough, too. I make no comment on my brother's story, and I won't ask whether you believe it. I don't expect you to. The question is whether you would undertake the defence. I suppose it isn't necessary for a lawyer to be convinced of his client's innocence in order to convince the jury."

"You are thinking of an advocate," said Thorndyke. "I am not an advocate, and I should not defend a man whom I believed to be guilty. The most that I can do is to investigate the case. If the result of the investigation is to confirm the suspicions against your brother, I shall go no farther in the case. You will have to get an ordinary criminal barrister to defend your brother. If, on the other hand, I find reasonable grounds for believing him innocent, I will undertake the defence. What do you say to that?"

"I've no choice," replied Chapman; "and I suppose if you find all the evidence against him, the defence won't matter much."

"I am afraid that is so," said Thorndyke. "And, now there are one or two questions to be cleared up. First, does your brother offer any explanation of the presence of these remains in his box?"

"He supposes that somebody at the »Red Lion« must have taken the jewellery out and put the remains in. Anyone could get access to the luggage-room by asking for the key at the office."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "that is conceivable. Then, as to the person who might have made this exchange. Is there anyone who had any reason for wishing to make away with deceased?"

"No," replied Chapman. "Plenty of people disliked her, but no one but my brother had any motive for getting rid of her."

"You spoke of a man with whom she was on somewhat intimate terms. There had been no quarrel or breach there, I suppose?"

"The man Gamble, you mean. No, I should say they were the best of friends. Besides, Gamble had no responsibilities in regard to her. He could have dropped her whenever he was tired of her."

"Do you know anything about him?" Thorndyke asked.

"Very little. He has been a rolling stone, and has been in all sorts of jobs, I believe. He was in the New Zealand trade for some time, and dealt in all sorts of things—among others, in smoked human heads; sold them to collectors and museums, I understand. So he would have had some previous experience," Chapman added with a faint grin.

"Not in dismemberment," said Thorndyke. "Those will have been ancient Maori heads—relics of the old head hunters. There are some in the Hunterian Museum. But, as you say, there seems to be no motive in Gamble's case, even if there had been the opportunity; whereas, in your brother's case, there seem to have been both the motive and the opportunity. I suppose your brother never threatened the deceased?"

"I am sorry to say he did," replied Chapman. "On several occasions, and before witnesses, too, he threatened to put her out of the way. Of course he never meant it—he was really the mildest of men. But it was a foolish thing to do and most unfortunate, as things have turned out."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "I will look into the matter and let you know what I think of it. It is unnecessary to remark that appearances are not very encouraging."

"No, I can see that," said Chapman, rising and producing his card-case.

"But we must hope for the best." He laid his card on the table, and having shaken hands with us gloomily, took his departure.

"It doesn't do to take things at their face value," I remarked, when he had gone; "but I don't think we have ever had a more hopeless-looking case. All it wants to complete it is the discovery of remains in Chapman's house."

"In that respect," said Thorndyke, "it may already be complete. But it hardly wants that finishing touch. On the evidence that we have, any jury would find a verdict of 'guilty' without leaving the box. The only question for us is whether the face value of the evidence is its real value. If it is, the defence will be a mere formality."

"I suppose," said I, "you will begin the investigation at Stoke Varley?"

"Yes," he replied. "We begin by checking the alleged facts. If they are really as stated, we shall probably need to go no farther. And we had better lose no time, as the remains may be moved into the jurisdiction

of a London coroner, and we ought to see everything *in situ* as far as possible. I suggest that we postpone the rest of to-day's business and start at once, taking Scotland Yard on the way to get authority to inspect the remains and the premises."

In a few minutes we were ready for the expedition. While Thorndyke packed the "research-case" with the necessary instruments, I gave instructions to our laboratory assistant, Polton, as to what was to be done in our absence, and then, when we had consulted the time-table, we set forth by way of the Embankment.

At Scotland Yard, on inquiring for our friend, Superintendent Miller, we received the slightly unwelcome news that he was at Stoke Varley, inquiring into the case. However, the authorisation was given readily enough, and, armed with this, we made our way to Charing Cross Station, arriving there in good time to catch our train.

We had just given up our tickets and turned out into the pleasant station approach of Stoke Varley when Thorndyke gave a soft chuckle. I looked at him inquiringly, and he explained "Miller has had a telegram, and we are going to have facilities, with a little supervision." Following the direction of his glance, I now observed the superintendent strolling towards us, trying to look surprised, but achieving only a somewhat sheepish grin.

"Well, I'm sure, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You don't mean to say you are engaged in this treasure-trove case?"

"Why not?" asked Thorndyke.

"Well, I'll tell you why not," replied Miller. "Because it's no go. You'll only waste your time and injure your reputation. I may as well let you know, in confidence, that we've been through Chapman's house in London. It wasn't very necessary; but still, if there was a vacancy in his coffin for one or two more nails, we've knocked them in."

"What did you find in his house?" Thorndyke asked.

"We found," replied Miller, "in a cupboard in his bedroom, a good-sized bottle of hyoscine tablets, about two-thirds full—one-third missing. No great harm in that; he might have taken 'em himself. But when we went down into the cellar, we noticed that the place smelt—well, a bit graveyardy, so to speak. So we had a look round. It was a stone-floored cellar, not very even, but so far as we could see, none of the flagstones seemed to have been disturbed. We didn't want the job of digging the whole of them up, so I just filled a bucket with water and poured it over the floor. Then I watched.

"In less than a minute one big flagstone near the middle went nearly dry, while the water still stood on all the others. 'What O!' says I. 'Loose earth underneath here.' So we got a crow-bar and prised up that big flag; and sure enough, underneath it we found a good-sized bundle done up in a sheet. I won't go into unpleasant particulars—not that it would upset you, I suppose—but that bundle contained human remains."

"Any bones?" inquired Thorndyke.

"No. Mostly in'ards and some skin from the front of the body. We handed them over to the Home Office experts, and they examined them and made an analysis. Their report states that the remains are those of a woman of about thirty-five—that was about Mings' age—and that the various organs contained a large quantity of hyoscine; more than enough to have caused death. So there you are. If you are going to conduct the defence, you won't get much glory from it."

"It is very good of you, Miller," said Thorndyke, "to have given us this private information. It is very helpful, though I have not undertaken the defence. I have merely come down to check the facts and see if there is any material for a defence. And I shall go through the routine, as I am here. Where are the remains?"

"In the mortuary. I'll show you the way, and as I happen to have the key in my pocket, I can let you in."

We passed through the outskirts of the village, gathering a small train of stealthy followers, who dogged us to the door of the mortuary and hungrily watched us as the superintendent let us in and locked the door after us.

"There you are," said Miller, indicating the slate table on which the remains lay, covered by a sheet soaked in an antiseptic. "I've seen all I want to see." And he retired into a corner and lit his pipe.

The remnants of mortality, disclosed by the removal of the sheet, were dreadfully suggestive of crime in its most brutal and horrible form, but they offered little information. The dismemberment had been manifestly rude and unskilful, and the remains were clearly those of a woman of medium size and apparently in the prime of life. The principal interest centred in the left arm, the waxen skin of which bore a very distinct tattoo-mark, consisting of the initials R. M. over a very symmetrical heart, transfixd by an arrow, beneath which were the initials J. B. The letters were Roman capitals about half an inch high, well-formed and finished with serifs, and the heart and arrow quite well drawn. I looked reflectively at the device, standing out in dull blue from its ivory-like background, and speculated vaguely as to who J. B. might have been

and how many predecessors and successors he had had. And then my interest waned, and I joined the superintendent in the corner. It was a sordid case, and a conviction being a foregone conclusion, it did not seem to call for further attention.

Thorndyke, however, seemed to think otherwise. But that was his way. When he was engaged in an investigation he put out of his mind everything that he had been told and began from the very beginning. That was what he was doing now. He was inspecting these remains as if they had been the remains of some unidentified person. He made, and noted down, minute measurements of the limbs; he closely examined every square inch of surface; he scrutinised each finger separately, and then with the aid of his portable inking-plate and roller, took a complete set of finger-prints. He measured all the dimensions of the tattoo-marks with a delicate calliper-gauge, and then examined the marks themselves, first with a common lens and then with the high-power Coddington. The principles that he laid down in his lectures at the hospital were: "Accept no statement without verification; observe every fact independently for yourselves; and keep an open mind." And, certainly, no one ever carried out more conscientiously his own precepts.

"Do you know, Dr. Jervis," the superintendent whispered to me as Thorndyke brought his Coddington to bear on the tattoo-marks, "I believe this lens business is becoming a habit with the doctor. It's my firm conviction that if somebody were to blow up the Houses of Parliament, he'd go and examine the ruins through a magnifying glass. Just look at him poring over those tattooed letters that you could read plainly twenty feet away!"

Meanwhile, Thorndyke, unconscious of these criticisms, placidly continued his inspection. From the table, with its gruesome burden, he transferred his attention to the box, which had been placed on a bench by the window, examining it minutely inside and out; feeling with his fingers the dark grey paint with which it was coated and the white-painted initials, "S. C.," on the lid, which he also measured carefully. He even copied into his note book the maker's name, which was stamped on a small brass label affixed to the inside of the lid, and the name of the lock-maker, and inspected the screws which had drawn from the wood when it was forced open. At length he put away his notebook, closed the research-case and announced that he had finished, adding the inquiry: "How do you get to the »Red Lion« from here?"

"It's only a few minutes' walk," said Miller. "I'll show you the way. But you're wasting your time, doctor, you are indeed. You see," he contin-

ued, when he had locked up the mortuary and pocketed the key, "that suggestion of Chapman's is ridiculous on the face of it. Just imagine a man bringing a portmanteau full of human remains into the luggage-room of a commercial hotel, opening it and opening another's man's box, and swapping the contents of the one for the other with the chance of one of the commercials coming in at any moment. Supposing one of 'em had, what would he have had to say? 'Hallo!' says the baggy, 'you seem to have got somebody's arm in your box.' 'So I have,' says Chapman. 'I expect it's my wife's. Careless woman! must have dropped it in when she was packing the box.' Bah! It's a fool's explanation. Besides, how could he have got Chapman's box open? We couldn't. It was a first-class lock. We had to break it open, but it hadn't been broken open before. No, sir, that cat won't jump. Still, you needn't take my word for it. Here is the place, and here is Mr. Butt, himself, standing at his own front door looking as pleasant as the flowers in May, like the lump of sugar that you put in a fly-trap to induce 'em to walk in."

The landlord, who had overheard—without difficulty—the concluding passage of Miller's peroration, smiled genially; and when the purpose of the visit had been explained, suggested a "modest quencher" in the private parlour as an aid to conversation.

"I wanted," said Thorndyke, waiving the suggestion of the "quencher," "to ascertain whether Chapman's theory of an exchange of contents could be seriously entertained."

"Well, sir," said the landlord, "the fact is that it couldn't. That room is a public room, and people may be popping in there at any time all day. We don't usually keep it locked. It isn't necessary. We know most of our customers, and the contents of the packages that are stowed in the room are principally travellers' samples of no considerable value. The thing would have been impossible in the daytime, and we lock the room up at night."

"Have you had any strangers staying with you in the interval between Chapman's going away and the discovery of the remains?"

"Yes. There was a Mr. Doler; he had two cabin trunks: and a uniform case which went to the luggage-room. And then there was a lady, Mrs. Murchison. She had a lot of stuff in there: a small, flat trunk, a hat-box, and a big dress-basket—one of these great basket pantechnicons that ladies take about with them. And there was another gentleman—I forget his name, but you will see it in the visitors' book—he had a couple of largish portmanteaux in there. Perhaps you would like to see the book?"

"I should," said Thorndyke, and when the book was produced and the names of the guests pointed out, he copied the entries into his notebook, adding the particulars of their luggage.

"And now, sir," said Miller, "I suppose you won't be happy until you've seen the room itself?"

"Your insight is really remarkable, superintendent," my colleague replied. "Yes, I should like to see the room."

There was little enough to see, however, when we arrived there. The key was in the door, and the latter was not only unlocked but stood ajar; and when we pushed it open and entered we saw a small room, empty save for a collection of portmanteaux, trunks, and Gladstone bags. The only noteworthy fact was that it was at the end of a corridor, covered with linoleum, so that anyone inside would have a few seconds' notice of another person's approach. But evidently that would have been of little use in the alleged circumstances. For the hypothetical criminal must have emptied Chapman's box of the jewellery before he could put the incriminating objects into it; so that, apart from the latter, the arrival of an inopportune visitor would have found him apparently in the act of committing a robbery. The suggestion was obviously absurd.

"By the way," said Thorndyke, as we descended the stairs, "where is the central character of this drama—Chapman? He is not here, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is," replied Miller. "He is committed for trial, but we are keeping him here until we know where the inquest is to be held. You would probably like to have a few words with him? Well, I'll take you along to the police station and tell them who you are, and then perhaps you would like to come back here and have some lunch or dinner before you return to town."

I warmly seconded the latter proposal, and the arrangement having been made, we set forth for the police station, which we gathered from Miller was incorporated with a small local prison. Here we were shown into what appeared to be a private office, and presently a sergeant entered, ushering in a man whom we at once recognised from his resemblance to our client, Mr. George Chapman, disguised though it was by his pallor, his unshaven face, and his air of abject misery. The sergeant, having announced him by name, withdrew with the superintendent and locked the door on the outside. As soon as we were alone, Thorndyke rapidly acquainted the prisoner with the circumstances of his brother's visit and then continued: "Now, Mr. Chapman, you want me to undertake your defence. If I do so, I must have all the facts. If there is

anything known to you that your brother has not told me, I ask you to tell it to me without reservation."

Chapman shook his head wearily.

"I know nothing more than you know," said he. "The whole affair is a mystery that I can make nothing of. I don't expect you to believe me. Who would, with all this evidence against me? But I swear to God that I know nothing of this abominable crime. When I brought that box down here, it contained my stock of jewellery and nothing else; and after I put it in the luggage-room, I never opened it."

"Do you know of anybody who might have had a motive for getting rid of Rebecca Mings?"

"Not a soul," replied Chapman. "She led me the devil's own life, but she was popular enough with her own friends. And she was an attractive woman in her way: a fine, well-built woman, rather big—she stood five-feet-seven—with a good complexion and very handsome golden hair. Such as her friends were—they were a shady lot—I think they were fond of her, and I don't believe she had any enemies."

"Some hyoscine was found in your house," said Thorndyke. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes. I got it when I suffered from neuralgia. But I never took any. My doctor heard about it and sent me to the dentist. The bottle was never opened. It contained a hundred tablets."

"And with regard to the box," said Thorndyke. "Had you had it long?"

"Not very long. I bought it at Fletchers, in Holborn, about six months ago."

"And you have nothing more to tell us?"

"No," he replied. "I wish I had"; and then, after a pause, he asked with a wistful look at Thorndyke: "Are you going to undertake my defence, sir? I can see that there is very little hope, but I should like to be given just a chance."

I glanced at Thorndyke, expecting at the most a cautious and conditional reply. To my astonishment he answered: "There is no need to take such a gloomy view of the case, Mr. Chapman. I shall undertake the defence, and I think you have quite a fair chance of an acquittal."

On this amazing reply I reflected, not without some self-condemnation, during our walk to the hotel and the meal that preceded our departure. For it was evident that I had missed something vital. Thorndyke was a cautious man and little given to making promises or forecasts of results. He must have picked up some evidence of a very conclusive kind;



but what that evidence could be, I found it impossible to imagine. The superintendent, too, was puzzled, I could see, for Thorndyke made no secret of his intention to go on with the case. But Miller's delicate attempts to pump him came to nothing; and when he had escorted us to the station and our train moved off, I could see him standing on the platform, gently scratching the back of his head and gazing speculatively at our retreating carriage.

As soon as we were clear of the station, I opened my attack.

"What on earth," I demanded, "did you mean by giving that poor devil, Chapman, hopes of acquittal? I can't see that he has a dog's chance."

Thorndyke looked at me gravely.

"My impression is, Jervis," he said, "that you have not kept an open mind in this case. You have allowed yourself to fall under the suggestive influence of the obvious; whereas the function of the investigator is to consider the possible alternatives of the obvious inference. And you have not brought your usual keen attention to bear on the facts. If you had considered George Chapman's statement attentively you would have noticed that it contained some very curious and significant suggestions; and if you had examined those dismembered remains critically, you would have seen that they confirmed those suggestions in a very remarkable manner."

"As to George Chapman's statement," said I, "the only suggestive point that I recall is the reference to those Maori heads. But, as you, yourself, pointed out, the dealers in those heads don't do the dismemberment."

Thorndyke shook his head a little impatiently.

"Tut, tut, Jervis," said he, "that isn't the point at all. Any fool can cut up a dead body as this one has been cut up. The point is that that statement, carefully considered, yields a definite and consistent alternative to the theory that Samuel Chapman killed this woman and dismembered her body; and that alternative theory is supported by the appearance of these remains. I think you will see the point if you recall Chapman's statement, and reflect on the possible bearing of the various incidents that he described."

In this, however, Thorndyke was unduly optimistic. I recalled the statement completely enough, and reflected on it frequently and profoundly during the next few days; but the more I thought of it the more conclusive did the case against the accused appear.

Meanwhile, my colleague appeared to be taking no steps in the matter, and I assumed that he was waiting for the inquest. It is true that, when, on one occasion, he had accompanied me towards the City, and

leaving me in Queen Victoria Street disappeared into the premises of Messrs. Burden Brothers, lock manufacturers, I was inclined to associate his proceedings with his minute examination of the lock at Stoke Varley. And, again, when our laboratory assistant, Polton, was seen to issue forth, top-hatted and armed with an umbrella and an attaché-case, I suspected some sort of “private inquiries,” possibly connected with the case. But from Thorndyke I could get no information at all. My tentative “pumpings” elicited one unvarying reply. “You have the facts, Jervis. You heard George Chapman’s statement, and you have seen the remains. Give me a reasonable theory and I will discuss it with pleasure.” And that was how the matter remained. I had no reasonable theory—other than that of the police—and there was accordingly no discussion.

On a certain evening, a couple of days before the inquest—which had been postponed in the hope that some further remains might be discovered—I observed signs of an expected visitor: a small table placed by the supernumerary arm-chair and furnished with a tray bearing a siphon, a whisky-decanter and a box of cigars. Thorndyke caught my inquiring glance at these luxuries, for which neither of us had any use, and proceeded to explain.

“I have asked Miller to look in this evening—he is due now. I have been working at this Chapman case, and, as it is now complete, I propose to lay my cards on the table.”

“Is that safe?” said I. “Supposing the police still go for a conviction and try to forestall your evidence?”

“They won’t,” he replied. “They couldn’t. And it would be most improper to let the case go for trial on a false theory. But here is Miller; and a mighty twitter he is in, I have no doubt.”

He was. Without even waiting for the customary cigar, he plumped down into the chair, and dragging a letter from his pocket, fixed a glare of astonishment on my placid colleague.

“This letter of yours, sir,” said he, “is perfectly incomprehensible to me. You say that you are prepared to put us in possession of the facts of this Chapman case. But we are in possession of the facts already. We are absolutely certain of a conviction. Let me remind you, sir, of what those facts are. We have got a dead body which has been identified beyond all doubt. Part of that body was found in a box which is the property of Samuel Chapman, which was brought by him and deposited by him at the »Red Lion« Hotel. Another part of that body was found in his dwelling-house. A supply of poison—an uncommon poison, too—

similar to that which killed the dead person, has also been found in his house; and the dead body is that of a woman with whom Chapman was known to be on terms of enmity and whom he has threatened, in the presence of witnesses, to kill. Now, sir, what have you got to say to those facts?"

Thorndyke regarded the agitated detective with a quiet smile. "My comments, Miller," said he, "can be put in a nut-shell. You have got the wrong man, you have got the wrong box, and you have got the wrong body."

The superintendent was thunderstruck, and no wonder. So was I. As to Miller, he drew himself forward until he was sitting on the extreme edge of the chair, and for some moments stared at my impassive colleague in speechless amazement. At length he burst out: "But, my dear sir! This is sheer nonsense—at least, that's what it sounds like, though I know it can't be. Let's begin with the body. You say it's the wrong one."

"Yes. Rebecca Mings was a biggish woman. Her height was five-feet-seven. This woman was not more than five-feet-four."

"Bah!" exclaimed Miller. "You can't judge to an inch or two from parts of a dismembered body. You are forgetting the tattoo-mark. That clenches the identity beyond any possible doubt."

"It does, indeed," said Thorndyke. "That is the crucial evidence. Rebecca Mings had a certain tattoo mark on her left forearm. This woman had not."

"Had not!" shrieked Miller, coming yet farther forward on his chair. (I expected, every moment, to see him sitting on the floor.) "Why, I saw it; and so did you."

"I am speaking of the woman, not of the body," said Thorndyke. "The mark that you saw was a *post-mortem* tattoo-mark. It was made after death. But the fact that it was made after death is good evidence, that it was not there during life."

"Moses!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a facer. Are you perfectly sure it was done after death?"

"Quite sure. The appearance, through a powerful lens, is unmistakable. Tattoo-marks are made, as you know, of course, by painting Indian ink on the skin and pricking it in with fine needles. In the living skin the needle-wounds heal up at once and disappear, but in the dead skin the needle-holes remain unclosed and can be easily seen with a lens. In this case the skin had been well washed and the surface pressed with some smooth object; but the holes were plainly visible and the ink was still in them."

"Well, I'm sure!" said Miller. "I never heard of tattooing a dead body before."

"Very few people have, I expect," said Thorndyke. "But there is one class of persons who know all about it: the persons who deal in Maori heads."

"Indeed?" queried Miller. "How does it concern them?"

"Those heads are usually elaborately tattooed, and the value of a head depends on the quality of the tattooing. Now, when those heads became objects of trade, the dealers conceived the idea of touching up defective specimens by additional tattooing on the dead head, and from this they proceeded to obtain heads which had no tattoo-marks, and turn them into tattooed heads."

"Well, to be sure," said the superintendent, with a grin, "what wicked men there are in the world, aren't there, Dr. Jervis?"

I murmured a vague assent, but I was principally conscious of a desire to kick myself for having failed to pick this invaluable clue out of George Chapman's statement.

"And now," said Miller, "we come to the box. How do you know it is the wrong one?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "is proved even more conclusively. The original box was made by Fletchers, in Holborn. It was sold to Chapman, and his initials painted on it, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of last April. I have seen the entry in the day-book. The locks of these boxes are made by Burden Brothers of Queen Victoria Street, and as they are quite high-class locks each is given a registered number, which is stamped on the lock. The number on the box that you have is 5007, and Burden's books show that it was made and sold to Fletchers about the middle of July—the sale was dated the 13<sup>th</sup>. Therefore this can not be Chapman's box."

"Apparently not," Miller agreed. "But whose box is it? And what has become of Chapman's box?"

"That," replied Thorndyke, "was presumably taken away in Mrs. Murchison's dress-basket."

"Then who the deuce is Mrs. Murchison?" demanded the superintendent.

"I should say," replied Thorndyke, "that she was formerly known as Rebecca Mings."

"The deceased!" exclaimed Miller, falling back in his chair with a guffaw. "My eye! What a lark it is! But she must have some sauce, to walk off with the jewellery and leave her own dismembered remains in exchange! By the way, whose remains are they?"

"We shall come to that presently," Thorndyke answered. "Now we have to consider the man you have in custody."

"Yes," agreed Miller, "we must settle about him. Of course if it isn't his box, and the body isn't Mings' body, that puts him out of it so far. But there are those remains that we dug up in his cellar. What about them?"

"That question," replied Thorndyke, "will, I think, be answered by a general review of the case. But I must, remind you that if the box is not Chapman's, it is some other person's; that is to say, that if Chapman goes out of the case, as to the Stoke Varley incidents, someone else comes in. So, if the body is not Mings' body, it is some other woman's, and that other woman must have disappeared. And now let us review the case as a whole.

"You know about the pocket-picking charge. It was obviously a false charge, deliberately prepared by 'planting' the purse; that is, it was a conspiracy. Now what was the object of this conspiracy? Clearly it was to get Chapman out of the way while the boxes were exchanged at Stoke Varley, and the remains deposited in the river and elsewhere. Then who were the conspirators—other than the agent who planted the purse?

"They—if there were more than one—must have had access to Mings, dead or alive, in order to make the exact copy, or tracing, of her tattoo-mark. They must have had some knowledge of the process of *post-mortem* tattooing. They must have had access to Chapman's house. And, since they had in their possession the dead body of a woman, they must have been associated with some woman who has disappeared.

"Who is there who answers this description? Well, of course, Mings had access to herself, though she could hardly have taken a tracing from her own arm, and she had access to Chapman's house, since she had possession of the latchkey. Then there is a man named Gamble, with whom Mings was on terms of great intimacy. Now Gamble was formerly a dealer in tattooed Maori heads, so he may be assumed to know something about *post-mortem* tattooing. And I have ascertained that Gamble's wife has disappeared from her usual places of resort. So here are two persons who, together, agree with the description of the conspirators. And now let us consider the train of events in connection with the dates.

"On July the 29<sup>th</sup> Chapman came to town from Stoke Varley. On the 30<sup>th</sup> he was arrested as a pick pocket. On the 31<sup>st</sup> he was committed for trial. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August Mrs. Gamble went away to the country. No one seems to have seen her go, but that is the date on which she is

reported to have gone. On August the 5<sup>th</sup> Mrs. Murchison deposited at Stoke Varley a box which must have been purchased between the 13<sup>th</sup> of July and the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, and which contained a woman's arm. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of August that box was opened by the police. On the 18<sup>th</sup> human remains were discovered in Chapman's house. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Chapman was released from Brixton. On the 28<sup>th</sup> he was arrested for murder at Stoke Varley. I think, Miller, you will agree that that is a very striking succession of dates."

"Yes," Miller agreed. "It looks like a true bill. If you will give me Mr. Gamble's address, I'll call on him."

"I'm afraid you won't find him at home," said Thorndyke. "He has gone into the country, too; and I gather from his landlord, who holds a returned cheque, that Mr. Gamble's banking account has gone into the country with him."


"Then," said the superintendent "I suppose I must take a trip into the country, too."

*R. A. F.*

"Well, Thorndyke," I said, as I laid down the paper containing the report of the trial of Gamble and Mings for the murder of Theresa Gamble, one morning about four months later, "you ought to be very highly gratified. After sentencing Gamble to death and Mings to fifteen years' penal servitude, the judge took the opportunity to compliment the police on their ingenuity in unravelling this crime, and the Home Office experts on their skill in detecting the counterfeit tattoo-marks. What do you think of that?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that his lordship showed a very proper and appreciative spirit."

## The Trail of Behemoth

f all the minor dissipations in which temperate men indulge there is none, I think, more alluring than the after-breakfast pipe. I had just lit mine and was standing before the fire with the unopened paper in my hand when my ear caught the sound of hurried footsteps ascending the stair. Now experience has made me somewhat of a connoisseur in footsteps. A good many are heard on our stair, heralding the advent of a great variety of clients, and I have learned to distinguish those which are premonitory of urgent cases. Such I judged the present ones to be, and my judgment was confirmed by a hasty, importunate tattoo on our small brass knocker. Regretfully taking the much-appreciated pipe from my mouth, I crossed the room and threw the door open.

“Good morning, Dr. Jervis,” said our visitor, a barrister whom I knew slightly. “Is your colleague at home?”

“No, Mr. Bidwell,” I replied. “I am sorry to say he is out of town. He won’t be back until the day after to-morrow.”

Mr. Bidwell was visibly disappointed.

“Ha! Pity!” he exclaimed; and then with quick tact he added “But still, you are here. It comes to the same thing.”

“I don’t know about that,” said I. “But, at any rate, I am at your service.”

“Thank you,” said he. “And in that case I will ask you to come round with me at once to Tanfield Court. A most shocking thing has happened. My old friend and neighbour, Giles Herrington has been—well, he is dead—died suddenly, and I think there can be no doubt that he was killed. Can you come now? I will give you the particulars as we go.”

I scribbled a hasty note to say where I had gone, and having laid it on the table, got my hat and set forth with Mr. Bidwell.

“It has only just been discovered,” said he, as we crossed King’s Bench Walk. “The laundress who does his chambers and mine was battering at my door when I arrived—I don’t live in the Temple, you know.

She was as pale as a ghost and in an awful state of alarm and agitation. It seems that she had gone up to Herrington's chambers to get his breakfast ready as usual; but when she went into the sitting-room she found him lying dead on the floor. Thereupon she rushed down to my chambers—I am usually an early bird—and there I found her, as I said, battering at my door, although she has a key.

"Well, I went up with her to my friend's chambers—they are on the first floor, just over mine—and there, sure enough, was poor old Giles lying on the floor, cold and stiff. Evidently he had been lying there all night."

"Were there any marks of violence on the body?" I asked.

"I didn't notice any," he replied, "but I didn't look very closely. What I did notice was that the place was all in disorder—a chair overturned and things knocked off the table. It was pretty evident that there had been a struggle and that he had not met his death by fair means."

"And what do you want us to do?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I was Herrington's friend; about the only friend he had, for he was not an amiable or a sociable man; and I am the executor of his will.

"Appearances suggest very strongly that he has been murdered, and I take it upon myself to see that his murderer is brought to account. Our friendship seems to demand that. Of course, the police will go into the affair, and if it turns out to be all plain sailing, there will be nothing for you to do. But the murderer, if there is one, has got to be secured and convicted, and if the police can't manage it, I want you and Thorndyke to see the case through. This is the place."

He hurried in through the entry and up the stairs to the first-floor landing, where he rapped loudly at the closed "oak" of a set of chambers above which was painted the name of "Mr. Giles Herrington."

After an interval, during which Mr. Bidwell repeated the summons, the massive door opened and a familiar face looked out: the face of Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department. The expression that it bore was not one of welcome, and my experience of the inspector caused me to brace myself up for the inevitable contest.

"What is your business?" he inquired forbiddingly.

Mr. Bidwell took the question to himself and replied: "I am Mr. Herrington's executor, and in that capacity I have instructed Dr. Jervis and his colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, to watch the case on my behalf. I take it that you are a police officer?"

"I am," replied Badger, "and I can't admit any unauthorised persons to these chambers."



"We are not unauthorised persons," said Mr. Bidwell. "We are here on legitimate business. Do I understand that you refuse admission to the legal representatives of the deceased man?"

In the face of Mr. Bidwell's firm and masterful attitude, Badger began, as usual, to weaken. Eventually, having warned us to convey no information to anybody, he grudgingly opened the door and admitted us. "I have only just arrived, myself," he said. "I happened to be in the porter's lodge on other business when the laundress came and gave the alarm."

As I stepped into the room and looked round, I saw at a glance the clear indications of a crime. The place was in the utmost disorder. The cloth had been dragged from the table, littering the floor with broken glass, books, a tobacco jar, and various other objects. A chair sprawled on its back, the fender was dislodged from its position, the hearth-rug was all awry; and in the midst of the wreckage, on the space of floor between the table and the fireplace, the body of a man was stretched in a not uneasy posture.

I stooped over him and looked him over searchingly; an elderly man, clean-shaved and slightly bald, with a grim, rather forbidding countenance, which was not, however, distorted or apparently unusual in expression. There were no obvious injuries, but the crumpled state of the collar caused me to look more closely at the throat and neck, and I then saw pretty plainly a number of slightly discoloured marks, such as would be made by fingers tightly grasping the throat. Evidently Badger had already observed them, for he remarked: "There's no need to ask you what he died of, doctor; I can see that for myself."

"The actual cause of death," said I, "is not quite evident. He doesn't appear to have died from suffocation, but those are very unmistakable marks on the throat."

"Uncommonly," agreed Badger; "and they are enough for my purpose without any medical hair-splittings. How long do you think he has been dead?"

"From nine to twelve hours," I replied, "but nearer nine, I should think." The inspector looked at his watch.

"That makes it between nine o'clock and midnight, but nearer midnight," said he. "Well, we shall hear if the night porter has anything to tell us. I've sent word for him to come over, and the laundress, too. And here is one of 'em."

It was, in fact, both of them, for when the inspector opened the door, they were discovered conversing eagerly in whispers. "One at a time,"

said Badger. "I'll have the porter in first"; and having admitted the man, he unceremoniously shut tile door on the woman. The night porter saluted me as he came in—we were old acquaintances—and then halted near the door, where he stood stiffly, with his eyes riveted on tile corpse. "Now," said Badger, "I want you to try to remember if you let in any strangers last night, and if so, what their business was."

"I remember quite well," the porter replied. "I let in three strangers while I was on duty. One was going to Mr. Bolter in Fig Tree Court, one was going: to Sir Alfred Blain's chambers, and the third said he had an appointment with Mr. Herrington."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger, rubbing his hands. "Now, what time did you let him in?"

"It was just after ten-fifteen."

"Can you tell us what he was like and how he was dressed?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He didn't know where Tanfield Court was, and I had to walk down and show him, so I was able to have a good look at him. He was a middle-sized man, rather thin, dark hair, small moustache, no beard, and he had a long, sharp nose with a bump on the bridge. He wore a soft felt hat, a loose light overcoat, and he carried a thickish rough stick."

"What class of man was he? Seem to be a gentleman?"

"He was quite a gentlemanly kind of man, so far as I could judge, but he looked a bit shabby as to his clothes."

"Did you let him out?"

"Yes. He came to the gate a few minutes before eleven."

"And did you notice anything unusual about him then?"

"I did," the porter replied impressively. "I noticed that his collar was all crumpled and his hat was dusty and dented. His face was a bit red, and he looked rather upset, as if he had been having a tussle with somebody. I looked at him particularly and wondered what had been happening, seeing that Mr. Herrington was a quiet, elderly gentleman, though he was certainly a bit peppery at times."

The inspector took down these particulars gleefully in a large notebook and asked: "Is that all you know of the affair?" And when the porter replied that it was, he said: "Then I will ask you to read this statement and sign your name below it."

The porter read through his statement and carefully signed his name at the foot. He was about to depart when Badger said: "Before you go, perhaps you had better help us to move the body into the bedroom. It isn't decent to leave it lying there."

Accordingly the four of us lifted the dead man and carried him into the bedroom, where we laid him on the undisturbed bed and covered him with a rug. Then the porter was dismissed, with instructions to send in Mrs. Runt.

The laundress's statement was substantially a repetition of what Mr. Bidwell had told me. She had let herself into the chambers in the usual way, had come suddenly on the dead body of the tenant, and had forthwith rushed downstairs to give the alarm. When she had concluded the inspector stood for a few moments looking thoughtfully at his notes.

"I suppose," he said presently, "you haven't looked round these chambers this morning? Can't say if there is anything unusual about them, or anything missing?"

The laundress shook her head.

"I was too upset," she said, with another furtive glance at the place where the corpse had lain; "but," she added, letting her eyes roam vaguely round the room, "there doesn't seem to be anything missing, so far as I can see—wait! Yes, there is. There's something gone from that nail on the wall; and it was there yesterday morning, because I remember dusting it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger. "Now what was it that was hanging on that nail?"

"Well," Mrs. Runt replied hesitatingly, "I really don't know what it was. Seemed like a sort of sword or dagger, but I never looked at it particularly, and I never took it off its nail. I used to dust it as it hung."

"Still," said Badger, "you can give us some sort of description of it, I suppose?"

"I don't know that I can," she replied. "It had a leather case, and the handle was covered with leather, I think, and it had a sort of loop, and it used to hang on that nail."

"Yes, you said that before," Badger commented sourly. "When you say it had a case, do you mean a sheath?"

"You can call it a sheath if you like," she retorted, evidently ruffled by the inspector's manner, "I call it a case."

"And how big was it? How long, for instance?"

Mrs. Runt held out her hands about a yard apart, looked at them critically, shortened the interval to a foot, extended it to two, and still varying the distance, looked vaguely at the inspector.

"I should say it was about that," she said.

"About what?" snorted Badger. "Do you mean a foot or two feet or a yard? Can't you give us some idea?"

"I can't say no clearer than what I have," she snapped. "I don't go round gentlemen's chambers measuring the things."

It seemed to me that Badger's questions were rather unnecessary, for the wall-paper below the nail gave the required information. A coloured patch on the faded ground furnished a pretty clear silhouette of a broad bladed sword or large dagger, about two feet six inches long, which had apparently hung from the nail by a loop or ring at the end of the handle. But it was not my business to point this out. I turned to Bidwell and asked: "Can you tell us what the thing was?"

"I am afraid I can't," he replied. "I have very seldom been in these chambers. Herrington and I usually met in mine and went to the club. I have a dim recollection of something hanging on that nail, but I have not the least idea what it was or what it was like. But do you think it really matters? The thing was almost certainly a curio of some kind. It couldn't have been of any appreciable value. It is absurd, on the face of it, to suppose that this man came to Herrington's chambers, apparently by appointment, and murdered him for the sake of getting possession of an antique sword or dagger. Don't you think so?"

I did, and so, apparently, did the inspector, with the qualification that the thing seemed to have disappeared, and its disappearance ought to be accounted for; which was perfectly true, though I did not quite see how the "accounting for" was to be effected. However, as the laundress had told all that she knew, Badger gave her her dismissal and she retired to the landing, where I noticed that the night porter was still lurking. Mr. Bidwell also took his departure, and happening, a few moments later, to glance out of the window, I saw him walking slowly across the court, apparently conferring with the laundress and the porter.

As soon as we were alone, Badger assumed a friendly and confidential manner and proceeded to give advice.

"I gather that Mr. Bidwell wants you to investigate this case, but I don't fancy it is in your line at all. It is just a matter of tracing that stranger and getting hold of him. Then we shall have to find out what property there was on these premises. The laundress says that there is nothing missing, but of course no one supposes that the man came here to take the furniture. It is most probable that the motive was robbery of some kind. There's no sign of anything broken open; but then, there wouldn't be, as the keys were available."

Nevertheless he prowled round the room, examining every receptacle that had a lock and trying the drawers of the writing-table and of what looked like a file cabinet.

"You will have your work cut out," I remarked, "to trace that man. The porter's description was pretty vague."

"Yes," he replied; "there isn't much to go on. That's where you come in," he added with a grin, "with your microscopes and air-pumps and things. Now if Dr. Thorndyke was here he would just sweep a bit of dust from the floor and collect any stray oddments and have a good look at them through his magnifier, and then we should know all about it. Can't you do a bit in that line? There's plenty of dust on the floor. And here's a pin. Wonderful significant thing is a pin. And here's a wax vesta; now, that ought to tell you quite a lot. And here is the end of a leather boot-lace—at least, that is what it looks like. That must have come out of somebody's boot. Have a look at it, doctor, and see if you can tell me what kind of boot it came out of and whose boot it was."

He laid the fragment, and the match, and the pin on the table and grinned at me somewhat offensively. Inwardly I resented his impertinence—perhaps the more so since I realised that Thorndyke would probably not have been so completely gruelled as I undoubtedly was. But I considered it politic to take his clumsy irony in good part, and even to carry on his elephantine joke. Accordingly, I picked up the three "clues," one after the other, and examined them gravely, noting that the supposed boot-lace appeared to be composed of whalebone or vulcanite.

"Well, inspector," I said. "I can't give you the answer off-hand. There's no microscope here. But I will examine these objects at my leisure and let you have the information in due course."

With that I wrapped them with ostentatious care in a piece of note and bestowed them in my pocket, a proceeding which the inspector watched with a sour smile.

"I'm afraid you'll be too late," said he. "Our men will probably pick up the tracks while you are doing the microscope stunt. However, I mustn't stay here any longer. We can't do anything until we know what valuables there were on the premises; and I must have the body removed and examined by the police surgeon."

He moved towards the door, and as I had no further business in the rooms, I followed, and leaving him to lock up, I took my way back to our chambers.

When Thorndyke returned to town a couple of days later, I mentioned the case to him. But what Badger had said appeared to be true. It was a case of ascertaining the identity of the stranger who had visited the dead man on that fatal night, and this seemed to be a matter for the

police rather than for us. So the case remained in abeyance until the evening following the inquest, when Mr. Bidwell called on us, accompanied by a Mr. Carston, whom he introduced as an old friend of his and of Herrington's family.

"I have called," he said, "to bring you a full report of the evidence at the inquest. I had a shorthand writer there, and this is a typed transcript of his notes. Nothing fresh transpired beyond what Dr. Jervis knows and has probably told you, but I thought you had better have all the information in writing."

"There is no clue as to who the suspicious visitor was, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Not the slightest," replied Bidwell. "The porter's description is all they have to go on, and of course it would apply to hundreds of persons. But, in connection with that, there is a question on which I should like to take your opinion. Poor Herrington once mentioned to me that he was subjected to a good deal of annoyance by a certain person who from time to time applied to him for financial help. I gathered that some sort of claim was advanced, and that the demands for money were more or less of the nature of blackmail. Giles didn't say who the person was, but I got the impression that he was a relative. Now, my friend Carston, who attended the inquest with me, noticed that the porter's description of the stranger would apply fairly well to a nephew of Giles's, whom he knows slightly and who is a somewhat shady character; and the question that Carston and I have been debating is whether these facts ought to be communicated to the police. It is a serious matter to put a man under suspicion on such very slender data; and yet—"

"And yet," said Carston, "the facts certainly fit the circumstances. This fellow—his name is Godfrey Herrington—is a typical ne'er-do-well. Nobody knows how he lives. He doesn't appear to do any work. And then there is the personality of the deceased. I didn't know Giles Herrington very well, but I knew his brother, Sir Gilbert, pretty intimately, and if Giles was at all like him, a catastrophe might easily have occurred."

"What was Sir Gilbert's special characteristic?" Thorndyke asked.

"Unamiability," was the reply. "He was a most cantankerous, overbearing man, and violent at times. I knew him when I was at the Colonial Office with him, and one of his official acts will show the sort of man he was. You may remember it, Bidwell—the Bekwè affair. There was some trouble in Bekwè, which is one of the minor kingdoms bordering on Ashanti, and Sir Gilbert was sent out as a special commissioner to settle it. And settle it he did with a vengeance. He took up an armed

force, deposed the king of Bekwè, seized the royal stool, message stick, state sword, drums, and the other insignia of royalty, and brought them away with him. And what made it worse was that he treated these important things as mere loot kept some of them himself and gave away others as presents to his friends.

"It was an intolerably high-handed proceeding, and it caused a rare outcry. Even the Colonial Governor protested, and in the end the Secretary of State directed the Governor to reinstate the king and restore the stolen insignia, as these things went with the royal title and were necessary for the ceremonies of reinstatement or the accession of a new king."

"And were they restored?" asked Bidwell.

"Most of them were. But just about this time Gilbert died, and as the whereabouts of one or two of them were unknown, it was impossible to collect them then. I don't know if they have been found since."

Here Thorndyke led Mr. Carston back to the point from which he had digressed.

"You are suggesting that certain peculiarities of temper and temperament on the part of the deceased might have some bearing on the circumstances of his death."

"Yes," said Carston. "If Giles Herrington was at all like his brother—I don't know whether he was—" here he looked inquiringly at Bidwell, who nodded emphatically.

"I should say he was, undoubtedly," said he. "He was my friend, and I was greatly attached to him; but to others, I must admit, he must have appeared a decidedly morose, cantankerous, and irascible man."

"Very well," resumed Carston. "If you imagine this cadging, blackmailing wastrel calling on him and trying to squeeze him, and then you imagine Herrington refusing to be squeezed and becoming abusive and even violent, you have a fair set of antecedents for—for what, in fact, did happen."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "what exactly did happen, according to the evidence?"

"The medical evidence," replied Bidwell, "showed that the immediate cause of death was heart failure. There were marks of fingers on the throat, as you know, and various other bruises. It was evident that deceased had been violently assaulted, but death was not directly due to the injuries."

"And the finding of the jury?" asked Thorndyke.

"Wilful murder, committed by some person unknown."

"It doesn't appear to me," said I, "that Mr. Carston's suggestion has much present bearing on the case. It is really a point for the defence. But we are concerned with the identity of the unknown man."

"I am inclined to agree with Dr. Jervis," said Bidwell, "We have got to catch the hare before we go into culinary details."

"My point is," said Carston, "that Herrington's peculiar temper suggests a set of circumstances that would render it probable that his visitor was his nephew Godfrey."

"There is some truth in that," Thorndyke agreed. "It is highly speculative, but a reasonable speculation cannot be disregarded when the known facts are so few. My feeling is that the police ought to be informed of the existence of this man and his possible relations with the deceased. As to whether he is or is not the suspected stranger, that could be settled at once if he were confronted with the night porter."

"Yes, that is true," said Bidwell "I think Carston and I had better call at Scotland Yard and give the Assistant Commissioner a hint on the subject. It will have to be a very guarded hint, of course."

"Was the question of motive raised?" Thorndyke asked. "As to robbery, for instance."

"There is no evidence of robbery," replied Bidwell. "I have been through all the receptacles in the chambers, and everything seems intact. The keys were in poor Giles's pocket and nothing seems to have been disturbed; indeed, it doesn't appear that there was any portable property of value on the premises."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "the first thing that has to be done is to establish the identity of the nocturnal visitor. That is the business of the police. And if you call and tell them what you have told us, they will, at least, have something to investigate. They should have no difficulty in proving either that he is or is not the man whom the porter let in at the gate; and until they have settled that question, there is no need for us to take any action."

"Exactly," said Bidwell, rising and taking up his hat. "If the police can complete the case, there is nothing for us to do. However, I will leave you the report of the inquest to look over at your leisure, and will keep you informed as to how the case progresses."

When our two friends had gone, Thorndyke sat for some time turning over the sheets of the report and glancing through the depositions of the witnesses. Presently he remarked: "If it turns out that this man, Godfrey Herrington, is not the man whom the porter let in, the police will be left



in the air. Apart from Bidwell's purely speculative suggestion, there seems to be no clue whatever to the visitor's identity."

"Badger would like to hear you say that," said I. "He was very sarcastic respecting our methods of research," and here I gave him an account of my interview with the inspector, including the "clues" with which he had presented me.

"It was like his impudence," Thorndyke commented smilingly, "to pull the leg of my learned junior. Still, there was a germ of sense in what he said. A collection of dust from the floor of that room, in which two men had engaged in a violent struggle, would certainly yield traces of both of them."

"Mixed up with the traces of a good many others," I remarked.

"True," he admitted. "But that would not affect the value of a positive trace of a particular individual. Supposing, for instance, that Godfrey Herrington were known to have dyed hair; and suppose that one or more dyed male hairs were found in the dust from the floor of the room. That would establish a probability that he had been in that room, and also that he was the person who had struggled with the deceased."

"Yes, I see that," said I. "Perhaps I ought to have collected some of the dust. But it isn't too late now, as Bidwell has locked up the chambers. Meanwhile, let me present you with Badger's clues. They came off the floor."

I searched in my pocket and produced the paper packet, the existence of which I had forgotten, and having opened it, offered it to him with an ironical bow. He looked gravely at the little collection, and, disregarding the pin and the match, picked out the third object and examined it curiously.

"That is the alleged boot-lace end," he remarked. "It doesn't do much credit to Badger's powers of observation. It is as unlike leather as it could well be."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is obviously whalebone or vulcanite."

"It isn't vulcanite," said he, looking closely at the broken end and getting out his pocket lens for a more minute inspection.

"What do you suppose it is?" I asked, my curiosity stimulated by the evident interest with which he was examining the object.

"We needn't suppose," he replied. "I fancy that if we get Polton to make a cross section of it, the micro-scope will tell us what it is. I will take it up to him." As he went out and I heard him ascending to the laboratory where our assistant, Polton, was at work, I was conscious of a feeling of vexation and a sense of failure. It was always thus. I had treated this

fragment with the same levity as had the inspector, just dropping it into my pocket and forgetting it. Probably the thing was of no interest or importance; but whether it was or not, Thorndyke would not be satisfied until he knew for certain what it was. And that habit of examining everything, of letting nothing pass without the closest scrutiny, was one of the great secrets of his success as an investigator.

When he came down again I reopened the subject. "It has occurred to me," I said, "that it might be as well for us to have a look at that room. My inspection was rather perfunctory, as Badger was there."

"I have just been thinking the same," he replied. "If Godfrey is not the man, and the police are left stranded, Bidwell will look to us to take up the inquiry, and by that time the room may have been disturbed. I think we will get the key from Bidwell to-morrow morning and make a thorough examination. And we may as well adopt Badger's excellent suggestion respecting the dust. I will instruct Polton to come over with us and bring a full-sized vacuum-cleaner, and we can go over what he collects at our leisure."

Agreeably to this arrangement, we presented ourselves on the following morning at Mr. Bidwell's chambers, accompanied by Polton, who, however, being acutely conscious of the vacuum-cleaner, which was thinly disguised in brown paper, sneaked up the stairs and got out of sight. Bidwell opened the door himself, and Thorndyke explained our intentions to him.

"Of course you can have the key," he said, "but I don't know that it is worth your while to go into the matter. There have been developments since I saw you last night. When Carston and I called at Scotland Yard we found that we were too late. Godfrey Herrington had come forward and made a voluntary statement."

"That was wise of him," said Thorndyke, "but he would have been wiser still to have notified the porter of what had happened and sent for a doctor. He claims that the death was a misadventure, of course?"

"Not at all," replied Bidwell. "He states that when he left, Giles was perfectly well; so well that he was able to kick him—Godfrey—down the stairs and pitch him out on to the pavement. It seems, according to his account, that he called to try to get some financial help from his uncle. He admits that he was rather importunate and persisted after Giles had definitely refused. Then Giles got suddenly into a rage, thrust him out of the chambers, ran him down the stairs, and threw him out into Tanfield Court. It is a perfectly coherent story, and quite probable up to a certain point, but it doesn't account for the bruises on Giles's

body or the finger-marks on his throat.”

“No,” agreed Thorndyke; “either he is lying, or he is the victim of some very inexplicable circumstances. But I gather that you have no further interest in the case?”

Bidwell reflected.

“Well,” he said, “I don’t know about that. Of course I don’t believe him, but it is just possible that he is telling the truth. My feeling is that, if he is guilty, I want him convicted; but if by any chance he is innocent—well, he is Giles’s nephew, and I suppose it is my duty to see that he has a fair chance. Yes, I think I would like you to watch the case independently—with a perfectly open mind, neither for nor against. But I don’t see that there is much that you can do.”

“Neither do I,” said Thorndyke. “But one can observe and note the visible facts, if there are any. Has anything been done to the rooms?”

“Nothing whatever,” was the reply. “They are just as Dr. Jervis and I found them the morning after the catastrophe.”

With this he handed Thorndyke the key and we ascended to the landing, where we found Polton on guard with the vacuum-cleaner, like a sentry armed with some new and unorthodox weapon.

The appearance of the room was unchanged. The half-dislodged tablecloth, the litter of broken glass on the floor, even the displaced fender and hearth-rug, were just as I had last seen them. Thorndyke looked about him critically and remarked “The appearances hardly support Godfrey’s statement. There was clearly a prolonged and violent struggle, not a mere ejection. And look at the table cloth. The uncovered part of the table is that nearest the door, and most of the things have fallen off at the end nearest the fireplace. Obviously, the body that dislodged the cloth was moving away from the door, not towards it, which again suggests something more than an unresisted ejection.” He again looked round, and his glance fell on the nail and the coloured silhouette on the wall-paper.

“That, I presume,” said he, “is where the mysterious sword or dagger hung. It is rather large for a dagger and somewhat wide for a sword, though barbaric swords are of all shapes and sizes.”

He produced his spring tape and carefully measured the phantom shape on the wall. “Thirty-one inches long,” he reported, “including the loop at the end of the handle, by which it hung; seven and a half inches at the top of the scabbard, tapering rather irregularly to three inches at the tip. A curious shape. I don’t remember ever having seen a sword quite like it.”

Meanwhile Polton, having picked up the broken glass and other objects, had uncovered the vacuum-cleaner and now started the motor—which was driven by an attached dry battery—and proceeded very systematically to trundle the machine along the floor. At every two or three sweeps he paused to empty the receiver, placing the grey, felt-like mass on a sheet of paper, with a pencilled note of the part of the room from whence it came. The size of these masses of felted dust, and the astonishing change in the colour of the carpet that marked the trail of the cleaner, suggested that Mrs. Runt's activities had been of a somewhat perfunctory character. Polton's dredgings apparently represented the accumulations of years.

"Wonderful lot of hairs in this old dust," Polton remarked as he deposited a fresh consignment on the paper, "especially in this lot. It came from under that looking-glass on the wall. Perhaps that clothes brush that hangs under the glass accounts for it."

"Yes," I agreed, "they will be hairs brushed off Mr. Herrington's collar and shoulders. But," I added, taking the brush from its nail and examining it, "Mrs. Runt seems to have used the glass, too. There are three long hairs still sticking to the brush."

As Thorndyke was still occupied in browsing inquisitively round the room, I proceeded to make a preliminary inspection of the heaps of dust, picking out the hairs and other recognisable objects with my pocket forceps, and putting them on a separate sheet of paper. Of the former, the bulk were pretty obviously those of the late tenant—white or dull black male hairs—but Mrs. Runt had contributed quite liberally, for I picked out of the various heaps over a dozen long hairs, the mousy brown colour of which seemed to identify them as hers. The remainder were mostly ordinary male hairs of various colours, eyebrow hairs and eyelashes, of no special interest, with one exception. This was a black hair which lay flat on the paper in a close coil, like a tiny watch-spring.

"I wonder who this negro was," said I, inspecting it through my lens.

"Probably some African or West Indian Law student," Thorndyke suggested. "There are always a good many about the Inns of Court."

He came round to examine my collection, and while he was viewing the negro hair with the aid of my lens, I renewed my investigation of the little dust-heaps. Presently I made a new discovery.

"Why," I exclaimed, "here is another of Badger's boot-laces—another piece of the same one, I think. By the way, did you ascertain what that boot-lace really was?"

"Yes," he replied. "Polton made a section of it and mounted it; and furthermore, he made a magnified photograph of it. I have the photograph in my pocket, so you can answer your own question."

He produced from his letter-case a half-plate print which he handed to me and which I examined curiously.

"It is a singular object," said I, "but I don't quite make it out. It looks rather like a bundle of hairs embedded in some transparent substance."

"That, in effect," he replied, "is what it is. It is an elephant's hair, probably from the tail. But, as you see, it is a compound hair; virtually a group of hairs agglutinated into a single stem. Most very large hairs are compound. A tiger's whiskers, for instance, are large, stiff hairs which, if cut across, are seen to be formed of several largish hairs fused together; and the colossal hair which grows on the nose of the rhinoceros—the so-called nasal horn—is made up of thousands of subordinate hairs."

"It is a remarkable-looking thing," I said, handing back the photograph; "very distinctive—if you happen to know what it is. But the mystery is how on earth it came here. There are no elephants in the Temple."

"I certainly haven't noticed any," he replied; "and, as you say, the presence of an elephant's hair in a room in the middle of London is a rather remarkable circumstance. And yet, perhaps, if we consider all the other circumstances, it may not be impossible to form a conjecture as to how it came here. I recommend the problem to my learned friend for consideration at his leisure and now, as we have seen all that there is to see—which is mighty little—we may as well leave Polton to finish the collection of data from the floor. We can take your little selection with us."

He folded the paper containing the hairs that I had picked out into a neat packet, which he slipped into his pocket; then, having handed the key of the outer door to Polton, for return to Mr. Bidwell, he went out and I followed. We descended the stairs slowly, both of us deeply reflective. As to the subject of his meditations I could form no opinion, but my own were occupied by the problem which he had suggested; and the more I reflected on it, the less capable of solution did it appear.

We had nearly reached the ground floor when I became aware of quick footsteps descending the stairs behind us. Near the entry our follower overtook us, and as we stood aside to let him pass, I had a brief vision of a shortish, dapper, smartly-dressed coloured man—apparently an African or West Indian—who carried a small suit-case and a set of golf-clubs.

"Now," said I, in a low tone, "I wonder if that gentleman is the late owner of that negro hair that I picked up. It seems intrinsically probable as he appears to live in this building, and would be a near neighbour of Herrington's." I halted at the entry and read out the only name painted on the door-post as appertaining to the second floor—Mr. Kwaku Essien, which, I decided, seemed to fit a gentleman of colour.

But Thorndyke was not listening. His long legs were already carrying him, with a deceptively leisurely air, across Tanfield Court in the wake of Mr. Essien, and at about the same pace. I put on a spurt and overtook him, a little mystified by his sudden air of purpose and by the fact that he was not walking in the direction of our chambers. Still more mystified was I when it became clear that Thorndyke was following the African and keeping at a constant distance in rear of him; but I made no comment until, having pursued our quarry to the top of Middle Temple Lane, we saw him hail a taxi and drive off. Then I demanded an explanation.

"I wanted to see him fairly out of the precincts," was the reply. "because I have a particular desire to see what his chambers are like. I only hope his door has a practicable latch."

I stared at him in dismay.

"You surely don't contemplate breaking into his chambers!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly not," he replied. "if the latch won't yield to gentle persuasion I shall give it up. But don't let me involve you, Jervis. I admit that it is a slightly irregular proceeding."

"Irregular!" I repeated. "It is house-breaking, pure and simple. I can only hope that you won't be able to get in."

The hope turned out to be a vain one, as I had secretly feared. When we had reconnoitred the stairs and established the encouraging fact that the third floor was untenanted, we inspected the door above which our victim's name was painted; and a glance at the yawning key of an old-fashioned draw-latch told me that the deed was as good as done.

"Now, Jervis," said Thorndyke, producing from his pocket the curious instrument that he described as a 'smoker's companion'—it was an undeniable pick-lock, made by Polton under his direction—"you had better clear out and wait for me at our chambers."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I replied. "I am an accessory before the fact already, so I may as well stay and see the crime committed."

"Then in that case," said he, "you had better keep a look-out from the landing window and call me if any one comes to the house. That will

make us perfectly safe."

I accordingly took my station at the window, and Thorndyke, having knocked several times at the "oak" without eliciting any response, set to work with the smoker's companion. In less than a minute the latch clicked, the outer door opened, and Thorndyke, pushing the inner door open, entered, leaving both doors ajar. I was devoured by curiosity as to what his purpose was. Obviously it must be a very definite one to justify this most extraordinary proceeding. But I dared not leave my post for a moment, seeing that we were really engaged in a very serious breach of the law and it was of vital importance that we should not be surprised in the act. I was therefore unable to observe my colleague's proceedings, and I waited impatiently to see if anything came of this unlawful entry.

I had waited thus some ten minutes, keeping a close watch on the pavement below, when I heard Thorndyke quickly cross the room and approach the door. A moment later he came out on the landing, bearing in his hand an object which, while it enlightened me as to the purpose of the raid, added to my mystification.

"That looks like the missing sword from Herrington's room!" I exclaimed, gazing at it in amazement.

"Yes," he replied. "I found it in a drawer in the bedroom. Only it isn't a sword."

"Then, what the deuce is it?" I demanded, for the thing looked like a broad-bladed sword in a soft leather scabbard of somewhat rude native workman ship.

By way of reply he slowly drew the object from its sheath, and as it came into sight, I uttered an exclamation of astonishment. To the inexperienced eye it appeared an elongated body about nine inches in length covered with coarse, black leather, from either side of which sprang a multitude of what looked like thick, black wires. Above, it was furnished with a leather handle which was surmounted by a suspension loop of plaited leather.

"I take it," said I, "that this is an elephant's tail."

"Yes," he replied, "and a rather remarkable specimen. The hairs are of unusual length. Some of them, you see, are nearly eighteen inches long."

"And what are you going to do now?" I asked.

"I am going to put it back where I found it. Then I shall run down to Scotland Yard and advise Miller to get a search warrant. He is too discreet to ask inconvenient questions."

I must admit that it was a great relief to me when, a minute later, Thorndyke came out and shut the door; but I could not deny that the raid had been justified by the results. What had, presumably, been a mere surmise had been converted into a definite fact on which action could confidently be taken.

"I suppose," said I, as we walked down towards the Embankment en route for Scotland Yard, "I ought to have spotted this case."

"You had the means," Thorndyke replied. "At your first visit you learned that an object of some kind had disappeared from the wall. It seemed to be a trivial object of no value, and not likely to be connected with the crime. So you disregarded it. But it had disappeared. Its disappearance was not accounted for, and that disappearance seemed to coincide in time with the death of Herrington. It undoubtedly called for investigation. Then you found on the floor an object the nature of which was unknown to you. Obviously, you ought to have ascertained what it was."

"Yes, I ought," I admitted, "though I am not sure that I should have been much forrader even then. In fact, I am not so very much forrader even now. I don't see how you spotted this man Essien, and I don't understand why he took all this trouble and risk and even committed a murder to get possession of this trumpery curio. Of course I can make a vague guess. But I should like to hear how you ran the man and the thing to earth."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Let me retrace the train of discoveries and inferences in their order. First I learned that an object, supposed to be a barbaric sword of some kind, had disappeared about the time of the murder—if it was a murder. Then we heard from Carston that Sir Gilbert Herrington had appropriated the insignia and ceremonial objects belonging to the king of Bekwè; that some had subsequently been restored, but others had been given to friends as curios. As I listened to that story, the possibility occurred to me that this curio which had disappeared might be one of the missing ceremonial objects. It was not only possible: it was quite probable. For Giles Herrington was a very likely person to have received one of these gifts, and his morose temper made it unlikely that he would restore it. And then, since such an object would be of great value to somebody, and since it was actually stolen property, there would be good reasons why some interested person should take forcible possession of it. This, of course, was mere hypothesis of a rather shadowy kind. But when you produced an object which I at once suspected, and then proved, to be an elephant's



hair, the hypothesis became a reasonable working theory. For, among the ceremonial objects which form what we may call the regalia of a West African king is the elephant's tail which is carried before him by a special officer as a symbol of his power and strength. An elephant's tail had pretty certainly been stolen from the king, and Carston said nothing about its having been restored.

"Well, when we went to Herrington's chambers just now, it was clear to me that the thing which had disappeared was certainly not a sword. The phantom shape on the wall did not show much, but it did show plainly that the object had hung from the nail by a large loop at the end of the handle. But the suspension loop of a sword or dagger is always on the scabbard, never on the hilt. But if the thing was not a sword, what was it? The elephant's hair that you found on the floor seemed to answer the question.

"Now, as we came in, I had noticed on the doorpost the West African name, Kwaku Essien. A man whose name is Kwaku is pretty certainly a negro. But if this was an elephant's tail, its lawful owner was a negro, and that owner wanted to recover it and was morally entitled to take possession of it. Here was another striking agreement. The chambers over Herrington's were occupied by a negro. Finally, you found among the floor dust a negro's hair. Then a negro had actually been in this room. But from what we know of Herrington, that negro was not there as an invited visitor. All the probabilities pointed to Mr. Essien. But the probabilities were not enough to act on. Then we had a stroke of sheer luck. We got the chance to explore Essien's chambers and seek the crucial fact. But here we are at Scotland Yard."

That night, at about eight o'clock, a familiar tattoo on our knocker announced the arrival of Mr. Superintendent Miller, not entirely unexpected as I guessed.

"Well," he said, as I let him in, "the coloured nobleman has come home. I've just had a message from the man who was detailed to watch the premises."

"Are you going to make the arrest now?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, and I should be glad if you could come across with me. You know more about the case than I do."

Thorndyke assented at once, and we set forth together. As we entered Tanfield Court we passed a man who was lurking in the shadow of an entry, and who silently indicated the lighted windows of the chambers for which we were bound. Ascending the stairs up which I had lately climbed with unlawful intent, we halted at Mr. Essien's door, on which

the superintendent executed an elaborate flourish with his stick, there being no knocker. After a short interval we heard a bolt withdrawn, the door opened a short distance, and in the interval a black race appeared looking out at us suspiciously.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the owner of the face demanded gruffly.

"You are Mr. Kwaku Essien, I think?" said Miller, unostentatiously insinuating his foot into the door opening.

"Yes," was the reply. "But I don't know you. What is your business?"

"I am a police officer," Miller replied, edging his foot in a little farther, "and I hold a warrant to arrest you on the charge of having murdered Mr. Giles Herrington."

Before the superintendent had fairly finished his sentence, the dusky face vanished and the door slammed violently—on to the superintendent's massive foot. That foot was instantly reinforced by a shoulder and for a few moments there was a contest of forces, opposite but not equal. Suddenly the door flew open and the superintendent charged into the room. I had a momentary vision of a flying figure, closely pursued, darting through into an inner room, of the slamming of a second door—once more on an intercepting foot. And then—it all seemed to have happened in a few seconds—a dejected figure, sitting on the edge of a bed, clasping a pair of manacled hands and watching Miller as he drew the elephant's tail out of a drawer in the dressing-chest.

"This—er—article," said Miller, "belonged to Mr. Herrington, and was stolen from his premises on the night of the murder."

Essien shook his head emphatically.

"No," he replied. "You are wrong. I stole nothing, and I did not murder Mr. Herrington. Listen to me and I will tell you all about it."

Miller administered the usual caution and the prisoner continued: "This elephant-brush is one of many things stolen, years ago, from the king of Bekwè. Some of those things—most of them—have been restored, but this could not be traced for a long time. At last it became known to me that Mr. Herrington had it, and I wrote to him asking him to give it up and telling him who I was—I am the eldest living son of the king's sister, and therefore, according to our law, the heir to the kingdom. But he would not give it up or even sell it. Then, as I am a student of the Inn, I took these chambers above his, intending, when I had an opportunity, to go in and take possession of my uncle's property. The opportunity came that night that you have spoken of. I was coming up the stairs to my chambers when, as I passed his door, I heard loud voices inside as

of people quarrelling. I had just reached my own door and opened it when I heard his door open, and then a great uproar and the sound of a struggle. I ran down a little way and looked over the banisters, and then I saw him thrusting a man across the landing and down the lower stairs. As they disappeared, I ran down, and finding his door ajar, I went in to recover my property. It took me a little time to find it, and I had just taken it from the nail and was going out with it when, at the door, I met Mr. Herrington coming in. He was very excited already, and when he saw me he seemed to go mad. I tried to get past him, but he seized me and dragged me back into the room, wrenching the thing out of my hand. He was very violent. I thought he wanted to kill me, and I had to struggle for my life. Suddenly he let go his hold of me, staggered back a few paces, and then fell on the floor. I stooped over him, thinking that he was taken ill, and wondering what I had better do. But soon I saw that he was not ill; he was dead. Then I was very frightened. I picked up the elephant brush and put it back into its case, and I went out very quietly, shut the door, and ran up to my rooms. That is what happened. There was no robbery and murder.”

“Well,” said Miller, as the prisoner and his escort disappeared towards the gate, “I suppose, in a technical sense, it is murder, but they are hardly likely to press the charge.”

“I don’t think it is even technically,” said Thorndyke. “My feeling is that he will be acquitted if he is sent for trial. Meanwhile, I take it that my client, Godfrey Herrington, will be released from custody at once.”

“Yes, doctor,” replied Miller, “I will see to that now. He has had better luck than he deserved, I suspect, in having his case looked after by you. I don’t fancy he would have got an acquittal if he had gone for trial.”

Thorndyke’s forecast was nearly correct, but there was no acquittal, since there was no trial. The case against Kwaku Essien never got farther than the Grand Jury<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Eine Jury, die darüber entscheidet, ob die Beweise der Anklage für einen Prozess ausreichen oder nicht. In England war diese Einrichtung bis 1933 tätig und wurde 1948 offiziell abgeschafft. In den USA ist sie auf Bundesebene und etwa der Hälfte der Bundesstaaten noch heute gebräuchlich.

## The Pathologist to the Rescue

“hope,” said I, as I looked anxiously out of our window up King’s Bench Walk, “that our friend, Foxley, will turn up to time, or I shall lose the chance of hearing his story. I must be in court by half-past eleven. The telegram said that he was a parson, didn’t it?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “The Reverend Arthur Foxley.”

“Then perhaps this may be he. There is a parson crossing from the Row in this direction, only he has a girl with him. He didn’t say anything about a girl, did he?”

“No. He merely asked for the appointment. However,” he added, as he joined me at the window and watched the couple approaching with their eyes apparently fixed on the number above our portico, “this is evidently our client, and punctual to the minute.”

In response to the old-fashioned flourish on our little knocker, he opened the inner door and invited the clergyman and his companion to enter; and while the mutual introductions were in progress, I looked critically at our new clients. Mr. Foxley was a typical and favourable specimen of his class: a handsome, refined, elderly gentleman, prim as to his speech, suave and courteous in bearing, with a certain engaging simplicity of manner which impressed me very favourably. His companion I judged to be a parishioner for she was what ladies are apt to describe as “not quite”; that is to say, her social level appeared to appertain to the lower strata of the middle-class. But she was a fine, strapping girl, very sweet-faced and winsome, quiet and gentle in manner and obviously in deep trouble, for her clear grey eyes—fixed earnestly, almost devouringly, on Thorndyke—were reddened and swimming with unshed tears.

“We have sought your aid, Dr. Thorndyke,” the clergyman began, “on the advice of my friend, Mr. Brodribb, who happened to call on me on some business. He assured me that you would be able to solve our

difficulties if it were humanly possible, so I have come to lay those difficulties before you. I pray to God that you may be able to help us, for my poor young friend here, Miss Markham, is in a most terrible position, as you will understand when I tell you that her future husband, a most admirable young man named Robert Fletcher, is in the custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder.”

Thorndyke nodded gravely, and the clergyman continued: “I had better tell you exactly what has happened. The dead man is one Joseph Riggs, a maternal uncle of Fletcher’s, a strange, eccentric man, solitary, miserly, and of a violent, implacable temper. He was quite well-to-do, though penurious and haunted constantly by an absurd fear of poverty. His nephew, Robert, was apparently his only known relative, and, under his will, was his sole heir. Recently, however, Robert has become engaged to my friend, Miss Lilian, and this engagement was violently opposed by his uncle, who had repeatedly urged him to make what he called a profitable marriage. For Miss Lilian is a dowerless maiden—dowerless save for those endowments with which God has been pleased to enrich her, and which her future husband has properly prized above mere material wealth. However, Riggs declared, in his brutal way, that he was not going to leave his property to the husband of a shop-woman, and that Robert might look out for a wife with money or be struck out of his will.

“The climax was reached yesterday when Robert, in response to a peremptory summons, went to see his uncle. Mr. Riggs was in a very intractable mood. He demanded that Robert should break off his engagement unconditionally and at once, and when Robert bluntly insisted on his right to choose his own wife the old man worked himself up into a furious rage, shouting, cursing, using the most offensive language and even uttering threats of personal violence. Finally, he drew his gold watch from his pocket and laid it with its chain on the table then, opening a drawer, he took out a bundle of bearer bonds and threw them down by the watch.

“‘There, my friend,’ said he, ‘that is your inheritance. That is all you will get from me, living or dead. Take it and go, and don’t let me ever set eyes on you again.’

“At first Robert refused to accept the gift, but his uncle became so violent that eventually, for peace’s sake, he took the watch and the bonds, intending to return them later, and went away. He left at half-past five, leaving his uncle alone in the house.”

“How was that?” Thorndyke asked. “Was there no servant?”

“Mr. Riggs kept no resident servant. The young woman who did his housework came at half-past eight in the morning and left at half-past four. Yesterday she waited until five to get tea ready, but then, as the uproar in the sitting-room was still unabated, she thought it best to go. She was afraid to go in to lay the tea-things.

“This morning, when she arrived at the house, she found the front door unlocked, as it always was during the day. On entering, her attention was at once attracted by two or three little pools of blood on the floor of the hall, or passage. Somewhat alarmed by this, she looked into the sitting-room, and finding no one there, and being impressed by the silence in the house, she went along the passage to a back room—a sort of study or office, which was usually kept locked when Mr. Riggs was not in. Now, however, it was unlocked and the door was ajar; so having first knocked and receiving no answer, she pushed open the door and looked in; and there, to her horror, she saw her employer lying on the floor, apparently dead, with a wound on the side of his head and a pistol on the floor by his side.

“Instantly she turned and rushed out of the house, and she was running up the street in search of a police man when she encountered me at a corner and burst out with her dreadful tidings. I walked with her to the police station, and as we went she told me what had happened on the previous afternoon. Naturally, I was profoundly shocked and also alarmed, for I saw that—rightly or wrongly—suspicion must immediately fall on Robert Fletcher. The servant, Rose Turnmill, took it for granted that he had murdered her master; and when we found the station inspector, and Rose had repeated her statement to him, it was evident that he took the same view.

“With him and a sergeant, we went back to the house; but on the way we met Mr. Brodribb, who was staying at the »White Lion« and had just come out for a walk. I told him, rapidly, what had occurred and begged him to come with us, which, with the inspector’s consent, he did; and as we walked I explained to him the awful position that Robert Fletcher might be placed in, and asked him to advise me what to do. But, of course, there was nothing to be said or done until we had seen the body and knew whether any suspicion rested on Robert.

“We found the man Riggs lying as Rose had said. He was quite dead, cold and stiff. There was a pistol wound on the right temple, and a pistol lay on the floor at his right side. A little blood—but not much—had trickled from the wound and lay in a small pool on the oilcloth. The door of an iron safe was open and a bunch of keys hung from the lock;

and on a desk one or two share certificates were spread out. On searching the dead man's pockets it was found that the gold watch which the servant told us he usually carried was missing, and when Rose went to the bedroom to see if it was there, it was nowhere to be found.

"Apart from the watch, however, the appearances suggested that the man had taken his own life. But against this view was the blood on the hall floor. The dead man appeared to have fallen at once from the effects of the shot, and there had been very little bleeding. Then how came the blood in the hall? The inspector decided that it could not have been the blood of the deceased; and when we examined it and saw that there were several little pools and that they seemed to form a track towards the street door, he was convinced that the blood had fallen from some person who had been wounded and was escaping from the house. And, under the circumstances, he was bound to assume that that person was Robert Fletcher; and on that assumption, he dispatched the sergeant forthwith to arrest Robert.

"On this I held a consultation with Mr. Brodribb, who pointed out that the case turned principally on the blood in the hall. If it was the blood of deceased, and the absence of the watch could be explained, a verdict of suicide could be accepted. But if it was the blood of some other person, that fact would point to murder. The question, he said, would have to be settled, if possible, and his advice to me, if I believed Robert to be innocent—which, from my knowledge of him, I certainly did—was this: Get a couple of small, clean, labelled bottles from a chemist and—with the inspector's consent—put in one a little of the blood from the hall and in the other some of the blood of the deceased. Seal them both in the inspector's presence and mine and take them up to Dr. Thorndyke. If it is possible to answer the question, Are they or are they not from the same person? he will answer it.

"Well, the inspector made no objection, so I did what he advised. And here are the specimens. I trust they may tell us what we want to know."

Here Mr. Foxley took from his attaché-case a small cardboard box, and opening it, displayed two little wide-mouthed bottles carefully packed in cotton wool. Lifting them out tenderly, he placed them on the table before Thorndyke. They were both neatly corked, sealed—with Brodribb's seal, as I noticed—and labelled; the one inscribed "Blood of Joseph Riggs," and the other "Blood of unknown origin," and both signed "Arthur Foxley" and dated. At the bottom of each was a small mass of gelatinous blood-clot.

Thorndyke looked a little dubiously at the two bottles, and addressing

the clergyman, said: "I am afraid Mr. Brodribb has rather over-estimated our resources. There is no known method by which the blood of one person can be distinguished with certainty from that of another."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Foxley. "How disappointing! Then these specimens are useless, after all?"

"I won't say that; but it is in the highest degree improbable that they will yield any information. You must build no expectations on them."

"But you will examine them and see if anything is to be gleaned," the parson urged, persuasively.

"Yes, I will examine them. But you realise that if they should yield any evidence, that evidence might be unfavourable?"

"Yes; Mr. Brodribb pointed that out, but we are willing to take the risk, and so, I may say, is Robert Fletcher, to whom I put the question."

"Then you have seen Mr. Fletcher since the discovery?"

"Yes, I saw him at the police station after his arrest. It was then that he gave me—and also the police—the particulars that I have repeated to you. He had to make a statement, as the dead man's watch and the bonds were found in his possession."

"With regard to the pistol. Has it been identified?"

"No. It is an old-fashioned derringer which no one has ever seen before, so there is no evidence as to whose property it was."

"And as to those share certificates which you spoke of as lying on the desk. Do you happen to remember what they were?"

"Yes, they were West African mining shares; Abusum Pa-pa was the name, I think."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "Mr. Riggs had been losing money. The Abusum Pa-pa Company has just gone into liquidation. Do you know if anything had been taken from the safe?"

"It is impossible to say, but apparently not, as there was a good deal of money in the cash-box, which we unlocked and inspected. But we shall hear more to-morrow at the inquest, and I trust we shall hear something there from you. But in any case I hope you will attend to watch the proceedings on behalf of poor Fletcher. And if possible, to be present at the autopsy at eleven o'clock. Can you manage that?"

"Yes. And I shall come down early enough to make an inspection of the premises if the police will give the necessary facilities."

Mr. Foxley thanked him effusively, and when the details as to the trains had been arranged, our clients rose to depart. Thorndyke shook their hands cordially, and as he bade farewell to Miss Markham he murmured



a few words of encouragement. She looked up at him gratefully and appealingly as she naïvely held his hand.

"You will try to help us, Dr. Thorndyke, won't you?" she urged. "And you will examine that blood very, very carefully. Promise that you will. Remember that poor Robert's life may hang upon what you can tell about it."

"I realise that, Miss Markham," he replied gently, "and I promise you that the specimens shall be most thoroughly examined; and further, that no stone shall be left unturned in my endeavours to bring the truth to light." At his answer, spoken with infinite kindness and sympathy, her eyes filled and she turned away with a few broken words of thanks, and the good clergyman—himself not unmoved by the little episode—took her arm and led her to the door.

"Well," I remarked as their retreating footsteps died away, "old Brodribb's enthusiasm seems to have let you in for a queer sort of task; and I notice that you appear to have accepted Fletcher's statement."

"Without prejudice," he replied. "I don't know Fletcher, but the balance of probabilities is in his favour. Still, that blood-track in the hall is a curious feature. It certainly requires explanation."

"It does, indeed!" I exclaimed, "and you have got to find the explanation! Well, I wish you joy of the job. I suppose you will carry out the farce to the bitter end as you have promised?"

"Certainly," he replied. "But it is hardly a farce. I should have looked the specimens over in any case. One never knows what illuminating fact a chance observation may bring into view."

I smiled sceptically.

"The fact that you are asked to ascertain is that these two samples of blood came from the same person. If there are any means of proving that, they are unknown to me. I should have said it was an impossibility."

"Of course," he rejoined, "you are quite right, speaking academically and in general terms. No method of identifying the blood of individual persons has hitherto been discovered. But yet I can imagine the possibility, in particular and exceptional cases, of an actual, personal identification by means of blood. What does my learned friend think?"

"He thinks that his imagination is not equal to the required effort," I answered; and with that I picked up my brief-bag and went forth to my duties at the courts.

That Thorndyke would keep his promise to poor Lilian Markham was a foregone conclusion, preposterous as the examination seemed. But

even my long experience of my colleague's scrupulous conscientiousness had not prepared me for the spectacle which met my eyes when I returned to our chambers. On the table stood the microscope, flanked by three slide-boxes. Each box held six trays, and each tray held six slides—a hundred and eight slides in all!

But why three boxes? I opened one. The slides—carefully mounted blood-films—were labelled “Joseph Riggs.” Those in the second box were labelled, “Blood from hall floor.” But when I opened the third box, I beheld a collection of empty slides labelled “Robert Fletcher”!

I chuckled aloud. Prodigious! Thorndyke was going even one better than his promise. He was not only going to examine—probably had examined—the two samples produced; he was actually going to collect a third sample for himself!

I picked out one of Mr. Riggs's slides and laid it on the stage of the microscope. Thorndyke seemed to have been using a low-power objective—the inch-and-a-half. After a glance through this, I swung round the nose-piece to the high power. And then I got a further surprise. The brightly-coloured “white” corpuscles showed that Thorndyke had actually been to the trouble of staining the films with eosin! Again I murmured, “Prodigious!” and put the slide back in its box. For, of course, it showed just what one expected: blood—or rather, broken-up blood-clot. From its appearance I could not even have sworn that it was human blood.

I had just closed the box when Thorndyke entered the room. His quick eye at once noted the changed objective and he remarked: “I see you have been having a look at the specimens.”

“A specimen.” I corrected. “Enough is as good as a feast.”

“Blessed are they who are easily satisfied,” he retorted; and then he added: “I have altered my arrangements, though I needn't interfere with yours. I shall go down to Southaven to-night; in fact, I am starting in a few minutes.”

“Why?” I asked.

“For several reasons. I want to make sure of the *post-mortem* tomorrow morning, I want to pick up any further facts that are available, and finally, I want to prepare a set of blood-films from Robert Fletcher. We may as well make the series complete,” he added with a smile, to which I replied by a broad grin.

“Really, Thorndyke,” I protested. “I'm surprised at you, at your age, too. She is a nice girl, but she isn't so beautiful as to justify a hundred and eight blood-films.”

I accompanied him to the taxi, followed by Polton, who carried his modest luggage, and then returned to speculate on his probable plan of campaign. For, of course, he had one. His purposive, resolute manner told me that he had seen farther into this case than I had. I accepted that as natural and inevitable. Indeed, I may admit that my disrespectful badinage covered a belief in his powers hardly second even to old Brodribb's. I was, in fact, almost prepared to discover that those preposterous blood-films had, after all, yielded some "illuminating fact" which had sent him hurrying down to Southaven in search of corroboration.

When I alighted from the train on the following day at a little past noon, I found him waiting on the platform, ready to conduct me to his hotel for an early lunch.

"All goes well, so far," he reported. "I attended the *post-mortem*, and examined the wound thoroughly. The pistol was held in the right hand not more than two inches from the head; probably quite close, for the skin is scorched and heavily tattooed with black powder grains. I find that Riggs was right-handed. So the *prima facie* probabilities are in favour of suicide; and the recent loss of money suggests a reasonable motive."

"But what about that blood in the hall?"

"Oh, we have disposed of that. I completed the blood-film series last night."

I looked at him quickly to see if he was serious or only playing a facetious return-shot. But his face was as a face of wood.

"You are an exasperating old devil, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed with conviction. Then, knowing that cross-examination would be futile, I asked: "What are we going to do after lunch?"

"The inspector is going to show us over 'the scene of the tragedy,' as the newspapers would express it."

I noted gratefully that he had reserved this item for me, and dismissed professional topics for the time being, concentrating my attention on the old-world, amphibious streets through which we were walking. There is always something interesting in the aspect of a sea-port town, even if it is only a small one like Southaven.

The inspector arrived with such punctuality that he found us still at the table and was easily induced to join us with a cup of coffee and to accept a cigar—administered by Thorndyke, as I suspected, with the object of hindering conversation. I could see that his interest in my colleague was intense and not unmingled with awe, a fact which, in conjunction

with the cigar, restrained him from any undue manifestations of curiosity, but not from continuous, though furtive, observation of my friend. Indeed, when we arrived at the late Mr. Riggs's house, I was secretly amused by the close watch that he kept on Thorndyke's movements, unsensational as the inspection turned out to be.

The house, itself, presented very little of interest excepting its picturesque old-world exterior, which fronted on a quiet by-street and was furnished with a deep bay which, as Thorndyke ascertained, commanded a clear view of the street from end to end. It was a rather shabby, neglected little house, as might have been expected, and our examination of it yielded, so far as I could see, only a single fact of any significance: which was that there appeared to be no connection what ever between the blood-stain on the study floor and the train of large spots from the middle of the hall to the street door. And on this piece of evidence—definitely unfavourable from our point of view—Thorndyke concentrated his attention when he had made a preliminary survey.

Closely followed by the watchful inspector, he browsed round the little room, studying every inch of the floor between the blood-stain and the door. The latter he examined minutely from top to bottom, especially as to the handle, the jambs, and the lintel. Then he went out into the hall, scrutinising the floor inch by inch, poring over the walls, and even looking behind the framed prints that hung on them. A reflector lamp suspended by a nail on the wall received minute and prolonged attention, as did also a massive lamp-hook screwed into one of the beams of the low ceiling, of which Thorndyke remarked as he stooped to pass under it, that it must have been fixed there by a dwarf.

"Yes," the inspector agreed, "and a fool. A swinging lamp hung on that hook would have blocked the whole fairway. There isn't too much room as it is. What a pity we weren't a bit more careful about footprints in this place. There are plenty of tracks of wet feet here on this oil-cloth; faint, but you could have made them out all right if they hadn't been all on top of one another. There's Mr. Foxley's, the girl's, mine, and the men who carried out the body, but I'm hanged if I can tell which is which. It's a regular mix up."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is all very confused. But I notice one rather odd thing. There are several faint traces of a large right foot, but I can't see any sign of the corresponding left foot. Can you?"

"Perhaps this is it," said Thorndyke, pointing to a large, vague oval mark. "I have noticed that it seems to occur in some sort of connection with the big right foot; but I must admit that it is not a very obvious

foot-print.”

“I shouldn’t have taken it for a foot-print at all, or at any rate, not a human foot-print. It is more like the spoor of some big animal.”

“It is,” Thorndyke agreed; “but whatever it is, it seems to have been here before any of the others arrived. You notice that wherever it occurs, it seems to have been trodden on by some of the others.”

“Yes, I had noticed that, and the same is true of the big right foot, so it seems probable that they are connected, as you say. But I am hanged if I can make anything of it. Can you, inspector?”

The inspector shook his head. He could not recognise the mark as a foot-print, but he could see very plainly that he had been a fool not to have taken more care to protect the floor.

When the examination of the hall was finished, Thorndyke opened the door and looked at the big, flat doorstep. “What was the weather like here on Wednesday evening?” he asked.

“Showery,” the inspector replied; “and there were one or two heavy showers during the night. You were noticing that there are no blood-tracks on the doorstep. But there wouldn’t be in any case; for if a man had come out of this door dropping blood, the blood would have dropped on wet stone and got washed away at once.”

Thorndyke admitted the truth of this; and so another item of favourable evidence was extinguished. The probability that the blood in the hall was that of some person other than the deceased remained undisturbed; and I could not see that a single fact had been elicited by our inspection of the house that was in any way helpful to our client. Indeed, it appeared to me that there was absolutely no case for the defence, and I even asked myself whether we were not, in fact, merely trying to fudge up a defence for an obviously guilty man. It was not like Thorndyke to do that. But how did the case stand? There was a suggestion of suicide, but a clear possibility of homicide. There was strong evidence that a second person had been in the house, and that person appeared to have received a wound. But a wound suggested a struggle; and the servant’s evidence was to the effect that when she left the house a violent altercation was in progress. The deceased was never again seen alive; and the other party to the quarrel had been found with property of the dead man in his possession. Moreover, there was a clear motive for the crime, stupid as that crime was. For the dead man had threatened to revoke his will but as he had presumably not done so, his death left the will still operative. In short, everything pointed to the guilt of our client, Robert Fletcher.

I had just reached this not very gratifying conclusion when a statement of Thorndyke's shattered my elaborate summing up into impalpable fragments.

"I suppose, sir," said the inspector, "there isn't anything that you would care to tell us, as you are for the defence. But we are not hostile to Fletcher. In fact, he hasn't been charged. He is only being detained in custody until we have heard what turns up at the inquest. I know you have examined that blood that Mr. Foxley took, and Fletcher's blood, too, and you've seen the premises. We have given all the facilities that we could, and if you could give us any sort of hint that might be useful, I should be very much obliged."

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments. Then he replied: "There is no reason for secrecy in regard to you, inspector, who have been so helpful and friendly, so I will be quite frank. I have examined both samples of blood and Fletcher's, and I have inspected the premises; and what I am able to say definitely is this: the blood in the hall is not the blood of the deceased—"

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector, "I was afraid it wasn't."

"And it is not the blood of Robert Fletcher."

"Isn't it now! Well, I am glad to hear that."

"Moreover," continued Thorndyke, "it was shed well after nine o'clock at night, probably not earlier than midnight."

"There, now!" the inspector exclaimed, with an admiring glance at Thorndyke, "just think of that. See what it is to be a man of science! I suppose, sir, you couldn't give us any sort of description of the person who dropped that blood in the hall?"

Staggered as I had been by Thorndyke's astonishing statements, I could not repress a grin at the inspector's artless question. But the grin faded rather abruptly as Thorndyke replied in matter-of-fact tones: "A detailed description is, of course, impossible. I can only sketch out the probabilities. But if you should happen to meet with a negro—a tall negro with a bandaged head or a contused wound of the scalp and a swollen leg—you had better keep your eye on him. The leg which is swollen is probably the left."

The inspector was thrilled; and so was I, for that matter. The thing was incredible; but yet I knew that Thorndyke's amazing deductions were the products of perfectly orthodox scientific methods. Only I could form no sort of guess as to how they had been arrived at. A negro's blood is no different from any other person's, and certainly affords no clue to his height or the condition of his legs. I could make nothing of it: and

as the dialogue and the inspector's note-takings brought us to the little town hall in which the inquest was to be held, I dismissed the puzzle until such time as Thorndyke chose to solve it.

When we entered the town hall we found everything in readiness for the opening of the proceedings. The jury were already in their places and the coroner was just about to take his seat at the head of the long table. We accordingly slipped on to the two chairs that were found for us by the inspector, and the latter took his place behind the jury and facing us. Near to him Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham were seated, and evidently hailed our arrival with profound relief, each of them smiling us a silent greeting. A professional-looking man sitting next to Thorndyke I assumed to be the medical witness, and a rather good young man who sat apart with a police constable I identified as Robert Fletcher.

The evidence of the "common" witnesses, who deposed to the general facts, told us nothing that we did not already know, excepting that it was made clear that Fletcher had left his uncle's house not later than seven o'clock and that thereafter until the following morning his whereabouts were known. The medical witness was cautious, and kept an uneasy eye on Thorndyke. The wound which caused the death of deceased might have been inflicted by himself or by some other person. He had originally given the probable time of death as six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening. He now admitted reply to a question from Thorndyke that he had not taken the temperature of the body, and that the rigidity and other conditions were not absolutely inconsistent with a considerable later time of death. Death might even have occurred after midnight.

In spite of this admission, however, the sum of the evidence tended strongly to implicate Fletcher, and one or two questions from jurymen suggested a growing belief in his guilt. I had no doubt whatever that if the case had been put to the jury at this stage, a unanimous verdict of "wilful murder" would have been the result. But, as the medical witness returned to his seat, the coroner fixed an inquisitive eye on Thorndyke. "You have not been summoned as a witness, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "but I understand that you have made certain investigations in this case. Are you able to throw any fresh light on the circumstances of the death of the deceased, Joseph Riggs?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "I am in a position to give important and material evidence."

Thereupon he was sworn, and the coroner, still watching him curiously, said: "I am informed that you have examined samples of the blood of

deceased and the blood which was found in the hall of deceased's house. Did you examine them, and if so, what was the object of the examination?"

"I examined both samples and also samples of the blood of Robert Fletcher. The object was to ascertain whether the blood on the hall floor was the blood of the deceased or of Robert Fletcher."

The coroner glanced at the medical witness, and a faint smile appeared on the face of each.

"And did you," the former asked in a slightly ironical tone, "form any opinion on the subject?"

"I ascertained definitely that the blood in the hall was neither that of the deceased nor that of Robert Fletcher."

The coroner's eyebrows went up, and once more he glanced significantly at the doctor.

"But," he demanded incredulously, "is it possible to distinguish the blood of one person from that of another?"

"Usually it is not, but in certain exceptional cases it is. This happened to be an exceptional case."

"In what respect?"

"It happened," Thorndyke replied, "that the person whose blood was found in the hall suffered from the parasitic disease known as *filariasis*. His blood was infested with swarms of a minute worm named *Filaria nocturna*. I have here," he continued, taking out of his research-case the two bottles and the three boxes, "thirty-six mounted specimens of this blood, and in every one of them one or more of the parasites is to be seen. I have also thirty-six mounted specimens each of the blood of the deceased and the blood of Robert Fletcher. In not one of these specimens is a single parasite to be found. Moreover, I have examined Robert Fletcher and the body of the deceased, and can testify that no sign of filarial disease was to be discovered in either. Hence it is certain, that the blood found in the hall was not the blood of either of these two persons."

The ironic smile had faded from the coroner's face. He was evidently deeply impressed, and his manner was quite deferential as he asked: "Do these very remarkable observations of yours lead to any further inferences?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "They render it certain that this blood was shed no earlier than nine o'clock and probably nearer midnight."

"Really!" the astonished coroner exclaimed. "Now, how is it possible to fix the time in that exact manner?"



"By inference from the habits of the parasite," Thorndyke explained. "This particular *filaria* is distributed by the mosquito, and its habits are adapted to the habits of the mosquito. During the day, the worms are not found in the blood; they remain hidden in the tissues of the body. But about nine o'clock at night they begin to migrate from the tissues into the blood, and remain in the blood during the hours when the mosquitoes are active. Then about six o'clock in the morning, they leave the blood and migrate back into the tissues.

"There is another very similar species—*Filaria diurna*—which has exactly opposite habits, adapted to day-flying suctorial insects. It appears in the blood about eleven in the forenoon and goes back into the tissues at about six o'clock in the evening."

"Astonishing!" exclaimed the coroner. "Wonderful! By the way, the parasites that you found could not, I suppose, have been *Filaria diurna*?"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "The time excludes that possibility. The blood was certainly shed after six. They were undoubtedly *nocturna*, and the large numbers found suggest a late hour. The parasites come out of the tissues very gradually, and it is only about midnight that they appear in the blood in really large numbers."

"That is very important," said the coroner. "But does this disease affect any particular class of persons?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "As the disease is confined to tropical countries, the sufferers are naturally residents of the tropics, and nearly always natives. In West Africa, for instance, it is common among the negroes but practically unknown among the white residents."

"Should you say that there is a distinct probability that this unknown person was a negro?"

"Yes. But apart from the *filaria* there is direct evidence that he was. Searching for some cause of the bleeding, I noticed a lamp-hook screwed into the ceiling, and low enough to strike a tall man's head. I examined it closely, and observed on it a dark, shiny mark, like a blood-smear, and one or two short coiled hairs which I recognised as the scalp-hairs of a negro. I have no doubt that the unknown man is a negro, and that he has a wound of the scalp."

"Does filarial disease produce any effects that can be recognised?"

"Frequently it does. One of the commonest effects produced by *Filaria nocturna*, especially among negroes, is the condition known as *elephantiasis*. This consists of an enormous swelling of the extremities, most usually of one leg, including the foot; whence the name. The leg and foot look like those of an elephant. As a matter of fact, the negro

who was in the hall suffered from elephantiasis of the left leg. I observed prints of the characteristically deformed foot on the oil-cloth covering the floor.”

Thorndyke’s evidence was listened to with intense interest by everyone present, including myself. Indeed, so spell-bound was his audience that one could have heard a pin drop; and the breathless silence continued for some seconds after he had ceased speaking. Then, in the midst of the stillness, I heard the door creak softly behind me.

There was nothing particularly significant in the sound. But its effects were amazing. Glancing at the inspector, who faced the door, I saw his eyes open and his jaw drop until his face was a very mask of astonishment. And as this expression was reflected on the faces of the jurymen, the coroner and everyone present, excepting Thorndyke, whose back was towards the door, I turned to see what had happened. And then I was as astonished as the others.

The door had been pushed open a few inches and a head thrust in—a negro’s head, covered with a soiled and blood rag forming a rough bandage. As I gazed at the black, shiny, inquisitive face, the man pushed the door farther open and shuffled into the room; and instantly there arose on all sides a soft rustle and an inarticulate murmur followed by breathless silence, while every eye was riveted on the man’s left leg.

It certainly was a strange, repulsive-looking member, its monstrous bulk exposed to view through the slit trouser and its great shapeless foot—shoeless, since no shoe could have contained it—rough and horny like the foot of an elephant. But it was tragic and pitiable, too for the man, apart from this horrible excrescence, was a fine, big, athletic-looking fellow.

The coroner was the first to recover. Addressing Thorndyke, but keeping an eye on the negro, he said: “Your evidence, then, amounts to this: On the night of Joseph Riggs’ death, there was a stranger in the house. That stranger was a negro, who seems to have wounded his head and who, you say, had a swelled left leg.”

“Yes,” Thorndyke admitted, “that is the substance of my evidence.”

Once more a hush fell on the room. The negro stood near the door, rolling his eyes to and fro over the assembly as if uneasily conscious that everyone was looking at him. Suddenly, he shuffled up to the foot of the table and addressed the coroner in deep, buzzing, resonant tones. “You tink I kill dat ole man! I no kill um. He kill himself. I look um.”

Having made this statement, he rolled his eyes defiantly round the court, and then turned his face expectantly towards the coroner, who

said: "You say you know that Mr. Riggs killed himself?"

"Yas. I look um. He shoot himself. You tink I shoot urn. I tell you I no shoot um. Why I fit kill this man? I no sabby um."

"Then," said the coroner, "if you know that he killed himself, you must tell us all that you know; and you must swear to tell us the truth."

"Yas," the negro agreed, "I tell you eberyting one time. I tell you de troof. Dat ole man kill himself."

When the coroner had explained to him that he was not bound to make any statement that would incriminate him, as he still elected to give evidence, he was sworn and proceeded to make his statement with curious fluency and self-possession.

"My name Robert Bruce. Dat my English name. My country name Kwaku Mensah. I live for Winnebah on de Gold Coast. Dis time I cook's mate for dat steamer Leckie. On Wednesday night I lay in my bunk. I no fit sleep. My leg he chook me. I look out of de porthole. Plenty moon live. In my country when de moon big, peoples walk about. So I get up. I go ashore to walk about de town. Den de rain come. Plenty rain. Rain no good for my sickness. So I try for open house doors. No fit. All doors locked. Den I come to dis ole man's house. I turn de handle. De door open. I go in. I look in one room. All dark. Nobody live. Den I look annudder room. De door open a little. Light live inside. I no like dat I tink, spose somebody come out and see me, be link I come for teef someting. So I tink I go away.

"Den someting make 'Ping!' same like gun. I hear someting fall down in dat room. I go to de door and I sing out, 'Who live in dere?' Nobody say nutting. So I open de door and look in. De room full ob smoke. I look dat ale man on de floor. I look dat pistol. I sabby dat ole man kill himself. Den I frighten too much. I run out. D place all dark. Someting knock my head. He make blood come plenty. I go back for ship. I no say nutting to nobody. Dis day I hear peoples talk 'bout dis inquest to find out who kill dat ole man. So I come to hear what peoples say. I hear dat gentleman say I kill dat ole man. So I tell you eberyting. I tell you de troof. Finish."

"Do you know what time it was when you came ashore?" the coroner asked.

"Yas. When I come down de ladder I hear eight bells ring. I get back to de ship jus' before dey ring two bells in de middle watch."

"Then you came ashore at midnight and got back just before one o'clock?"

"Yas. Dat is what I say."

A few more questions put by the coroner having elicited nothing fresh, the case was put briefly to the jury.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen, and most remarkable evidence it was. Like myself, you must have been deeply impressed by the amazing skill with which Dr. Thorndyke reconstructed the personality of the unknown visitor to that house, and even indicated correctly the very time of the visit, from an examination of a mere chance blood-stain. As to the statement of Kwaku Mensab, I can only say that I see no reason to doubt its truth. You will note that it is in complete agreement with Dr. Thorndyke's evidence, and it presents no inconsistencies or improbabilities. Possibly the police may wish to make some further inquiries, but for our purposes it is the evidence of an eyewitness, and as such must be given full weight. With these remarks, I leave you to consider your verdict."

The jury took but a minute or two to deliberate. Indeed, only one verdict was possible if the evidence was to be accepted, and that was agreed on unanimously—suicide whilst temporarily insane. As soon as it was announced, the inspector, formally and with congratulations, released Fletcher from custody, and presently retired in company with the negro to make a few inquiries on board the ship.

The rising of the court was the signal for a wild demonstration of enthusiasm and gratitude to Thorndyke. To play his part efficiently in that scene he would have needed to be furnished, like certain repulsive Indian deities, with an unlimited outfit of arms. For everyone wanted to shake his hand, and two of them—Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham—did so with such pertinacity as entirely to exclude the other candidates.

"I can never thank you enough," Miss Markham exclaimed, with swimming eyes, "if I should live to be a hundred. But I shall think of you with gratitude every day of my life. Whenever I look at Robert, I shall remember that his liberty, and even his life, are your gifts."

Here she was so overcome by grateful emotion that she again seized and pressed his hand. I think she was within an ace of kissing him; but being, perhaps, doubtful how he would take it, compromised by kissing Robert instead. And, no doubt, it was just as well.

## Gleanings from the Wreckage

**T**here was a time, and not so very long ago, when even the main streets of London, after midnight, were as silent as—not the grave; that is an unpleasant simile. Besides, who has any experience of conditions in the grave? But they were nearly as silent as the streets of a village. Then the nocturnal pedestrian could go his way encompassed and soothed by quiet, which was hardly disturbed by the rumble of a country wagon wending to market or the musical tinkle of the little bells on the collar of the hansom-cab horse sedately drawing some late reveller homeward.

Very different is the state of those streets nowadays. Long after the hour when the electric trams have ceased from troubling and the motor omnibuses are at rest, the heavy road transport from the country thunders through the streets; the air is rent by the howls of the electric hooter, and belated motor-cyclists fly past, stuttering explosively like perambulant Lewis guns with an in exhaustible charge.

“Let us get into the by-streets,” said Thorndyke, as a car sped past us uttering sounds suggestive of a dyspeptic dinosaur. “We don’t want our conversation seasoned with mechanical objurgations. In the back-streets it is still possible to hear oneself speak and forget the march of progress.”

We turned into a narrow by-way with the confidence of the born and bred Londoner in the impossibility of losing our direction, and began to thread the intricate web of streets in the neighbourhood of a canal.

“It is a remarkable thing,” Thorndyke resumed anon, “that every new application of science seems to be designed to render the environment of civilised man more and more disagreeable. If the process goes much farther, as it undoubtedly will, we shall presently find ourselves looking back wistfully at the Stone-age as the golden age of human comfort<sup>4</sup>.”

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<sup>4</sup>Das klingt angesichts der Mitgliedschaft des Autors in der “Eugenics Society”

At this point his moralising was cut short by a loud, sharp explosion. We both stopped and looked about from the parapet of the bridge that we were crossing.

“Quite like old times,” Thorndyke remarked. “Carries one back to 1915, when friend *Fritz* used to call on us. Ah! There is the place; the top story of that tail building across the canal.” He pointed as he spoke to a factory-like structure, from the upper windows of which a lurid light shone and rapidly grew brighter.

“It must be down the next turning,” said I, quickening my pace.

But he restrained me, remarking: “There is no hurry. That was the sound of high explosive, and those flames suggest nitro compounds burning. *Festina lente*. There may be some other packets of high explosives.”

He had hardly finished speaking when a flash of dazzling violet light burst from the burning building. The windows flew out bodily, the roof opened in places, and almost at the same moment the clang of a violent explosion shook the ground under our feet, a puff of wind stirred our hair, and then came a clatter of falling glass and slates.

We made our way at a leisurely pace towards the scene of the explosion, through streets lighted up by the ruddy glare from the burning factory. But others were less cautious. In a few minutes the street was filled by one of those crowds which, in London, seem mysteriously to spring up in an instant where but a moment before not a person was to be seen. Before we had reached the building, a fire-engine had rumbled past us, and already a sprinkling of policemen had appeared as if, like the traditional frogs, they had dropped from the clouds.

In spite of the ferocity of its outbreak, the fire seemed to be no great matter, for even as we looked and before the fire-hose was fully run out, the flames began to die down. Evidently, they had been dealt with by means of extinguishers within the building, and the services of the engine would not be required after all. Noting this flat ending to what had seemed so promising a start, we were about to move off and resume our homeward journey when I observed a uniformed inspector who was known to us, and who, observing us at the same instant, made his way towards us through the crowd.

“You remind me, sir,” said he, when he had wished us good-evening, “of the stories of the vultures that make their a in the sky from nowhere

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nach dem 1. Weltkrieg (s. Band 1) beinahe wie Selbstironie und lässt auf eine gewisse innere Distanz zu diesem Abschnitt seines Lebens schließen. B. L.

when a camel drops dead in the desert. I don't mean anything complimentary," he hastened to add. "I was only thinking of the wonderful instinct that has brought you to this very spot at this identical moment, as if you had smelt a case afar off."

"Then your imagination has misled you," said Thorndyke, "for I haven't smelt a case, and I don't smell one now. Fires are not in my province."

"No, sir," replied the inspector, "but bodies are, and the fireman tells me that there is a dead man up there—or at least the remains of one. I am going up to inspect. Do you care to come up with me?"

Thorndyke considered for a moment, but I knew what his answer would be, and I was not mistaken.

"As a matter of professional interest, I should," he replied, "but I don't want to be summoned as a witness at the inquest."

"Of course you don't, sir," the inspector agreed, "and I will see that you are not summoned, unless an expert witness is wanted. I need not mention that you have been here; but I should be glad of your opinion for my own guidance in investigating the case."

He led us through the crowd to the door of the building, where we were joined by a fireman—whose helmet I should have liked to borrow—by whom we were piloted up the stairs. Half up we met the night-watchman, carrying an exhausted extinguisher and a big electric lantern, and he joined our procession, giving us the news as we ascended.

"It's all safe up above," said he, "excepting the roof; and that isn't so very much damaged. The big windows saved it. They blew out and let off the force of the explosion. The floor isn't damaged at all. It's girder and concrete. But poor Mr. Manford caught it properly. He was fairly blown to bits."

"Do you know how it happened?" the inspector asked.

"I don't," was the reply. "When I came on duty Mr. Manford was up there in his private laboratory. Soon afterwards a friend of his—a foreign gentleman of the name of Bilsky—came to see him. I took him up, and then Mr. Manford said he had some business to do, and after that he had got a longish job to do and would be working late. So he said I might turn in and he would let me know when he had finished. And he did let me know with a vengeance, poor chap I lay down in my clothes, and I hadn't been asleep above a couple of hours when some noise woke me up. Then there came a most almighty bang. I rushed for an extinguisher and ran upstairs, and there I found the big laboratory all ablaze, the windows blown out and the ceiling down. But it wasn't so bad as it looked. There wasn't very much stuff up there; only the experimental

stuff, and that burned out almost at once. I got the rest of the fire out in a few minutes.”

“What stuff is it that you are speaking of?” the inspector asked.

“Celluloid, mostly, I think,” replied the watchman. “They make films and other celluloid goods in the works. But Mr. Manford used to do experiments in the material up in his laboratory. This time he was working with alloys, melting them on the gas furnace. Dangerous thing to do with all that inflammable stuff about. I don’t know what there was up there, exactly. Some of it was celluloid, I could see by the way it burned, but the Lord knows what it was that exploded. Some of the raw stuff, perhaps.”

At this point we reached the top floor, where a door blown off its hinges and a litter of charred wood fragments filled the landing. Passing through the yawning doorway, we entered the laboratory and looked on a hideous scene of devastation. The windows were mere holes, the ceiling a gaping space fringed with black and ragged lathing, through which the damaged roof was visible by the light of the watchman’s powerful lantern. The floor was covered with the fallen plaster and fragments of blackened woodwork, but its own boards were only slightly burnt in places, owing, no doubt, to their being fastened directly to the concrete which formed the actual floor.

“You spoke of some human remains,” said the inspector.

“Ah!” said the watchman, “you may well say ‘remains’. Just come here.” He led the way over the rubbish to a corner of the laboratory, where he halted and threw the light of his lantern down on a brownish, dusty, globular object that lay on the floor half buried in plaster. “That’s all that’s left of poor Mr. Manford; that and a few other odd pieces. I saw a hand over the other side.”

Thorndyke picked up the head and placed it on the blackened remnant of a bench, where, with the aid of the watchman’s lantern and the inspection lamp which I produced from our research-case, he examined it curiously. It was extremely, but unequally, scorched. One ear was completely shrivelled, and most of the face was charred to the bone. But the other ear was almost intact; and though most of the hair was burned away to the scalp, a tuft above the less damaged ear was only singed, so that it was possible to see that the hair had been black, with here and there a stray white hair.

Thorndyke made no comments, but I noticed that he examined the gruesome object minutely, taking nothing for granted. The inspector noticed this, too; and when the examination was finished, looked at him



inquiringly.

"Anything abnormal, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied Thorndyke; "nothing that is not accounted for by fire and the explosion. I see he had no natural teeth, so he must have worn a complete set of false teeth. That should help in the formal identification, if the plates are not completely destroyed."

"There isn't much need for identification," said the watchman, "seeing that there was nobody in the building but him and me. His friend went away about half-past twelve. I heard Mr. Manford let him out."

"The doctor means at the inquest," the inspector explained. "Somebody has got to recognise the body if possible."

He took the watchman's lantern, and throwing its light on the floor, began to search among the rubbish. Very soon he disinterred from under a heap of plaster the headless trunk. Both legs were attached, though the right was charred below the knee and the foot blown off, and one complete arm. The other arm—the right—was intact only to the elbow. Here, again, the burning was very unequal. In some parts the clothing had been burnt off or blown away completely; in others, enough was left to enable the watchman to recognise it with certainty. One leg was much more burnt than the other; and whereas the complete arm was only scorched, the dismembered one was charred almost to the bone. When the trunk had been carried to the bench and laid there beside the head, the lights were turned on it for Thorndyke to make his inspection.

"It almost seems," said the police officer, as the hand was being examined, "as if one could guess how he was standing when the explosion occurred. I think I can make out finger-marks—pretty dirty ones, too—on the back of the hand, as if he had been standing with his hands clasped together behind him while he watched something that he was experimenting with." The inspector glanced for confirmation at Thorndyke, who nodded approvingly.

"Yes," he said, "I think you are right. They are very indistinct, but the marks are grouped like fingers. The small mark near the wrist suggests a little finger and the separate one near the knuckle looks like a forefinger, while the remaining two marks are close together." He turned the band over and continued "And there, in the palm, just between the roots of the third and fourth fingers, seems to be the trace of a thumb. But they are all very faint. You have a quick eye, inspector."

The gratified officer, thus encouraged, resumed his explorations among the debris in company with the watchman—the fireman had retired after

a professional look round—leaving Thorndyke to continue his examination of the mutilated corpse, at which I looked on unsympathetically. For we had had a long day and I was tired and longing to get home. At length I drew out my watch, and with a portentous yawn, entered a mild protest.

“It is nearly two o’clock,” said I. “Don’t you think we had better be getting on? This really isn’t any concern of ours, and there doesn’t seem to be anything in it, from our point of view.”

“Only that we are keeping our intellectual joints supple,” Thorndyke replied with a smile. “But it is getting late. Perhaps we had better adjourn the inquiry.”

At this moment, however, the inspector discovered the missing forearm—completely charred—with the fingerless remains of the hand, and almost immediately afterwards the watchman picked up a dental plate of some white metal, which seemed to be practically uninjured. But our brief inspection of these objects elicited nothing of interest, and having glanced at them, we took our departure, avoiding on the stairs an eager reporter, all agog for “copy.”

A few days later we received a visit, by appointment, from a Mr. Herdman, a solicitor who was unknown to us and who was accompanied by the widow of Mr. James Manford, the victim of the explosion. In the interval the inquest had been opened but had been adjourned for further examination of the premises and the remains. No mention had been made of our visit to the building, and so far as I knew nothing had been said to anybody on the subject.

Mr. Herdman came to the point with business directness.

“I have called,” he said, “to secure your services, if possible, in regard to the matter of which I spoke in my letter. You have probably seen an account of the disaster in the papers?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke. “I read the report of the inquest.”

“Then you know the principal facts. The inquest, as you know, was adjourned for three weeks. When it is resumed; I should like to retain you to attend on behalf of Mrs. Manford.”

“To watch the case on her behalf?” Thorndyke suggested.

“Well, not exactly,” replied Herdman. “I should ask you to inspect the premises and the remains of poor Mr. Manford, so that, at the adjourned inquest, you could give evidence to the effect that the explosion and the death of Mr. Manford were entirely due to accident.”

“Does anyone say that they were not?” Thorndyke asked.

"No, certainly not," Mr. Herdman replied hastily. "Not at all. But I happened, quite by chance, to see the manager of the *Pilot Insurance Society*, on another matter, and I mentioned the case of Mr. Manford. He then let drop a remark which made me slightly uneasy. He observed that there was a suicide clause in the policy, and that the possibility of suicide would have to be ruled out before the claim could be settled. Which suggested a possible intention to contest the claim."

"But," said Thorndyke, "I need not point out to you that if he sets up the theory of suicide, it is for him to prove it, not for you to disprove it. Has anything transpired which would lend colour to such a suggestion?"

"Nothing material," was the reply. "But we should feel more happy if you could be present and give positive evidence that the death was accidental."

"That," said Thorndyke, "would be hardly possible. But my feeling is that the suicide question is negligible. There is nothing to suggest it, so far as I know. Is there anything known to you?"

The solicitor glanced at his client and replied somewhat evasively: "We are anxious to secure ourselves. Mrs. Manford is left very badly off, unless there is some personal property that we don't know about. If the insurance is not paid, she will be absolutely ruined. There isn't enough to pay the debts. And I think the suicide question might be raised—even successfully—on several points. Manford had been rather queer lately: jumpy and rather worried. Then, he was under notice to terminate his engagement at the works. His finances were in a confused state; goodness knows why, for he had a liberal salary. And then there was some domestic trouble. Mrs. Manford had actually consulted me about getting a separation. Some other woman, you know."

"I should like to forget that," said Mrs. Manford; "and it wasn't that which worried him. Quite the contrary. Since it began he had been quite changed. So smart in his dress and so particular in his appearance. He even took to dyeing his hair. I remember that he opened a fresh bottle of dye the very morning before his death and took no end of trouble putting it on. It wasn't that entanglement that made him jumpy. It was his money affairs. He had too many irons in the fire."

Thorndyke listened with patient attention to these rather irrelevant details and inquired: "What sort of irons?"

"I will tell you," said Herdman. "About three months ago he had need for two thousand pounds; for what purpose, I can't say, but Mrs. Manford thinks it was to invest in certain valuables that he used to purchase from time to time from a Russian dealer named Bilsky. At any rate, he got

this sum on short loan from a Mr. Clines, but meanwhile arranged for a longer loan with a Mr. Elliott on a note of hand and an agreement to insure his life for the amount.

"As a matter of fact, the policy was made out in Elliott's name, he having proved an insurable interest. So if the insurance is paid, Elliott is settled with. Otherwise the debt falls on the estate, which would be disastrous; and to make it worse, the day before his death, he drew out five hundred pounds—nearly the whole balance—as he was expecting to see Mr. Bilsky, who liked to be paid in bank-notes. He did see him, in fact, at the laboratory, but they couldn't have done any business, as no jewels were found."

"And the bank-notes?"

"Burned with the body, presumably. He must have had them with him."

"You mentioned," said Thorndyke, "that he occasionally bought jewels from this Russian. What became of them?"

"Ah!" replied Herdman, "there is a gleam of hope there. He had a safe deposit somewhere. We haven't located it yet, but we shall. There may be quite a nice little nest-egg in it. But meanwhile there is the debt to Elliott. He wrote to Manford about it a day or two ago. You have the letter, I think," he added, addressing Mrs. Manford, who thereupon produced two envelopes from her handbag and laid them on the table.

"This is Mr. Elliott's letter," she said. "Merely a friendly reminder, you see, telling him that he is just off to the Continent and that he has given his wife a power of attorney to act in his absence."

Thorndyke glanced through the letter and made a few notes of its contents. Then he looked inquiringly at the other envelope.

"That," said Mrs. Manford, "is a photograph of my husband. I thought it might help you if you were going to examine the body."

As Thorndyke drew the portrait out and regarded it thoughtfully, I recalled the shapeless, blackened fragments of its subject; and when he passed it to me, I inspected it with a certain grim interest, and mentally compared it with those grisly remains. It was a commonplace face, rather unsymmetrical—the nose was deflected markedly to the left, and the left eye had a pronounced divergent squint. The bald head, with an abundant black fringe and an irregular scar on the the side of the forehead, sought compensation in a full beard and moustache, both apparently jet-black. It was not an attractive countenance, and it was not improved by a rather odd-shaped ear—long, lobeless, and pointed above, like the ear of a satyr.

"I realise your position," said Thorndyke, "but I don't quite see what you want of me. If," he continued, addressing the solicitor, "you had thought of my giving *ex parte* evidence, dismiss the idea. I am not a witness-advocate. All I can undertake to do is to investigate the case and try to discover what really happened. But in that case, whatever I may discover I shall disclose to the coroner. Would that suit you?"

The lawyer looked doubtful and rather glum, but Mrs. Manford interposed, firmly: "Why not? We are not proposing any deception, but I am certain that he did not commit suicide. I agree unreservedly to what you propose."

With this understanding—which the lawyer was disposed to boggle at—our visitors took their leave. As soon as they were gone, I gave utterance to the surprise with which I had listened to Thorndyke's proposal.

"I am astonished at your undertaking this case. Of course, you have given them fair warning, but still, it will be unpleasant if you have to give evidence unfavourable to your client."

"Very," he agreed. "But what makes you think I may have to?"

"Well, you seem to reject the probability of suicide, but have you forgotten the evidence at the inquest?"

"Perhaps I have," he replied blandly. "Let us go over it again."

I fetched the report from the office, and spreading it out on the table began to read it aloud. Passing over the evidence of the inspector and the fireman, I came to that of the night-watchman.

"Shortly after I came on duty at ten o'clock, a foreign, gentleman named Bilsky called to see Mr. Manford. I knew him by sight, because he had called once or twice before at about the same time. I took him up to the laboratory, where Mr. Manford was doing something with a big crucible on the gas furnace. He told me that he had some business to transact with Mr. Bilsky and when he had finished he would let him out. Then he was going to do some experiments in making alloys, and as they would probably take up most of the night he said I might as well turn in. He said he would call me when he was ready to go. So I told him to be careful with the furnace and not set the place on fire and burn me in my bed, and then I went downstairs. I had a look round to see that everything was in order, and then I took off my boots and laid down. About half-past twelve I heard Mr. Manford and Bilsky come down. I recognised Mr. Bilsky by a peculiar cough that he had and by the sound of his stick and his limping tread—he had something the matter with his right foot and walked quite lame."

"You say that the deceased came down with him," said the coroner. "Are you quite sure of that?"

"Well, I suppose Mr. Manford came down with him, but I can't say I actually heard him."

"You did not hear him go up again?"

"No, I didn't. But I was rather sleepy and I wasn't listening very particular. Well, then I went to sleep and slept till about half-past one, when some noise woke me. I was just getting up to see what it was when I heard a tremendous bang, right overhead. I ran down and turned the gas off at the main and then I got a fire extinguisher and ran up to the laboratory. The place seemed to be all in a blaze, but it wasn't much of a fire after all, for by the time the fire engines arrived I had got it practically out."

The witness then described the state of the laboratory and the finding of the body, but as this was already known to us, I passed on to the evidence of the next witness, the superintendent of the fire brigade, who had made a preliminary inspection of the premises. It was a cautious statement and subject to the results of a further examination; but clearly the officer was not satisfied as to the cause of the outbreak. There seemed to have been two separate explosions, one near a cupboard and another—apparently the second—in the cupboard itself; and there seemed to be a burned track connecting the two spots. This might have been accidental or it might have been arranged. Witness did not think that the explosive was celluloid. It seemed to be a high explosive of some kind. But further investigations were being made.

The superintendent was followed by Mrs. Manford, whose evidence was substantially similar to what she and Mr. Herdman had told us, and by the police surgeon, whose description of the remains conveyed nothing new to us. Finally, the inquest was adjourned for three weeks to allow of further examination of the premises and the remains.

"Now," I said, as I folded up the report, "I don't see how you are able to exclude suicide. If the explosion was arranged to occur when Manford was in the laboratory, what object, other than suicide, can be imagined?"

Thorndyke looked at me with an expression that I knew only too well. "Is it impossible," he asked, "to imagine that the object might have been homicide?"

"But," I objected, "there was no one there but Manford—after Bilsky left." "Exactly," he agreed, dryly; "after Bilsky left. But up to that time there were two persons there."

I must confess that I was startled, but as I rapidly reviewed the circumstances I perceived the cogency of Thorndyke's suggestion. Bilsky had been present when Manford dismissed the night-watchman. He knew that there would be no interruption. The inflammable and explosive materials were there, ready to his hand. Then Bilsky had gone down to the door alone instead of being conducted down and let out; a very striking circumstance, this. Again, no jewels had been found though the meeting had been ostensibly for the purpose of a deal; and the bank-notes had vanished utterly. This was very remarkable. In view of the large sum, it was nearly certain that the notes would be in a close bundle, and we all know how difficult it is to burn tightly-folded paper. Yet they had vanished without leaving a trace. Finally, there was Bilsky himself. Who was he? Apparently a dealer in stolen property—a hawker of the products of robbery and murder committed during the revolution. "Yes," I admitted, "the theory of homicide is certainly tenable, But unless some new facts can be produced, it must remain a matter of speculation."

"I think, Jervis," he rejoined, "you must be overlooking the facts that are known to us. We were there. We saw the place within a few minutes of the explosion and we examined the body. What we saw established a clear presumption of homicide, and what we have heard this morning confirms it. I may say that I communicated my suspicions the very next day to the coroner and to Superintendent Miller."

"Then you must have seen more than I did," I began. But he shook his head and cut short my protestations.

"You saw what I saw, Jervis, but you did not interpret its meaning. However, it is not too late. Try to recall the details of our adventure and what our visitors have told us. I don't think you will then entertain the idea of suicide."

I was about to put one or two leading questions, but at this moment footsteps became audible ascending our stairs. The knock which followed informed me that our visitor was Superintendent Miller, and I rose to admit him.

"Just looked in to report progress," he announced as he subsided into an arm-chair. "Not much to report, but what there is supports your view of the case. Bilsky has made a clean bolt. Never went home to his hotel. Evidently meant to skedaddle, as he has left nothing of any value behind. But it was a stupid move, for it would have raised suspicion in any case. The notes were a consecutive batch. All the numbers are known, but, of course, none of them have turned up yet. We have made

inquiries about Bilsky, and gather that he is a shady character; practically a fence who deals in the jewellery stolen from those unfortunate Russian aristocrats. But we shall have him all right. His description has been circulated at all the seaports and he is an easy man to spot with his lame foot and his stick and a finger missing from his right hand."

Thorndyke nodded, and seemed to reflect for a moment. Then he asked: "Have you made any other inquiries?"

"No; there is nothing more to find out until we get hold of our man, and when we do, we shall look to you to secure the conviction. I suppose you are quite certain as to your facts?"

Thorndyke shook his head with a smile.

"I am never certain until after the event. We can only act on probabilities."

"I understand," said the superintendent, casting a sly look at me; "but your probabilities are good enough for me."

With this, he picked up his hat and departed, leaving us to return to the occupations that our visitors had interrupted.

I heard no more of the Manford case for about a week, and assumed that Thorndyke's interest in it had ceased. But I was mistaken, as I discovered when he remarked casually one evening: "No news of Bilsky, so far; and time is running on. I am proposing to make a tentative move in a new direction." I looked at him inquiringly, and he continued: "It appears, 'from information received,' that Elliott had some dealings with him, so I propose to call at his house to-morrow and see if we can glean any news of the lost sheep."

"But Elliott is abroad," I objected.

"True; but his wife isn't; and she evidently knows all about his affairs. I have invited Miller to come with me in case he would like to put any questions; and you may as well come, too, if you are free."

It did not sound like a very thrilling adventure, but one never knew with Thorndyke. I decided to go with him, and at that the matter dropped, though I speculated a little curiously on the source of the information. So, apparently, had the superintendent, for when he arrived on the following morning he proceeded to throw out a few cautious feelers, but got nothing for his pains beyond vague generalities.

"It is a purely tentative proceeding," said Thorndyke, "and you mustn't be disappointed if nothing comes of it."

"I shall be, all the same," replied Miller, with a sly glance at my senior, and with this we set forth on our quest.



The Elliotts' house was, as I knew, in some part of Wimbledon, and thither we made our way by train. From the station we started along a wide, straight main street from which numbers of smaller streets branched off. At the corner of one of these I noticed a man standing, apparently watching our approach; and something in his appearance seemed to me familiar. Suddenly he took off his hat, looked curiously into its interior, and put it on again. Then he turned about and walked quickly down the side street. I looked at his retreating figure as we crossed the street, wondering who he could be. And then it flashed upon me that the resemblance was to a certain ex-sergeant Barber whom Thorndyke occasionally employed for observation duties. Just as I reached this conclusion, Thorndyke halted and looked about him doubtfully.

"I am afraid we have come too far," said he. "I fancy we ought to have gone down that last turning." We accordingly faced about and walked back to the corner, where Thorndyke read out the name, Mendoza Avenue.

"Yes," he said, "this is the way," and we thereupon turned down the Avenue, following it to the bottom, where it ended in a cross-road, the name of which, Berners Park, I recognised as that which I had seen on Elliott's letter.

"Sixty-four is the number," said Thorndyke, "so as this corner house is forty-six and the next is forty-eight, it will be a little way along on this side, just about where you can see that smoke—which, by the way, seems to be coming out of a window."

"Yes, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "The staircase window, apparently. Not our house, I hope!"

But it was. We read the number and the name, 'Green Bushes', on the gate as we came up to it, and we hurried up the short path to the door. There was no knocker, but when Miller fixed his thumb on the bell-push, we heard a loud ringing within. But there was no response; and meanwhile the smoke poured more and more densely out of the open window above.

"Rum!" exclaimed Miller, sticking to the bell-push like a limpet. "House seems to be empty."

"I don't think it is." Thorndyke replied calmly.

The superintendent looked at him with quick suspicion, and then glanced at the ground-floor window.

"That window is unfastened," said he, "and here comes a constable."

Sure enough, a policeman was approaching quickly, looking up at the houses. Suddenly he perceived the smoke and quickened his pace, arriving just as Thorndyke had pulled down the upper window-sash and was preparing to climb over into the room. The constable hailed him sternly, but a brief explanation from Miller reduced the officer to a state of respectful subservience, and we all followed Thorndyke through the open window, from which smoke now began to filter.

"Send the constable upstairs to give the alarm," Thorndyke instructed Miller in a low tone. The order was given without question, and the next moment the officer was bounding up the stairs, roaring like a whole fire brigade. Meanwhile, the superintendent browsed along the hall through the dense smoke, sniffing inquisitively, and at length approached the street door. Suddenly, from the heart of the reek, his voice issued in tones of amazement.

"Well, I'm hanged! It's a plumber's smoke-rocket. Some fool has stuck it through into the letter-cage!"

In the silence which followed this announcement I heard an angry voice from above demand: "What is all this infernal row about? And what are you doing here?"

"Can't you see that the house is on fire?" was the constable's, stern rejoinder. "You'd better come down and help to put it out."

The command was followed by the sound of descending footsteps, on which Thorndyke ran quickly up the stairs, followed by the superintendent and me. We met the descending party on the landing, opposite a window, and here we all stopped, gazing at one another with mutual curiosity. The man who accompanied the constable looked distinctly alarmed—as well he might—and somewhat hostile.

"Who put that smoke in the hall?" Miller demanded fiercely. "And why didn't you come down when you heard us ringing the bell?"

"I don't know what you a talking about." the man replied sulkily, "or what business this is of yours. Who are you? And what are you doing in my house?"

"In your house?" repeated Thorndyke. "Then you will be Mr. Elliott?"

The man turned a startled glance on him and replied angrily: "Never you mind who I am. Get out of this house."

"But I do mind who you are," Thorndyke rejoined mildly. "I came here to see Mr. Elliott. Are you Mr. Elliott?"

"No, I am not. Mr. Elliott is abroad. If you like to send a letter here for him, I will forward it when I get his address."

While this conversation had been going on, I had been examining the stranger, not without curiosity. For his appearance was somewhat unusual. In the first place, he wore an unmistakable wig, and his shaven face bore an abundance of cuts and scratches, suggesting a recently and unskilfully mown beard. His spectacles did not disguise a pronounced divergent squint of the left eye; but what specially caught my attention was the ear—large ear, lobeless and pointed at the tip like the ear of a satyr. As I looked at this, and at the scraped face, the squint and the wig, a strange suspicion flashed into my mind; and then, as I noted that the nose was markedly deflected to the left, I turned to glance at Thorndyke.

“Would you mind telling us your name?” the latter asked blandly.

“My name is—is—Johnson; Frederick Johnson.”

“Ah,” said Thorndyke. “I thought it was Manford—James Manford—and I think so still. I suggest that you have a scar on the right side of your forehead, just under the wig. May we see?”

As Thorndyke spoke the name, the man turned a horrible livid grey and started back as if to retreat up the stairs. But the constable blocked the way; and as the man was struggling to push past, Miller adroitly snatched off the wig; and there, on the forehead, was the tell-tale scar. For an appreciable time we all stood stock-still like the figures of a tableau. Then Thorndyke turned to the superintendent.

“I charge this man, James Manford, with the murder of Stephan Bilsky.” Again there was a brief interval of intolerable silence. In the midst of it, we heard the street door open and shut, and a woman’s voice called up the stairs: “Whatever is all this smoke? Are you up there, Jim?”

I pass over the harrowing details of the double arrest. I am not a policeman, and to me such scenes are intensely repugnant. But we must needs stay until two taxis and four constables had conveyed the prisoners away from the still reeking house to the caravanserai of the law. Then, at last, we went forth with relief into the fresh air and bent our steps towards the station.

“I take it,” Miller said reflectively, “that you never suspected Bilsky?”

“I did at first. But when Mrs. Manford and the solicitor told their tale I realised that he was the victim and that Manford must be the murderer.”

“Let us have the argument,” said I. “It is obvious that I have been a blockhead, but I don’t mind our old friend here knowing it.”

“Not a blockhead, Jervis,” he corrected. “You were half asleep that night and wholly uninterested. If you had been attending to the matter, you would have observed several curious and anomalous appearances. For

instance, you would have noticed that the body was, in parts, completely charred, and brittle. Now we saw the outbreak of the fire and we found it extinguished when we reached the building. Its duration was a matter of minutes; quite insufficient to reduce a body to that state. For, as you know, a human body is an extremely incombustible thing. The appearance suggested the destruction of a body which had been already burnt; and this suggestion was emphasised by the curiously unequal distribution of the charring. The right hand was burnt to a cinder and blown to pieces. The left hand was only scorched. The right foot was utterly destroyed, but the left foot was nearly intact. The face was burned away completely, and yet there were parts of the head where the hair was only singed.

"Naturally, with these facts in mind, I scrutinised those remains narrowly. And presently something much more definite and sinister came to light. On the left hand, there was a faint impression of another hand—very indistinct and blurred, but still unmistakably a hand."

"I remember," said I, "the inspector pointed it out as evidence that the deceased had been standing with his hands clasped before or behind him; and I must admit that it seemed a reasonable inference."

"So it did, because you were both assuming that the man had been alone and that it must therefore have been the impression of his own hand. For that reason, neither of you looked at it critically. If you had, you would have seen at once that it was the impression of a left hand."

"You are quite right," I confessed ruefully. "As the man was stated to have been alone, the hand impression did not interest me. And it was a mere group of smudges, after all. You are sure that it was a left hand?"

"Quite," he replied. "Blurred as the smudges were, one could make out the relative lengths of the fingers. And there was the thumb mark at the distal end of the palm, but pointing to the outer side of the hand. Try how you may, you can't get a right hand into that position."

"Well, then, here was a crucial fact. The mark of a left hand on a left hand proved the presence of a second person, and at once raised a strong presumption of homicide, especially when considered in conjunction with the unaccountable state of the body. During the evening, a visitor had come and gone, and on him—Bilsky—the suspicion naturally fell. But Mrs. Manford unwittingly threw an entirely new light on the case. You remember she told us that her husband had opened a new bottle of hair dye on the very morning before the explosion and had applied it with unusual care. Then his hair was dyed. But the hair of the corpse was not dyed. Therefore the corpse was not the corpse of Manford."

Further, the presumption of murder applied now to Manford, and the body almost certainly was that of Bilsky."

"How did you deduce that the hair of the corpse was not dyed?" I asked.

"I didn't deduce it at all. I observed it. You remember a little patch of hair above the right ear, very much singed but still recognisable as hair? Well, in that patch I made out distinctly two or three white hairs. Naturally, when Mrs. Manford spoke of the dye, I recalled those white hairs, for though you may find silver hairs among the gold, you don't find them among the dyed. So the corpse could not be Manford's and was presumably that of Bilsky.

"But the instant that this presumption was made, a quantity of fresh evidence arose to support it. The destruction of the body was now understandable. Its purpose was to prevent identification. The parts destroyed were the parts that had to be destroyed for that purpose: the face was totally unrecognisable, and the right hand and right foot were burnt and shattered to fragments. But these were Bilsky's personal marks. His right hand was mutilated and his right foot deformed. And the fact that the false teeth found were undoubtedly Manford's was conclusive evidence of the intended deception.

"Then there were those very queer financial transactions, of which my interpretation was this: Manford borrowed two thousand pounds from Clines. With this he opened an account in the name of Elliott. As Elliott, he lent himself two thousand pounds which he repaid Clines—subject to an insurance of his life for that amount, taken out in Elliott's name."

"Then he would have gained nothing," I objected.

"On the contrary, he would have stood to gain two thousand pounds on proof of his own death. That, I assumed, was his scheme: to murder Bilsky, to arrange for Bilsky's corpse to personate his own, and then, when the insurance was paid, to abscond with the company of some woman, this sum, with the valuables that he had taken from Bilsky, and the five hundred pounds that he had withdrawn from the bank.

"But this was only theory. It had to be tested; and as we had Elliott's address, I did the only thing that was possible. I employed our friend, ex-Sergeant Barber, to watch the house. He took lodgings in a house nearly opposite and kept up continuous observation, which soon convinced him that there was someone on the premises besides Mrs. Elliott. Then, late one night, he saw a man come out and walk away quickly. He followed the man for some distance, until the stranger turned back and began to retrace his steps. Then Barber accosted him, asking for

a direction, and carefully inspecting him. The man's appearance tallied exactly with the description that I had given—I had assumed that he would probably shave off his beard—and with the photograph; so Barber, having seen him home, reported to me. And that is the whole story."

"Not quite the whole," said Miller, with a sly grin. "There is that smoke-rocket. If it hadn't been for the practical joker who slipped that through the letter-slit, we could never have got into that house. I call it a most remarkable coincidence."

"So do I," Thorndyke agreed, without moving a muscle; "but there is a special providence that watches over medical jurists."

We were silent for a few moments. Then I remarked: "This will come as a terrible shock to Mrs. Manford."

"I am afraid it will," Thorndyke agreed. "But it will be better for her than if Manford had absconded with this woman, taking practically every penny that he possessed with him. She stood to lose a worthless husband in either event. At least we have saved her from poverty. And, knowing the facts, we were morally and legally bound to further the execution of justice."

"A very proper sentiment," said the superintendent, "though I am not quite clear as to the legal aspects of that smoke-rocket."

## END OF VOLUME 4