

THE
HOBBIES OF
AUSTIN PORTEUS

EDWARD
DYSON

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Edward Dyson

(writing as "Dy Edwardson")

Edited and produced by Terry Walker, Dec 2024

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Edward Dyson

1865-1931

The author was born on the Ballarat gold fields in 1865, and grew up in gold mining towns in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania, before his family settled in Melbourne.

At the age of 19 he began writing short fiction, tales from the mines and from the factory floors. He became a very prolific freelance author of short stories under several names: Edward Dyson, Dy Edwardson, Eddyson, S.S, Ward Edson, Silas Snell, Tom Tyson, Ed Ward and others.

He wrote a handful of novels, published five volumes of short stories, and one volume of poetry.

The stories in this volume have never been collected before. They were published as a series in the Melbourne "*Punch*" commencing 3 July 1913. They all appeared on Page 10 of each issue. Two of the stories were published without titles, so I invented them. They were all published under the "Dy Edwardson" pseudonym.

T Walker, Dec 2024

1: The God Shoo Shan

3 July 1913

THE SHOP of Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar shop, and Mr. Austin Porteus was a peculiar man; a man of medium height, very broad-shouldered, somewhat corpulent, with a large head, made much larger to the view by a plenteous growth of curling white hair and a handful of curling white whiskers on either cheek. Out of this snowy fleece Mr. Austin Porteus peered through a pair of steel-rimmed glasses with thick lenses.

He had chubby, red, round cheeks, and a chubby, red, round, clean-shaven chin. His upper lip was shaven, too, and it was a perfect Cupid's bow of an upper lip. Mr. Porteus had a mouth like a baby. In fact, his whole face suggested Cupid grown elderly and run to whiskers, without having lost his peculiar interest in men, women and affairs.

Mr. Porteus sat behind the small counter in his small, rather dusty shop, and peered closely at a bronze cist, evidently an antique, beautifully chased, and embossed with charming figures. Mr. Porteus was, in fact, an archaeologist— a collector of antiques. His curious little shop was well stocked with objects of quaint interest— some delightful, others ugly, all strange and unusual. The shop was situated in a narrow, out-of-the-way street in a little-frequented corner of the city. It had one small window, not very carefully attended, through the dusty glass of which you might discover— if you were quite determined about it— a few articles of pottery, some scraps of South Sea ornament, such as armlets, anklets, necklaces and feathered head-dresses, and several aboriginal weapons. Mr. Austin Porteus seemed to trouble little about customers. If you called to deal you were as likely as not to find the little shop closed light, and Mr. Porteus away. This might make you angry— but Mr. Porteus was never upset. He knew that his customers would come again.

It was early in the afternoon of a warm day in October, Mr. Austin Porteus chuckled over the ancient metal chest, flipped it with his thumb-nail, and chuckled again.

"A forgery!" he said, and giggled like a happy child. "A lovely forgery!"

Then Mr. Henry Brain looked in.

Mr. Brain was an entirely different type of man— tall, lean, clean-shaven, dressed in a neat blue sac suit; shrewd of face, not more than 'forty-five— a man of the world in every twitch and crease of him. He might have been an eminent lawyer; he was actually a successful detective.

"Lord, I'm lucky," said Mr. Brain. He took off his hat, and wiped his square brow. "Was afraid to death you wouldn't be in."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Porteus quietly, wrapping his fictitious antique in tissue paper with loving care. "Something very much in your line. Will you come? We can talk as we travel. It's at Riverton, and it's serious."

"Dear me," said Mr. Austin Porteus. "Dear, dear me." He locked his cist in a large, iron-lined cupboard, and followed Brain out, locking the door after him. Brain had a cab at the door, and a moment later the two were being bowled at a smart pace in the direction of Kiverton, a suburb priding itself on its exclusiveness and its aristocratic inconveniences. In the daylight between the shop door and the cab the contrast between the two men was flashed upon us with glaring emphasis— the rather shabby, somewhat dusty black suit of Mr. Porteus looking particularly seedy and unkempt alongside Mr. Brain's gentlemanly neatness. It was noted, too, that Mr. Porteus wore carpet slippers, rather down at the heel, and that his tie had not been knotted.

"Murder?" said Mr. Porteus in the cab.

"Why that guess?"

"You have your murderous air, my friend."

The detective smiled. "I suppose I had. I am very much at a loss. Here are the details as closely as possible. It's either suicide or murder, and Mr. John Pride is the victim."

"John Pride!" ejaculated Mr. Porteus. "Bless my soul! I knew him. He was a bit of a collector himself; now and then a customer of mine."

"Good, you will be doubly interested. He was found at about half-past two this afternoon stabbed and dead on the floor of his room in most extraordinary circumstances.

"He was a bachelor, you know," Brain continued, "and lived in rather a fine house in River-street, Riverton. He intended leaving the house, and two people called at about a quarter past two to look over the place. While the housekeeper was showing these people through the back premises, they having already seen the front, of the house, a shriek was heard from the drawing-room, and the general servant— a girl of about seventeen— rushed into the kitchen, white with horror, and crying murder. She had found her master lying upon the drawing room floor, with a knife through his heart."

"There was nobody with him in the interval between the strangers leaving, the room and the discovery of his body?"

"Nobody we know of. It hardly seems possible that anybody could have reached him unobserved."

"And this servant girl?"

"A timid, rather foolish, country-bred creature. She is almost dead with terror. Quite out of the question."

"In affairs of this kind, my dear Brain, nobody is quite out of the question. What of the visitors— these people looking over the house?"

"They are Americans, a Mr. and Mrs. Decken. He is a member of a his Chicago firm of packers, a rich man, and has been in Melbourne about five months. They have a servant with them, a Chinese boy, Won Yen."

"And these people were under observation during the whole of the time?"

"Practically. They had just been through the conservatory, which is a very fine one, had entered the kitchen, when the alarm and was given. The housekeeper was with them all that time."

"Then if the man were alone the whole of the time there is no escape from the certainty that he suicided."

"I cannot quite reconcile myself to that. There is no discoverable reason. Pride was a man comfortably off, a man of cheerful disposition, and it seems to me— and here the doctor supports my opinion— that the blow that drove this curious weapon clean through the man's body was not self-delivered. Then again I admit that in falling, the weight of his body may have driven the knife further. He was lying on his face."

"There is one thing quite certain, Brain, that if a man is found stabbed, and no living; soul has been near him. he has stabbed himself. Detective science eliminates miracles. Are all the people of the house accounted for?"

"One curious incident remains. The Chinese boy who followed the Deckens over the house carrying Mrs. Decken's wraps was left in the conservatory."

"Oh, oh ! This is quite another story."

"Wait. He was not with the party in the kitchen when the body was found, and was not thought of till ten minutes later, when the hubbub had subsided somewhat, and the Police had arrived. Then he alone was missing. A hurried search was made. Telephone messages were sent in all directions advising the police of the adjacent suburbs to look out for him. Our friend John Hop imagined he had a soft thing, and that Won Yen was the guilty man."

"But," said Brain, "Won Yen came to light a few minutes' later. He was heard calling in the garden, and the constable himself found him in the conservatory."

"Where he had been hiding?"

"Where he was securely locked up. Mrs. Camden, the housekeeper, had locked the conservatory securely on leaving. It was a precaution her master had always insisted upon. Won Yen, who had loitered behind the others, examining the peculiar flowers, was overlooked for the time. He was not, liberated till the policeman himself unlocked the door in the presence of four witnesses, all of whom are positive that the door was locked."

Not another word passed between Mr. Austin Porteus and Brain, during the remainder of the ride. Mr. Porteus sat in his corner, twiddling two fat thumbs, and murmuring at intervals, "Bless my soul! God bless my soul!" Detective Brain had taken all necessary precautions.

The body remained on a couch in the drawing room, the witnesses were all detained. Mr. Porteus looked down at the mortal remains of the late John Pride, without a trace of emotion. He examined the weapon with which the deed was done, and recognised it immediately. as a valuable sample of an old art peculiar, to one notoriously martial Burmese tribe.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He walked slowly round the room, and halted before an art object here and there. Mr. Pride had been a judicious collector of curios. He knew a good thing, and had purchased many.

Austin Porteus paused finally before a remarkable object standing on a fine carven, black-wood bureau in one corner of the room. It was a gross sample of Asiatic fancy, a monstrous conception, half-human,. half-frog, marvellously wrought in three metals— brass, silver and gold— touched with a pearl-like enamel in green and red, chased with exquisite art. Its large, blood-red eyes were twin stones having extraordinary fire. Its teeth were true pearls, and a great crystal was embedded in its breast.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. He polished his glasses, and looked more closely, and lingered so long that presently Brain ventured to remind him.

"After all, my old friend, we are not here to study curiosities, are we?"

"Aren't we?" replied Mr. Porteus, beaming over his steel-rimmed glasses. "Aren't we, though, really?" Porteus went back, to the body, and pondered that as he had pondered the graven image.

Then he took up John Pride's right hand.

"Bless my soul," he said. "Now I should like to see these people— the Deckens. I would prefer to see them alone for a minute, if you don't mind."

Mr. Porteus spent only five minutes with the Deckens, eliciting nothing of any importance, it would seem. The case troubled him, apparently. He went into the garden to ponder it. He drifted in and out of the conservatory, and round the left wall of the house. He spent a minute or two under the window of the drawing-room, then startled the people in with the body by suddenly appearing among them. He had accomplished this by pushing up the window and clambering nimbly into the room. For a stout, elderly man he did it remarkably well.

"You did not hear me," he said. "You saw me, of course, but you did not hear me." "What of it?" asked Brain. "Just to show that it was possible for a man to get in from the garden, stab John Pride, and get out again, as Won Yen did."

"The Chinaman?"

"Won Yen is not a Chinaman."

"You have seen him? He has confessed?"

"I have not seen him; but you had better put him under arrest at once, I think."

Brain signalled to a constable, who hastened from the room.

"Then you do not uphold the idea of suicide?" Brain said, turning to Mr. Porteus.

"John Pride was murdered as he stood at this table!" Mr. Porteus took the dead man's right hand in his, and pulled aside the clenched fingers. "See," he said.

Brain looked closely. Under the fingers, against the palm, was a small object like a beetle carved in stone.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That is a scarab. It is genuine."

"But what does it prove?"

"Only that a man does not stab himself whilst holding another article than the knife in his right hand, unless he, is a left-handed man, which John Pride was not."

"But if it is a murder what is the object— the motive?"

"There is the object and the motive." Austin Porteus pointed to the squat metal monster on the black bureau.

"That appears only the fantastical work of some decadent sculptor to a casual observer— it is really Shoo Shan, a very venerable object to you if you happen to be a Burmese, an object of absolute sanctity for which you would happily lay down your earthly life in the certain hope of celestial glory if you happened to be a Twoi Burmese, of the Pakoi hills, where the pure Buddhism of Lower Burma is mixed with the hideous superstitions of Assam and Tibet. Shoo Shin was stolen from a Twoi pagoda temple seven years ago. Pride bought it in China, and brought it here. Won Yen is a Burmese, a Twoi of the Pakoi heights, and no Chinaman. He killed John Pride to restore Shoo Shan to that Twoi Pagoda out from Manchi. I know the history of Shoo Shan. I expected trouble for the owner while I envied him the treasure, but I did not know Pride was that man."

"But Won Yen was locked in the conservatory."

"Where he locked himself after killing John Pride."

"Where the housekeeper locked him before the killing of John Pride."

"The conservatory is practically a hot-house. It is built of glass. There is a loose pane in the wall near the door. This pane slides in its leaden setting. Won Yen, your Chinese boy, is a Twoi priest of forty. He has a subtle mind and a

keen eye. He discovered the loose pane, or he made it loose. Slipping the pane aside, he put his head through, unlocked the padlock, let himself out, stole through the window, and killed Pride with the knife he had seen lying on the table when he went through the loom with his master and mistress. He saw Shoo Shan at the same time; but it is a thousand to one he had long known it was in Pride's possession, and was only waiting and plotting for a chance to recover it. When he had killed Pride, he escaped through the window, closed the window, relocked himself in the conservatory, and waited with celestial stoicism to be found there by the first silly policeman who might be called in."

"But, confound it all, he didn't steal the idol."

"That was not necessary. John Pride was a single man. His collection will be sold under the hammer. The god, Shoo Shan, will be bought, by an emissary, from the Twoi, and returned to its temple."

"Thank God, we have Won Yen hard and fast."

"Don't be too sure. He. is probably dead by this," said Porteus, sweetly.

Brain uttered an exclamation of amazement, and darted from the room. He was too late. He found a horrified policeman standing over Won Yen, who lay convulsed upon the kitchen floor.

"Why didn't you warn me earlier?" Brain complained when next he met his friend, the archaeologist.

"It did not occur to me sooner that he would kill himself when arrested. However, the chances are it would not have been prevented. Won Yen was prepared for any emergency, be sure of that."

HENRY BRAIN and Austin Porteus were present at the sale of Pride's belongings a few months later. Porteus bid high for the marvellous idol, Shoo Shan, but was outbid by a small, quiet, dark-skinned man who looked extremely odd in his European setting— a black frock coat, white linen, and a high silk hat.

"That," said Porteus, "is Won Yen's confederate."

Brain jerked a short oath. "Can nothing be done?" he said.

"Nothing," answered Austin Porteus. "You wouldn't work up a conviction in a thousand years."

2: The Cough Mixture Advertisement

10 July 1913

MR. AUSTIN PORTEUS had been attracted to the picture show by a film representing excavation work in Egypt, exposing the tomb of the maternal aunt of Rameses, or a second cousin of Pharoah, rather eminent in his day, and was extremely interested.

The chubby man with the lambs-wool whiskers growing in wing-like clusters on either side of his benign and cherubic countenance, the deeply dimpled chin, and the profuse, curling, lambswool coiffure, attracted a good deal of attention during the interval. Mr. Porteus could not fail to attract attention anywhere. He was a very good looking, elderly gentleman in an infantile way. With the gentlest blue eye in the world, sparkling behind round glasses and the rosiest of round rosy cheeks, he looked like a delightful child that had developed whiskers and profuse white hair for show purposes.

Our dealer in curiosities did not move from his seat during the interval, but sat gazing at the rather stupid advertisements bobbing on and off the screen, with the same friendly interest that he had displayed in the films. Suddenly Mr. Porteus sat up, leaning forward to look more closely at somebody's exciting! advertisement of an important cough mixture, guaranteed to remove coughs and colds after three applications.

Austin had neither cough nor cold, and no prospect of either; but the advertisement thrilled him. He took off his glasses, rubbed them hastily, and readjusted them.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Austin Porteus. "Bless my soul!"

In no circumstances did Mr. Porteus use a more profane expletive, and he only used this when more than usually concerned.

Really, the advertisement on the screen presented no qualities calculated to please a man of excellent art instincts and fine judgments such as Mr. Austin Porteus was, nor did it possess attraction likely to appeal to the archaeologist and connoisseur. It was an execrable coloured daub representing a rather stout purple man sneezing a yellow sneeze, surrounded by ill-written statements of the virtues of Gormon's Coughnot.

Mr. Austin Porteus neglected matters of some consequence to visit the Piquant Picture Theatre again on the following evening. Again he remained during the interval, and displayed extraordinary interest in the grotesque advertisement of Gormon's Coughnot.

Several times that advertisement was flashed on the screen during the ten minutes' wait, without exhausting the interest of the benignant gentleman in seedy black, beaming behind his large, round spectacles.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus, every time the picture appeared. He said it out loud, with the result that the raffish youth on his left imparted to the young lady further on the disconcerting assurance that his gills with the cotton-wool whiskers, was as dippy as a doped goose, and liable to break out at any moment and do violence to the audience.

Doubtless the young lady further on was much relieved, when Mr. Porteus arose from his seat, and went out just before the conclusion of the interval. Mr. Porteus did not go away. He asked at the office if he might see the manager. The manager, a small, affable, hurried gentlemen, hoped he could be of some service.

"I merely wished to congratulate you on the excellence of one feature of your entertainment," said Austin Porteus. "That Egyptian film— most instructive, most edifying."

"Delighted to know you like it," said the manager.

"As a student of Egyptology, it as of peculiar interest to me, but it has an educational value to the whole community. You cinematograph showmen are doing admirable work— admirable. You are bringing the masses into contact with strange people, familiarising them with strange countries and curious customs."

The manager was most gratified. He believed there was a wonderful future before the living picture.

"I am sure of it," said Austin Porteus. "Really, it is an astonishing thing. I don't understand the principle of the apparatus at all. I must give it some attention."

"Would you like to have a peep into our operating room?" asked the manager.

"I would, indeed. I should not have cared to ask; but it is most kind of you to offer."

Mr. Porteus was shown into the operating room, and presently was in close conversation with the proud operator, who explained things with great minuteness. About the, working of the advertisement slides he was most contemptuous. That was mere magic lantern work, and no class, but with a film running he could be eloquent and properly proud.

The operator was a young fellow of about twenty-eight, a youth of the artisan class with a turn for mechanics. He became quite communicative under the influence at the marked interest and hearty appreciation of this smiling, dimpled and most courteous old gentleman.

Mr. Porteus took his leave while the second film was running. He did not go back to the show, but hastened away, and boarded a passing tram. Mr. Porteus's haste was not suspicious; there was nothing in his manner suggestive

of the criminal; but in reality the celebrated archaeologist had just stolen something from the operating room of the Piquant Picture Theatre, and with the cherished object stowed securely in the breast pocket of his coat was making the best speed possible to take cover in his dusty little shop in Bell's Lane.

Stowed in the shop, with the door locked, and a shaded lamp throwing a narrow circle of light on the small counter, the collector of curios drew his prize from his pocket, and examined it with closest interest.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus. The object was the little glass slide containing the atrociously painted advertisement of Gormon's Coughnot.

Mr. Porteus spent an hour over the slide, and a few other trifles. Had there been spectators they must have wondered what interest this commonplace item could have possessed for a man whose cupboards were stored with truly remarkable articles of great rarity and much beauty from all the corners of the old earth.

Next day at about noon Mr. Porteus visited a public telephone, and rang up his friend, Detective Brain.

"I want you to come with me to the Piquant Picture Theatre this evening if you can find time," he said.

"Why," replied the detective, "anything doing?"

"There is an excellent film showing recent Egyptian excavations, with beautiful views of a sarcophagus, and some inscribed tiles and amulets."

"Sorry, but I have an important engagement to-night."

Detective Brain did not enter with zest into his friend's enthusiasm over Babylonian bricks and tiles from the lower Nile.

"Very well, very well, to-morrow night will do. You might try and give me to-morrow night."

"You are quite sure there's nothing hanging on to this? A man never quite knows what you're getting at, Porteus."

"Shall we say to-morrow night? We'll take dinner together at the Grill."

"Very well."

On the following evening Porteus and Brain dined together, and Porteus talked all the time with affectionate delight of a fictitious set of old china he had secured that day.

"But if it's a fraud, what's the good of it?" asked the practical detective.

"Ah, my friend, but it is such an excellent fraud— so wonderfully done. It was an achievement to detect it. Some of these forgeries of antiques are simple marvellous. The joy you take in tracking down a thief I find in demonstrating the fraudulent nature of an alleged Rembrandt or a supposed Cellini. I have done it in all parts of the world, even in Australia, to which many

of the first families brought antiques, legitimate and forged. They were fascinating fellows those artists who set themselves to imitate the old masters, and trade off their products on the credulous— much more fascinating than your brainless forgers of pewter half-crowns, my good Brain. I love to track them out, and can show you samples of china, old silver, tapestry, and painting that are rank forgeries, and far superior originals they imitated. I have a Botticelli that that is as fine as anything painted by the degenerate Florentine, and it was turned out to order by poor consumptive devil of an artist in a London slum and sold to an African pork packer for five thousand pounds. I assured him that he was the victim of a deception, the pork packer paid me to expose the fraud; and tracking it out was the piece of detective work of which I am most proud. The pork packer paid me well for my pains, and threw in the fictitious Botticelli. It is my greatest treasure."

Detective Brain was not enormously delighted with the picture show. The Egyptian film rather bored him; but immediately after it had passed Mr. Austin Porteus began to be very interesting. The audience was not a big one, and Brain and the archaeologist were seated by themselves.

Suddenly Porteus admitted: "I did really bring you here merely to see the pictures. I know your heart is not in Egyptian tombs; but I imagined one item here would compensate for the general weariness. The fact is, I have found the man who killed Thomas Dore."

"What!" Brain had positively whirled in his seat. "What are you saying?"

"You remember the case?"

"Do I remember it? I was never so bewildered in my life. We were utterly beaten from start to finish."

"Let me recall a few details. Thomas Dore, a gentleman of means, was found lying dead in one of the upper rooms of his house shortly after leaving the dinner table. There were several guests in the house, all of whom were with Mrs. Dore in the drawing-room when the crime was committed."

Brain cut in eagerly: "The front part of the house was securely locked. The servants were all accounted for. The window of the room in which the deed was done was secured with a hasp."

"Yes. The man who killed Thomas Dore was a fireman."

"How do you know that?"

"He has told me so."

"Has he confessed?"

"No, he has not the remotest idea that he is suspected. He was a fireman, and being a fireman he was at the fire which broke out in Dore's house some weeks before the perpetration of the crime. It was then he discovered the fine

jewels in Dore's room. The sight of those jewels inspired him with the idea of becoming moderately rich, as quickly and as easily as possible.

"He worked out a simple scheme. All that was necessary was to watch Dore's upstairs room for a suitable time when the window would be open wide enough to admit a slim, athletic young man. He resigned from the Fire Brigade to keep the watch. He hired a room in a house near, from which he could keep an eye on Dore's wall."

"You forget it was a blank wall."

"You forget the rain-pipe, Brain, and do not forget that my hero is a fireman, accustomed to scaling walls. When the moment came, he went up that wall like a cat, through the window, and was after the jewellery when Dore entered.

"The thief seized a heavy chair, and crashed it. on Dore's skull. Dore happened to have rather a thin skull— the blow cracked it like an eggshell. Dore fell upon, the bed, and slid from there to a bearskin rug upon the floor. There was no noise."

"But nothing was stolen."

"The fireman, a new hand at crime, horrified at what he had done, thought only of escape. He went out through the window again, and down the rain-pipe."

"He did not. The window was open only about three inches, and latched on the inside."

"Latched with a trailing latch."

"What!"

"The window was secured with a trailing latch. When raised it could be pulled down from the outside, but could not be pushed up. I have been to investigate that window. The fireman went through, pulled the window down after him, and escaped by the pipe."

"Great Scotland Yard! And you have found him?"

"I have."

"In a living picture film?"

"No, in an advertisement. Here it is." Austin Porteus drew the cough-medicine advertisement slide from his pocket, and handed it to Brain.

"Handle it carefully," he said. Brain took the glass, and examined it closely.

"I'm licked," he said.

"Wait."

The friends remained for the interval, and sat through the display of advertisements.

When half-a-dozen slides had been shown Austin asked: "Well, my dear Brain, have you discovered nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"Bless my soul, and the thief advertising himself before your eyes with a confession as large as a haystack."

"In heaven's name, how?"

"You'll remember the police secured one piece of evidence in the Dore case."

"I do. The thumb print on the windowpane."

"A perfect thumb print, and a remarkable one, with a centre like a cornucopia. It was not in the book of prints possessed by the detectives for the simple reason that the prints you have are those of the thumbs of known criminals. My fireman had made his first experiment in crime and his last."

"Well, well, go on."

"I was deeply interested in thumb print evidence at the time. I remembered that thumbprint well. It has been staring you in the face in an enormously enlarged form from the edges of several of those advertisement slides; it is imprinted on the slide you now hold as plainly as the impression taken from the window-pane."

"Then the artist who painted the slides is our man."

"No. When this performance is over you might arrest the ex-fireman, Horace Smith, now operator here at the Piquant Picture Theatre."

3: The Bronze Minerva

17 July 1913

(This story was untitled. I invented one. TW)

TWO HOURS and a-half earlier Mr. Austin Porteus had not met Professor Arle; now Mr. Porteus was seated at table with the Professor and Mrs. Arle, chatting with the gusto of an old friend of the family. There is nothing like a keen common interest for the sudden making of friendships. Because Professor Arle had devoted a great deal of time to slimy dredgings from Old Nile, and possessed a cabinet of beautiful cameos, and another of exquisite gold filigree, he and Mr. Austin Porteus loved each other like brothers after a conversation of forty minutes' duration.

The Professor, although a devout Egyptologist and fired with a warm admiration of all things ancient and curious, specialised in gold filigree. He had filigrees in gold ornate with tiny gems found in the tomb of an Egyptian Queen who flourished in a civilisation that was prehistoric when Moses lurked in the bulrushes; he had beautiful work from the hands of Greek artists, who practised their calling before the days of the Dorian invasion, alongside (Etruscan work, and) wonderful examples a thousand years old from India and Central Asia. He had Irish filigree and filigree from Scandinavia older than written history, with the most finished specimens of the art as followed to-day by the skilled workmen of Malta.

It was the knowledge that Professor Arle possessed this fine collection of filigree, and was at length willing to part with some portion of it, that had taken Austin Porteus on a trip to Sydney, and from Sydney to the Professor's quaint, semi-rural home at Port Hacking, with a soft pad of bank-notes to the value of £800 in his breast pocket.

Mr. Porteus, as an omnivorous gatherer of curios, had long been acquainted with Professor Arle's filigrees. He had spent days over the specimens when the loan collection was, to him, the most thrilling feature of Sydney Museum. He envied their owner with the sort of avarice that takes hold of all sedulous collectors, and the fact that at length the good Professor's misfortunes compelled him to part with a portion of his treasure was hailed by our cherubic friend with un-Christian delight.

"Of course, I know you by reputation, Mr. Porteus," said the Professor, "and had thought it probable you would be a buyer when the stuff was on the market, but you have forestalled my intentions."

"Still, you are selling, Professor?"

"It is unfortunately unavoidable. I have made serious financial mistakes, and am returning to England in three months' time. I am compelled to sell, but have not yet made the matter public."

"Then I congratulate myself," said Austin Porteus, his bright eyes dancing behind their round classes. He ran his fingers through his snowy fleece, and his dimples deepened. He chuckled like a fat happy babe.

"I am the first comer, who, with your kind permission, may be the first served."

The Professor smiled gravely. "Provided, of course, my prices do not send you flying, sir."

"There is no one in Australia who knows the value of these filigrees better than I, Professor Arle, and no one more willing to pay full value."

"In that case we should agree admirably."

The two men were in very marked contrast. Professor Arle was a tall, thin, clean-shaven, close-cropped man of about fifty— quiet, humourless— a dreamt specialist in learning, self-contained, and with far less knowledge of the workaday world of his time than he had of the home-life in old nations and civilisations when the little Egyptians ran to and fro about the building of Cheops.

Austin Porteus knew deeply, too; but with his curious knowledge and his profound interest in the arts of all ages went an alertness that was in absurd contrast with his mop of hair like washed wool, his round clumps of side-whisker, his dimples, and his infantile chubbiness. Observation with him was an instinct. His life's work as a dealer in curios had made minute investigation a work of moments. To him the faintest line made with a graver was as portentous as a beam. He missed nothing even when seeking nothing.

There was no haggling between the two men. Each knew, and each knew the other knew. Business running into £580 was executed in a few minutes.

Austin Porteus pointed to a sample, and said, "Fifty sounds."

The Professor nodded.

"Seventy," said Mr. Porteus, raising a Celtic sample.

"Agreed."

Another sample from Malta was £20. For a scrap of Etruscan work Mr. Porteus gave £100, and for a large Scandinavian brooch set with rubies £140. This was eminently business-like, Mr. Porteus paid in notes.

"I did not take it for granted you would be willing to take the cheque of a total stranger," said Austin, "so provided myself with cash"

"Not a total stranger." replied the Professor. "Mr. Austin Porteus is known to every art lover in Australia— and in Europe, too, I fancy."

The transaction was completed. Mr. Porteus placed his purchases in a stout, buffalo-hide handbag with a stubborn steel lock, and took the Professor's receipt for five hundred and eighty pounds cash. Mr. Porteus could not fail to observe that the Professor, with a carelessness remarkable in a man who, on his own showing, was very short of moneys, folded the notes once, and dropped the pad into a small, ebony escritoire.

"Now," said Mr. Porteus, "I shall wish you good-day, professor."

"Not at all. You must stay and take dinner with us." The Professor took Austin's arm. "Mrs. Arle will be delighted to meet you. She, too, has the frenzy of the collector. I shall be greatly obliged if you will stay. There is much yet to be said about that Carnelian Scarabaeus."

"Thank you very much. I will stay, but the scarab, like the Mosaic breastplate, is an ingenious forgery."

The Professor and Mr. Porteus argued the matter during a long dinner; Mrs. Arle, a pleasant-faced woman of forty, with an English complexion, offering a helping word here and there.

The conversation did not last through the dinner, the talk and the meal alike were interrupted suddenly by the sound of a heavy fall in one of the front rooms. Professor Arle looked inquiringly at his wife.

"Did you hear that, my dear?"

Mrs. Arle smiled. "Please, don't forget it is you who are slightly deaf, James," she said.

Austin Porteus was on his feet.

"It sounded like the fall of a body," said he. "I think, perhaps, we had better investigate. No, no," he continued, as Mrs. Arle raised a small bell, "if you will excuse me."

He led the way. in the drawingroom, prostrate upon the floor, he found a man. The man was bleeding from a severe wound in the head. The front window was open, the frame being splintered where the latch was smashed. The escritoire, too, was broken.

"It's Wilson!" cried Mrs. Arle.

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus.

The Professor was gazing upon the scene in perfect amazement. "What does it mean?" he blurted.

"It means, my dear Professor, that your money has been stolen."

Mr. Porteus pointed to the broken escritoire.

Professor Arle ran to the desk, but that no longer interested Mr. Porteus. He was kneeling by the man Wilson.

"It's a bad knock," he said. "Better get the man a-bed, and send for a doctor."

Wilson was disposed of, and a doctor called; but, meanwhile, Mr. Porteus made himself very busy. He helped to dress Wilson's wound, and heard his first words of amazement as he recovered consciousness. Wilson was handy man to the Arle household, performing half-a-dozen different functions, from shaving the Professor to tending the garden, officiating as footman on state occasions. There was one other servant, a young woman of about twenty-six, who had attended at table, and whom Mr. Porteus had noted for the briskness and precision— a neat-handed maid servant, very quiet and correct.

Austin Porteus observed with satisfaction that it has not been necessary for the mistress to give a single order. May Raymond was an exemplary servant excepting in a very distinct and impressive superiority of manner, which, as all mistresses admit, is a grave drawback in a servant.

After disposing of Wilson, Austin Porteus had three minutes' talk with the Professor.

"I am interested in this unfortunate affair," he said. "Have I your permission to investigate?"

"No further investigation is necessary," replied Professor Arle. "The thief broke into the place by the drawing-room window, he took the money, and several of my small valuables, Wilson caught him in the act, he knocked Wilson on the head and escaped."

Austin Porteus chuckled.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

The Professor turned a surprised look upon him.

"You are laughing," he remarked with a touch of asperity.

"Am I? Bless my soul!" Mr. Porteus took another turn round the drawingroom, and stopped at the window.

"Will you look here a moment, Professor?" he said. He pointed to the window-sash. "Do you see nothing strange about that?"

The Professor looked closely. "I see the sash is splintered, and the glass is cracked across."

"You do not observe that the window was open from the inside."

"From the inside?"

"Yes, and with an axe or some broad-bladed implement like an adze. I should say an adze."

"Then you think the thief got into the house some other way, and broke open the window to get out?"

"Why, should he break open the window from the inside when it would have been so much easier to spring the catch and throw up the window?"

"Dear me!" said the Professor. "I'm sure I cannot say, unless the fellow was a fool."

"Oh, the fellow was a fool," chuckled Mr. Porteus. "These fellows always are fools. And now will you go back to Wilson, and stay with him till I come? Don't leave him for a moment."

"Hadn't we better wait till the police come in the morning? There's no hope of clearing the matter up in the dark."

"Bless my soul! It is already cleared up." Mr. Porteus's dimples deepened, and he blinked happily behind his spectacles. "It's so very simple," he said.

"Simple, of course it is. It's simple enough to comprehend; but catching the thief— that's the difficult task."

"Not at all. I fancy we have got the thief."

"Got the thief? Where? Whom?" The Professor looked quite dazed.

Professor Arle sat with the wounded man while Austin Porteus busied himself in quite an absurd way, pottering about the garden with a lantern, mooning at the water's edge, and talking a survey of the plan of the house. The Professor's villa was built close to the bay on one side. Just beyond the drawing-room window half-a-dozen steps descended to the water. Mr. Porteus went down those steps, and extended his examination to the sea. The spectacle of an elderly gentleman, with profuse white curling hair, curling white whiskers, the face of an optimistic wax doll, and a decorous frock suit of seedy black, inquisitively examining the sea with a small lantern in quest of a burglar might have been considered supremely ridiculous had there been any facetious spirits overlooking the proceeding.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when Mr. Austin Porteus entered the bedroom where the smitten Wilson was sitting up in bed, with his damaged head elegantly bandaged. Mr. Porteus carried several curious objects— a pair of old boots, a bronze head of Minerva, an adze, a small silver Roman coin by Cellini, and three crumbs of pie crust.

"With your permission, Professor," said Mr. Porteus. "we'll go through the important event of the evening here. I should like Mrs. Arle and the servant girl Raymond to be present. That will mean that our little meeting will comprise all the persons in the house when the theft occurred."

"Saving the thief," corrected the Professor.

Mrs. Arle and the girl joined the others in Wilson's room. Wilson was looking very pale and distressed; but Mr. Porteus seemed to have small consideration for his sufferings. He got promptly down to business.

"I have here a few important exhibits. There are the boots that made the tracks under the drawing-room window. I found them in the rubbish bin in the stable, well covered. This is the adze with which the window was prized open. I found it in the sea. I found the bronze in the sea, too, and the Cellini coin on the sand. The crumbs I will explain later.

"Don't move, Wilson, you may start your wound bleeding. Besides, I have it all clear enough without any demonstration from you. This. Professor, is the bronze head I saw standing on the tall blackwood cupboard in your drawingroom. You did not notice its absence after the robbery. I did. It is hardly a thing a robber would steal, is it?"

"The fact is, Wilson didn't steal it. Wilson only stole the notes. Wilson is a modest man—he wanted nothing more. He probably witnessed our business transactions through the window this afternoon, and resolved that the £580 would be a great comfort to him in his travels, so he seized the earliest opportunity to put on the large old boots, and make very deep footprints in the flower bed under the window, after obliterating his own. That was quite an ingenious precaution, Wilson."

"It's a lie!" rasped Wilson. "It's a lie!"

"Wilson smuggled the adze to the front room of the house, to be handy when he needed it," continued Mr. Porteus. "A cute fellow this Wilson. While we were at dinner he stole into the drawing-room, broke open the window with the adze to convey the impression that a thief from outside had done the work, but here his fine astuteness forsook him. It was unworthy of you, Wilson, to break the window from the inside, even a broad adze blade leaves marks. Wilson then broke the catch of the escritoire, although it was not locked—a thing no experienced thief would ever do."

"Wilson, took the notes from the escritoire, and put them in the left-hand breast pocket of his coat. Then he hurled the adze from the window into the sea. At this point he had another ingenious idea. To make it appear that the thief was not after money, he took a number of valuables from the Professor's collection, and threw them into the sea also."

"He's lying," said Wilson feebly."

"Will you feel the right-hand pocket of Wilson's coat, Professor?" said Mr. Porteus.

The Professor went to where the coat was hanging, and felt the pocket. He drew out a small pad.

"The notes," he said. But instantly his expression changed. "No," he said, "it is only tissue paper."

"Precisely," said Mr. Porteus. "I discovered that when we removed Wilson's coat before putting him to bed."

"It seems to me, Mr. Porteus, you are talking a good deal of nonsense. Wilson hasn't the money, and I don't suppose you are going to ask us to believe the poor fellow knocked himself on the head?"

"On the contrary, Professor, that is just what I am going to ask you to believe. Wilson, pulling open the door of the high glass cupboard to secure

other valuables to cast into the sea, was too impetuous, he rocked the cupboard on its tall legs, and the bronze Minerva fell with unpleasant consequences to Wilson we all know of."

"Then," said the Professor, "how did Wilson, lying unconscious on the floor, dispose of the money he had stolen?"

"He did not. Miss Raymond did that. Please do not leave the room, Miss Raymond. Miss Raymond, Professor, has had designs on your valuables for some time. I imagine she had seized a spare moment to run to the drawing-room, wondering, no doubt, what my visit meant. She was in hiding behind the curtains of the second door when Wilson entered. Here are the crumbs of the pie crust to prove it. Our last course at dinner was pie. She saw all. When he was knocked out by the Goddess of Wisdom, it was Miss Raymond threw the goddess into the sea. It was she took the notes from his pocket, and substituted the pad of tissue paper, which I had left folded on the table after wrapping up my purchases.

"Miss Raymond then ran from the drawing-room by the left passage, and calmly resumed her duties in the kitchen. Miss Raymond, will you be so good as to restore those notes?"

"I will, I will," she said, "if you will only let me go. They're hidden in the flour bin in the kitchen."

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus delightedly. "After all, the science of detection is only the combination of close observation with a series of shrewd guesses."

4: The Colville Rubies

24 Jul 1913

(This story was untitled. I invented one. TW)

MR. AUSTIN PORTEUS knew more about gems and precious stones than any other man in Australia, while Mr. Colwell owned the finest set of rubies in the Commonwealth. That was sufficient to draw the pair together.

The Colwell rubies were a family possession of considerable antiquity. All the pride of the Colwells was centred in the rubies— the last remaining proof of their ancient lineage and crusted respectability. Howard Colwell was the direct representative of the first Howard Colville, who arrived in England in the train of William the Conqueror, and on much the same mission. It was claimed, without shame or remorse, that the Colwell rubies were the first reward of the first Colville, filched from an early English church.

The Colwells had undergone many changes and vicissitudes since the name had been modified by long use, and here was a Colwell, a stout and seemly citizen, of Victoria, the Antipodes, still in possession of a relic of the Norman Invasion. Howard Colwell had suffered vicissitudes in Australia, but had clung to the rubies in their quaint, wide floral settings through all trials and tribulations.

In the early days he had gone hungry, with three thousand pounds' worth of gems concealed in his swag, consoled by his family pride, and the faith within him, a firm conviction that wealth would come, and with it an opportunity of restoring the dignity of the Colwells, of which restored edifice the precious stones must be the sure and stable foundation. Howard Colwell without the rubies might be a social nobody; Howard Colwell with the rubies had a passport to antiquity, so to speak.

When he claimed ancient descent they were his guarantee of good faith. It is true that there are sermons in stones, if the stones are valuable and old. All this is necessary to explain Howard Colwell and the Colwell family. Many human antiques, as well as old jewels, have reached Australia; but Howard Colwell prided himself on being unique in this quarter of the globe.

Grave, grey, extremely dignified, old-fashioned in all his airs and graces, he bore himself like the titled father in an old comedy. He discovered in Mr. Austin Porteus a man who probably knew more about the Colwell rubies than he knew himself, and that made the cherubic antiquarian a personage to be propitiated.

"You must come and see us," said Mr. Colwell warmly. "I have many things that will interest you. We shall be happy to have your opinion of the rubies."

Austin Porteus, to whom anything old in art was a matter of vital importance and supreme interest, accepted the invitation, and in due course appeared at Howard Colwell's spacious portal, still wearing his well-worn black suit, and carrying a square black satchel large enough for a change of linen and a toothbrush, with which he would have started for Timbuctoo as readily as to Torwell. The home of the Colwells had the same pretension to gracious ancientness as seemed to flavour Howard Colwell himself. It was severely fine, representing great age in good order. The furnishings were heavy, solid, and delightfully out-of-date.

"The oldest place I could get in this lamentable newness," said Howard Colwell.

"Charming," the visitor replied. "Nothing in your furniture since 1800."

"I have no love for modernity."

"There is but one advantage in being modern— we are privileged to appreciate most fully what is old."

"To be sure."

Mr. Colwell was a widower. He was not disposed to lament the fact. Apparently his wife had always been a trifle too new for a man of Howard's peculiar tastes.

Austin Porteus was introduced to Colwell, junior, a young man of about twenty-eight, tall, pale, and emaciated, convalescing after a severe illness, and not yet able to be long from his bed. He was sitting in an invalid chair, and was attended by a nurse, who excited an immediate interest in the heart of Austin Porteus.

The old collector's eye did not merely see things— it photographed them down to the merest details. Every glance was a snapshot. He saw this much of Mary Guest— that she was a little over medium height, slim, but well nourished, olive-skinned, black-haired, with the gentlest dark-brown eyes. The face was full of character, the firmness of the mouth in marked contrast with the tenderness of the eyes. She wore a plain, dark-grey dress. Her hands were unusually long and white. Her attitude towards the patient was quite devoted.

Austin Porteus had heard something of young Colwell, who, it would seem, had inherited little of his father's appreciation of the niceties of the older order and the grace of culture. He was a very modern young man, with a, decided inclination to the vanities of his day and generation. His severe illness had followed on a couple of years of wild life in big cities, and had brought him so close to death's door that, as he explained, his hand was on the knocker. Now, thanks largely to Nurse Guest, he was taking the return journey. The nurse, while renewing his life had regenerated his character.

To-day Arthur Colwell was what a Colwell had never been— a very religious man. With this Colwell. senior, credited the nurse, too.

"A very excellent young lady," said the old gentleman. "She has done wonders with the boy, but I could wish she had not made a saint of him. We know what is due to the church, of course, but piety in a man is— eh!— just a trifle— eh!— weird: You agree with me? It seems to leave no room for the charm of life. However, the lad will grow out of it, no doubt. It's part of the sickness. 'When the devil was well'— you know the proverb."

The patient was not well enough, to sit at dinner with them, and Austin and Colwell, senior, dined tête-à-tête.

"I shall be happy to show you the rubies now," said Mr. Colwell, after the liqueur. "I keep them with me always, very securely, you may be sure. You'll excuse me."

He left Austin sitting at the dining room fire, a large cigar projecting from between his lumps of swansdown whiskers. He returned in two minutes, white-faced and trembling.

"They are gone!" he gasped.

Austin Porteus wheeled round. "The rubies gone? Stolen?"

"There is no other explanation. The safe in which I keep them is secreted in the library wall. Come, let me show you."

Austin followed his excited host. By pressing upon a portion of the wall near the big fireplace the oaken dado slid into the floor, exposing the face of an ordinary iron safe.

Mr. Colwell opened the safe.

"You see," he said; "they are gone. We must have the police."

He turned towards the telephone.

"Just a moment, please." Austin Porteus restrained him. Mr. Porteus was still smoking. The incident did not seem to have disturbed him in the least, his ordinary bland, dimpled gentleness.

"The safe is not empty." He went on his knees before it. "Pearls, I see. This one is valuable." He held up a fine unset pearl in a velvet case. "And this, I presume, is money— gold." He touched a leather bag in the corner of the safe.

"About ninety pounds," said Mr. Colwell.

"Then the thieves who stole your rubies did not want money. Rather an unusual attribute in thieves. Strange, too, that they should take rubies and leave pearls. When did you last open the safe?"

"Yesterday morning."

"Things were all right then, of course? And the key?"

"Is always kept in a secret drawer in the bureau in my bedroom. I found it there where I had placed it after putting the money away yesterday."

Mr. Porteus went hastily round the room trying the windows. One was unlatched.

"They are always securely latched after nightfall," Mr. Colwell explained. "I attended to them myself last evening."

"And you are sure this one was fastened?"

"I am certain of it."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Porteus did not appear in the least surprised; but he repeated the ejaculation several times as he looked at the window.

"I am afraid you do not appreciate the extent of my loss," said Mr. Colwell impatiently. "This is a very serious thing to me— a very serious thing. I really must communicate with the police."

Mr. Porteus removed his cigar with some reluctance.

"Perhaps, sir, you have heard I have a certain facility in elucidating little problems of this sort. If you will, take my advice you will not call in the ordinary police at this stage. Detective Brain is a friend of mine; we might get in touch with him, after which, with your permission, I should be delighted to go into this matter thoroughly. It really interests me very much."

After some delay Detective Brain was secured at the other end of the 'phone. He promised to be on the job within an hour.

Austin Porteus spent twenty minutes at the hall door and under the library windows, and then began a systematic search of the interior of the house.

When Brain arrived Austin was still busy. He even searched the invalid's room which adjoined the library. Neither the young man nor the young woman had heard anything of a suspicious nature during the day, but the invalid had spent a couple of hours in the sun on a side verandah. The nurse was reading to him during this time, and a thief might easily have made his way into the library through the outer window while they were so engaged. Nothing whatever could be made of the evidence of the servants. They had seen no one, heard nothing, suspected none. One thing seemed quite certain— that the thief could not reach the library from any direction but the window without being seen by Arthur or his nurse, excepting during the time when they were together on the verandah.

Brain shook his head.

"What about that nurse?" he said.

"Bless my soul ! I hadn't thought of her," answered Austin Porteus.

"Then do," continued Brain. "My experience teaches me that none can look too innocent to be guilty. I'm going to look over the grounds."

"It is unnecessary, my friend. The jewels are not out of the house."

"How the deuce do you know that?"

"I do know it."

"Then where are they?"

"I don't know where they are; but I do know they are not in the grounds."

Austin Porteus with Colwell, senior, at his elbow most of the time, continued his search of the house, and three times he came back to the invalid's room. The third time he apologised.

"I hope I am not disturbing you greatly," he said.

"Not at all," replied Arthur Colwell from his bed, where he had lain watching the previous search with feverish eyes, the nurse sitting by him, her hand on his. "I have an idea the thief, possibly a servant, used this room to hide the jewels."

"They would make a large packet. They could not be hidden easily," said the father.

"To be sure, Mr. Colwell. It is very odd."

Austin Porteus went round and round the room, drumming his fingers on the walls. "Ah," he said suddenly. "Bless my soul!" Then he sat down.

"Better have Brain in, I can trust him."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the elder Colwell. "Have you discovered anything?"

"I have discovered everything. I had already satisfied myself. It was only necessary to find the hiding place. There are more secret places in this house than you knew of, sir."

Brain answered the summons with alacrity. He found Austin Porteus sitting in a wicker chair, twiddling his thumbs and beaming blandly, and young Colwell sitting up in bed, his hollow eyes fixed upon the antiquarian, the nurse's restraining hand on his shoulder.

"It is all right now. Brain, I think," said Austin. "This is a little family matter. The rubies are not out of the house— they never have been. The thief— if it were a thief— could only have escaped through the library window, and a little tendril of the nasturtium growing under the window twined round a tack in the frame satisfied me that particular window had not been opened for two days at least. The person who took the rubies from the safe undid the catch to give the idea that a thief entered that way. Really, the person who took the jewels was in the house all the time; is probably here now."

The elder Colwell started forward. "Then why not have the rascal arrested?" he said.

Mr. Porteus held up an apologetic palm.

"No hurry, no haste," he said. "Young Mr Colwell took the rubies with no shameful intention I am sure."

"My son took the rubies? Preposterous!"

"In the absence of his nurse, at about two o'clock to-day, the invalid left his room, took the key from your bureau, unlocked the safe and removed the jewels. But he left something behind that told the story."

"I saw nothing," said Colwell, senior.

"Neither did I see anything. I smelt it. Your son's medicine, I notice, is strongly flavoured with peppermint. He went to the safe shortly after taking a dose. I notice by the label on the bottle he takes one dose at two. He left in the safe a strong odour of peppermint."

The young man was still staring at Austin Porteus. He made no protest. The nurse's arm was about him now.

"Why your son took the rubies I cannot say, possibly it was an effect of his illness. Lying here many long hours, with nothing to do but study the woodwork, of the walls, he discovered a slight peculiarity in the pattern thereby the fireplace."

Austin Porteus walked to the wall, and pressing a Portion of the woodwork, slid the oak. Panel downwards, and revealed a small secret chamber in the wall. Out of this he took a Packet. It was the Colwell rubies, wrapped in a man's undershirt. While the others stood about, looking on in amazement, Austin Porteus examined the jewels.

"It is as I imagined. Mr. Colwell," he said. "These are not the Colwell rubies. The rubies have been removed from their settings, and rather clever imitation stones substituted. Mr. Colwell, junior, could tell the rest of the story better than I, perhaps, and with more comfort in our absence, Brain, I think."

"Stay!" The invalid spoke sharply. "Do not go. Porteus is right— these are not the rubies. I did take them from the safe. I did so because I feared he would detect the fraud, and in the hope it would be thought a burglar had taken them. Finding that secret place in the wall gave me the idea. It is a year since I took the real stones, and had the fictitious stones put in their place. I admit my crime. I hope my father will forgive me, as my God has done. I hope the woman I love will not remember against the new man she has created the iniquities of my other self now dead and done with."

Nurse Guest put her arms about the young man, and kissed him softly on the cheek, and Porteus and Brain stole from the room, leaving Colwell, senior, with the mock rubies in his hand, sitting bent in his chair.

5: The Missing William Dickery

31 July 1913

THE GENTLE ANTIQUARIAN, looking more than ever like a happy waxed doll with exuberant side-whiskers of the whitest cotton wool, lifted his eyes from a large, time-worn, leather bound book with great metal clasps, its back, hinged on with small metal hinges, and metal corner pieces to its covers. The book was more like a treasure chest than a mere volume of heraldry, and as such Austin Porteus regarded it.

"Well, madam?" He blinked amiably through his round spectacles at the lady who had just entered his shop, and was looking inquiringly at him across the counter.

"I want to see Mr. Porteus."

"Very well."

"Mr. Austin Porteus, the gentleman who, I understand, sometimes acts as a private detective."

"I am the Mr. Austin Porteus who sometimes acts as a private detective. Please, do not apologise for expecting me to look like a sleuth hound, and to have the eyes of a lynx. As a matter of fact, my eyesight is not particularly good, and my sense of smell is indifferent."

The lady smiled faintly. "I am afraid you will consider me presumptuous in endeavouring to saddle you with some part of my great trouble,"

"Not at all. I shall be happy to help you if I can."

"I was recommended to come to you by a friend, who saw you do an extraordinary thing at Sandhill."

"Let me offer you a seat, madam."

The woman smiled again with an effort, and seated herself.

"Thank you," she said. "My name is Dickery, and my trouble is that my husband has disappeared."

"In extraordinary circumstances?"

"In very extraordinary circumstances. Sir, I have been advised to give you my complete confidence."

"If I am to help you, it is essential. "My husband is William Dickery. He was in business in Melbourne. He left me three weeks ago to go to Sydney, with the intention of taking steamer to Japan on a business trip. This was the third journey of the kind since our marriage. Since then he has entirely disappeared." "But if he went to Japan you would scarcely have been able to say with certainty whether he had disappeared or not."

"He did not go to Japan. I wired to the last Australian port of call, and he was not aboard the *Jingshu*, the steamer in which he was to have travelled."

"Why did you wire— your suspicions had been aroused?"

"Mr. Porteus, it is a terrible story I have to tell."

Mrs. Dickery took a handkerchief from her handbag, and pressed it to her eyes; for presently she continued in a low, resolute voice:

"I should have taken my case to the proper authorities, but I do not dare. I feared for his sake, and now my doubts and terrors are killing me."

"Please go on. I am already deeply interested."

"When my husband told me he was going to Japan, I had no mistrust. He went about a good deal in pursuit of his business. I did not question him, I accepted everything in absolute confidence. He should have been gone a week, when one day, as I was riding on the tram in one of the principal streets of the city, I saw my husband walking on the footpath. He was disguised, but I knew him. I dismounted from the tram, and followed as hastily as I could. He was walking quickly. I saw him enter the front door of the warehouse of John Sponton and Co., and, more than ever amazed, I followed. I waited a minute or two at the door, expecting him to return. But as he did not do so I entered, a prey to the greatest anxiety."

Mrs. Dickery paused again; she was trembling painfully. It was only after a struggle that she succeeded in resuming her story.

"When I entered the warehouse, people were running about; a crowd of employees was collected at the door leading into the proprietor's private office. I was told that Mr. John Sponton had that moment been found dead on his office floor."

"But Mr. Sponton died from natural causes. I remember reading the case. The doctors certified heart disease."

"Yes, but why did he die then? And what had become of my husband? I looked for him among the crowd, but he was nowhere to be seen. I waited an hour in the street, but, he did not reappear. Why should he have stolen away unseen? Why was he disguised? Why did he take the left passage by which he could reach Mr. Sponton's office unseen by people in the warehouse? Why did he tell me he was going to Japan? Why is he hiding now? Oh, Mr. Porteus, forgive me, but I am oppressed with the worst suspicions— the very worst."

Mrs. Dickery broke down and wept violently. Austin Porteus offered no words of consolation, but sat in cherubic serenity, his mild eyes upon the lady. When the paroxysm had passed he said in the suave tone of a man suggesting a cup of tea:

"You suspect your husband of killing John Sponton. Was there anything between them?"

"I know there were occasional business relations, and once I heard my husband use bitter words in connection with Mr. Sponton's name. He was

speaking in his sleep, Mr. Porteus. I heard the name 'John Sponton' then quite distinctly, my husband said: 'One of us must die.' "

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus with mildly lifted eyebrows. "Bless my soul!"

"You see my position, sir? If I appeal to the police I set them on my poor husband's track as a murderer perhaps. Yet while I have these terrible indications of his guilt, I cannot in my heart believe him capable of so terrible a crime. He was all gentleness to me and our two children. It seems impossible to think of him as a murderer. What am I to do? Oh, what am I to do?"

"You believe your husband had business relations with Sponton and Co.?"

"Yes. My husband said little about his business affairs to me. Thinking of it now, I find he was extremely reticent. That there were dealings with Sponton and Co. only came out through my accidental discovery of a letter or a bill or something of the kind."

"What was your husband's business?"

"I never rightly understood. I don't understand now. But it was an agency of some sort. Yet we were five years married."

"Had he offices?"

"He had one office. I have been to it several times since. The door is locked. No one has seen my husband there for several weeks, but it is cut off from observation from other offices in the building. He might easily have come and gone a dozen times without being seen."

"Let us go there. On the way you may give me some further details. Did your husband make provisions for a long absence?"

"He provided for myself and the family in the fullest way. The house in which I live at Surrey Hills was bought in my name; there is a fixed deposit of £7000 and a current account for £550 both in my name, and four months ago my husband presented me with debentures to the value of £5000."

"Does it seem to you that he was making provision for you in the expectation of some serious development?"

"It does strike me now that he may have had some such idea in his mind."

"Apparently his business was a prosperous one."

"He seemed to be doing very well; but we lived quietly and simply. We had no friends. Mr. Dickery was a retiring man. He was content with his children and me."

MR. DICKERY'S office was in a large building in one of the business lanes of the city. With some trouble Mrs. Dickery obtained a duplicate key to the office from the landlord, and Austin Porteus opened the door. The room— not a large one, was furnished like an office, with a table, a set of pigeonholes, two

chairs, and a small cupboard. The few papers scattered about gave no indication of business. There was a thin dust over everything. There was a key in the door of the cupboard. The cupboard contained coat, vest and trousers, a black boxer hat, and a silver watch and chain.

"They are the clothes I last saw him in," said Mrs. Dickery with some agitation. "He was dressed unusually when I saw him enter Sponton's. He wore a bell topper. I had never seen him in a bell topper before."

"You have suggested a disguise?"

"Yes ; there was some disguise. He was different. I cannot tell what the change was exactly. I was so surprised and distressed, and I caught only fleeting glances of him."

"Do you think he saw you?"

"I had an idea that he had. He seemed so eager to get away. But really he could not have seen me. He would not have done this thing had he known that I was following him."

"You are convinced he killed John Sponton?"

"I think there, was a quarrel which hastened Mr. Sponton's end. I think my husband had a grudge against him, and here is proof that he came to his office and disguised himself, leaving his ordinary clothes, even his watch. What was his intention?"

"I could tell you a thousand possible intentions, all short of murder, Mrs. Dickery. On the available evidence, your worst suspicions are justified, but not yet verified."

Austin Porteus threw himself into the case of the missing William Dickery with greatest zest. It developed quaint features as he progressed, and delighted the investigator immensely. The first curious discovery was the fact that William Dickery really had no business at all. At any rate, if he had a business he had no business connections with anybody, and his office in the Wheathill Buildings gave no hint whatever of any kind of dealings. There were business forms with the name of William Dickery, General Agent, at the top, but not a word of writing to hint at any agencies. The books were all blank, and the papers in the wastepaper basket were scraps of newspaper and blank sheets. There was not a sign of an addressed envelope or a letter anywhere.

The head clerk at the warehouse of Sponton and Co. did remember that John Sponton had once suggested sending a Mr. Dickery on a commission to Japan, but the clerk had never seen William Dickery, and knew nothing further. There was no photograph of Dickery.

His wife explained that he had never been photographed. He was a plain, quiet man, and considered photographs an egregious vanity. He had no

pretensions in the matter of dress, always wearing sac suits of dark grey, cut without any hint of style, and often rather shabby before he abandoned them.

Austin Porteus visited Mrs. Dickery's home at Surry Hills, and spent a whole afternoon wandering about the place, looking into odd corners. He obtained only a few scraps of paper with Dickery's handwriting. It was a peculiar hand, the letters were square and upright, and looked as if they were laboriously printed; but Mrs. Dickery assured Porteus that that was her husband's natural handwriting, and that he wrote rapidly.

The antiquarian's zeal took him to the home of the late John Sponton at Sandringham. He was accompanied by his friend, Detective Brain, who explained to the widow that he was engaged on a case that touched the life and business of her deceased husband.

They were shown photographs of John Sponton, who was obviously something of a buck; a fair man who wore a wig to conceal his extensive baldness, who affected a monocle and dressed most elaborately.

"John was frequently spoken of as the best dressed man in Melbourne," his tearful widow explained with a touch of pride. "He loved to be dressed well, and left seventeen suits."

If the widow had not been an extremely talkative lady, foolishly proud of her husband's foppish eccentricities, she might have thought the kindly, chubby gentleman with the pom-pom whiskers and effervescent white hair impertinently curious; but she loved the theme, and was voluminous in talk.

Porteus came away, chuckling like a happy parrot.

"Bless my soul!" he said. He repeated his favourite expletive quite twenty times in the cab.

"So you've got what you want, where you want it?" said Brain.

"I have verified my idea, Brain, thank you." "And it's strictly private and confidential?"

"Strictly, I am afraid, my friend. For the time being at any rate."

AUSTIN PORTEUS went straight to Mrs. Dickery. That lady met him eagerly.

"You said you might have something to tell me this afternoon," she said.

"Yes, and I have. I have located your husband, Mrs. Dickery. At any rate, I know where Dickery is to be found."

"You can take me to him?"

"Yes."

"And he is safe? He did not kill John Sponton?"

"He did kill John Sponton; but, have no alarm, he is quite safe."

"I don't understand you; but take me to my husband if you can. Take me to him, please."

"Mrs. Dickery, I want you to prepare yourself for a shock. I can take you to where your husband is, I cannot take you to him. I can lead you to within a few feet of him, I cannot show him to you."

"He's in prison! Oh, my God! He has been arrested."

"No, no, no! I assure you what has happened is best for you— far the best. William Dickery is dead!"

"Dead! Dead! And you say it is the best?"

"Your husband is in his grave— in John Sponton's grave. William Dickery and John Sponton were one and the same man."

"It's not true. It is impossible— impossible!"

"It is perfectly true. John Sponton was already a married man with a family when he life— he had a dual personality. With you he was plain, simple William Dickery; with his first wife he was foppish John Sponton, who wore a fair wig to disguise his baldness, sported an eyeglass, and dressed like a modern Brummell. But John Sponton was afflicted with heart disease. The doctors had told him exactly how long he had to live. Knowing this, as William Dickery he cunningly arranged for your future, and that of your family, faked up the idea of a trip to Japan, and went away to die as John Sponton. You saw him in the street. He had seen you. His hurry and excitement in endeavouring to escape you hastened the finish. When he reached his office he fell, to the floor, and never spoke again."

Mrs. Dickery was sitting with clasped hands and horrified eyes, staring at Porteus, muttering:

"It is not true! It cannot be true." But in her heart she knew it must be true.

"See," said Mr. Porteus, "this is a photograph of John Sponton. It must convince."

Mrs. Dickery took the portrait in her hands, and gazed at it.

"Is it he?"

The broken woman nodded her head. "Yes," she whispered.

6: A Forced Sale

7 August 1913

AUSTIN PORTEUS was peculiarly employed. He would have made an, astonishing spectacle had it been possible to see him; but in point of fact he was invisible, sitting in the shaft of an abandoned mine about twenty feet from the surface, and three hundred feet from the bottom.

Having Mr. Porteus in mind, a stout, grey, chubby gentleman, with profuse, waving grey hair, round spectacles, clumps of fluffy side-whiskers like powder puffs, and the expression of a happy Cupid, try to picture him seated on a rather awkward contrivance rigged to the rusty rungs of a ladder going straight down a deep old shaft at a quarter past eleven o'clock at night, and you will perceive that the situation is an extraordinary one.

Mr. Porteus, although in the pitch dark, still wore the round spectacles, which in a proper light gave him rather the appearance of an amiable owl. He seemed to have nothing to do in the shaft, which was damp, and cold, and dangerous, and full of eerie noises, murmurings as of the dead from the cavernous depths below, echoes of falling water, and moanings of the air currents in the drives and winzes.

The stoutish gentleman, in sedate, if somewhat rusty, black, who, it may be remembered, affected soft black silk ties knotted in flowing bows, and a wide-rimmed soft felt hat, also of becoming black, resembled a well-nourished artist perched precarious, like an elderly hen, on the perpendicular ladder, assuming, of course, that he was visible. A slip from his perch, and Mr. Porteus would have been dashed to death against the slab walls of the shaft before striking the black water hundreds of feet below. But this possibility did not assail him; he sat there in great seeming contentment, beaming with infantile sweetness even in the dark.

There was another peculiar feature of the situation— also invisible. Across the shaft at the feet of the silent watcher was stretched a square of hessian that just filled the shaft. Possibly Mr. Porteus had tacked it there to prevent a draught.

Mr. Porteus sat as described, for nearly an hour. The night was still and moonless, the deserted shaft was among the trees in Peebles's grass paddock at Waroong, surrounded by a rough fence to keep the cattle from falling into the pit.

Mr. Porteus was supposed to be in bed at the guest's chamber at Peeble's fine homestead looming darkly on the hill-side. What Mr. Porteus thought it is not given to us to say; but a little humming sound of song— too faint to reach the surface— that he gave forth at times, indicated perfect contentment. We

doubt if another man of Austin's age and weight could have been content in such unpropitious circumstances.

The minutes went ticking by the night above was silent, and Mr. Porteus lingered. Suddenly a sharp metallic sound rang out in the shaft, followed by a muffled plunk as of a small object falling into the hessian. Mr. Porteus waited for two minutes. All was still— all was silent.

"Ah!" whispered Austin Porteus. "Bless my soul!"

He waited another two minutes, then clinging with one hand to the ladder he reached out and groped upon the surface of the hessian. Finding what he sought, he carefully deposited it in his breast pocket. Then tearing the hessian from its moorings he dropped it into the depths.

After this Mr. Austin Porteus climbed out of the shaft, rearranged the loose slabs covering the mouth, and went to Waroong to bed.

Austin Porteus slept well. He was awakened at about eight in the morning by the owner of Waroong. Mr. Peebles was greatly disturbed. He was wearing a dressing-gown, he was half shaved, and one side of his face was covered with lather.

"Sorry to disturb you, Porteus," he said, "but an extraordinary thing has occurred, the Charles snuff-box has disappeared."

Mr. Austin Porteus sat up in bed.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"Yes," said Peebles, "the case door has been broken, open, and the snuff-box is stolen."

Mr. Porteus rolled out of bed. Swathed in a bath-gown he went to investigate the mystery.

The snuff-box was gone. The ornamental case containing many other curios had been forcibly opened, the woodwork was splintered, the oval glass of the door was cracked across.

"Someone who knew the value of the snuffbox," said Austin Porteus. "Nothing else appears to be missing."

"That is the extraordinary feature of the affair," said Mr. Peebles. "I have sent for Constable Hare. One of the servants has done this."

"No, no, James," ejaculated Miss Susan Peebles, "I am sure the servants are honest."

Miss Peebles was very nervous. Mr. Austin Porteus noticed it; but he realised that such nervousness in an elderly maiden lady was only to be expected in the exciting circumstances.

Miss Peebles was her bachelor brother's housekeeper. In the absence of a wife she kept him and his house in order. She was a tall, thin, high-nosed,

nervous type, and grievously mistrusted many of the quaint objects included in Peebles's collection.

"You are positive of the servants, Miss Peebles?" said Porteus.

"I trust them implicitly. They have been with us for years."

"Then I am the only suspicious person on the premises," said the guest with a bland smile.

"Don't talk d—d nonsense, Porteus!" snorted the squatter.

Constable Hare arrived, looked wisely at the broken case, asked a great many questions, searched a few boxes in the servants' quarter, and then went away. He had a clue, he said. Here was a case which should have invoked Mr. Porteus's activities of mind and body. It did nothing of the kind. Strangely enough, he did not indulge himself in any form of investigation despite his peculiar weakness for such work.

Austin Porteus was staying a few days at Waroong. His visit was now three days' old. Peebles, too, was something, of a collector, and the greatest craving of a true collector of bric-a-brac, after the passion of collecting, is the desire to have someone of taste and knowledge to admire his collection, hence Austin's visit to the Peebles's homestead.

Nothing fresh happened at Waroong up to 11 o'clock that night, when Austin Porteus went to bed. Meanwhile, Constable Hare was following his clue— a half-inebriated swagman who had called at Waroong for rations on the evening preceding the robbery.

Next morning, our cherubic friend was awakened even earlier by his host.

"This is simply amazing, Porteus," the squatter blurted, "I don't know if I'm on my head or my heels."

"You are, I think, right end up, Mr. Peebles," said Austin Porteus, adjusting his glasses.

"Am I? Well, that confounded snuff-box has turned, up again. It is back in its place, and my sister Susan is in a fit. What the deuce does it all mean?"

"The thief has repented, I presume," said Mr. Porteus, with quite childlike simplicity.

"I suppose so. Anyhow, when I looked into the case this morning there was the confounded snuff-box in its place— as if nothing whatever had happened, and every window and door locked tight."

"The servants?"

"The servants' part of the house was locked off, too. Confound it, man, people can't walk through bolted doors and solid walls!"

"True, true ; but bolted doors can be unbolted."

"And bolted again from the outside ? Come, come, Porteus, what of that extraordinary sagacity of yours?"

"And bolted again from the inside," continued Porteus sweetly.

"Here, here, hold hard! On the inside are yourself, myself and my sister. You don't mean to say—"

"I don't say anything definite. I merely pointed out possibilities where you were insisting on impossibilities."

It was true the snuff-box was in its place. It was a marvellous sample of the gold-worker's art. The antique had been dubbed a Charles II. snuff-box, and the legend that it had served that gaudy monarch in such a capacity was probably true; but the box was certainly much older than the Second Charles. The thing was beautifully wrought, the technique of the filigree was daintiest perfection, and woven with it was an extraordinary arabesque of human hair of a reddish hue, almost the colour of the rich gold itself, and covered with a crystal enamel of such wonderful texture that hundreds of years had effected no visible evidence of wear. On the lid was piled a small pyramid of writhing nude figures with stretched hands towards the vertex, which was a pointed ruby with scarlet fire. There was no object in Peebles's collection, or in any other collection in Australia, to equal this small casket for beauty or rarity.

At breakfast Peebles was rather constrained, and Miss Peebles did not appear, although she had recovered from her seizure.

"This thing seems to have got on Susan's mind," said Peebles. "She's worrying about it. The reappearance of the infernal box has upset her even more than its disappearance. I wish you hadn't spun that romantic rigmarole the other night."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Austin Porteus. "You don't imagine that has troubled her."

"I'm certain it has. Susan's religious. She's bigoted— she's superstitious. You've given her the idea there's something a bit uncanny about the antique, and it'll stick."

An hour later the squatter rode away to attend to some business, and Austin Porteus strolled, in the orchard, where presently Miss Peebles found him. She was very pale, and labouring under great excitement.

"Mr. Porteus," she said. "I am terribly distressed. I am frightened. I want to talk to you."

She sank upon a garden seat, and Austin Porteus seated himself beside her.

"My dear lady, calm yourself," said the antiquarian. "there is really no occasion for excitement. You are trembling. You are pale."

"But you do not know all. It is terrible. I am terrified— simply terrified. It is so unnatural, so horrible. You remember what you told us about the Charles snuff-box, that it was a specimen of the finest early Italian art, that the hair

was that of a saint, and that the box was originally designed to contain some other portion of the dead saint."

"An index finger-bone of St. Mark."

"Yes. And you talked about the superstition of ill luck attaching to the keeper of the casket."

"Those quaint old Italian figures in the filigree hint at death and disaster for infidels or unbelievers who might steal the casket or dishonour the relic."

"That frightened me. I brooded over it. You said that to remove the danger of disaster the impious possessor must bury the casket hundreds of feet; from the sun."

"That is how I read the symbols. Of course this is all superstitious nonsense. Nobody troubles about such stuff to-day, apart from its curious interest. Relics no longer have miraculous power because nobody believes in either relics or miracles."

"You believe that," cried Miss Peebles. "Well, you are wrong— you are wrong. It was I stole the casket on Tuesday night. I broke open the case, and took it away because I was frightened of it, because I believed it had caused disaster. I thought our possession of it may have brought about my elder brother's death. He was shot dead one Sunday morning. I thought it may have brought about our many other misfortunes and sorrows, and I stole it."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Austin Porteus, patting her hand in a fatherly way.

"That is not the worst. I carried it to the old shaft in the grass paddock at midnight, and dropped it down. The mine is 300ft. deep, and there is a hundred feet of water in the old workings."

"My dear lady, it is impossible. You must be mistaken."

"No, no. I did drop it down. I was wide awake. I knew what I was doing. I dropped it into the shaft, and there it is back again. It means some fresh terror for us. What shall I do? Whatever shall I do?"

"There, there, there, my dear Miss Peebles, you must be mistaken. You were labouring under a delusion; you thought you took the casket to the mine, probably you dreamt it. That is most likely. You may have carried it away somewhere in a condition of temporary derangement; you have replaced it, and no harm has been done. As for its supernatural power, as I tell you, nobody believes such nonsense. Why, my dear lady, I would buy the box tomorrow, and be glad of the chance. I think so much of its power to do mischief that I would take it at a good price, and be only too delighted. But, of course, your brother won't sell. No one has been able to tempt him to sell, I understand."

"He has refused dozens of offers. But you are wrong, Mr. Porteus. I did take the casket to the mine. That seemed the only way of hiding it hundreds of feet deep from the sun. I did throw it down— and it has come back! I shall never be able to live in the same house with it. It frightens me."

Mr. Porteus made quite an elaborate effort to soothe the poor, distracted spinster, but in vain. She could not rid herself of the terror the casket had inspired, and her belief in the genuineness of the apparent miraculous return.

On the following day Austin Porteus returned to Melbourne. He waited for five days with commendable patience, and then the expected happened.

ON THE AFTERNOON of the fifth day James Peebles bustled into the dusty little curio shop in Bell's Lane.

"Porteus," he said, "I want you to find me a buyer for the Charles snuff-box."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus.

"Yes. I have decided, to part with the thing. In fact, I can no longer live with it and my sister. She threatens to leave the house of the casket is kept there, and, dash my eyes, she means it. She's got the maddest kind of idea into her brain about having thrown the box down the old mine shaft, and its having been brought back by a miracle. Blow me, if I don't think she's gone dotty about it. Anyhow, it's impossible for a man to live in peace in the same house with Susan and the blighted snuff-box, so the snuff-box must go, I suppose."

"What is your price?" asked Austin Porteus.

Mr. Peebles named a price, and the antiquarian drew out a cheque-book.

"I will buy it," he said mildly.

When Mr. James Peebles left he carried away Mr. Austin Porteus's cheque, but he left behind the Charles II. snuff-box— a treasure Austin had long yearned for with the fierceness of a dipsomaniac's lust for whisky.

"I prophesied it would be mine," said Porteus, fondly handling the beautiful antique. "It is safe to prophesy if you know, how to bring about the unexpected."

7: John Leslie's Burglar

14 Aug 1913

DETECTIVE BRAIN looked troubled.

"I'd be awfully obliged, Porteus, if you could spare me a few moments," he said. "It may be something the same as the Harding case. Another mess like that, and I'd never hold up mv chin again. The bovs haven't done jollyng me about .it yet."

Mr. Porteus reached for his hat, gave his spectacles a characteristic forward pull, balanced them right in the middle of his straight, short nose, knocked his white fleece into shape before a magic mirror from old Japan, and, "Why, certainly," he said.

"Dedrick is receiving every attention at the local lockup," Brain explained in the cab. "I'd like you to run a look over him. He's not a bit the usual type, and he won't talk. Seems quite resigned to his little lot, and its not the pleasantest going on the available evidence. This is how it stands. Leslie, the proprietor of the big white house back from Homan-road, a wealthy widower, with one child, declares that he "was awakened by hearing movements in a room at some little distance from his own. He stole along the passage, armed with a largo, ebony ruler, and discovered a man at the open window in a room overlooking the side balcony. He stole upon this man, challenged him, and then knocked him senseless with the ruler before he could draw a weapon."

"Had he a weapon to draw, by the way?"

"In point of fact, he hadn't. Nothing was discovered on the young man that usually goes with the amiable housebreaker— not a single implement ; and he's the most guileless midnight marauder I've struck up to now."

"This Leslie sent for the police."

"He did. 'Phoned them up at the local lockup. and had done everything: so neatly and expeditiously that when the Hop arrived the rest of the household were still sleeping peacefully, and our worthy widower wias standing guard over the prostrate burglar, with the ruler ready, quite prepared to sock him another should he wink a lid. But Master Ernest Dedrick had taken all he wanted for the time being. He had a seam in his head like a large pipe, and if liis skull hadn't been extra hard-baked and as thick as a fish-plate it must have been a plain pine coffin and a clay bed for Ernest."

"Bless my soul! Poor boy. But, as vou have him safely gaoled, and the details so clear, whv am I invited to intervene?"

"We have Ernest, but we want Ernest's partner in guilt. When the police arrived old Leslie ran a sudden survey over his goods and chattels, and reported all well; but Ernest was no sooner comfortably housed in the guests'

chamber at the Pell-street lockup than in wings a message from Leslie to the effect that a desk in his library had been broken open, and cash to the value of £230 lifted, and removed from his ken and guardianship."

"Tut, tut, tut!" Mr. Porteus clicked his tongue as if quite distressed at such wickedness, and glowed pleasantly at the detective through his absurd spectacles, which were horn-rimmed, and should have had a conspicuous place in his stock of antiques.

"And had the poor young man the money about him?"

"Not a bean of it. He possessed a scarce supply of small silver, but the quids are not discoverable, nor to be accounted for, excepting on John Thomas Leslie's theory that Ernest had passed them to an accomplice in the garden below. I want that accomplice, and this is where you come in, if you'll be so good. I can't find a trace of the man who passed into the darkness and the void with Leslie's two-thirty. There are Dedrick's tracks in the garden below, but no hint of Dedrick's pal. Leslie explains that when he first saw Dedrick the fellow was apparently in the act of passing something from the window."

Mr. Austin Porteus was introduced to Ernest Dedrick in the privacy of Ernest's cell. Young Mr. Dedrick sat on his bunk, a slightly-built, fair youth of perhaps twenty-six, dressed in a dark tweed suit, well cut, but damaged by service. His boots, too, though carefully kept, were almost through at the sole, and Porteus registered the fact as implying a motive for the crime. He had observed that men, naturally honest, are often betrayed into misdeeds when their feet come into contact with the pavement.

Dedrick's broken head was done in a professional binding of white linen, his pale face peering out of the neat folds betrayed none of the characteristics of the hardened villain. In point of fact, it suggested an absurdly chaste idea to Austin Porteus, reminding him of a nun.

Ernest Dedrick would not talk. Beyond saying he had nothing to say he was mute. To any questions put to him he merely shook his head and smiled, and when, the business grew wearisome he coolly extended himself on the bunk, turned his face to the wall, and fell asleep.

"An extraordinary young man," said Austin Porteus. "Bless my soul, a most extraordinary man! His silence is edifying— and instructive."

"Instructive?" smiled Brain.

"Instructive ' Yes, with the sort of instruction Shakespeare got from stones."

Mr. Porteus only smiled his benevolent, cherubic smile.

"Let us call on Mr. John Thomas Leslie," said he.

AUSTIN PORTEUS examined the fine home of Mr Leslie from the hansom.

"A beautiful place," he said, "and a high wall; but our—" He drew up sharply, and blinked at the house, a series of twenty quick blinks. "Bless my soul," he said. "Bless my soul!"

"What is it?" asked Brain sharply. Mr. Porteus sat back and beamed at the white house.

"I was going to say our young friend would negotiate the wall easily enough. No, no, Brain, let the cabman remain where he is for a moment. I like the appearance of the house, I do, indeed. It is Greek in its fine simplicity. Leslie is a man of taste."

For quite five minutes Austin Porteus stared at the house through his ridiculous spectacles Then said he, with a little, fat chuckle:

"Do you know, Brain, I believe that balcony suggests the solution of our problem?"

"The balcony?" answered Detective Brain in surprise. "Of course: Dedrick climbed that balcony; but how ths deuce can it offer a solution?"

"Only if you have imagination, my friend— the right kind of imagination. My idea is almost entirely imaginative and sentiments but then in dealing with criminal riddles my theories are almost invariably imaginative. I imagine the plot, so to speak, after some preliminary investigation, and then work up to it I leave it to you to say I have been fairly successful. To be correct in such circumstances calls for a knowledge of human nature, human motives, and human impulses and actions that is almost an instinct. My good Brain, if I am right in this case, the fact will illustrate I have been telling you most effectually."

"Well, I don't know how the deuce you do it Austin; but it's a picture palace to a peanut you'll be right."

MR. JOHN THOMAS LESLIE did not offer Austin Porteus and Detective Brain an exuberant welcome. He was a testy man, probably close on seventy, lean, big boned, Scotch, rust-coloured, and tough, with a mouth that dropped suddenly to his chin at the corners.

"Eh, eh, eh!" he snorted. "What's this? More dommed detectives? It is no sufficient to be robbed in one's own house, but ye must come, one and anither o' ye, mackin' a, dommed nuisance o' it, too?"

"The matter has to be cleared up, Mr. Leslie, said Brain in a conciliatory tone, "and the sooner the better for all of us. If it can be cleared up, Mr. Porteus is the man for the job.

Mr. Porteus, not in the least disconcerted by the householder's outburst, was smiling gently and plucking; with caressing forefinger and thumb at his soft side-whiskers as his gaze wheeled round the apartment.

"Bless my soul!" he said. "And this is the room? Dear me! And that is the window? Well, well well, well! The window from which you saw the money thrown? Bless my soul!"

He walked to the window, and looked out over the small, quaint verandah into the garden below. Then he looked at the window sash.

"You locked the windows. Mr. Leslie, my friend Brain tells me?" said Mr. Porteus.

"I did. Before ganging t' my bed, I mack a point o' seem' all secure."

"There is no mark of a housebreaking tool at all on the sashes."

"Mebee, no. I'm thinkin' the rascal thrust a knife between the sashes an' sprung the catch."

Mr. Porteus examined the catch as if it were a matter of great importance.

"It, could be done, I dare say," he chatted. "Yes, yes, I have no doubt it could be done."

Mr. Porteus wandered about, the room in an aimless, drifting way, drifted into the passage beyond, and looked up and down, with John Thomas Leslie at his heels.

"This room?" he inquired, tapping a door opposite.

" 'Tis to a spare bedroom that's no often occupied."

"This door?" He tapped on the next one.

"The door o' me daughter's bedroom, sir," said Leslie sharply, "an' I make no sense o' these inquiries, I may tell you."

"Bless my sou! I Yon have a daughter?"

"I have, sir, 'an why no'?"

Mr. Porteus held up an apologetic palm. "There's no reason why not—none in the world, Mr, Leslie. Doubtless she is a very charming young lady. May I ask if she has been questioned in this matter?"

"No, she has not, and I will no have her questioned, mind ye that." Mr. Leslie was very angry. "She is verra much upset, naturally, bein' of a nervous, sensible disposition; an' she has no left her ain room since the miserable affair."

"Poor young lady," said Mr. Porteus sweetly. "Most natural, I'm sure. This room?"

He did not wait for the host's reply, but walked into the long library.

"I should like," he said, "to see the desk from which the money was abstracted."

Leslie's dour expression deepened. He rang a bell, and when a manservant appeared he growled: "Aleck, ye micht show these gentlemen over the hoose. Deny them nathing. Show them everything, Aleck, no matter how dommed impertinent they may appear, and then, Aleck, ye may show them the door."

Mr. Leslie was striding from the room, but Mr. Porteus barred the way, smiling gild kindly.

"Before you go, sir, a word as to the money. You said two hundred and thirty pounds?"

"I said twa hoonderd and theerty poond."

"Bound with a red rubber band, you said?"

"Nathin' o' the kind, sir. It was no bound at all."

"Two hundred and thirty single pound notes loose?"

"No, sir, not all single pound notes; tens maistly, an' two fivers."

Leslie slammed the door after him, and smiling and unperturbed Austin Porteus turned his attention to the desk. This he examined with great care. There was the mark of a tool that had been used to prize the baize-covered flap of the desk from its brass fastenings, and this mark Mr. Porteus peered at from every possible angle for a space of twenty minutes, using Brain's magnifying glass, and deriving great seeming gratification from the work. When satisfied he turned to the man-servant.

"I should like to look into your master's bedroom," he said.

"Yes, sir, certainly. This way, sir."

Aleck led the way into Leslie's large bedroom furnished with heavy old blackwood furniture, and Austin Porteus, with Brain at his elbow, went only as far as the bedside, then turned abruptly and left the room, without making any investigation whatever. It would appear that nothing but vulgar curiosity had led him to peer into the host's sleeping apartment.

In the library Mr. Porteus stood at the desk pursing his lips and thinking hard then he said: "Aleck—Aleck is your name, I believe?"

"Yessir."

"Will you be so kind as to ask vour master to rejoin us? And, Aleck—"

"Yessir."

"You might tell him it is rather important I have made a discovery of some interest. It is really necessary that lie should see us "

Mr. Leslie came back with the man, grimmer than ever.

"Well," he said, "when I'm robbed again I'll have the gude sense t' bear it in silence, I'm thinkin'."

"Mr. Leslie," said Austin, "we might all sit down I think, excepting Aleck. Aleck can go "

"And has it come t' this—that ye give orders in my ain hoose?"

"Will you please ask the man to go, Mr. Leslie. I am sure you would rather not have him hear the whole details of the coming inter view."

"You can go," growled Mr. Leslie.

"Now," said Austin comfortably, when Aleck had gone, "I want to know if you have the numbers of the missing notes, Mr. Leslie"

"I have not."

"Well, well, perhaps it does not matter, after all."

"Doesn't matter ? Maybe yi'll be tellin' me it's no matter me havin' my house broke and my property stolen ?"

"Your house was not broken, Mr. Leslie your property was not stolen. Sit down if you please, and let us be friendly and confidential. In the first place, the window in the next room was not forced from the outside. A knife used to push the catch aside must have made some impression on the soft brass. There is none. In the second place, no money was thrown from the window. You will remember Brain, what kind of a night last night was. You, Mr. Leslie cannot have forgotten that it was decidedly boisterous. Had a loose roll of notes been thrown from the window they would have blown all over your spacious garden, sir, and some of them must have been recovered this morning."

Mr. Leslie sat in a large, oaken arm chair, and stared blankly at Austin Porteus. Austin Porteus peered back at him with the amiable interest of a nice old gentleman, who was settling a family trouble in the pleasantest way possible.

"This desk was not broken open by the young man Dedrick; it was broken open by you, and you used the flat blade of a curious pair or very old brass candle snuffers. They are now in that delightful old candlestick by your bedside. No, no, sir, don't stir. They are there. I assure you. I know the snuffers well. I have the same brass set in my stock, and prize them highly. If you will look at the impression in the smooth wood of the desk with Brain's glass you will actually find a vivid impression of the embossed brand from the snuffers. I recognised that brand at once. That being there, a faint trace of verdigris is not necessary to substantiate my theory.

"You admit the so-called burglar was not in your room; you say you had been awake for an hour. You admitted lighting this very candle when you were disturbed by the sounds in the balcony room. Breaking open the desk was an afterthought on your part. You desired to do young Dedrick as much mischief as possible, so you faked this theft, relying on the young man's chivalry to keep him silent even under such a grim iniustice. He is silent for the young lady's sake."

Austin Porteus was now standing. John Thomas Leslie was cowering, in his chair, speechless.

"If you will take my advice, Mr. Leslie," said Austin Porteus in the friendliest way, "you will let the young people marry. This Dedrick seems to be a

gentleman, if a poor one. As for the lady, I assume she loves him, or she would not have unlocked the window to admit him to the house at such an hour without her father's knowledge. Good day, sir."

Outside, in the cab again, Brain said, "Well, I'm jiggered! This licks Gehenna! But how did that balcony suggest a solution?"

Austin Porteus sighed with quite a touch of sentiment. "It reminded me of Romeo and Juliet," he said.

8: A Welcome Deception

21 August 1913

AUSTIN PORTEUS, with a long white apron tied about his ample waist over the well-worn, demure black suit that he never seemed to change, still in his somewhat aggressive, wide rimmed, soft black felt hat, and his staring, round, horn spectacles, was fussing over the contents of a glass-fronted bureau in his little store, dusting small articles, pausing now and then to gaze with a sort of fat, paternal fondness on some curio of exceptional merit or peculiar interest.

The shop of Austin Porteus, archaeologist, was situated in a small, blind, city street that saw no traffic worth mentioning. Customers did not often come to deal with Mr. Porteus, but he seemed quite content, and had always much money at his command. Anyone who could deliver the goods was certain of flitting a liberal buyer in Austin. Anyone who could pay found a ready seller.

It was in his capacity as a buyer that Sin Fat sought Mr. Porteus.

Sin Fat was a stout, prosperous-looking Chinaman with a large, expressionless face, like an unbaked loaf. Sin Fat entered the shop very softly on his wooden shoes.

"Goo' day!" he said in a voice correspondingly soft.

"Good day!" replied the collector mildly. "What can I do for you?"

Sin Fat did not answer immediately. He walked to the door, and stood for a moment, looking casually to the right and left, and Mr. Porteus watched him with benignant interest. The Chinaman returned to the counter, he placed a finger on his lips, and said in a low voice:

"You buy Joss? Welly gleat Joss. Plenty dear."

"That depends, my Celestial friend, on many things. Where is your Joss?"

"Me no carry him. No feah. Soo Ting watch, watch. Maybe; Soo Ting kill he know."

"Oh, ho! So there is a mystery?"

Sin Fat looked uneasily towards the door.

"Joss bid away," he said. "Joss lotta gold, lotta luby. Plessious stone belonga Joss eye. Me keep Joss welly quiet."

"Where did you get this Joss?"

"Me dig him up, me nodder Chinaman— two nodder Chinaman. Dig him up by big tlee in garden in Bhamo."

"Burma, eh?"

"All li— Bhamo in Burmah. Me dig him up— Quo Fang dig him up— Luck To dig him up, top-si Quo Fang's garden, Bhamo. Quo Fang dead. Luck To dead. Me live. Me bling Buddha Joss alonga Melbin. Me sell Buddha Joss lotta money— fi' bundled pong."

"A Buddha image from Bhamo, eh? They have Lamaism about Bhamo. They would be rather particular about their gods."

Sin Fat nodded. "Yes," he said, nervously. "Quo Fang die, Luck To die. Sin Fat no die, yet."

"They found out you had the image, and that fact hastened your friends' lamentable end. I take it, that Quo Fang died a sudden death, and that Luck To did not die in his bed."

Sin Fat leaned forward, lunged a blow as if with a knife, and grunted meaningly. His further pantomime represented the holding up of a Chinese head by its little pigtail.

"Quo Fang!" he said. "I see. Most expressive. The kris got to work. Nasty weapon a Malay kris in the hands of a rascal who knows the trick of it."

"Luck To go out one day, cally bundle, Lama catch up long si' welly quiet." Sin Fat indulged in a little more expressive byplay.

"Bless my soul: They strangled the poor fellow. How very unneighbourly. And the bundle?"

"One watermelon. No Joss. Buddhists welly mad. Buddhists go after me. Sin Fat go to Yunnan. By-um-bye Sin Fat come to Canton. Lama come after Sin Fat. Sin Fat come Australia. Lama come Austlalia, too. Sin Fat hide Buddha Joss. Lama no find; but Soo Ting he watch alla time. Maybe Soo Ting tly kill Sin Fat. Maybe tly stealum Joss. Me tired, me get frightened, me sellum Buddha Joss fi hundled pong."

"Five hundred pounds for a heap of trouble? If I buy the Joss, Soo Ting will transfer his gentle attentions to me, and, who knows, I may he found some fine evening in a most undignified attitude over my own shop counter, with my throat cut."

"No feah!" Sin' Fat shook his head vigorously. "No feah, you. You got stlong place hidem Joss. So Ting knew he not get Joss he' kill you. So Ting come along buy Joss, give you lotta money— five tlousan' pong, plaps."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. However, I do not buy pigs in pokes, not invisible gods. Where is your Buddha?"

"Me gottim all li. Plaps you buy?"

"Perhaps. Very probably, if it looks like a good thing."

"Me bling Buddha Joss to-day some lilly house belonga you, welly quiet place where you live."

Austin Porteus thought a moment, and then wrote an address on a card.

"No. 27, Prout-street, St. Kilda," he said. "You savee?"

"I savee all li. To-day afternoon fi' o'clock me come."

Sin Fat went to the door again, leant on the jamb carelessly for a minute, with his hands hidden in the sleeves of his blue jerkin, then he trotted off up the street.

Austin Porteus locked up his shop, and went off in a brown study to look up his friend, Detective Brain. In Bourke-street he discovered he was still wearing his white apron.

Mr. Porteus was very thoughtful, indeed, as became a man who realised that he might have a kris-armed Lamaistic fanatic on his track before evening.

At half-past four that afternoon Austin Porteus and Detective Henry Brain sat together in the latter's small drawing room in an unpretentious red villa, No. 27 Prout-street, St. Kilda. Austin Porteus told the story of the golden image of Buddha.

"And you believe this frantic yarn about the Buddhist priest chasing a frowsy lot of Chows, and doing them in like so many chickens for the sake of his old pot Joss?" said Brain.

Porteus beamed with infantile sweetness.

"Why not?" he said. "Why not, my friend? Wasn't a Sydney family attacked by night by two or three Taoistic priests from China, bent on recovering some sacred object an Australian soldier had stolen from their temple during the rebellion? That side of the story is very probable. You Australians are in touch with the East, but you know nothing of the Oriental character. You haven't any knowledge even of what is going on daily among the Asiatics in your midst."

Brain grinned derisively.

"I know there is an attempt to shroud the Chow and the Jap in a sort of awe-inspiring mystery, which is all fluff."

Austin Porteus shook his head.

"That's a very soothing conclusion," he said. "But think what you detectives have done with serious Oriental crimes in our midst. I could recite twenty that have beaten you completely."

At this point a girl knocked at the door.

"Please, sir," she said, "there is a Chinese vegetable hawker in the yard, who says he wants to see Mr. Porteus."

"That's the man," said Austin. "Show him in, my girl."

A slight disturbance in the passage followed, and the girl reappeared in a feverish state. "The wretch wants to bring his old baskets into the drawing room," she said.

Here a Chinaman, with the usual vegetable hawker's baskets slung from a bamboo, appeared at the doorway, murmuring: "Goo' day, Goo' day, missetah!"

"That is all right," said Brain to the indignant girl. "We want to see what fruit he has."

The girl flounced off, and the Chinaman closed the door after her. It was Sin Fat, but disguised in deplorable European clothes, and the sort of grey cats' whiskers old Chinamen sometimes grow.

"Well, Sin Fat," said the archaeologist, "have you brought the fatal Buddha?"

"Him all li?" Sin Fat pointed anxiously at Brain.

"Oh, yes. He is my friend."

Sin Fat turned to one of his baskets, and lifted out of what was apparently a bag of beans a large object swathed in yellow silk. He stood this on the table, and let the silk fall from it, revealing a curious image in a whitish metal freely inlaid with gold, and set here and there with jewels.

Austin Porteus sat moveless, gazing at the image. On a small, quaintly-graven stool stood a sort of crown curiously wrought, which in turn upheld a round disc marked with flames of gold radiating from its centre. On top of this was set the bust of a turbanned and bearded man, with four hands— two hands holding flames of gold, two holding golden chains that encircled the flaming disc below.

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus after long and seemingly languid contemplation. "So this is your image of Buddha?"

Sin Fat's face fell. "Welly ni'," he said. "Plenty rich Joss, lotta gold, plenty di'mond. You buy fi' hunded pong?"

Austin Porteus shook his head.

"Too much," he said.

"No fear, too muchee. Welly cheap. Soo Ting buy em fi' tlousan' pong."

"If he doesn't whip my head off and help himself to the god of his fathers."

"Soo Ting no kill Engliceman— too frightened. You buy fou' hunded fifty pong?"

"I'll give you three hundred." Sin Fat's Oriental calm was not equal to the shock of delight this offer gave him.

"All li, all li," he said, "tlee hunded pong."

Austin Porteus made no further remarks. He drew a big, leather-covered wallet from his breast pocket, and produced six fifty pound notes. Then he filled in a form of receipt.

"You can sign this in English," he said.

"All li," said the smiling Sin Fat, and he supplied a laborious signature. Two minutes later Sin Fat was swinging down the streets under his bamboo, babbling to himself in his glee. Austin turned to Brain.

"I want to know where he goes, and what he does," he said.

"And you're not afraid of being left alone with this infernal thing after what you have been told?"

"Not in the least. I shall call a cab, and take it to the shop."

"I wouldn't like to have you carved with a kris in my drawing room."

"It shall be my constant endeavour to avoid such a contretemps."

Brain went off after Sin Fat, and Austin Porteus sent for a cab, and, taking the mysterious image in its silk wrapping, conveyed it to his shop, without betraying the smallest concern for the homicidal Lama, Soo Ting.

In point of fact, instead of being depressed by a possession which, on the showing of our veracious friend, Sin Fat, might bring down direst calamity on his head at any moment, Mr. Austin Porteus was singularly jubilant during the rest of the afternoon. He employed himself over the new purchase, examining it very closely, and consulting many large and curious books.

Detective Brain looked in at about 7 o'clock.

"There's no particular mystery about the goodly Sin Fat," he said. "I picked up a plainclothes man and sent him after the Chow. Fat went rather a roundabout way, and seemed to have some little fear of being followed, but finally he landed in a house in South Melbourne, one of a row of five inhabited by a small colony of Chinese."

"Doubtless this is a great weight off the poor fellow's mind." Austin indicated the image. "Beautiful thing, isn't it?"

"It's certainly curious. What the deuce is it all about?"

Mr. Porteus sat back, and gazed lovingly at the prize.

"Cunning workmanship, eh? God bless my heart, look at that head, man—look at the marvellous technique. The expression in the face is astonishing considering the artist was dealing with dead metal: and it is just the expression; he wanted— a large benevolence, beatitude, serenity, nothing haphazard, all genius. Ah! those old metal workers knew their business."

"Well, I'm glad you are satisfied. Anything more about Sin Fat?"

"Hmmm, yes. You might send a uniformed policeman to the house two or three times in the course of the next few days to ask after him.": "And if he finds him?"

"He won't."

"Won't find him? Why, what's up?"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing, really, my dear Henry. You might do this to oblige me."

"I will, of course, but it doesn't seem called for."

TWO DAYS passed before Detective Henry Brain looked in at the little shop again. Then he seated himself on the counter.

"How is it going; with your Oriental god and the man-eating Lama?" he said. "By the way, Sin. Fat has hooked it."

"Indeed? Bless my soul!"

"Yes. I sent a man to call on him. The other Chows said they didn't know of him."

Austin chuckled. "Just as I expected," he said.

"Just as you expected ! Did you know Sin Fat would clear out?"

"I thought it very probable that he would disappear most effectually the moment he laid hands on my money."

"In the name of common reason, why?"

"Well, you see, this is not an image of Buddha at all, and he knew it was not. That yarn about, the murder of Quo Fang and Luck To, and the stirring tale of the Lama following him to the ends of the earth to recover the god were a pack of lies cunningly faked to deceive me with regard to the image "

"Then it's a d—d fraud?"

"Sin Fat's scheme was a fraud. God knows where he got hold of this image. Perhaps he did dig it up in a garden somewhere in Asia: but he had heard similar stories of gods stolen from Eastern temples having tremendous value in the eyes of European dealers, so he utilised this figure to deceive me."

"And you let the scoundrel go?"

"Yes, I encouraged him to so. The idea of sending the police to make inquiries was to induce him to disappear."

"Well, you were always soft. This is forgiving your enemies and those who spitefully use you with a vengeance."

"Not at all. You see, although Sin Fat was not aware of the fact, this is an extremely valuable antique, certainly the only one of its kind in Australia. It is a Babylonian relic. This inscription upon it is Babylonian, the workmanship is Babylonian, and the thing is a certainly authentic image of the sun-god, Bel-Merodach, and worth anything from £3,000 upwards."

"Suffering Moses!" gasped Detective Henry Brain.

9: His Unwilling Guest

28 Aug 1913

MR. PORTEUS sat on his humble couch in the little back room that was bedroom, sitting room and kitchen, and listened attentively. It was after one in the morning, and there should have been nothing to keep a respectable elderly gentleman from his sleep at such an hour. Austin Porteus was old-fashioned in many respects, remarkably so for so singularly up-to-date an archaeologist. For instance, his horn-rimmed spectacles were old-fashioned. No reasonable person who does not wish to be connected with the Ark wears large, round, horn-rimmed spectacles. Mr. Porteus did. He was wearing them now. In fact, the very last act of Mr. Porteus on retiring was to detach his spectacles, and place them on the table at his bedside; his very first act on rising was to don those antique blinkers again.

Another old-fashioned feature of Mr. Austin Porteus, not forgetting his white wool side-whiskers, was his habit of sleeping in a nightshirt, alias bed gown. The day (or night) of night-shirts passed with the squatter's gap shave and bone-shaker bicycles. Even now Mr. Austin Porteus was sitting in his long white night-shirt, and his horn spectacles, looking in the shaft of moonlight hitting him from the window like a benignant matron— ruddy, dimpled, and , remarkably placid— who had miraculously grown cotton wool whiskers. Mr. Porteus sat there, blinking, his head a little on one side.

He remained so for a space of fifteen minutes, then a tender smile deepened his dimples. He struck a match, lit a candle, and walked from his bedroom into the passage that led past the middle room into his tiny shop. There was a door in the passage. On this Mr. Austin Porteus knocked gently.

Now, this action is simple enough in itself, but extraordinary in view of the fact that when Mr. Austin Porteus retired at eleven o'clock he was alone in the house. Since then there had been no callers. Mr. Porteus knocked again. Naturally there was no answer. He knocked a third time.

"Do you think you will be able to make yourself comfortable for the night?" he said. Still there was no reply. Mr. Porteus smiled to himself.

"There is a rug on the couch," he said. "You will find the couch in the left-hand corner near the door. The hospitality is not magnificent, but it is the best I can do for you. Besides, you know, I did not ask you to come."

Still no answer. There was no sound at all in the dark room. Mr. Porteus went back to his kitchen-bedroom, and donned a large dressing-gown made from a grey blanket, blew out the candle, and fumbling at the dividing wall of the room, drew aside a small iron slide. Through this he spoke into the middle room.

"I hope you are not trying to damage my door," he said. Through the opening he could see a disc of light about two feet in diameter, thrown upon the inside of the door leading into the passage. The light disappeared suddenly, and again the middle room was dark and still.

"Because," said Mr. Porteus dispassionately, "that door cost me a great deal of money. I had it put in at my own expense for my own purposes. The people who put it in gave me a guarantee that it was practically burglar-proof."

Mr. Porteus was silent for a moment. "You are not in a conversational mood, are you?" he said. "Let me have a look at you, anyhow."

He touched a button in the wall at his side, and a flood of electric light illumined the room into which he was peering,

"Ah, there you are," said the archaeologist. "How do you do?"

Mr. Austin Porteus was looking through an eight-inch aperture in the brickwork, covered on the inside with a stout gauze, in keeping with the papering of the walls. He was not visible from the inside of the lighted room, but commanded a full view of the interior. What he saw— that is, the object of his special regard— was the figure of a man in a kneeling position, crouched against the closed door. He was a young man, clean-shaven, not ill-looking, and fairly well-dressed. Beside him lay a dark lantern and a few tools.

"I thought possibly there would be two of you," said Mr. Porteus, in the tone of a gentleman discussing an everyday occurrence with an acquaintance.

The young man looked carefully about the room.

"Where the deuce are you?" he growled.

"Here, to be sure," replied the proprietor. And you have been trying to damage my door. It is useless, I assure you."

"Well, what do you mean to do?" asked the man, standing erect.

"I mean to invite you to sit down and make yourself comfortable. You may have to stay there quite a long time. Try the couch."

The young man seated himself with an air of abandonment.

"I'm beat," he said. "Bless my soul! of course you are. You see, you made the mistake ninety-nine burglars out of every hundred would make of assuming that the only difficulty is in getting into a place. I counted on that, and left my place rather easy and accessible, but so constructed that the thief would find it extremely difficult to get out."

The man on the couch breathed a bad word.

"Hush, hush!" said Austin, "do not let us forget we are gentlemen. You found it quite a trifling matter to break in, didn't you? My shop window offered scarcely any resistance. Now you are in— however, you must remain in till I choose to let you out again. That is quite a fair deal, I think. You came at your

pleasure— you leave at mine. Extraordinary isn't it, that people afraid of burglars left it to a fogey like me to act upon the simple idea of keeping burglars in instead of keeping them out."

"You are devilishly garrulous, anyhow," said the intruder. "Cut the cackle, and get to the cops."

"Now, young man, you must permit me to please myself in my own house. You have been at my safe, I see."

The man turned involuntarily before the green-painted iron door of a safe set in the brick wall on his left. The door was not more than eighteen inches square, and had a formidable appearance.

"You have scratched the paint," said Mr Porous. "Tut, tut, tut! Too bad! Too bad!"

Again the man on the couch ejaculated profanely.

"You were after the Gatehouse gems of course," said Mr. Porteus. "Bless my soul, a young strong, apparently-intelligent man like you should know twenty better ways of making living."

"Should he ?" said the man bitterly. "Perhaps you will tell me a few."

"Well, even if you stick to housebreaking you must develop greater perspicacity. Fancy coming here for the Gatehouse gems!"

The man arose suddenly, and turned towards the voice.

"Why not?" he said. "You bought them."

"Sit down, if you please," said Austin Porteus in a voice of authority, "and tell me what you intended doing with the gems if you had obtained them."

"I suppose a man could sell them." The reply was sullenly even.

"Yes, he might, but not here in Melbourne, there are collectors in Europe and America would give rather a pretty figure for them. In fact, I acted as agent for a wealthy New Yorker. You had no idea of selling here. Come, what did Cruckster offer you for the gems?"

The man was on his feet again, staring wildly.

"It's a trap," he said. "The old dog, has sold me."

"Ah-h, my friend, that is as good as a confession. But it did not matter. Console yourself. I realised the situation the moment I flashed the electric light upon you. Indeed, I expected it when I heard you cutting the glass out of my window. Cruckster was at the sale of the Gatehouse gems: he was the only one who bid against me: he was furious when I outbid him. Cruckster is a very bad old man a picturesque scamp, a fence, a receiver of stolen property and many other unpleasant things, but he knows the goods as well as any man in Australia. When I came from the sale he was standing on the opposite side of the street in an hotel doorway, talking to you. I never saw you before, but I have an excellent memory, especially faces I want to remember!

"I won't say another d—d word," said the burglar.

"Yes you will. It is your only way out."

The man looked up with a hopeful expression "You mean there's 8 chance of your letting me get out of this scot free?"

There is a kind of chance. Sit, down at the desk against the other wall, and write a letter to Mr Joseph Cruckster at my dictation."

"What, give myself away? I'm cursed if I do!"

"Well, and where are you if you don't? Look around you, my dear young friend. You are pent in a small room with eighteen-inch brick walls, an iron ceiling, an iron floor, and an iron door that you couldn't cut through in a week with those tools. Bless my soul! you are in a tight place, Edward."

"The outlook is not the brightest, I admit; but, for heaven's sake, don't call me Edward. What is the nature of the letter you want?"

"I recognise that Cruckster has put you up to this. He wanted those gems so desperately that he must have had a rich buyer up his sleeve. Cruckster does not let trifles stand in his way. He had some grip on you."

"He had, d— him!"

"And this was to be your way out. If you got the gems you received a certain sum and were free of Mr. Cruckster."

"He offered me two hundred, the clearance of a debt, and a passage to 'Frisco."

"Dear me. He certainly had a rich buyer in view."

"He intended sending them to Paris."

"Come, you are getting communicative, write."

"If I write this letter you open your doors to me, and kick me out?"

"Write. If the letter doesn't suit you when you've written it, you can eat it."

"I will."

The man seated himself at the desk and took up a pen.

"Fire away."

" 'Mr. Joseph Cruckster,' dictated Austin Porteus, " 'I am trapped, and in the power of Austin Porteus. There is no escape for me or for you— (underline 'or for you')— excepting on his terms. If he sees it duly set forth in tomorrow's evening paper that Mr. Joseph Cruckster has given £200 to the Melbourne charities I will be set at liberty. If not, his intention is to immediately hand me over to the police and apply for a warrant for your arrest as an accomplice in the burglary.'

"That, will do, Edward. Sign, please "

"Signed, Harry Beresford," said the man.

"Put the letter in an envelope, address it and push it under the door. There is room, I fancy."

A minute later Austin Porteus was in possession of the letter. He returned to the opening. "Thank you," he said. "And now I think we can 'both go to bed. You will find the couch not uncomfortable. But if you must try to break open the door, please do it as noiselessly as possible, I am a very light sleeper. Goodnight."

Mr. Austin Porteus switched off the electric light, and rolled into bed. Within five minutes he was sound asleep.

IT WAS the archaeologist himself delivered the letter to Mr. Joseph Cruckster at the latter's shop counter. Mr. Cruckster was amazed, dumbfounded. After five minutes he said that the communication was an outrage upon an honest tradesman, and threatened to give Porteus in charge for blackmail.

"Very well! " said Austin Porteus amiably "I shall be at my shop till six this evening. Good morning. Naturally I shall look for this evening's "*Herald*" with considerable interest."

Austin Porteus returned to his shop, and remained there all day, transacting business just as usual. At five he called a passing "*Herald*" boy, and bought a paper.

It was six, however, before the collector again interviewed his unwilling guest.

"I am very sorry to have been compelled to act so inhospitably," he said. "You have gone a whole day without food. It is a great pity, but here is a news item that, will console you. It is in this evening's '*Herald*':

'We are in receipt of the sum of two hundred pounds to be distributed among the Melbourne charities This liberal gift is bestowed by Mr. Joseph Cruckster, a well-known business man in the city.'

The paragraph goes on to eulogise that, excellent citizen, Mr. Joseph Cruckster, for his benevolence and other good qualities, but I will spare you that, Henry."

"Do you let me go?" asked Beresford, eagerly.

"Certainly, but first, I have a word to say. You have been very foolishly employed, Henry. That seeming safe upon which you employed your talent as a mechanical engineer is really not a safe, but a flat sheet of iron four inches thick set in the solid masonry. It is a dummy intended to keep burglars well employed while the mechanism of my door works.

"You were deceived in another direction," Mr Porteus continued. "When I came from the sale of the Gatehouse collection, I carried a brass-bound, thick leather satchel. My friend Brain, who had been acting with me at the sale,

went in another direction, carrying a common sugar-bag. The gems were in the sugar bag. It may interest you to know they were never here."

"For the love of heaven, let me go!" said Beresford.

"To be sure. When I open the door, walk straight into the street, and go your way. In sheer friendliness I advise you to leave your revolver on the desk."

Beresford drew a revolver from his breast pocket, and placed it on the desk.

"Meanwhile I shall keep mine, Henry," said Mr. Porteus, "and I am an excellent shot for an elderly man. The door is open. It has been open this ten minutes."

Henry Beresford walked from the room through the shop, and straight into the street.

10: Ephraim Day's Faithful Servant

4 Sep 1913

DETECTIVE BRAIN had written:

"I wish you could have a look at this case. It is simple enough, but has a few curious features that will interest you."

The delight in unravelling mysteries, small and great, was so strong in Austin Porteus, Esq., that he was always ready to drop pure business to bestride his favourite hobby.

That afternoon at four he was with his friend Brain at Scofield.

"The body is in the bedroom," said Brain. "The inquest was a few hours ago, and a verdict of wilful murder against some person unknown was returned."

"Bless my soul!" said Austin. It was the archaeologist's nearest venture to an expletive. It was always spoken without a trace of emotion.

"Have you followed the case, Porteus?"

Mr. Porteus shook his head. "I understand it is a case of murder and robbery, with an heroic servant somewhere in the foreground"

"Yes. Ephraim Day, the murdered man, was something of an invalid, a man approaching seventy, an irritable, nervous old man, apparently a great trial to his family— two daughters and a son, living here with him. For over seven years Day had been in charge of Martm Guest, who acted as nurse and general attendant, and who alone could manage the old fellow. Guest is the man who put up this big fight with tire murderer. He is now bedridden, suffering from his injuries."

"The son— where was he when the tragedy happened?"

"He and his two sisters had gone to a dance at Clever's, twelve miles from here. They did not return till three in the morning. It was Bernard Day, the son, who discovered his father's body in the bedroom, and Guest lying in an unconscious state at the stone wall at the bottom of the garden.

"The murderer was bent upon burgling the house. Day surprised him, and he struck the old man over the head with a loaded stick. Here it is."

Detective Brain produced an ebony stick about eighteen inches long, shaped like a policeman's baton, the thick end of which had been bored out and filled with lead.

Mr. Porteus took it in his hand, and weighed it.

"A deadly weapon," he said. "Silent and more fatal than a revolver."

Brain nodded.

"It was found by the body," he said.

Austin Porteus blinked behind his round spectacles. "Bless my soul!" he said mildly.

"Martin Guest, the old man's nurse, who had been smoking in the garden, heard the fall, and was hastening into the house when he met the man coming out. Guest could see his master prone in the bedroom. He immediately grappled with the fellow, and was struck several heavy blows. But he clung gamely to the miscreant, and fought with him right across the garden. At the wall the thief struck Guest a terrible blow on the head. There Guest's story ends. It must be assumed the fellow climbed the high stone wall, and made off into the bush, carrying his booty with him."

"Booty? You have given no details of the robbery."

"Close upon two hundred pounds was stolen from a small, japanned, zinc deed case in Day's room."

"Martin Guest provides a description of the thief, of course?"

"Yes. He describes him as a man of about forty-five, with sandy hair and beard, five feet nine inches high, large-framed, but lean, and dressed like a bush worker."

"Your men are after a suspect?"

"Yes; but he does not quite tally with this description. He is not more than five feet six, is stoutly built, and has only a moustache. But Guest may easily have been deceived in the darkness."

"He saw this man in the light coming from the room."

"Only silhouetted against the illuminated French window of Day's bedroom."

"Yes, and in combats of this kind witnessed invariably over-estimate the size and formidable qualities of their opponents. Still, the beard is an obstacle. Can I see Guest?"

"With the doctor's permission. He is suffering from shock, and is terribly cut-up about his master's death. He was very much attached to the old fellow, and it appears Day thought a good deal of him, although the squatter was a cantankerous customer with his own family and others he had dealings with. Better have a look at him first. He is lying in his bedroom."

Austin Porteus went in, and looked at the dead man, who lay in his coffin, his old crabbed face somewhat, refined by death.

"Was there bleeding?" asked Porteus.

"None. The blow caused laceration of the brain, and death was instantaneous."

Austin Porteus stood in the centre of the room, and slowly revolved, taking in every detail of the apartment. Then he stepped through the open French window on to the wide verandah.

"Here Martin Guest saw the murderer coming from the house?" he said.

"Yes, and grappled with him at the steps. He clung to him across the garden, past the red camellia, and over the stone wall fencing the garden."

Mr. Porteus went down the steps, and under Brain's guidance followed the course of the struggle between Guest and the unknown.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus on reaching the wall. Here there were patches of blood on the stones, and the dry grass gave every indication of a fierce contest.

After twenty minutes Detective Brain departed to assist in the search for the culprit, and Austin Porteus remained pottering about in the garden, peering inquisitively over every inch of the course of the conflict.

The only item of value he discovered just then was a dry gumleaf— an ordinary leaf, that might have presented no peculiarities to an average man; but the archaeologist wrapped it in tissue paper, and stowed it very carefully between the leaves of his pocket-book.

When the doctor came he proved to be an elderly, fussy, bush practitioner, with an inordinate sense of duty, and Porteus experienced no little difficulty in persuading him to permit his patient to be seen. But, as usual, the cherubic and guileless antiquarian had his way.

Martin Guest was reclining in a half-sitting attitude in his bed. His head was swathed in bandages, so that little more than his eyes and mouth were visible, and one eye was blackened and two teeth were missing from the injured mouth.

"Are the injuries really serious?" asked Mr. Porteus.

"Well, no," answered the doctor, "they are numerous and painful, the poor fellow was badly beaten, but his wounds are superficial. He will be all right in a week or two."

"And you think the injuries are such as a weapon like this would produce?"

Austin Porteus held up the murderer's club.

"Precisely. In point of fact, that is the weapon with which they were produced."

"And your patient bled freely?"

"He lost quite a deal of blood."

"Bless my soul! He acted very pluckily."

"I only did my duty, sir," faltered Martin Guest from his bed.

"No doubt, my man; but most of us are content to have duty stop short at being beaten to death."

"I would have done a thousand times more for my master. He was a kind master to me. My poor master! My poor master!"

Martin Guest was shaken by a burst of grief, and turned his face to the wall.

"There, what did I say?" fussed the little doctor. "You are agitating him. You really must not disturb my patient further."

Austin Porteus resumed his drifting tactics in the garden and after nearly an hour of it was interrupted by Bernard Day, the thirty year old son of the murdered man.

"You are the new detective, I believe," said Day.

"Bless my soul, no! A mere dilettante investigator; but I have a record. This thing interests me."

"Really. But there seems little scope for a solver of mysteries here. It is all plain and aboveboard."

"Yes, yes ; it does seem so. This two hundred pounds that was stolen. Was it the old man's custom to keep large sums about the house?"

"That I cannot say positively; but I do not think so. Formerly, he was very cautious with money. Of late years he was most secretive, so far as I and my sisters were concerned. He lived a good deal apart from us. Guest was his sole companion."

"A faithful fellow?"

"Yes. We have every reason to be grateful to him, and what he gets we do not begrudge him. I am willing to increase it."

"What does he get, may I ask?"

"He is bequeathed £4000 by my father's will."

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus.

"Yes, and I consider he has earned every penny of it. The old man paid him rather poorly for his services, yet he has been most devoted all these years."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the sudden arrival of Detective Henry Brain, who hastened into the garden in quest of young Day, flushed with success.

"We've got him!" he cried. "I nabbed the beggar camped in the scrub at Cockatoo."

"You're sure of your man?" said Day.

"Positive. He had the exact sum mentioned by Martin Guest in an oatmeal bag in his swag, and there are bloodstains on his shirtsleeves. He is the man we suspected."

"What does he say for himself?" asked Porteus.

"Not a word," replied the detective. "Since we grabbed him he has not once opened his lips."

"I should like to see this man," said Austin Porteus.

"Very well. He is in the lockup at Scofield."

WILLIAMS, the arrested man, differed from Guest's description in being comparatively short and in wearing no beard; but there was every reason to believe that he was the man wanted. The money found in the swag tallied in amount and in its nature with that missing from Ephraim Day's deed case, and already two witnesses had been found who had seen him with a loaded black stick precisely similar to that with which Day was murdered. Austin Porteus had asked to be left alone with the prisoner.

"Well?" was Brain's greeting as he came from the cell.

Mr. Porteus pursed his lips, and shook his head.

"He has no conversation whatever," he said.

Brain laughed. "Fortunately, it does not matter much. We have got the right man."

"Yes," said Austin Porteus. "You have got one of them."

"One of them? Than you think there was an accomplice?"

"No, there was no accomplice."

"Is it a riddle, Austin, my boy?"

"Bless my soul, no! I thought for a little while it might be; and then the motive was supplied, and the whole thing was plain."

"Of course it is. And Williams is the murderer."

"Oh, dear, no! Williams did not kill Ephraim Day. In point of fact, he was never in the house."

"Oh, come, surely you don't believe that ? Does the fellow pretend to be able to prove it?"

"He pretends nothing. But I think I can prove it to your satisfaction. Let us return to the homestead."

The friends walked back to Day's house in silence, and on the verandah Porteus resumed the conversation.

"It does not seem to have occurred to you as a remarkable thing that Martin Guest and this man Williams in fighting their way from the verandah to the garden wall left no particular tracks in the garden."

"But they did," protested Brain. "You have seen the evidences of this fight."

"Yes, in the grass among the trees. But here, on the flower beds?"

"I assume that they struggled down the path."

"They did not. In point of fact, the struggle commenced over there among the trees, and ended at the wall. There was no struggle here."

"Then Guest is mistaken!"

"Guest is mistaken in several important details. For instance, he says Ephraim Day was killed in his bedroom, when in point of fact he was killed here on the verandah, and dragged into the bedroom."

"Impossible. Guest was in the garden. He must have seen it."

"There are spots of blood on the verandah floor; there are shreds from the peculiar dressing-gown Day wore in the splinters of the window sill, or door step, whichever you like to call it, to show where the body was dragged from the verandah into the bedroom. There are spots of blood on the bedroom floor."

"But I tell you the murdered man did not bleed."

"No. The doctor has convinced me of that. But the murderer did."

"There are no wounds on Williams."

"I dare say not. Williams did not kill Ephraim Day, but Martin Guest did!"

Detective Brain swung round upon Austin Porteus.

"Martin Guest murdered Ephraim Day?"

"To be sure."

"Utterly impossible! Why, he was beaten out of his senses."

"I think not. Here is blood on the verandah floor, there is more in the bedroom, so little as to have escaped you."

"I did not look for it."

"My dear Brain, you are deficient as a detective in taking too much for granted. The stains are there, and here is a leaf I found half embedded in the garden soil. It has two spots of blood on it, you will notice. There is another spot on that boulder at the corner of the pansy bed. Remember, Day did not bleed, and Williams is not wounded. Where did the blood come from? From the man who was wounded."

"But the robbery of the deed case?"

"The deed case was not robbed. Williams robbed Martin Guest's plant under the big apple tree. At some time he saw Guest hiding money there, money Guest had been systematically stealing from his master. Guest caught Williams stealing his plant. They fought, and Guest was injured. The old man came upon them fighting, and understood that Guest had been robbing him. When Williams had gone with the money Guest realised that his master had seen all, and that he was a ruined man. He made up his mind in a flash what to do. The old man must not be permitted to live, or he would alter his will. Guest would lose the four thousand, lose his place, and perhaps be sent to prison for his systematic thefts. Guest took up the thief's weapon, staggered back to the house, and finding Day on the verandah struck him a fearful blow with the club. He then dragged the body into the bedroom, and returning to the wall lay down, and either pretended unconsciousness, or became unconscious as a result of his wounds."

"This is mad guesswork."

"It is gospel truth, Brain. Guest was clever. He knew the murder would be credited to the thief; but he did not want the thief captured, so he gave a wrong description. He made one terrible mistake though."

"What was that?"

"He left the club in the bedroom with the body, whereas, if he story were true, it should have been by the wall where (according to his story) Williams beat him after killing Ephraim Day."

"By the Lord Harry, that true!" said Brain.

"You will find that my elucidation founded on facts is the true story of the shocking death of Ephraim Day. To begin with, examine the hollow under the root of the apple tree. There you will find Guest's second great error— a few coins of the stolen plant, remain there."

Two days later Martin Guest's confession under pressure vindicated Porteus's judgment in every detail.

11: The Scandal of the Bland Family

11 Sep 1913

AUSTIN PORTEUS derived a greater deal of satisfaction from detecting crime—none from the punishment of criminals. He derived still greater satisfaction from detecting innocence.

"That is a branch of the detective business in which professional detectives rarely employ themselves," said Austin Porteus. "Their business is to affix crime rather than to dissect it. The problem of the professional detective is, having a given individual to whom a certain number of clues point, how can we prove him guilty? That necessarily stunts their talent, and gives them a partial view of crime; whereas the true detective should be wholly impartial, as a true sportsman is."

But, after all, Mr. Porteus derived fullest satisfaction from clearing up domestic complications. If he could restore happiness to a shattered family he was as delighted as the small boy in the-gallery when virtue is triumphant in the last act, and rubbed his plump, white hands, and chuckled and chortled over his achievement for days after.

When the Bland family called Mr. Porteus in to their assistance, it was as an old friend, from whose assistance they had benefitted before; and the genial detective discovered in a few moments that he was expected to saddle his favourite hobby.

Mr. Porteus was introduced to a sort of family council. Mr. and, Mrs. Bland, at the head of the table— the former severe, the latter tearful. Arthur Bland, junior, on the right wing. Aunt Helen Bland, prim, purse-mouthed, bespectacled, on the left wing. Austin Porteus was the only cheerful person present.

"I notice an omission, my dear friend," he -said.

"Julia?" replied Mr. Bland in his most business-like manner. "Yes. To tell you the truth, Porteus, we have had little of Julia's society lately."

Aunt Helen coughed, Mrs. Bland wiped her eyes, and Bland, junior, said it was dashed unpleasant, dash it all.

"It is an extremely delicate matter, Porteus," said Bland, senior, "and our effort has been to keep it quite; but there have been development—developments, sir."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus, beaming mildly over his horn spectacles.

"The facts, which I need hardly tell you, are given in strictest confidence, are these: One night, about seven weeks ago "

"Six weeks and six days," said Aunt Helen. Then Aunt Helen coughed behind her hand, and subsided.

"Six weeks and six days ago." resumed Mr. Bland, "at about one o'clock in the morning, finding myself unable to sleep, I went to the dining room to get a nip of whisky. Passing my daughter's, room, I was surprised to see a faint light under the door. Listening, I heard low voices. I instantly tried the door. It was snibbed on the inside. Throwing all my weight upon it, I broke the snib, and precipitated myself into the room. I entered with such force that I tripped and fell. There was a young man in the room. Judge my amazement, sir, a young man in my daughter's room at half-past one in the morning!"

"Judge all our amazement," sobbed Mrs. Bland. "Appalling!"

"As I raised myself," continued the anguished father, "I saw my daughter throw up the window, the fellow stepped hastily to the balcony. Then Julia closed the window, and stood with her back to it to prevent, me opening it. Furthermore, she interfered all she could to prevent me giving an alarm. When at length I escaped from the room, I— eh!— judged it advisable not to give an alarm. Of course, I demanded an explanation from Julia."

"We all demanded an explanation from Julia," said Mrs. Bland.

"Indeed, we did," said Aunt Helen. "She would not speak a word, Porteus, not a word. Naturally, I reproached, her. In fact, we all reproached, her."

"I was never so dashed angry in my life," said Bland, junior.

"Julia simply ignored us. She treated our protestations with contempt. By George! she treated is all with contempt. She has done so ever since. We have not been able to get a civil word out of her. She refuses to sit with us, or to eat with us; and when I threatened her the other day that she would have to leave my house and cease to be my daughter if she did not behave as such, what do you think happened? She put on her hat, and said: 'Very well, father. Good afternoon!' I was put, sir, in the extremely undignified position of having to force my daughter to stay under my own roof!"

"Bless my soul !" said Austin Porteus. "But you spoke of developments."

Mr. Bland drew his chair closer to his visitor, and tapped him on the knee. "Julia is seeing that fellow. We find she is frequently absent when we imagine she is in her room. She sometimes stays away a whole day. This thing must be stopped. But how? We must get hold of that fellow. But how? Julia tells nothing, explains nothing. She defies us. And, well— eh!— in point of fact I— eh!—am at a loss as to the best way of handling Julia."

"What my brother means, Mr. Porteus," said Aunt Helen, "is that he is afraid of his daughter— that she is his master."

"Nothing of the kind, Helen," snorted Mr Bland; "but it is a delicate matter. One might precipitate a— eh!— domestic— eh!— disaster."

"I think I should like to have a look at Miss Bland's room," said the antiquarian , "and the balcony."

"We had better go to the balcony through the library, I think," said Mr. Bland upstairs. "Julia is in her room. She would certainly resent anything in the nature of an investigation."

They went through the library to the balcony and strolled up and down—and nothing was done.

After about ten minutes of this a window opened, and a young woman of about twenty-two, with copper-coloured hair, a clear, white skin, determined, brown eyes, and a more determined, handsome, large mouth confronted them.

"Well, Mr. Porteus," said Julia Bland, "what do you make of the case?"

Austin Porteus smiled gently on the girl, and offered his hand.

"I won't pretend to misunderstand," he said. "I have not yet given it any serious thought."

"Naturally, you share the opinions of all those nearest and dearest to me, that I am a worthless creature."

"I am sure, my dear girl, they do not think that."

Mr. Bland snorted: "What is a man to think? Half-past one in the morning—a man—in her room!" Infamous!"

Austin Porteus pretended not to hear.

"I am slow at forming judgments of people," he said to Julia, "and much slower at changing my judgments. I had always great admiration for Miss Julia."

Julia shook his hand.

"That is very nice of you," she said.

In the drawing room again Porteus asked: "Is there nothing— no letters, no articles?"

Mr. Bland coughed.

"There is a hat," he said. "The fellow's hat. She kicked it under the bed, but I recovered it. A wretched hat!"

Mr. Bland seemed keenly distressed over the quality of the hat. He produced it from his desk.

"A trumpery, six-and-eightpenny hat," he said, "and well worn at that."

Austin Porteus took the hat, and examined it. It was a cheap hat, and it was well worn— a soft brown felt, size 6 and 7 eighths

The antiquarian looked it over carefully.

"Bless my soul!" he said, but the ejaculation conveyed nothing. "Have you noticed, Mr. Bland, if anything is missing?"

Mr. Bland coughed again. "My daughter had three hundred pounds in the bank. She has drawn £150 of it in one sum, and will not tell what has become of it."

"Extraordinary, really," said Mr. Porteus.

When Austin left, he carried the brown hat with him.

Two days later M'Guire, a plain clothes policeman, called at his shop.

"I've had an eye on the girl, sir," he said. "Detective Brain asked me to report to you. There's nothing much to say, excepting that she has twice hired a motor and gone for a spin."

"The same motor?"

"Yes. A young fellow named Delroy owns it, and plies for hire in the suburb. He's usually waiting a fare on the corner of Lyon-street."

"Thank you, M'Guire," said Mr. Austin. "That will do nicely."

After that Mr. Austin Porteus developed a taste for motoring. Hitherto he had shown no inclination towards the motor, preferring the slower and more deliberate shanks' pony when moving about for pleasure only. Austin always chose the fawn-coloured car of young Delroy. He said he liked the colour.

He formed a rapid estimate of the chauffeur. Twenty-eight years of age, rather tall, strikingly handsome in quite a refined way, plainly a gentleman.

In the course of their third journey Austin Porteus substituted a soft, brown felt hat for the soft, black felt hat Henry Delroy had placed on the seat between them. When the car returned to Lyon-street Austin Porteus retained his seat.

Placing a hand on Delroy's knee, he said:

"Don't get excited, my boy, don't make any demonstration, but I know you."

"Know me! What do you mean?"

"You are the man who broke into Mr. Bland's house in Principal-street on the night of the 11th of March."

Delroy turned pale to the lips, and his head fell. "My God!" he whispered. Then with an effort he pulled himself together.

"She has told?" he said quietly.

"Nobody has told anything. I identify you partly by the hat you are wearing."

Delroy took the hat from his head, and stared at it in amazement.

"What, does it mean?" he faltered.

"Nothing at all mystifying. I substituted your old brown hat for your new felt one, that is all. You put it on your head without detecting the difference. Now, it does not happen once in a hundred times that a man can put on a stranger's hat and not know it. Besides, there are the same initials behind the band."

Delroy threw the hat on the seat. "I suppose you are a detective," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"I am not going to do anything. I may ask you to do something, though. I can tell you what happened. You were in a tight place, driven to desperation, you broke into Bland's house. After climbing the balcony you forced back the window clasp in the library with a flat file. You were searching for valuables when Miss Julia surprised you. She did not scream; rather she took pity on you— perhaps your appearance appealed to her. She offered you a chance. If you would go from the house she could help you in a proper way to retrieve yourself, and earn an honest living. She did help you. She provided the money that paid the deposit on this car. You are now paying for it by instalments."

"How did you know all this?"

"Partly by observation; largely by intuition."

"You are practically right."

"Why, bless my soul, of course I am!"

"And what does it all come to?"

"You know her father discovered you in the room. Do you know the conclusion he jumped to— the conclusion of the whole family?"

"No, Miss Bland has studiously avoided the subject."

"It has led to an estrangement between her and her family. They believe you were her lover, and she is too proud to defend herself."

Delroy sprang to his feet.

"They do?" he said. "They believe that of a girl like Miss Julia, the best that heaven ever trusted on this earth. I can put them right, and I'll do it; let them do their worst with me."

Austin Porteus blinked on the young fellow quite affectionately.

"Gently," he said ; "don't let us be precipitate. You might drive me round a little and explain why you ventured to dabble in burglary. It does not strike me as being quite in your line. For one thing, a systematic burglar does not carry his initials in his hat."

IT WAS on the following afternoon that Austin Porteus begged leave to introduce his young English friend, Henry Delroy, to the Bland family. Delroy was remarkably well-dressed, his appearance was impressive, his manners singularly correct. There had been about fifteen minutes' casual conversation, when Austin Porteus said:

"Do you think, Bland, you could persuade Miss Julia to come down to see me— expressly to see me?"

The appeal was successful. Five minutes later Julia followed her father into the room. She stopped just within the door, her eyes upon Henry Delroy.

"I need not introduce Miss Julia to my young friend," said Austin Porteus with a chuckle; "they have met before. In point of fact, Bland, he is the burglar

who broke into your house on 11th March, and whom you subsequently discovered in your daughter's room."

"Where I had gone," said Delroy quietly, "with the intention of robbing it. Your daughter caught me. I appealed to her to have mercy. I pointed out that I was a gentleman new to the country, wild with despair, almost dying with hunger. She took pity on me. She said that she would let me go, that she would help me. She did help me. Driving a motor was the only work I could do. She assisted me to get a second-hand car, and I have been earning my living with it ever since."

The Bland family were on their feet. Bland was furious with indignation.

"Send for the police," he said.

"Bless my soul, no, Bland," said Porteus, "you can't do that. I have given this young gentleman my word that if he made a clean breast here no harm would come to him. Besides, I imagined you would be satisfied with the blessed knowledge that your worst suspicions were unfounded."

Julia stepped to Delroy's side.

"There is one important fact you have not been told, father," she said. "Possibly it has escaped you, too, Mr. Porteus. I am going to be married to Mr. Delroy in twelve months' time."

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus. "Whoever would have dreamed of it," and he chuckled softly.

"Marry him— marry a burglar!" cried Bland. "Never! I'll gaol him first."

"If you do, father, I shall marry him after."

Delroy took her hand. "Don't, dear," he said, "I came here hoping to make peace."

"I know you did, Harry."

She put her arms about his neck, and kissed him. Then she did the same to Austin Porteus, to his great wonderment. At the door she added: "Peace or war, we are to be married, dear."

"And of course it will be peace," said Austin Porteus.

Peace it was.

12: The Slaying of Walter Raeburn

25 Sep 1913

WALTER RAEBURN was dead, shot through the head. Arthur Raeburn was under arrest charged with encompassing the death of the said Walter Raeburn. They were uncle and nephew.

"It's a particularly strong case against accused," Detective Brain pointed out with rather more assurance than he was wont to display in the presence of Austin Porteus.

The gentleman with the absurd lambs wool whiskers had a quaint way of upsetting Brain's most elaborate calculations that made the detective rather diffident in advancing conclusions.

Mr. Porteus turned a benign eye upon his friend.

"Particularly strong case is it?" he said. "Yet there are doubts. The evidence has dubious spots, otherwise you would not have invited me out."

"Of course there is always room for doubts." Brain lingered over the lighting of a cigarette. "In the present instant I am somewhat disturbed by the fact that Arthur Raeburn is not a consummate ass."

"If he were a consummate ass the evidence would tally? I see. The things he seems to have done are not the sort of things a man of his mental calibre would be likely to do. Brain, I commiserate you. It's shameful the way characters refuse to fit in with indubitable evidence."

"There's the finding of the revolver in the young man's room, for instance. It lay on the bed when the fellow was arrested."

"And there is his apparent oversight in neglecting to make a run for it. Murderers do not usually loiter in the vicinity of their crime, more especially with a damning load of evidence against them."

"And it is a damning loan. The nephew came here, had a terrific row with his uncle, fled the place to take cover at the township hotel. The uncle is subsequently found, lying on the floor of his room, shot through the head. The nephew arrived at the hotel in a very excited condition at twenty minutes to seven o'clock. He took a room, having expressed his intention of catching the early morning train to Melbourne. The body was not found till ten that night, when Castles, a manservant employed by Walter Raeburn, returned to the house after an absence of some hours."

"Castles found the body lying here by the bed?" said Austin Porteus. "Two shots had been fired?"

"Yes. The first one fired at Raeburn's heart struck his watch, and glanced off. The second struck him in the temple, killing him instantly."

"And the watch was stopped at seven minutes past six."

"Giving Arthur Raeburn thirty-three minutes to reach the hotel after killing his uncle. And when Constable Walton went to arrest young Raeburn he found the revolver lying, on the young man's bed." Brain produced the weapon, a medium-sized American six-shooter.

"Two chambers had been recently discharged," continued the detective; "the other four were loaded. Here are Arthur Raeburn's initials on the butt, and the young man will say nothing beyond politely assuring me that anything he has to say that is of the smallest importance will be said at the proper time and in the proper place."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus, gently. He was sitting on the edge of the dead man's bed.

The story of the crime seemed to have concerned him about as much as a recital of the pathetic demise of poor Cock Robin.

"You want a word with the housekeeper?" said Brain a little acidly. This phlegmatic air in his friend always irritated him.

"Yes," said Porteus. "Perhaps it would be as well. Best have her in here, with the man Castles."

Brain left Austin Porteus alone for a few minutes, which time the antiquarian spent going slowly around the room with pursed lips, blinking, mildly through his large, round, horn-encased spectacles, and murmuring "Bless my soul! Bless my soul!" with just about the fervour an ordinary portly, middle-aged draper displays over an exhibition of giant vegetables at an agricultural show.

Miss Neville, Mr. Walter Raeburn's housekeeper, was a slim, gentle-spoken, dark-haired woman of thirty, with quiet manners, some refinement, certain good looks, and puzzling eyes, that seemed undecided in colour, vacillating curiously between black and blue. She answered Austin Porteus's questions very clearly. Her attitude was that of a woman who, having recovered somewhat from the terrible shock the murder produced, had schooled herself to calmness.

The story she told Austin Porteus was precisely the story she told Detective Brain. Mr. Arthur Raeburn had paid an unexpected visit to his uncle. He arrived at about noon. The two men wandered about the garden during the afternoon. There was a certain constraint between them. She imagined Mr. Arthur was endeavouring to get money from his uncle, and Mr. Walter was refusing. They had an early dinner, which was interrupted by a fierce quarrel between the men. They left the meal unfinished, and went into the library, where the quarrel was resumed.

She believed Mr. Walter had struck his nephew. Mr. Arthur left the house in a great rage at about six o'clock, and Mr. Walter went into his bedroom. She

assisted the girl to clear away and wash up, after which the girl went to visit her mother.

Miss Nevill went for a walk, and on her return noticed a light in Mr. Walter Raeburn's room,. She went to her own room, and remained there till Castles returned. Hearing Castles call, she ran to the front part of the house, and saw Raeburn lying on the floor. He was quite dead. Austin Porteus had a few words with Castles, and later interviewed the girl M'Coll, a blubberly sort of damsel, who found that the occasion called for unmeasured tears, and burst into fresh showers with every second question. Her evidence, so far as it went, corroborated that of Miss Nevill.

Mr. Porteus spent an hour drifting about home of the late Walter Raeburn in company with Castles, who had officiated as a sort of general handy man. He thought Mr. Porteus a very pleasant, affable gentleman, with a kindly interest in small domestic details. He was particularly delighted with Mr. Porteus's praise of his carnations. A man who could give a remedy for croup in a two-year-old baby, and at the same time show a nice discrimination in the presence of a bed of carnations, was a man to be trusted and confided; in.

Later, the genial antiquarian requested that he might have the house wholly to himself for two hours. He spent that two hours in a state of surprising activity. When through he looked like a person who might have been employed on an extremely necessary spring cleaning. There was even bed fluff in his two entrancing tufts of snow-white whiskers; but fifteen minutes in the bathroom served to restore his customary spick and span appearance. When Detective Brain returned at the appointed hour, he found Mr. Porteus, his dimples very much in evidence, thoughtfully perusing an auctioneer's catalogue.

"Well ?" asked Brain eagerly. Mr. Porteus arched his eyebrows, peering over the horn rim of his glasses.

"Jetson is selling the Strickland goods and ware on Friday. There's some beautiful Georgian silver—"

"Excuse me, won't you, Porteus, if I presume to damn the Georgian silver, cup and platter. What about this Raeburn affair?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, to be sure!" Mr. Porteus took up a bulging pillowcase. "In the deceased's bedroom," he said; "and I think we will have Miss Nevill in. She can supply details."

Brain rang for the housekeeper, and she came almost instantly.

"Can I assist you further, gentlemen?" she asked.

"There may be some small matters upon which you can enlighten us, my dear young lady," said Austin benignly, "if it is not too much trouble."

"I am willing to do anything that will help, sir."

Austin Porteus was the last to enter Walter Raeburn's room. He sat near the door, with his back to it. Detective Brain sat near the window. Miss Nevill near the bed. Mr. Porteus's bundle of exhibits lay at his feet.

"You were right, my dear friend," Austin began gently, "in concluding that a few features of this case seemed to make it difficult to believe that an intelligent man like young Raeburn can really be guilty of murder. It is curious that he should not have attempted to make his escape, even though the district offered few facilities, and the chances are that he would have been easily overtaken. It is most extraordinary that the revolver should, have been found on his bed at the hotel."

"Men in the excitement following a crime like this often lose their heads, and do even more foolish things," said Brain.

"True, perfectly true; but in the journey from here to the township, a matter of over two miles, a man had ample time to recover his wits. He arrived at the hotel at twenty minutes to seven. At six o'clock the deceased was seen going to his room. The assumption is that Arthur returned to the house a few minutes later, entered his uncle's bedroom by the open window, resumed the quarrel, and shot Walter Raeburn. There is motive to be found in his assumption that he was his uncle's sole heir. Allowing Arthur Raeburn twenty-five minutes in which to accomplish the journey to the township, we perceive that the shooting must have been done before a quarter past six. Where you in the house at that time, Miss Nevill?"

"Possibly, sir. I had no clock in the kitchen, and cannot be certain."

"You heard no shots?"

"Not a sound. But the kitchen is detached, and the distance from Mr. Raeburn's room to the back is considerable."

"True. It is quite possible that the shooting could have happened without the reports being heard in the kitchen. You saw a light in Mr. Raeburn's room when you returned to the house at a quarter to ten, Miss Nevill?"

"Yes, but I took no notice of it. I assumed that Mr. Raeburn was reading. I had spent an hour or so with my friend, Miss Payne, the school teacher. She accompanied me part of the way home. She, too, noticed the light."

Of course, you did not wonder how the light came to be there?"

"Of course not. It was quite usual."

"Do you wonder now? Do you, Brain?" Mr. Porteus deepened his dimples, glancing from one to the other. "Bless my soul!" he said, "do you imagine a dead man lit his own lamp?"

Brain sprang to his feet. "Why, what are you driving at?" he asked impatiently.

"Sit down, Henry. There is no occasion for haste now. We are agreed it seems that Raeburn was killed before a quarter past six. What was the man doing with a lighted lamp at that hour? At a quarter past six at this time of the year it is broad daylight. And if it was not lit, then how came it lit later? If Walter Raeburn did not light his lamp, who did?"

"By heaven! I never thought of that!" said Brain. "In fact, this is the first I've heard about the lamp."

Mr. Porteus chuckled. "Henry," he said, "you should cultivate the capacity to see pictures, and to see them exactly. I wanted to see the picture of this crime in all its details; naturally, the lighting was an important matter."

"Young Raeburn must have lit the lamp to assist him in a search— for the will probably."

"In broad daylight?" Mr. Porteus looked reproachfully at his friend. "It was twenty to seven when Arthur Raeburn reached the hotel, remember."

"Then who the deuce lit the confounded lamp?"

"Mr. Walter Raeburn lit the lamp."

"For pity's sake don't be enigmatic, Porteus. When did he light it, any way?"

"He lit it at about seven, I suppose, when it was getting dusk. He lit it to write."

"Walter Raeburn was dead long before seven."

"Walter Raeburn was alive and well at seven."

"But Arthur Raeburn arrived at—"

"Arthur Raeburn had nothing to do with the killing of his uncle."

"The watch!" cried Brain, triumphantly. "The watch stopped at nine minutes past seven. You forget the watch."

"I do not," said Austin Porteus. "Here it is. The watch was wrong, Brain. Watches often are— and detectives. As a matter of fact, the watch was not stopped by the bullet— it had run down."

Brain leaned forward. "Would you be so good as to come right to the point?" he said. "Who murdered Walter Raeburn?"

"Walter Raeburn was not murdered. Was he, Miss Nevill?"

Arthur Porteus had swung suddenly upon the housekeeper. He addressed her in a ringing tone. Miss Nevill started violently. She sprang to her feet, and moved to the door, then to the window. The two men confronted her.

"Was he?" repeated Porteus, with sudden gentleness.

"You frighten me," said the woman. "I have told you what I know."

"Then I must tell what I know," resumed the antiquarian, sighing, and reseating himself. "And you will excuse me, Miss Nevill, if I use blunt language. The fact is, Brain, Mr. Walter Raeburn was going to, marry. His nephew visited

him to expostulate with him, and to endeavour to dissuade him. The young man had good reason. The woman Walter was going to marry had been Arthur's mistress. She had deserted Arthur with the deliberate intention of entrapping the older man. The nephew heard of this, and that explosion at dinner followed his declaration of the truth. It was over the woman both had loved that uncle and nephew fought. They parted in anger; but despite his rage Walter Raeburn was convinced. He knew his nephew had spoken the truth; and a splendid hope died, his house of dreams tumbled about his ears. In his room he thought the whole thing over. When dusk fell he lit the lamp, and sat at that table to write. He did write. You will find a slight trace of ink still upon the fingers of the corpse, Henry. It was not till after he had written that death came."

"Arthur Raeburn entered the room and shot him," said Miss Nevill passionately.

"He did not. Arthur Raeburn is one of the best revolver shots in Australia; he would not need to stand within two feet of a man to kill him."

"It was Arthur's revolver," said Brain.

"It was once Arthur's revolver, but had been in the uncle's possession for three years. Castles knows that. The revolver was given to Walter Raeburn by Arthur three years ago, when there was a burglar scare in the district Walter Raeburn shot himself, having decided not to survive the ruin of his happiness."

"But the two shots?" said Brain.

"First he aimed at his heart, and failed ; then he shot himself in the head, sitting here at the table. His head as he fell forward upset the ink. You did not notice traces of ink in the dead man's hair. I did."

"He was found lying face down on the floor there," said the detective emphatically.

"Where he was placed after death," replied Porteus. "Where the woman placed him— the woman who had been the nephew's mistress, and was to have been the uncle's wife; the woman who had not missed one detail or word of the quarrel, who knew she was exposed, and that her scheme had failed; the woman who heard the fatal shot, and found the dead man sitting at the table, who burned what he had written, and dragged the body to the floor there in furtherance of her blind, bitter desire for vengeance on Arthur Raeburn ; the woman who made her way to the hotel in the township, and threw the revolver through the open window on to the young man's bed, then coolly visited her friend at the school, spent an hour with her as if nothing had happened, and returned without a qualm, knowing all the time that Walter Raeburn lay dead on this floor."

Miss Nevill was facing them, erect, no paler than usual, no terror in her eyes.

"The housekeeper!" said Brain.

Austin Porteus nodded.

"It was Miss Nevill threw the revolver into young Raeburn's room," he said. "I cannot understand Arthur's silence unless it is that he thinks this woman may have killed his uncle, and he still loves her well enough to shield her."

Mr. Porteus turned to the housekeeper with his ingratiating, fatherly manner.

"Is that likely, Miss Nevill?" he asked.

"From this moment I shall not speak a word," she answered calmly.

Miss Nevill kept her resolution, but the verdict at the inquest was: "Suicide whilst in a state of unsound mind."

13: Two In One

9 Oct 1913

DETECTIVE BRAIN had telephoned:

"A curious case at Pill's Buildings. Better trot round and look her over, if you have half-an-hour to spare."

Mr. Austin Porteus always had half-an-hour to spare for curious cases, and within five minutes of receiving the message he was standing in a somewhat dim passage on the third floor of Pill's Buildings, looking down at a dead Chinaman. The deceased was of small stature, but had the wiry appearance of a burden-bearer. There was no electric light in Pill's Buildings, and the solitary gas jet at the end of the passage over the stairs shed a feeble light.

Austin Porteus held a candle over the dead man.

"A vegetable hawker," he said.

"How do you know that?" asked Brain.

Mr. Porteus passed a plump, white hand over the Chinaman's coat, polished to a high lustre on the left shoulder. "He has been in the habit of carrying baskets," he said. "They don't often do that now. It should not be difficult to trace him."

The Chinaman had been stabbed from the back. There was much blood, but death must have been instantaneous. No one had heard a sound. The body had been found by the occupant of a room at the end of the passage, who, leaving when late, had stumbled over the prostrate figure in the dusk. He was one of the two or three silent onlookers, very whitefaced, and very shaky from the shock.

"Anything on the body?" asked Porteus. Brain produced a paper, and handed it to the antiquarian, and Porteus examined it.

"Bless my soul!" he said gently. "And this was all? No money?"

"A shilling and three coppers. Nothing else whatever."

"And the rooms?" "All accounted for but No. 9 here. And there is no one in there. I have looked through the fanlight. No. 11 is empty."

"Have you observed that the key is on the inside of No. 9?" said Mr. Porteus. Detective Brain had not. He thought the fact rather curious now that his attention was drawn to it.

"It was there the Chinaman had business," said the man from No. 7. "I saw him go in with Rankin yesterday. I heard them afterwards as I passed the door. They seemed to be having high words."

"Have you seen this Rankin about this evening?" asked the detective.

"No. He doesn't use the room much, and he's a very quiet man. He has occupied No. 9 about a month, but no one here has had any conversation with

him. We don't even know what he is; but I fancy he is in the Jewellery trade. At any rate, I have seen him coming and going at jewellery establishments three or four times."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Porteus, looking at No. 7 mildly through his quaint, horn spectacles. "Dear me! Dear, dear me!" He looked at No. 7 like a bewildered owl. It seemed really as if his mind were on anything but the pale, trembling little man representing No. 7.

"I think we had better have a peep at No. 9," he continued, turning to Brain.

"I think so," said Brain.

The kindly, elderly gentleman with the lambswool whiskers looking exactly like a powder puff under each ear drew a large button hook from his pocket, and was presently working at No. 9's keyhole like an expert picklock, as though the dimpled, ruddy-cheeked collector of curios resembled nothing less than a gifted member of the criminal classes.

With a few twists he freed the key; and pushed it from the lock. It fell inside, and Mr. Porteus artfully fished it from under the door. Brain unlocked No. 9, and he and Mr. Porteus stepped in. The others gathered about the door.

The room was simply furnished with a cedar table, two chairs, a couch and a cupboard. A small, nickel clock ticked on the shelf, over the grate. Mr. Porteus went straight to the window, and threw it up.

"A man went this way," he said.

"Impossible!" interjected Brain. "It must be 90 feet to the right-of-way."

"You might look for his, body on the paving stones," said Mr. Porteus, smiling. "Everything is possible. Certainly he went this way. If a man locks himself in his own room, and you open that room and find it empty, there must be another exit. Miracles do not happen in the detective business, my dear Brain. There is the clay off the man's boot as he climbed out. Note the fresh scrape of his heel on the cement sill. There is the downpipe to abolish all mystery."

"Whew!" gasped the detective. "A man would need a nerve to go down that."

"This Mr. Rankin has a nerve. Note that he closed the window after him."

Mr. Porteus went quickly to the globe over the gas-bracket, and placed a hand upon it.

"Quick!" he said. "Search the room directly below this."

The globe was warm. A light had been burning in it within twenty minutes.

Brain with two policemen hastened to obey. They were followed by the anxious onlookers, and Mr. Austin Porteus was left alone in the room. He lit the gas, and went musing about the small apartment. He pulled out a drawer

of the table, he examined scraps of hand-writing; he was interested even in a few small chamois-leather bags, which, however, were all empty.

"Bless my soul !" said Mr. Porteus, as he went from the room, and almost, stumbled over the body. "Dear me, yes, I had almost forgotten."

The poor dead Chinaman looked very lonely there. Excited voices were raising a minor babel in the next flat. The doctor had arrived; but for the moment his attention was called to a young woman, who lay on the floor of room 9 of the third flat, the room directly below that of the missing Mr. Rankin.

The young woman was about twenty-six; she was in a dead faint.

"Severe shock!" said the doctor.

"It's Miss Cashin," explained the excited little man from No. 7. "She's a typewriter. I never knew her to take on like this before."

"The room was locked. The key was gone," Brain explained. "We had to break in. We found the girl bound and gagged."

Mr. Porteus was at the window. It was not hasped. The antiquarian collected a bit of clay from the sill.

"You will probably find traces of this clay still on the boots of the man who escaped from the room above if you catch him before he has been to a boot-black," he said.

"He came down the pipe, and into this room?" questioned Brain."

"Yes. He took the girl from behind. Overcame her, tied her, and escaped, probably when everybody had rushed upstairs in response to the alarm."

The doctor had gone up to the murdered man. He gave his professional word that the Chinaman was as dead as he seemed to be, and then returned to Miss Cashin.

"You will get nothing from her to-night, I'm afraid," he said.

The Chinaman was sent to the Morgue, and Brain and Austin Porteus went off together to obtain a translation of the scrap of Chinese writing found on the body. It did not seem to be very illuminating. One translator made it read. "You have the big light. I watch."

"Try another," said Mr. Porteus. A second expert was appealed to, and he made the sentence read:

"You hold the glowing light. I see all."

"Bless my soul!" said Austin Porteus. Mr. Brain muttered a bitter word. He had hoped for more light.

"Plainly, this Rankin is our man," he said.

"It does look as if poor Mr. Rankin were to enjoy a brief but troubled future," answered Austin Porteus, with a touch of regret.

MR. HENRY BRAIN and Mr. Austin Porteus parted company for the evening, and did not meet again till they met before going to dine together on the following day.

"What fortune, my friend?" asked Mr. Porteus blandly.

"The best. We've got Rankin."

"Actually got him in your hands."

"Not mine. He was caught on the Sydney express at Seymour this evening."

"That is excellent. Now you had better call in a man, and send him to arrest one Hi Me, a Chinese employed at. No. 19 Cameron-street, Greenhill. Or, as there is no particular hurry, you can wait till after dinner, and arrest him yourself."

"Hello ! What's little Hi Me been up to?"

"He is not little. He is rather large for a Chinaman, and he will be wrr useful to von in this case. In fact, he; killed Hook Looey."

"Hook Looev? Why, man, that's the fellow Rankin killed !"

Austin Porteus shook his head, and smiled pleasantly.

"Bless my soul, no!" he said. "He is the man found dead in the nfssatre on the ton floor of Pills Buildings, but he is not the man Rankin killed."

"Well, where does Rankin come in?"

"Let me explain. The explanation of the whole business lay in that trifle of Chinese writing."

Brain swung upon Porteus. " 'You have the d big light,' " he quoted. "What, explanation can that offer?"

"The dull and complete explanation of two crimes, Brain, two very important crimes, my friend. You have not forgotten the sunburst stolen from the residence of Mrs. Welsley-Porter ?"

"Of course not. That was over two months ago."

"To be sure. You will recollect that the address of Mrs. Welsley-Porter was No. 19 Cameron-street, Greenhill."

"By heaven! so it was."

"You may also recollect that I had some suspicion of Hi Me, the Chinese man-of-all-works, in whom, simple Mrs. Welsley-Porter had so much confidence."

"I thought I had heard of Hi Me. Get,on."

"It may surprise you, but those words in the Chinese writing suggested only one thing to me, and suggested it instantly— sunburst. 'The big light,' said one translator. 'The glowing light,' said another. I said 'sunburst.' Perhaps it was absurd, but I regarded that business of Mrs. Wesley-Porter's lovely diamond ornaments as a standing reproach. It was a failure, and, like all failures, it hung to my mind when successes had fallen off like ripe fruit. Idly enough, I went to

investigate. I saw Mrs. Welsley-Porter. I made inquiries of her, enjoining strict secrecy. I learned what I thought possible, but what I had scarcely expected that the Asiatic who had been serving her kitchen with vegetables for some time prior to the beginning of last month was a small, wiry Chinaman, answering to the description of the murdered man, Hook Looey. In fact, his name was Hook Looey.

"Hook Looey ceased to call at Mrs. Welsley Porter's to sell cabtbagee, carrot and lettuces after a violent quarrel with Hi Me, conducted in pure Chinese, the purport of which was unknown to the servants, till Hi Me kindly explained. Hook Looey, the villain, had been robbing Hi Me's kind, good mistress by overcharging for his unworthy vegetables, and Hi Me's virtuous reproaches had resulted in an outburst from Hook Looey with a recital of which Hi Me piously refused to sully Christian ears.

"Hook Looey did not reappear at Mrs. Welsley-Porter's, but Hi Me was not done with him. He commenced to spy upon Hook Looey, possibly to prevent him overcharging other confiding householders. He even took a holiday, which he spent tracking Hook Looey.

"Of this tracking business there is no material evidence, my fertile imagination is filling in blanks.

"Hi Me tracked Hook Looey up the stairs to Mr. Rankin's door the evening before last. He lurked in the passage till Hook Looey came out. He followed him to the empty room along the passage, and plunged a knife into his heart, at the same time throwing an arm about his mouth to stifle a possible cry.

"When he had let his victim slip quietly to the floor Hi Me took a large sum in gold from the body, went quietly down stairs, and away. Returning calmly to Mrs. Welsley-Porter's, he resumed his duties. Doubtless, you will find the money secreted about his room over Mrs. Welsley-Porter's stables."

"But Rankin, man? What of Rankin?"

"Mr. Rankin, as you have probably fully satisfied yourself, is a dealer in precious stones."

"Well, well?"

"My dear Henry, if you had only half as much imagination as you have common sense, no further explanation would be necessary. Here is the story as I have set it out on paper. It will be interesting to me to see how completely the facts verify my theories. You know, Brain, I usually build up a criminal drama as the great scientists build up an extinct monster, from a single bone. I had only a single bone in the case. It set me after other bones, and with those fragments of a skeleton I have constructed my drama.

"Hi Me had told Hook Looey of Mrs. Welsley-Porter's sunburst. He had explained how it was possible to steal the diamonds. Hook Looey was to get

the precious stones while Hi Me engaged the family's attention in front, which he did, having a terrible fit on the geranium bed. You will remember that interesting fit. It cropped up several times while we were investigating the jewel robbery. Hook Looey got the diamonds. Their absence was not discovered for fifty-six hours, and then there did not seem a clue. But Hi Me knew.

"However, when Hi Me came to deal with Hook Looey, he found that perfidious heathen denying all knowledge of the diamonds. He had funked on it, he said, and had not stolen the stones.

"Hi Me had no doubts. He knew Hook Looey was lying, and in his natural exasperation, and his native greed, determined to get even. He did get even last night in Pill's Buildings, when he avenged himself on his perfidious countryman, and secured the proceeds of the robbery."

"I see, now; but you might as well tell it out," said Brain, gloomily. "Of course you see. Rankin heard the first outcry, when the body was discovered, or nerhans heard the fatal blow, found his door locked, because cunning Hi Me had softly locked it to prevent their being followed as he went after Hook Looey. Then realising his awkward position, Rankin went out by way of the window, and down through Miss Cashin's room. You see, it would have been particularly unpleasant for him if he had been caught with Mrs. Welsley-Porter's diamonds in his possession, he having just purchased the sunburst from Hook Looey. He was a quick thinker. He realised he would be suspected and searched. He had no means of hiding the diamonds. He was a quick doer. He got away."

"Well, thank whatever gods there be. we have quite wasted valuable energy in laying Mr. Rankin by the heels," said Brain.

"You have not," said Mr. Porteus. "He will certainly have Mrs. Welsley-Porter's sunburst somewhere handy."

And he had. Mr. Rankin received three years hard as a receiver of stolen property. Mr. Hi Me was ungracefully hanged.

14: The Brown Coat

13 Nov 1913

MRS. MURRAY DOWNS was waiting up. Mrs Murray Downs was not the sort of woman any right-thinking husband would dream of keeping waiting-up. But at was now seventeen minutes to one, and Mr. Murray Downs had not returned from that very important postponed grand annual meeting of the United Order of Bucks— a semi-philanthropic and social body of which he had long been an ornament and a prop.

Mrs. Murray Downs was small and fair, with large, tender, blue-grey eyes, and soft, pale gold hair. She had been the spoilt child of her parents— now she was the spoilt child of her big, handsome husband. There was a pout on the pretty red mouth of Mrs. Murray Downs, and a tear in the big, blue-grey eye when the hand of the clock crept to one a.m., and the familiar latchkey had not clicked in the lock of the hall door.

The sharp click came a minute later, and the heart of Mrs. Murray Downs bounded with relief and joy; but the pout became, more pronounced, and the tear overflowed, and hung perilously on an under-eyelid as Mr. Murray Downs dashed into the room. Murray took in the situation at a glance, and, feeling a wise man, waited for no recrimination. He gathered Mrs. Murray in his arms, and kissed her tear away; then literally kissed the pout out of countenance.

"So sorry, sweetheart," he protested. "I've been thinking of you for the last three hours, but I simply couldn't get away. As you know, we've postponed that meeting three times already after sitting beyond midnight, and we know our wives would not stand for another call, so we determined to get the business done if it kept us till daybreak."

"I wish you would give up the wretched old club," murmured Mrs. Downs.

"Now, Grace, you know you don't wish anything of the kind. The Bucks are of enormous use to me in business. As hon. treasurer I'm making myself an important official, because it is worth my while and what's worth my while is worth yours, sweetheart, even if it does mean one a.m. once in a way."

"Once in a way? This is three times in three weeks."

"Extraordinary circumstances, darling. Now it's finished, and I won't desert my little girl for so long for a year at any rate."

"I don't think married men should have clubs."

"The Bucks are not merely a club. We are an institution, my dear— an institution. Our objects are partly benevolent. The members secure social and business advantages and great mental improvement. Believe, me, I have gained much from Professor Burning's lecture on the 'Specific Gravity of

Volcanic Rocks.' No, it would be folly to abandon the Bucks: but dearest has my promise— no more one o'clock sittings for ever so long."

Grace kissed Murray as a token of forgiveness, and the young husband divested himself of his brown great-coat, and threw it over the back of a chair, then turned into his own room, seeking a cigar, talking back in a hearty voice, describing the events of the big meeting. The overcoat slid from the back of the chair, and fell to the floor. Mrs. Downs picked it up.

Then happened a simple, commonplace incident that has been the undoing of domestic happiness for as long as man has been fool enough to wear pockets, and put things in them that are safer in the fire— a large envelope dropped from the inside pocket of the coat. Grace took up the envelope. From it looked out a laughing, bold, handsome face— the face of the woman. Grace drew the picture right out. Scrawled across the bottom of it were the words: "*Loving Rube to Loving old Murray.*"

The date underneath the inscription was that of the day the clock, had ticked off an hour ago.

Mrs. Murray Downs stood staring at the picture, and she felt as Lot's wife must have felt when that hapless lady realised that she was being converted into rock salt. Her world seemed to be slipping away from her— everything that had been dear and beautiful in it froze and stiffened into icy horror.

He was false to her. He had lied and lied again. She understood his miserable scheming, his tergiversation, his mean deceits, and, understanding, felt that life was abominable. She no longer heard her husband's hearty voice from the next room; and when he entered, lighting up, she did not look towards him.

"So they gave me a rousing vote of thanks, and I am to have the presentation, dear," said Murray Downs.

He said no more. His eye had caught his wife's face, and noted the cold misery in it, and an instant later beheld the photograph in her hand. Murray's cigar fell from his lips, and he stood frozen as she was, gazing almost as miserably at the incriminating picture.

ii

MR. AUSTIN PORTEUS, collector of curios, and antiquarian, sat in his little shop, with a small, distorted brass figure in his hand— a figure of peculiar ugliness and exceeding beauty. Mr. Porteus was holding the figure with much the same care as a young mother handles her firstborn.

"Are you Mr. Austin Porteus?" Mr. Porteus transferred his gaze to the lushed apparently disturbed young man who had just entered. he said: "Can I help you in any way?"

"I hope to heaven you can, Mr. Porteus.

"You seem considerably put out."

"I am up against the trouble of my life, and the worst of it is, I thoroughly deserve all that is coming to me. But I want to dodge it just the same, and I want to dodge with all the earnestness my soul is capable of. At the best I'm not an ingenious person. In this bewildering mess I'm little better than an idiot. My name is Murray Downs. I have come to you because a few weeks ago I heard a mutual friend— a Mr. Peebles, a squatter to whom you had rendered a peculiar service—talking with great enthusiasm of your remarkable ingenuity. He said the whole detective force of Australia did not contain a tenth of the acumen stowed in your grey head."

Austin Porteus held up a plump, protesting hand.

"Peebles is too easily impressed I am afraid, Mr. Downs," he said.

"I hope not, for my sake. Mr. Porteus will you help a stranger in distress?"

"Well, well, bless my soul! Best explain your distress, young man."

"I will. I am a married man."

"Of course, strangers in distress invariably are."

"I have been married only three years. I am in, love with my wife— never was as much in love with her as I am now, when it seems certain that I am about to lose her."

Talking quickly, and excitedly, Mr. Murray Downs recited the story contained in our front chapter.

"It's an unfortunate situation," said Mr. Porteus mildly; "but you admit you deserve what is coming to you."

"I admit it. I deserve anything, everything. But she doesn't; and although it is she who remains inflexible and determined upon a divorce, it is she who will suffer most. In pity's name, Mr. Porteus, devise a way out of this for us both, if you can, and I'll pay you anything— all I possess."

Austin Porteus shook his head. "These little affairs are not my business," he said. "I do not attack them professionally; but I do make something of a hobby of— eh!— unravelling domestic complications."

"Then unravel mine, and do one man the greatest possible service, preserve the happiness of two young people, give me another chance by clearing this matter up, and I swear by all I hold honourable and sacred that I'll never play with fire again."

"Let us see," said Austin Porteus: "this 'Rube' of the portrait might be easily discovered?"

"Yes. If my wife does as she threatens, the private detectives will have no difficulty in tracing her; my wife will get her divorce and her life and mine will be ruined."

"You think she is quite determined?"

"I would never have believed she could be so resolute. She was always so yielding and gentle. She is adamant now."

"You have admitted nothing?"

"Nothing. I swore I did not know how the portrait came into my pocket. I said I had never seen the face before. She replied quite coldly: 'That is a matter the private detectives shall clear up for me!'"

Mr. Porteus looked long and attentively at Mr. Murray Downs, so long and so attentively that the young man began to feel very uneasy under the placid, owl-like eyes of the antiquarian.,

"You could not get the incriminating photograph from your wife?" he said.

"No I did not urge it too strongly for fear of making a practical confession of guilt."

"I will help you," said Mr. Porteus. "Leave your overcoat with me. Go to your business, and wait till you receive a visit or a message."

iii

IT WAS necessary to act quickly. Murray Downs had confessed his fear that his wife would communicate with a lawyer immediately. Austin Porteus put the brown overcoat across his arm, and after locking up his shop took a hansom to Prout-street, Malvern. He dismissed the cab at the street corner, and walked to No. 28.

It was a gentle-looking, benevolent, grey-whiskered gentleman with a dimpled chin and a seraphic expression who rang at the door of No. 28 Prout-street. To the servant who opened the door he said he wished to see Mr. Murray Downs.

Mr. Murray Downs was not at home. How unfortunate. Mrs. Murray Downs then? Mrs. Murray Downs could see the gentleman.

Mr. Austin Porteus found her hatted and dressed for a walk.

"I have important business. I hope you will not keep me," said pretty Mrs. Downs. Austin Porteus had already decided that he was engaged upon a mission of love. There was no mistaking the suffering in Mrs. Downs's face.

"My business is very trifling, Mrs. Downs," said Mr. Porteus. "I had hoped to see Mr. Downs. If you will give me his business address, it will perhaps be best for me to see him. It is only a matter of an overcoat I wish to see him about."

"An overcoat?" Mrs. Downs sat down fronting Mr. Porteus. Her eyes fell upon the overcoat on his knees. "It will be better if you explain to me," she said. Her agitation was very apparent.

"There is little to explain. Only that I have his overcoat, and I think he has mine."

Mrs. Murray Downs sat very rigidly in her chair, fighting her feelings. For a moment it seemed that she would faint.

"Please go on," she faltered.

"Walter Murray is my name. I am a member of the Order of Bucks. Mr. Downs is our treasurer, as no doubt you know. As it happens, he and I have overcoats of the same colour, and last night, or at least this morning, in the hurry of leaving after a long and tiresome meeting, I took his overcoat, and I assume that he took mine."

"Will you permit me?" Mrs. Downs took the overcoat from Austin Porteus. Her hands trembled as she turned it over.

"Yes," she said, "this is my husband's coat. I recollect sewing the tab on with brown twist not a week ago."

Mr. Austin Porteus was at the side of Mrs. Murray Downs. He helped her to a seat. She was very pale; her hand was clasped to her heart.

"You are ill?" he said.

"A little faint. It is an oppressive day."

"Shall I ring?"

"No, no. Please tell me more about the coat. It is of more consequence to me than you can guess."

"Madam, I am very sorry to have disturbed you. The fact is, I would probably not have noticed that I had taken the wrong coat, being somewhat absent-minded, but that evening I had placed a portrait of my ward, Miss Ruby Berrigan, in the inside pocket, and on missing it I feared it was lost; but on investigating I discovered that I was in possession of someone else's coat. There was a handkerchief in one of the pockets with Mr. Downs's initials, and you will find his pocket book in the breast pocket."

Mrs. Murray Downs drew out the pocket-book.

The tears were flowing from her eyes as she left the room. Returning, she offered Austin Porteus a photograph.

"Is this your ward, Mr. Murray?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady. I am very much obliged."

"No, it is I who am much obliged to you. You have saved me from a great folly. My husband has your coat with him."

"I am going into the city, perhaps I might call for it."

"Do. If you will take a note to my husband at the same time, you will be doing me a kindness."

"I shall be delighted."

Mr. Austin Porteus left the brown overcoat with Mr. Downs— but he took the photograph. He made all speed to the office of Mr. Murray Downs, and placed the photograph on the table before the young man.

"Burn that!" he said. "You have succeeded!" Downs was wild with eagerness.

"I think so. Perhaps this will say." Mr. Porteus handed Downs Grace's letter. Downs read it, and handed it back. It was very brief: "Forgive me, dear."

Downs was putting on his hat.

"I am going to her," he said.

"Very well; but do not forget that Walter Murray, a fellow member of the Bucks, called on you here, and took away his own coat."

"As if I could forget that, or the great service you have done me. How can I ever repay you?"

"By following my advice, young man. Don't gamble with your own happiness."

"Never again!" said Murray Downs. "I resign from the United Order of Bucks this very day."

15: The Man in the O. P. Box

23 October 1913

THE PLAY had been "La Tosca," with Jane Stomray, the celebrated American beauty, in the title role. The show was over, and the theatre was empty of its audience. A few busy employees were bustling about, drawing long, calico coverings over the circle seats in the dim light afforded by half-a-dozen gas jets. A startled youth appeared in the office of the manager of the front of the house.

"Better come an' look at a bloke in the box, boss," he said.

"What's he doing in the box?" asked the intelligent management.

"Dunno. He might be sleepin', but he might be dead."

"Dead!"

The gifted management was on its feet at once.

The occupant of the O.P. box was a stoutish, baldish gentleman of about forty-five, in full evening dress. He sat in a padded armchair well back in the box, shielded from view from other parts of the house. The occupant of the O.P. box was dead. He had been shot clean through the head.

Almost instantly every intellect thrown into connection with the case of the dead man in the O.P. box dissolved into a condition of tumult.

Detective Brain had been first to respond to the telephoned appeal for the police. He found the man in the O.P. box undisturbed. Nothing on earth would ever disturb him again, said Detective Brain.

"If it didn't seem to the gifted management the height of improbability that a man could be shot through the head in a crowded theatre, and nobody be aware of the fact, I should say this man had been shot."

"Bless my soul! why assume that it was done in a crowded theatre, Henry?" asked Austin Porteus, who happened to be taking supper with his friend when the call came, and had accompanied him.

"You think the man was killed elsewhere, and carried here?" questioned Brain. "Preposterous!"

"Preposterous, but not impossible. However I think nothing of the kind; but I do think he may have been shot after the theatre emptied."

The doctor verified Detective Brain's opinion the man had been shot in his chair. A fairly large bullet had gone clean through his head. Death had been instantaneous and there was little bleeding. He had been dead a little over fifteen minutes.

There was no mystery attaching to the man himself. He was a comparative stranger in Melbourne, but a frequent patron of this particular house. He had occupied the same box five times during the run of 'La Tosca'. In fact his

chauffeur in a large grey and black motor was waiting patiently at the door, Mr. Anderson Black sat in his box awaiting the judgment.

The papers next morning gave prominence to the mystery of the man in the O. P. Box. He was known to be a wealthy American. He was staying at the most expensive hotel in town, and living like a man with a million.

Mr. Anderson Black had arrived in Melbourne six weeks earlier— one week after the opening of Jane Stomray's season. Miss Stomray in a tearful interview admitted that she had some little knowledge of Mr. Black. He had made her acquaintance during her list season in San Francisco, just prior to the date of her departure for Australia. He had professed greatest admiration for her— had been most generous in his gifts of jewellery (thrown to her in bouquets), and had not missed one night at the theatre during the last three weeks of her San Francisco season.

Miss Stomray believed Mr. Black had followed her from America. In fact, he had declared that he had no other object in visiting Australia. than to be near her.

Miss Stomray knew nothing of the American's life and connections. She did not know what his business was, or to what part of America he really belonged; but she had taken it for granted that he was very rich. She had not encouraged his advances in any way. In fact, she had returned several of his recent gifts. She was engaged to Mr. Daring, talented member of her company. They were to be married on their return to America, and it grieved her very much to have his name associated with that of Mr. Anderson Black.

Mr. Daring had greatly resented Mr. Black's too obvious attentions, and had once threatened to horsewhip that gentleman. Suspicion attached to Daring, but Daring, who was playing Scarpia, had been under the eye of the audience up to within a few minutes of the conclusion of the drama; and from the time of his supposed death at the end of the first scene of the last act had apparently engaged himself in his dressing-room. But Daring had at least a motive in wishing Anderson Black out of the way, and he was notoriously jealous of Miss Stomray, and was recognised by the other members of the company as an exceedingly hot-tempered man.

Brain and his friend, the plump, dimpled, white-haired and cherubic antiquarian, went together again in the theatre next morning.

"It's an amazing thing that I can find no one who heard the shot," said Brain.

"Not at all, my dear friend. Nothing amazing about it. Nobody heard it, because everybody heard it."

"What?" Brain wheeled on his friend. "Drop paradox. How in the deuce could nobody hear it because everybody heard it?"

"Well, there was much firing, and everybody was expecting it, and everybody heard. Why should anyone pick out or recollect the actual shot that killed Anderson Black? You will remember that in the last scene of 'La Tosca' the hero is shot at the order of Scarpia by a small body of musketeers. Well, that volley of shooting was sufficient to account for no one hearing any individual report."

"By the holy! Why didn't you mention that before? It may be an accidental death. It certainly is. A loaded cartridge was introduced by mistake, and the bullet struck Black here in the box."

"What could be simpler?" said Austin Porteus, his eyes twinkling behind his large glasses. "I have suggested it as possible; but there were two shots fired into the box."

"Two! How do you make that out?"

"They have recovered one, or portion of one, from Black's brain, the other passed through the curtain here, making this small hole, struck and penetrated the woodwork of the gas bracket, and is now embedded in the plaster of the theatre wall behind that woodwork. If you care to try you may feel it with a knife blade."

That evening the "*Herald*" published, with the air of excitement newspapers so curiously assume on such occasions, a full and detailed explanation of the shooting of Anderson Black, due to the discoveries of that patient and most perspicacious investigator— Detective Henry Brain.

It was plain that loaded cartridges had by some dreadful mischance got among those served out to the soldier supers detailed for the execution of the artist hero in "La Tosca." The supers were instructed not to fire point blank at the actor, which accounted for his escape— and in all probability for the bullet reaching Black, his position being not far out of the line of fire.

Of course, there was an investigation into the origin of the cartridges; but the gunsmith who supplied them was absolutely positive that no bulleted cartridges were in the package he delivered at the theatre.

"That," said Brian, "is a thing he could not be positive about. You cannot eliminate the possibility of human error."

"No," replied Porteus with a fat chuckle; "otherwise the police force might attain perfection."

Austin Porteus had appeared little in this case. He was present at the theatre after the discovery of the body only in the absence of the employees; but he had manifested great curiosity concerning all the hands, and Brain's men had collected many details which he seemed to consider of greater interest than Brain's investigations at the gunsmith's.

It was on the evening of the day following the death of Anderson Black that Austin Porteus, accompanied by a square box and a portmanteau, appeared on the mat of Mrs. Greenleigh's humble boarding-house in West Richmond, where he had taken a small room, for the use of which and his bed and board he was to pay the munificent sum of 18 shillings per week.

But Austin Porteus was a man of simple tastes and wide and generous interests. There was no reason at all why he should not go to dwell in amity with an upholsterer, two carpenters, two drivers of lorries, a shopman at a leather warehouse, two corporation labourers and a scene-shifter.

It was perhaps just a coincidence that the scene-shifter was engaged at the Imperial Theatre, where Jane Stomray was starring, in "La Tosca."

It may have been only natural for Austin Porteus to single out Stores, the scene-shifter, for his blindest and most genial attentions, Stores being easily the most interesting man in the company. To Ephraim Stores, Mr. Porteus was merely a quaint, elderly gentleman with absurd powder-puff whiskers and curious, old-fashioned spectacles, who kept a little shop somewhere, and who could talk interestingly of all sorts of people and places.

At first Stores was very reticent; but within a week the pair were quite confidential friends, and Porteus found Ephraim Stores to be a man far above his present station in life.

The antiquarian had been nine days at Mrs. Greenleigh's. It was Sunday afternoon. He had entered Stores' room. For the moment Stores was absent, and Austin Porteus drew a very large Colt's revolver from his inner pocket and placed it upon the small table in the room beside Stores' hat and pipe.

Stores returned a minute later, and Porteus continued to inspect a book he had taken from the shelf. He asked presently in his pleasantest voice, and without any stress at all: "Why do you pretend to be a Lancashire man, Stores?"

"Pretend?" replied Stores. He turned sharply towards the elder man, whose dimpled face betrayed nothing.

"Yes. You try to put a Lancashire touch into your speech, and you don't do it well. Why not admit you are an American. There's no prejudice against Americans here."

"But I am not an American.

Austin Porteus smiled. "You come from the Pacific Slope. If I don't much mistake, you are an actor. You—"

Austin Porteus ceased speaking; his big, round, horn-rimmed glasses were fixed on Stores. Stores's eyes were fixed upon the revolver on his table, and in them was a look of utter terror. He reached a trembling hand, shifted his hat to

cover the revolver. Then, finding the antiquarian watching him, he took up the revolver.

"Did you put that there?" he asked, and his voice ran thin despite the effort he made to control it.

Austin Porteus went to the door, and shut it. Then he returned to the table, and said: "Let us sit down. Tell me why you killed Anderson Black."

Stores fell back, feeling for the wall behind him, and a black menace came into his eyes.

"You are mad!" he said.

"Sit down," repeated Austin Porteus without feeling, "and tell me why you killed him. I know how you did it. I take it for granted you followed him from America to kill him. I know you saw your opportunity to fire from a position in the wings covered by the gaol wall, simultaneously with the firing of the soldiers in the play. But why did you do it?"

As Stores did not answer, but stood with his back to the wall, his eyes turning occasionally to the window, seeking a possible way of escape, Porteus went on: "It would be foolish for you to bolt now. That would be a confession of guilt. I could, out of my imagination, provide half-a-dozen excellent reasons why Anderson Black should be killed; but I prefer facts. Tell me. I know that you actually fired at Anderson Black once before, and missed him. I know that, because I found the bullet hole in the curtain at the back of the box, and the bullet in the wall beyond. That bullet was grazed and broken; but the lead on the grazed surface had a dull tinge showing that it has not been fired within forty-eight hours.

"You fired twice at Anderson Black. You were determined to kill him. And 'La Tosca' offered you a magnificent opportunity. Coming away from the theatre you threw the revolver you shot him with into the small pond in the gardens— the only water you passed on your way home. I found it there myself by simply taking off my boots and socks and paddling. One is safe in 90 cases out of 100 in assuming that the assassin will throw his weapon into water— the first water he comes to."

"I am no assassin," said Stores fiercely.

"Well, avenger— if you like the term better. Why did you kill him?"

"Because he ruined my life and my happiness. I was an actor. You guessed right. I am an American. Again you guessed right. I did kill Anderson Black, and I am telling you so, because I don't believe you would destroy the man who has taken clean vengeance on a foul villain.

"I was acting with my wife in a theatre in Sacramento, when Anderson Black came into our lives. He was a wealthy orchardist. My wife was very young and very pretty. Under my tuition she was making strides in her

profession. One day she disappeared. I neither saw nor heard of her for five years, and then I saw her body in the Morgue at San Francisco. She had been living in the Chinese quarter for some time. She had killed herself. Her life for two years past had been hideous. Anderson Black had taken her from me. He had tired of her, and had kicked her into the slums.

"Over her poor, wasted body I swore to have vengeance. I tracked Black down. It was not difficult. He was now the adoring follower of Jane Stomray. But there were to be no more victims for him— I had sworn it. The killing of this beast was as sacred a trust in my soul as any that possessed the medieval knights.

"I followed Anderson Black from America to Australia, knowing that I should find him wherever Jane Stomray might be appearing. I took this job as scene-shifter, because he was always about the theatre. The shooting of the hero in "Tosca" suggested a magnificent idea. I could kill my beast of prey in circumstances that would leave no suspicion upon me. I lurked in the wings watching my chance.

"You are right. I had fired at him two nights previous ; but my hand was tremulous. I missed, As luck would have it, he noticed nothing. The firing of the volley covered my shot— and perhaps Black was a little drunk.

"But I got him. I aimed for the centre of his forehead, and I can shoot. He is dead, and I am content... They talk of the remorse of the murderer. I have none of it— I feel only happiness. If I betrayed trepidation just now, was only the instinct of the animal whose safety is threatened. I could go to the gallows as gallantly as a martyr. Try me, if it is your business."

Austin Porteus held out his hand. "Goodnight, Ephraim Stores, and long life," he said. "My imagination was not at fault. I had built up your story fairly accurately."

Austin Porteus left Mrs. Greenleigh's lodgings next day.

Throughout the remainder of the run of "La Tosca," the gifted management was particularly careful about the cartridges it used in the execution scene: but its contingent of scene shifters remained unchanged.