

PAST MASTERS

250

Peter Cheyney
Edward Dyson
R. Austin Freeman
C. S. Montanye
Baroness Orczy
Elizabeth Sanxay Holding
H. de Vere Stacpoole
Capel Boake

and more

Past Masters 250

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker from short stories in magazines, newspapers and other sources, and all in the Life + 70 years public domain.

15 Feb 2026

Contents

1: Inches and Ells / <i>Elisabeth Sanxay Holding</i>	3
2: Last Request / <i>Mark Hellinger</i>	12
3: "Moo-oo-oo-oo!" / <i>Laurence Donovan</i>	15
4: Justly Due / <i>Jeffery Farnol</i>	22
5: Beyond the Violet / <i>J.U. Giesy</i>	25
6: Eight Stone Six / <i>Randolph Bedford</i>	34
7: The Perfect Way / <i>Achmed Abdullah</i>	40
8: The Affair of Mrs. Lotus Leaf / <i>Peter Cheyney</i>	50
9: The House by the River / <i>Capel Boake</i>	56
10: O'Callaghan-O'Brien's Secret / <i>Richard Dowling</i>	63
11: The Black Poodle / <i>F. Anstey</i>	74
12: The Murder Hole / <i>Catherine Sinclair</i>	95
13: The Scandal Detectives / <i>F. Scott Fitzgerald</i>	97
14: The Romance of Captain Duffy / <i>H. de Vere Stacpoole</i>	113
15: Shanghai Explosive / <i>William J. Makin</i>	123
16: The Blue Scarab / <i>R. Austin Freeman</i>	128
17: The Bron's Bog Debating Society / <i>Edward Dyson</i>	148
18: His Last Ship / <i>Vernon Ralston</i>	160
19: On the Brighton Road / <i>Richard Middleton</i>	166
20: Things / <i>Alice Duer Miller</i>	169
21: The Lenton Croft Robberies / <i>Arthur Morrison</i>	181
22: At 9.30 Precisely / <i>C. S. Montanye</i>	200
23: The Waters of Death / <i>Erckman-Chatrian</i>	203
24: "The Giggle" Newspaper Company / <i>Ernest O'Ferrall</i>	214
25: The Mystery of the Dog's Tooth Cliff / <i>Baroness Orczy</i>	220

1: Inches and Ells

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

1889-1955

Munsey's Magazine, June 1928

HE LISTENED TO HIS FOOTSTEPS, going down and down the stone stairs, until the echo died away; and still she stood as if she were listening, one hand on the back of a chair, her lips parted, a faint frown on her brow.

But the silence settled about her, and even her own fast beating heart and quickened breathing grew quieter.

"He's gone," she said aloud.

Very well! She had told him to go, and she wanted him to go. She turned away from the doorway and went toward her bedroom.

"I never should have let him call here," she thought. "He doesn't understand. He's impossible. I knew it, too. I knew that if I gave him an inch, he'd take ells and ells!"

She was surprised and displeased to feel tears running down her cheeks.

"How silly!" she said to herself. "I'll see him again to-morrow; and if he's sorry— if he apologizes—"

She clasped her hands tight, struggling against a sob.

"I'll go to bed and get a good night's sleep," she thought. "In the morning—"

But the tears would not stop. She saw her orderly little room in a mist. The silver on the dressing-table made a dazzling blur, and the edge of the mirror was like a rainbow.

"Silly!" she said to herself.

There before her were the precious photographs of her father and her mother, in a double frame. She picked them up and looked at them, blinking away the tears until the beloved faces were clear to her. They had trusted her to come to New York alone, to manage her own life with dignity and discretion; they counted upon her not being silly.

At this moment they would be sitting in the library at home, in the serene quiet of their mutual affection and understanding. Perhaps her father would be writing at his table, his gray head bent over some scientific treatise, and her mother would be sewing or reading; but whatever they were doing, their child would not be forgotten. The thought of her would come to them at any moment. They must miss her, but they were proud of her and sure of her.

"I've got to make Douglas see," she said to herself. "He's got to show decent respect for me. I know he's fond of me, but—"

The tears came again in a rush.

"I know he's fond of me," she thought, and remembered the ring.

Imagine his coming like that, with a ring to put on her finger, before he had even asked her if she liked him! The very first time she had asked him here, too! Catching her roughly in his arms and kissing her!

He had shown no trace of delicacy or respect, no appreciation of the honor done him in being asked here. He knew that she was quite alone, and he had taken advantage of it. Kissing her like that, when she had forbidden him!

Well, she had made him realize her just resentment. She had sent him away, him and his ring, not angrily, but quietly.

"If he had even said he was sorry," she thought. "Perhaps he will to-morrow."

All the time she undressed, the tears were running down her face.

"Because I'm so disappointed," she told herself. "I didn't think he'd be like that."

She had seen him in the office every day for two months, and once she had gone out to lunch with him, and once to dinner; and she had felt that a very beautiful thing was beginning. She had seen in his gray eyes a look that made her heart beat fast, had heard in his voice a queer, grudging tenderness not to be forgotten.

She had known, of course, that he was not quite the man she had dreamed of, no knightly figure of romance. His manner was abrupt and domineering. More than once she had seen him lose his temper with some unlucky fellow worker, and speak in a grim white anger that distressed her bitterly; but he was so honest and so uncompromising! She had respected that, and had admired his tireless energy, his undoubted cleverness.

There were not many men of his age who had gone as far as he— head of a department at twenty-four. Yes, she had been justified in liking him; but there were those other things, those unreasonable things. When she thought of him, it was not his business ability that she remembered, but his quick smile, his steady glance, his way of scowling and running his hand over the back of his head.

"If he just says he's sorry to-morrow," she thought. "If he'll just realize that he was— horrible!"

She fell asleep in a troubled and confused mood, and waked the next morning with a heavy heart.

"I won't be weak and silly," she thought. "If he's not sorry— if he can't show the proper respect for me— then it's finished!"

SHE WAS sitting at her typewriter when he came into the office. She heard his curt "good morning" to some one else, heard his footsteps behind her. A

wave of emotion rushed over her, so that for an instant she could not breathe; but she sat very quiet, the slender, neat, dark-haired Miss Graham that the office always beheld.

Almost at once he sent for her. She rose, took her notebook and pencil, and went into his private office.

"Shut the door," he said.

The color rose in her cheeks, but she paid no heed to the command. He rose and shut the door himself.

"Look here!" he said. "I— I shouldn't have made such a fool of myself, only I thought you— liked me."

Her cheeks were flaming now. She looked straight into his face.

"If that's the way you look at it—" she said.

"I came to you," he said. "I offered you all I had, and you told me to get out."

"Do you mean to say," she cried, "that you don't see how outrageous you were?"

They stood facing each other, like enemies.

"No," he said, "I don't see. I thought that if you asked me there, you had been nice to me. I thought you liked me. Now that I see you don't, I'm sorry."

"You just call it making a fool of yourself, to be so arrogant and disrespectful?"

"I wasn't arrogant!" he replied hotly. "Call it arrogance to come and ask a girl to marry you— to offer her all you have?"

"I suppose I should have felt honored," she said, with a faint smile.

His own face flushed.

"Damned if I see what more you can expect!"

"I expect respect from a man," she told him.

"Do you think I'd ask you to marry me if I didn't respect you?"

"The way you did it!" she cried. "It was— "

"If you cared for me," he said, "you wouldn't have minded my— my kissing you."

"Yes, I should!"

Their eyes met.

"Oh, Mildred!" he cried. "Do you mean you do care?"

A panic fear seized her.

"I don't!" she said. "No— I— it's not fair to make me stand here and listen to you!"

He turned on his heel and walked over to the window.

"All right," he said unsteadily. "You needn't stay."

She opened the door and went back into the outer office. She knew that the other girls would notice her hot color, would see that she had no dictation to transcribe, and would talk about it. She was humiliated, and it was his fault.

"I hate him!" she thought, and was shocked.

It was wrong and horrible to hate. It was shameful to be so angry and shaken.

"He's not worth bothering about," she thought. "He is arrogant. He's domineering and conceited. He calls it making a fool of himself to insult and hurt me."

She did not see him again that morning. He used the dictaphone for his letters, and presently she had them to type. It was strange to hear his voice in her ears, his impatient young voice:

"No, cross that out. No, begin it all over."

All that long day, and all the next day, went by without a word or glance between them. The following morning was Saturday, a half holiday, and Mildred was going, as usual, to spend the week-end at home. She came to the office dressed for traveling, and bringing her bag with her.

She went directly into Randall's little office.

"Mr. Randall," she said, "I'm leaving to-day."

He looked up at her.

"You're supposed to give a week's notice," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not coming back."

"I haven't— bothered you," he said.

After she had returned to her own desk, his voice echoed in her ears, miserable, angry, and forlorn:

"I haven't bothered you."

"I can't help it," she thought. "I can't stay here."

Promptly at twelve o'clock Randall left the office, without a word to any one. The door closed behind him.

"He's gone," she thought. "I won't see him again!"

And it seemed to her that his going left all the world empty and desolate.

"His lordship isn't quite so gay this morning," said the girl next to her. "He got an awful calling down. Mr. Williams sent for him. I was in Mr. Pratt's office, and we both heard every word. I was tickled to death! I can't stand Randall."

"What was the matter?" asked Mildred, her eyes on her work.

"Oh, it seems that Randall had been out with the boys last night, playing poker and drinking, and Mr. Williams heard about it. When Randall made a mistake in his work this morning, the old man jumped on him— told him he wasn't up to his work, and that if he kept on like that he'd get the gate— told him he was expected to get here in the morning fresh and fit. Oh, he just jumped on him! I was tickled to death, Randall's so high-hat."

"What did he say?" asked Mildred.

"What could he say? 'All right, sir. Yes, sir! No, sir!' He had to come down off his high horse that time!"

Mildred had a vision of young Randall, not domineering and energetic, but standing downcast and unhappy before his chief.

"I think it's a shame!" she cried suddenly. "Mr. Williams might have closed the door, anyhow, so that no one would hear!"

"It'll do Randall good," said the other, with satisfaction.

"No, it won't!" Mildred retorted.

She felt certain that humiliation would not do Randall good, but harm. A great anger filled her, and a curious fear.

"He can't stand that," she thought. "He won't stand it. He'll do something silly. If Mr. Williams had just talked to him quietly and nicely— if some one would—"

iii

SHE HAD LUNCH alone in a little tea room, and all the while she thought of Randall, the arrogant, who had been humiliated and humbled. Playing poker and drinking! They were things utterly outside her experience, and the thought of them filled her with dismay and alarm.

"He's so reckless," she thought. "He told me he was all alone in New York. There's no one to talk to him."

That public reprimand had come to him just after she had told him that she was leaving. Perhaps that ring had been in his pocket at the time— the ring that he must have bought with such a high heart.

Through the tea room window she could look out on the crowded street. That was the world out there— the world he lived in, hurried, careless, and jostling; and he was pushing his way through it, hurried himself and careless and solitary.

"I can't let him go like this, without a word," she thought. "Perhaps if I just spoke to him— nicely, it might help."

It was hard for her to do that, for it was he who should have come to her, should have asked her not to go away, should have tried to set himself right with her.

"Now he'll think I didn't really mind his behaving that way," she thought. "He'll be hard to manage, if I encourage him."

But she had to do it. Reluctantly, with a heavy heart, she telephoned to the address he had given her.

"Randall's not in," said a cheerful masculine voice. "I expect him any minute. Can I take a message?"

She hesitated.

"Yes, please," she said at last. "If you'll tell him that Miss Graham is leaving for Hartford on the five o'clock train, and that she'd like to see him at the Grand Central for a moment before she goes."

"Miss Graham— leaving on the five o'clock train for Hartford— wants to see him at the Grand Central. Right! I've got it all written down."

That was a later train than she had meant to take, and there was a long time to be filled. She went into the book department of a big store and picked out something to read— a serious book, the sort she had been brought up to appreciate. Then she went to a tea room and had a plate of ice cream.

At half past four she reached the station, and stood near the gates of the train, waiting— such a neat, composed, dignified young creature, with her book under her arm. At heart she was nervous, but she meant to try. She was going to speak to Randall gravely and earnestly. She would not encourage him too much, but she would offer him her friendship, if he would be worthy of it. It was a difficult thing for her to do, this cherished only daughter, so sheltered, so gently bred, so quietly proud in her own honorable and blameless life. She had taken a step down in doing this.

Her face was pale, but her eyes were steady and clear, searching the crowd for him. It was right to try and help him.

He was late in coming. Only fifteen minutes now— only ten minutes!

On impulse she hurried to a telephone.

"He hasn't got the message," she thought. "I'll just say good-by. I'll tell him that perhaps I'll see him again."

The same masculine voice answered.

"I did give him the message," it protested; "but you see, he's got a little party on here. He must have lost track of the time. I'll call him."

"No!" she cried. "Thank you. Good-by!"

He had got her message and he had not troubled to come. She had to run now to catch the train. He hadn't come. He didn't care.

She stopped short as she reached the gates.

"All abo-o-ard!" cried the conductor.

But she did not go. She turned away from the train with a strange blank look on her face.

"I can't!" she thought. "I love him. I can't go like this!"

She was surprised to find that it had grown dark when she reached the street. A cold wind blew, and the myriad flashing lights of Forty-Second Street, the noise, the crowds, confused her. Her composure and her dignified self-reliance were gone; she felt desolate and abandoned.

"What's the matter with me?" she thought with a sob. "I ought to be ashamed of myself. He got my message— and he didn't come!"

She tried to stop a taxi, but they all went past.

"But he wanted to come!" she cried in her heart. "I know he wanted to come, only he's too proud. I hurt him too much."

He would not come to her, so she was going to him. Was it possible?

"I don't care!" she said to herself. "I won't go away like this!"

At last she stopped a cab.

"If he sees me—" she thought.

For somehow she, who knew so little of love and life, knew that if he saw her his stubborn pride would be melted. She must do it, at any cost to her own pride.

Terribly pale, she entered the hall of the apartment house where he lived. The hall boy came forward.

"Mr. Randall? I'll telephone up."

"N-no, thank you," she said. "I'll just go up."

"It's the rule—" the boy began; but after a glance at her pale, set face he resigned himself with a sigh, and took her up in the elevator.

He watched her going along the hall, so slender and straight, still with the serious book under her arm.

She rang the bell, and waited. She rang again, and the door was flung open with a crash by a cheerful, fair-haired young fellow.

"I want to see Mr. Randall," she said.

He stared at her for a moment.

"Ran!" he called. "Come here! Some one to see you!"

iv

FROM A ROOM at the end of the hall young Randall appeared in his shirt sleeves, with his dark hair ruffled and his face flushed.

"Mildred!" he cried.

The fair-haired fellow disappeared.

"Mildred!" said Randall again.

She tried to speak, but she could not. She stood there just outside the door, with the book under her arm, only looking at him.

He came down the hall to her. He, too, was silent. From the room at the back she could hear laughter and the rattle of chips, and the air was heavy with tobacco smoke.

"Come in!" he said.

She shook her head mutely, but he took her hand, drew her into the little sitting room at the right, and closed the door after him.

A terrible despair filled her. She had done this incredible thing, come here after him, and now he would despise her!

"Sit down!" he said.

She was glad to do so, for her knees were trembling.

"I couldn't—" she said unsteadily. "I couldn't go— I was afraid."

"Oh, darling!" he cried. He was on his knees beside her chair, with his dark head bent on her arm. "Oh, my darling girl!"

"Douglas!" she breathed, amazed, incredulous.

"I'm so sorry!" he said in a muffled voice. "My darling girl! For you to come here— you little angel! I'm so sorry!"

"I just thought—" she faltered.

"I'm so sorry!" he cried again. "I wish I could tell you! You're such an angel, and I'm not fit to speak to you!"

She laid her hand on his head. He caught it in his own and raised it to his lips in reverence.

"Mildred," he said, "you don't know how I feel. I mean it when I say I'm at your feet."

"But—" she began, and stopped, struggling with a new idea. "Is it like this?" she thought. "If I'm just kind to him, and generous—"

If she stooped in love and pity— if she came down from her pedestal— would he worship her? She put her arm around his neck.

"I do love you, Douglas!" she whispered.

He rose to his feet.

"Mildred," he said, "you'll see— I'll do anything for you! I'm not half good enough, but, Mildred, I'll try. I don't care how long you want me to wait. I'll do anything you tell me!"

When she had given him an inch, he had taken an ell; but when she was reckless in her giving, he stood before her like this, utterly humble.

"Just tell me what you want," he said.

She was silent for a moment.

"I'd like you to come out to Hartford and see my father and mother," she said gravely.

"All right!" he said. "I'll get my hat and coat."

He left the door of the room open, and she could hear his curt voice in the back room.

"I'm going, boys."

"You can't break up the party!" protested an indignant voice.

"I've got to go," he said. "My— the girl I'm engaged to— wants me to go out to see her people."

"Hen-pecked already!" observed the same indignant voice.

"Good-by!" said Randall. "You can take my chips, Fry. We'll settle up later."

When she had been dignified and reserved, he had been angry and unmanageable. When she ran after him, at such a cost to her pride, she became his sovereign lady, whose least word he obeyed.

"Men are queer!" thought Mildred.

2: Last Request

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 2 Mar 1937

Newspaperman, Broadway producer, and movie producer, Mark Hellinger's life was a crowded one. For years he had a daily newspaper column which was originally intended to be a Broadway gossip column, but he presented it in the form of short stories, writing one a day for the best part of two decades. They were usually short and sharp, like this one. More than two hundred of them also appeared in Australian newspapers in the 30s and 40s.

TO BEGIN this story, we'll have to travel back some thirty years. You mustn't permit that to alarm you, because your correspondent likes to go back through the years every now and then. It gives him a chance to catch up with some of the radio comedians of today.

At any rate, it was back around 1906 that Faro Carson and Whitey Gans first met. They both went to work for the same gambling house in the Middle-West. Gans ran one of the two roulette wheels in the joint, while Carson sat against the wall in the opposite corner of the room and dealt the Faro game.

Whitey and Faro liked each other immensely from the very beginning. They spoke the same lingo, and their ideas ran along similar lines. Both were fairly young, and both were ambitious. So it was perhaps inevitable that they would one day become partners in their own enterprise. Which is exactly what happened. They worked diligently, pooled their resources, found a good location— and opened their own gambling house.

Soon, as in all short stories, they were prospering nicely. It's only in real life that most gaming houses go bankrupt in short order.

Time rolled on, and Whitey and Faro were two very happy men. Theirs was a genuine friendship, and they enjoyed their work together. For some ten years they moved serenely along. Nothing had happened to disturb their partnership, and there was only one thing that had a chance of doing it. That one thing finally arrived. Her name was Ethel.

Faro fell for Ethel in short order. Overnight, she made a changed man out of this man who made change. His business began to suffer. He kept seeing Ethel's face before him, and one evening he handed a player the correct change for a 100-dollar bill. He knew then that it was time to talk to his partner. So, after they closed the place that night, Faro broke the news to Whitey.

"No sense beatin' around the bush with you. Whitey," he said. "I'm stuck on Ethel— so stuck that I don't know whether I'm comin' or goin'. You're the best pal a guy ever had, and I hate like blazes to quit you. But, because you're a swell pal, I guess you're gonna understand.

"I'm gonna marry Ethel. She don't like gamblin', so I'm gonna quit the racket and move East. Name your own price for my share of the business, 'cause I'm sellin' out to you right now."

Whitey lit a cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"Faro," he replied, "I ain't buyin' your share. Well sell the place tomorrow, and we'll split fifty-fifty. Without you, I couldn't stick around here. I'll go north and open a new place entirely. Things'll feel better if I do it that way." He paused. "Faro," he went on, "we been together a long time. I'd like to keep on bein' together. I'd like to tell you a lotta things about dames, and how you'd be better off stickin' with me, and such like. But I ain't gonna open my kisser in that direction.

"All I'm gonna do. Faro, is shake hands and wish you and that skirt all the luck in the world. And we're gonna promise each other that, if one of us ever needs anythin' in the years to come, he'll ask the other guy for it. No matter what it is. Is that okay with you?"

Whitey extended his hand. Faro grasped it firmly. "That's a go, Whitey," he said slowly. "If I need you— or you need me— we'll get together. All the luck in the world to you, Whitey."

Whitey smiled. "Keep a little for yourself, pal," he suggested. "You'll be needin' it more than me."

FOR MORE than nineteen years Whitey and Faro did not see each other again. Perhaps once a year they exchanged letters. And it was only through this meagre correspondence that each knew what the other was doing. Whitey had done well, as he figured to do. He had opened a gambling house in a new location and had prospered through the years.

Faro had never returned to the gaming racket. His wife had presented him with a son about a year after their marriage, and she had died in the effort. So Faro had invested in a small business in the East, and had raised his motherless son to the most comfortable surroundings he could provide.

Then, one morning about a year ago, Whitey received an unexpected letter from his old pal. The promise they had exchanged so long before was suddenly recalled. Faro was dying, his letter said, and he wanted very much to see Whitey immediately. It was about his son, Faro's letter went on. He wanted to talk to Whitey about the boy's future before death snatched him from the picture. Would Whitey come at once? Whitey didn't hesitate for a moment. His old partner needed him, and that was all he had to know. He packed a grip hurriedly, and tossed a wad of bills into the case. If Faro needed any money, it would be there for the asking.

An hour later Whitey was on his way.

THE FOLLOWING morning found Whitey sitting at Faro's bedside. As he looked at the other man, Whitey verged on tears for what was possibly the first time in his life. Thin, feeble, gasping, it was obvious that Faro wasn't good for more than another few hours on this earth. The dying man made a tiny attempt at a smile.

"I knew you'd come, old pal," he said haltingly. "And you're just about in time. too. I'll be meetin' the Big Dealer almost any minute now." His voice grew lower. "I gotta talk fast, Whitey. So listen close.

"I love my kid. He's nineteen now, and I want him to have every chance in life. We're in a tough world, Whitey, and I want my son's future to be assured. I don't want him to be broke, or to need nothin' as he goes along."

Whitey pressed the other man's bony hand. "Okay, partner." he cried. "Tell me what I gotta do for him. I'll do anythin' you want, Faro. Anythin.' "

Faro clutched at his throat. His words were coming with great difficulty.

"I got fifteen thousand bucks in the bank." he murmured. "I want you to handle that for the kid. Take that dough. And invest it for him."

Sure," cried Whitey, biting his lip. "Sure I will, in invest it for the kid. Is there any business you wanna suggest?"

Faro was going rapidly now. He tried to nod.

"Yes, Whitey." he whispered. "I want you to take that fifteen thousand dollars and give my boy an interest in your roulette wheel. And remember, Whitey, that I love my son, and I wanna see him raised right. So be sure the wheel is run crooked!"

3: "Moo-oo-oo-oo!"

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Munsey's Magazine, Feb 1929

EVEN A HARD-BOILED, hard-eyed, hard-swearing traffic regulator may have his moments. Officer James Emmet Corcoran had four each week day.

Shortly before nine o'clock each morning a silken little lady in a silky little roadster went by. This moment was merely the curtain raiser to the other three; for at her initial appearance Officer Corcoran was forced to content himself with a view of her golden red bob.

In the morning she wore a coat that concealed her satin-white arm, but at noon that member curved graciously smooth and bare. When twelve o'clock sounded on distant whistles, Corcoran imperiously put east and west traffic back on its tail. Heedless of lurid objurgation, he kept the north avenue open, and permitted the south-bound stream to trickle along until a glowing aura of red showed through the wind shield of the tricky roadster.

At just the right moment he faced his six feet three of Irish authority toward the north and waved the grinding gears and gnashing teeth of east and west traffic into the clear. That put the golden red bob on the sidewalk dead line. Thereupon the little lady would press the roadster's flippantly musical siren and smile. With the gesture of a king in his own right, Corcoran would acknowledge the salutation by again putting the curse upon east and west traffic.

The same maneuver, except that Corcoran faced to the south, was repeated at five minutes to one o'clock. These were the two high moments of the daily four; and at these times Officer Corcoran had the fantastic Irish fancy that he would like to be one of the dancing heat waves quivering upward from the stewing asphalt to caress that alluring arm.

He wondered if his ears were as huge and red as they felt when he closed his eyes for a fleeting second or two and figuratively rested his head, with its unruly black thatch, against the cushion of the exposed satiny shoulder. Then he would open his eyes and grin back. When she was gone, flashing away in the saucy machine, he would sigh disconsolately.

"Not for such as ye, laddie buck!" he would mutter.

Thereafter, for a brief space, he would permit profane truck drivers and flustered lady gear clashers to fight for their own disputed rights of way. Then he would snap out of it and again put the razz on his dazed customers.

His fourth moment was at four o'clock sharp. To be sure, the aggravating concealment of her lovely shoulder was repeated; but several times, at the end of the day, Officer Corcoran dared to think that her smile held something of wistfulness, of reaching out to him.

Perhaps she was only wearied with her day's duties, whatever they were; but the smile warmed the heart of the big policeman. It left him dreaming dreams that a traffic dictator with a curly black thatch has no business to dream.

Each morning, however, he would come down into the cold, gray murk of his traffic corner, knowing that she was a creature of another world—a world of luxury, from which silky roadsters with made-to-order musical sirens are materialized; in which only gentlemen born may expect to hear the sweet assent of purring voices that go with bare arms of velvety smoothness.

Officer James Emmet Corcoran had come over in the steerage. He brought with him the most primitive ideas about social distinctions. Removed from his uniformed crust, he was a great, awkward, shy inferiority complex in person.

FOUR O'CLOCK drew near— an orderly, decorous evening quitting time. Mechanically Officer Corcoran passed off the first twenty minutes of his final half hour on duty.

At the beginning of the concluding ten minutes, however, his spirit perked up. He gave his badge a furtive rub. He wiped his humid brow and straightened his cap. Soon, very soon now, it would be time to roll up those obstructive lines of east and west traffic.

All afternoon Corcoran had been anathematizing his lamentably inferior birth, breeding, and ancestry. At the high noon moments he had resolved to be bespeaking the little lady this same evening; but as four o'clock approached he was merely a uniformed Irish peasant with humility clogging his initiative.

At ten minutes to four an attenuated rural truck driver with ragged chin whiskers and an untrustworthy foot on the gas got into a traffic jam some four blocks from Officer Corcoran's post. His foot reached for the brake, found the accelerator, and pushed. He cried "Whoa!" and "Gee-haw!" in a panicky voice, but the nose of his battered truck kept right on ascending the slanting guy wire attached to a telephone pole.

The crated animal in the body of the truck remained penned until the truck attained an angle of sixty degrees. Then she went crashing over and out of the broken crate into the narrow, shut-in spaces of urban office buildings and four-alarm fires.

When the driver's chin whiskers had been untangled from the remnants of a shattered radiator and the guy wire, their owner did not for some time take an active interest in his smashed crate. He was probably the only individual among the polyglot population of that immediate neighborhood who was familiar with the personal habits of the escaped animal; so the cow caused mild consternation as she wound her way over the hard-paved lea of Eighty-Fourth Street.

At that moment the silky little roadster came to a stop with its front wheels exactly on the sidewalk dead line. A tired little quirk at the corner of the girl's mouth made her evening smile more wistful than ever before.

Corcoran let east and west traffic flow along far beyond its rightful time. South-bound motorists alongside and behind the red roadster honked profane horns. Corcoran looked them blandly in the eye and told them where to stay.

Now or never, he decided. The girl's musical siren joined the raucous insult; but its tone was melody in Corcoran's ears.

"Come on— come on— come on!" it said.

Behind him east and west traffic was tangling. Suddenly a new sound crept through the squawk and grind— something utterly alien to that metropolitan atmosphere.

"Moo-oo!" bawled a deep, insistent voice.

Corcoran glanced over his shoulder.

With her forefeet braced wide apart and bewilderment in her great brown eyes, the wandering cow had arrived at one of the world's four thousand, four hundred and forty-four busiest corners. (Figures supplied by any chamber of commerce.)

Officer Corcoran swallowed his Don Juan impulse, choked, grew red in the face, and lost his poise. A torrent of Gaelic Americanese flooded to his lips. He waved his arms.

"Shoo-oo, ye domned baste!" he yelled.

The cow only braced her forefeet more firmly and eyed the abusing policeman with mild surprise.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo!" she said with doleful emphasis.

A two-ton truck attempted to get by on the wrong side and ripped the fender off a Lincoln. The swarthy driver got down.

"Ita happen lika dis, you domba-headed—"

A choleric fat man climbed from behind the wheel of the Lincoln and waddled toward the truck driver. The truck and the Lincoln made a perfect block.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo!" pleaded the cow, addressing Officer Corcoran.

"Gwan! Git! Ye're blockin' the strate, ye slab-sided moo-ron, ye!" shouted Corcoran, frantically waving ineffectual arms.

He saw a piece of rope dangling from the offside crumpled horn. He seized the rope and tugged. Nothing came of it.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo!" repeated the cow, putting upon Officer Corcoran's broad shoulders the burden of the world, or at least of six blocks in four directions of jumbled traffic, which perhaps is worse.

"Git 'er some hay!" squealed the high-pitched voice of an anemic-looking taxi driver.

"I'll be afther gittin' ye some—"

Corcoran remembered too late. The girl's roadster had sneaked over the dead line. For a desperate minute all he could see was the liquid depths of a pair of brown eyes framed by wisps of golden red.

Hanging on to the rope, Corcoran got to one side of the cow and shoved. A mighty man was the policeman. The cow's hoofs slid along the hard pavement. He drew her head close to his traffic signal post and half-hitched the rope around it.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

The cow was getting into full voice. Long drawn and plaintive, her cry of distress fell upon the heedless ears of the unrighteous urbanites.

With one hand Corcoran held the rope around the iron standard. With the other he gesticulated the Lincoln and the two-ton truck out of their jam, and got east and west traffic moving past him.

Somewhere to the northward a fire siren split the air.

"Ye'd have made of a airypine to be crossin' here!" groaned Corcoran.

Jeers and jests, advice and what-not, were being hurled at him by passing motorists. All the time the silver-winged figure on the radiator of the silky roadster was poked as close to the flowing stream of cross travel as the girl dared.

Corcoran wondered vaguely how it would seem to go back to pavement pounding on some outlying beat.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

In the distance the fire sirens were circling the jam.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

A woman driver, from whom emanated a musky perfume strong enough to overcome almost any barnyard odor, stopped her car between the traffic signal and the roadster. Then she tried to strip three sets of gears, but the auto maker knew his lady drivers. The gears stood the strain and killed the engine.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

Officer Corcoran hung on. A low-browed hawker, piloting a tin boiler, reached from his hip and extended a long brown twist of tobacco toward the policeman.

"Here, youse!" he offered. "Dey chews a cud, mister!"

Officer Corcoran could not hold the rope and kill him. That alone saved the hawker's life.

THROUGH the perspiration streaming into his eyes, Corcoran was beginning to see things in a blurred vista. Behind the scented lady's stalled car he saw the red-haired girl climb from the seat of her roadster. The policeman was not so blind that he did not catch a vision of a diminutive foot shod in alligator skin,

followed by a brand of shapeliness that would stop any show. Having long studied the contour of her shoulder, Corcoran was not surprised.

Now she had the carry-all at the rear of the roadster open.

"Mooo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

It was the longest enduring, the most heart-rending, the most bloodcurdling bawl he had ever heard.

"Shut up, ye slab-sided hunk o' perambulatin' beefsteak, ye domned—"

A lilting voice interrupted him.

"Why, officer, I'm surprised! The poor thing must be suffering terribly—don't you know?"

If the big Irishman with his primitive ideas had not already been delivered in chains, the ripple of her voice would have finished him off. He didn't know. How could he?

"An' what are ye afther—" Officer Corcoran gulped.

At the moment he wished he were the cow, so that he might have swallowed his cud and begun over again. He remembered that this was not at all what he had intended to say to the red-haired vision.

"What is it the bucket's for?" he tried again, not bettering his address appreciably.

The red-haired girl was carrying the emergency water pail and a folding camp stool from the roadster.

"Mooo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

"O-o-o-h, the poor thing! So-o-o, bossy," she rippled again.

Forthwith she unfolded the canvas camp stool and seated herself beside the bawling animal.

"They must have just taken her calf away," she said, looking up and favoring Corcoran with his first close-up of a smile that created a vast empty feeling under his buttoned coat.

"I didn't— did she have one?" he stammered.

Without replying, the girl reached out and under. Her slender fingers gripped and gave a tentative pull here and there.

"*Ziss, whung! Ziss, whung! Ziss, whung!*"

Two white streams alternately zissed and whunged into the tin pail.

"Moo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

This time the sound was low and grateful, as the lowing of a contented cow should be.

Corcoran knotted the rope to the post. The lady gear grinder had got her motor started again, but she still sat motionless in perfumed and scornful amazement. Such a thing couldn't, simply couldn't, happen!

"*Ziss, ziss, ziss, ziss!*"

The "whung" from the once empty pail had given way to the steady "ziss" of creamy milk.

Corcoran peremptorily waved the scented lady on her way. She went with eyes sneering. With hands, voice, and whistle Corcoran attacked the jam immediately around him. Blocks away the fire sirens screamed futilely.

"Ziss, ziss, ziss, ziss!"

A burly, red-faced chauffeur stalled his car purposely and leaned out. He laughed with ribald inflection. Following his eyes, Corcoran noticed that the girl's skimpy silken skirt was proving inadequate. A gleam, white as the creamy milk zissing into the pail, fogged his vision.

Instantly he was beside the halted car.

"Git movin'!" was all he said.

The omitted curse was in his eyes. They blazed first degree murder at the arrant chauffeur.

"Whaffor? A show's a show, ain't it?"

Corcoran's big hand gripped the chauffeur's shoulder. His great thumb pressed deep into the man's armpit. With his other hand he fished a ticket from his pocket.

"Ziss, Ziss, ziss, ziss!"

The chauffeur squirmed painfully.

"Aw, lay off o' me! What's the big idea?"

Corcoran released him and scribbled on the ticket.

"Blockin' traffic," he intoned, and paused. "Drivin' to the common danger—resistin' an officer," he chanted on, still scribbling. "Street mashin'—insultin' a lady." He handed the ticket to the chauffeur. "I'll think of somethin' else to charge ye with in court," he added.

The offender snatched the ticket and stepped on the gas.

"Ziss, Ziss, ziss, ziss!"

The pail was half full. East and west, north and south, Officer Corcoran autocratically restored the traffic. With a final scream the fire sirens had given it up and taken another route.

"Ziss, ziss, ziss, ziss!"

The golden red aureole of the girl's hair contrasted warmly with the lighter yellow of the cow's flank. For a fleeting moment Officer Corcoran devoutly wished that his shoulder was the cow's hip.

At length she straightened her back and rose. The pail was two-thirds full of foamy milk.

"Moo-oo-oo!" mooed the cow in low-voiced appreciation.

The eyes of liquid brown looked into the puzzled eyes of blue. A merry light appeared in the brown ones, a dawn of happy understanding came into the blue ones.

Through the east and west traffic there blundered a set of ragged chin whiskers.

"Wall, I'll swan to gosh— who'd ever 'a' thunk it?" drawled a nasal voice through the whiskers. The man untied the cow and was starting to lead her away. He thought of something. "Ye kin keep the milk," he added generously.

"Oh, thank you!" the girl replied sweetly.

Through the north and south traffic Corcoran's relief came pushing his way. Corcoran saw him; then he looked back to the girl, who held out the pail.

"You may carry it," her voice rippled again; "and I guess you may see me home."

Ten minutes later the silky roadster stopped before a tiny, old-fashioned house set back in an equally old-fashioned garden. Corcoran, his arm numb from balancing the pail, got out and stood stiffly.

"You see, we only moved here from the country last fall," said the girl. "That's how I knew—" A real, honest-to-goodness blush warmed the translucent skin of her cheeks. "And— oh, I'm so tired of the city!" She wore the wistful four-o'clock smile. "I want to go back to the country. I wouldn't have stayed, I guess, but I won the car in a drawing, and— but won't you come in, and we'll have some of the cream on strawberries from the garden?"

Swinging the pail, from which not one precious drop had been spilled, Officer James Emmet Corcoran went up the walk behind the golden red bob. His primitive ideas about social distinctions were smashed forever.

4: Justly Due

Jeffery Farnol

1878-1952

Collier's 24 May 1930

FATE, being not quite so blind as Justice, her sister goddess, sometimes borrows the sword and scales and, while patient Justice fumbles with facts and pores over proofs, metes out swift and sudden retribution with such extreme neatness and dispatch as may pass with the busy world as mere accident, fortuitous happening, or strange coincidence.

All of which may serve as introduction to Mr. Arthur Farrant, whose uncanny skill in the opening of burglar-proof safes and guaranteed thief-defying locks had won for him, in the higher walks of his one-time profession, such enviable titles as Slick Arthur the Yegg, Artful Art, and Gentleman Farrant.

It was, then, upon a certain balmy summer's eve that Mr. Farrant glanced up from the careful planting of an Emperor daffodil to see a man upon his newly-trimmed lawn, a thin, narrow-shouldered, sharp-eyed man who nodded his sleek head and smiled, though his eyes seemed sharper than ever.

"Howdy, Slick!" he murmured. "Quite a little Eden you got here, eh? And some li'l Eve back in the house yonder— oh, boy!"

Mr. Farrant rose and turned upon his visitor with a certain lithe and cat-like celerity.

"Ah, Burrin," said he, softly, "get this right now— whatever you want there's nothing doing, and— good-by!" Mr. Burrin merely smiled.

"And such lov-ely roses too!" he sighed. "My, my! But, coming to cases, Art, old sport, all I want is them real magical hands o' yours... tonight... for half an hour... say fifteen minutes... and there's five thou for you, my lad, five thousand dollars for, say, ten minutes' work—"

"Now see here, Burrin," said Mr. Farrant, soft of voice but grim-lipped, "I'm through with you and all you mean, so get that right and hike!"

"Aw, say now, Slick— Art, old sport, we was friends once, real pals and—"

"No! We worked one or two jobs together, that's all. Now, do you go or must I— chuck you through the hedge?"

"Neither, Art— nix to both!" said Mr. Burrin, shaking his sleek, vulpine head. "No guy lays a hand on me, no, sir! And here's why— see?" Now, glancing down, Mr. Farrant saw how the speaker's hidden left hand was swaying the skirt of his light overcoat gently to and fro.... "The old gat, Arty boy, me li'l old gun! I'm always heeled, you'll remember.... So, say now you're going to stand in with me tonight, eh, old-timer?"

"No!" answered Mr. Farrant, unflinching. "Shoot and be damned!" Mr. Burrin sighed wearily and jerked his head toward the distant, pretty house.

"Talking o' jobs, Slick," he murmured, "how if I step indoors and put your li'l Eve wise about some o' them jobs we pulled off in N'York... or Paris... or that dago that got bumped off at Monte Carlo?" Farrant turned slowly and stood gazing toward his home for some while and so still that he scarcely seemed to breathe; then, as slowly, he faced his visitor again, teeth bared and gnashing:

"Ah... damn you!" he murmured in soft voice, dreadfully at odds with his distorted face. Mr. Burrin smiled and nodded brightly:

"Art, old sport," said he, "I knowed you would. I banked you'd trail along."

THE MIGHTY safe door, obedient to Slick Farrant's master touch, moved, swung slowly, smoothly open and Burrin, who crouched behind, holding the pocket torch, uttered a joyful gasp and leaned eagerly forward.... A sudden glare... a hoarse voice whose challenge was cut short by three rapid detonations; then they were afoot and, leaping the watchman's huddled body, ran for their lives....

"Hey— Sullivan— easy!" gasped Sergeant O'Brien, a few minutes later. "Easy wid that noight shtick, me bhoy... don't kill 'em entoirely!"

Followed in due course the trial for murder but with only one prisoner at the bar, for Mr. Burrin had turned state's evidence and proved witness so damning that Arthur Farrant, alias this, that, and the other, known also as Gentleman Farrant, Artful Art, and Slick Arthur the Yegg was duly doomed to die. Now as they led him from the dock he turned for a last look:

"Your account will be paid!" said he, glaring malevolently; "you'll get your just dues," whereat Mr. Burrin cowered instinctively in his seat.

And now, though a free man with the whole earth before him, Mr. Burrin was possessed of a strange whim that lured and held him in the vicinity of this great, grim place wherein so many malefactors had been shocked from life by that dreadful engine— the electric chair.

So Mr. Burrin stayed in the neighborhood, waiting very patiently though troubled now and then, not by remorse, but by this new, sharp pain that stabbed him ever and anon. By good fortune he secured a room in a small hotel whence by merely sitting at the window he could glimpse the distant loom of that same grim building above swaying green of trees. And he was sitting at his window this evening, for tonight Arthur Farrant was to die. But even now— oh, cursed fortune— his pain was back again, a pain so sharp that he writhed in his chair, an agony that grew with every dragging minute until at last he was forced to summon aid.

It was a breezy young medico who examined him with a jocosity that languished to somber gravity:

"Appendicitis— must operate at once."

"A... hospital, Doctor?"

"Here! Now! At once! No time to lose!"

"Is it... serious, Doctor?"

"Lord, no more than having a tooth out. But we must jump to it— right now! I'll ring up Dr. Pratt; he specializes in appendixes— loves 'em! Hello, ten o'clock— I'll just about catch him."

"Ten!" groaned the sufferer, "and in an hour... only an hour... they're going to electro— Oh, Doctor, d'ye think you'll be through with me in an hour?"

"Sure!" nodded young Æsculapius cheerily. "Don't you worry anyway!"

And so, after some while, in that small, very inadequate hotel room, the doctors got to their work, knives and sponges and forceps.

"Now!" said Dr. Pratt, bending close, "we must work fast. Be ready with— Ha, what the—" for in this most critical moment the lights had failed, dimmed to a glow— vanished. A tense moment and then all was confusion, blundering steps, crash of falling glass, uproar of urgent cries:

"Lights— lights for God's sake! Candles— a lamp... anything...."

And then while feet ran stumbling to and fro the electrics glared again, a dazzling brilliance... there was a gasp of horrified dismay:

"Good Lord— Pratt!... Something's wrong. Look!..."

"God, man... why... he's gone... he's dead! Ah, these damned electric lights! Landlord, what in hell's wrong with your service?"

"Why, nothing, Doctor," answered the peering landlord. "Ye see, they often dim on us so when they're on the job— up yonder... ye see, they've just been busy up at the jail electrocuting that guy Farrant...."

"Well," answered Dr. Pratt, covering what lay on the bed, "I guess they've executed two men tonight."

For, as hath been said, Fate, not so blind as her sister Justice, works sometimes more speedily and as surely.

5: Beyond the Violet

J.U. Giesy

1877-1947

Argosy All-Story Weekly, 27 Nov 1920

THERE were four of us in the lounge of the club. There was Carnick, the broker, a man who dealt with material values, stocks and bonds and such things. There was Abbington the banker, whose interests in life were pretty much along the same line as those of his friend. Then there was Vance, M.D., B.S., and some other things, I believe, the neurologist, who having served his time in a base hospital on the other side as a part of the Medical Corps, A.E.F., had come back and resumed the practise he had laid down at such time as the call of his citizen's duty sent him a volunteer, heart and soul, into the army life.

The fourth member of our group was myself, who dabbled somewhat with typewriter and pen.

Carnick and Abbington were reading; the former a current magazine, the latter an evening paper, and I was simply lounging back in a deep chair, and smoking when Vance strolled up.

"Gentlemen," he said, smiling. We all knew him— a slender, dapper, almost effeminate sort of chap, unless one happened to catch his eyes, as cold and steady a blue as the chilled steel of a surgeon's knife.

Carnick glanced up. "Hello, Vance," he mumbled.

Abbington nodded.

I returned the doctor's smile.

He took up a paper and found himself a chair, respecting the mood of the others. And I continued to enjoy my cigar.

All at once Carnick cast his magazine aside. "Rot!" he snorted. "Bosh! What's got into people inside the last few months is more than I can understand! Two years ago you couldn't have got that sort of stuff into a standard magazine."

Vance lifted his eyes over the edge of his paper, and Carnick saw he had gained his attention. "I suppose you'd call it a sort of universal hysteria, wouldn't you, Vance? I believe that state is characterized by the belief on the part of the one afflicted that he sees and hears nonexistent things."

Vance's customary smile twitched at his lips. He glanced from the broker to the paper again. "I presume you refer to the prevalence of articles dealing with the possibility of a future life and its demonstration?" he suggested.

Carnick nodded. "Yes. They're getting to be an epidemic. Some publication runs one, and the others all follow like sheep. What I can't comprehend, however, is the effect the thing seems to have had not only on the popular mind, but on some of those we have been in the habit of considering the world's biggest men. They've fallen for it, and they've fallen for it strong."

Abbington laid down his paper. I sat holding my cigar in my hand. Carnick had pushed himself up in his chair and was regarding Vance with a sort of impersonal frown.

For a time the physician made no answer, and then: "He is a rather bold man, I fancy, Carnick, who undertakes to say what does or does not lie beyond the border line."

Carnick took it with no evidence of any full understanding. "Border line?" he repeated. "Just what do you mean by border line?"

"The limit," said Vance slowly, "of the sensory perception of mankind, meaning thereby the individuals inhabiting a world bounded by a minimum and a maximum perceptive zone— violet for the sense of sight, or for hearing the most rapid vibratory rate which can be consciously denominated sound."

Abbington nodded. "That's a pretty comprehensive definition, too, I imagine," he said.

Carnick somewhat widened his eyes. "You think there *is* something— beyond?" he asked.

Vance smiled again. "It's presumable, isn't it, at least? We've proven the X-ray as regards light already. Man senses what lies within his limitations. Sticking to the sense of sight— presupposing that our eyes turned merely sidewise— we would be conscious of only length and breadth, and thickness for us would not exist.

Carnick grinned. "As it is we have three dimensions; do you mean to insinuate that there may be a fourth?"

"I'm not a metaphysician," said Vance. "But a questioning of the possibility of a stage beyond mere corporeal existence is a blow at the very foundations of religion, is it not?"

"I never went in for religion," Carnick said quickly, and added: "Of course I suppose I recognize some causal reason back of what we call life. But beyond that, I've sever given the matter much thought."

"Exactly." Vance smiled again. I noted a slight contraction of the corners of his lids. "You recognize something, Carnick, and you don't know what it is. Thus far we've spoken of sensory perception, yet a man— some men— may perceive something without exactly sensing its absolute nature. It comes down then to a question of what life is. A moment ago I spoke of a vibratory rate, and it is not too far a cry to assume that life, like all other force, is in itself a ratio of vibration. If that is correct, then life is a harmony in the midst of a universal scale, and man may perceive certain things beyond the scope of his senses, in very much the same way that the string of a violin may be set into vibration by the sounding of a sympathetic chord.

"I think that may be the explanation for the universal racial belief in the possibility of a future life— a sort of sympathetic perception of a truth. Take the

violin again for instance, and tune it without lifting the bridge. What then would happen if after the tuning were finished the bridge were raised?"

Carnick frowned again. "I suppose," he said after a moment, "that the result would be to raise the pitch."

"Precisely." Vance nodded. "For the rest you must accept my statement that certain things may at times have the same effect on the human brain and nerves."

Abbington sat forward. "Raising the pitch, you mean?"

"Yes."

"So that— one can see— beyond the violet?"

"Why, yes— that's a very good way to put it," said Vance.

Carnick eyed the physician in a shrewd way he had at times and brought the matter to an issue: "See here, do you know of any concrete example?"

Vance met him directly. "Coming to a show-down, eh, Carnick? Well, as a matter of fact, I do know of one such instance. It was the most interesting demonstration of what I think we may best call sensory hyperesthesia, I have ever encountered."

"He could see— beyond?"

"Yes. At least I am convinced that is the explanation. Something happened to his optic nerves or center, which actually raised his visual perceptibility an octave, if we may still employ a musical parallel, with the result that his sight was shifted up on the scale."

Carnick puffed out his lips. He glanced at Abbington and me, and then leaned back in his chair. "All right, doctor," he said, "tell the story, but spare me your technical terms. If I get you, this chap saw things that, in so far as those around him were concerned, weren't there."

"He saw things 'beyond the violet,' as Abbington puts it," Vance returned. "As a matter of fact, violet was the only mundane color as we know it, of which he retained any perception. In his scheme of things after I came to know him, violet was his minimum rate of vibration, and in so much corresponded to our red."

He tossed his paper aside, produced and lighted a cigar. "You've all heard of shell shock cases, or read of them," he resumed. "And I'll merely say that the condition in so far as we men who observed them were able to determine, was with all respect to Carnick's restriction on my use of medical parlance, a hyperesthesia or excessive irritability of the brain and nerves. The victims of the complaint were subject to various mental and physical aberrations, with certain forms of hallucination— though mainly of a subjective nature, meaning thereby that their imaginary ills and experiences were largely if not wholly centered about themselves— their immediate condition and future welfare, that is.

"As you know, I was connected during my medical service on the other side with a convalescent base. That's how Edward Stinson came to us. The history that came with him indicated very clearly that in the opinion of those who had observed him, he was mentally deranged. I do not mean violent—there had been no manifestations of that nature at any time, but there was something about him decidedly strange. And in addition he was blind."

"Hold on," Carnick interrupted.

Vance shook his head and smiled. "Blind in the ordinary sense, I mean. I'm not musing up my facts, my friend. The man had to be cared for like any other blind man. You want to remember that, Carnick. He couldn't see a thing that went on around him, because violet was the minimum of his sight perception, and the last link that bound him to the color scheme of the every-day world.

"He had been an infantry Looie with the Twelfth Field. You know that outfit did some very heavy work, and, well— Stinson didn't know exactly what happened to him after he was advancing under fire with his men, and had a sudden sensation of going up in the air, until he woke up in an evacuation hospital back of the line and an entirely different world. He told me the whole thing himself. The trouble seemed to be with his eyes or the mechanism of his sight.

"At first he told me he thought he had surely died, except that he could not harmonize that idea with the fact that he was able to hear all that went on around him distinctly, to sense ordinary odors, to taste the food that was given to him, and was exquisitely sensitive to any ministering touch.

"But so far as his sight was concerned, Edward Stinson came back to a world of ghosts."

"Good God!" Abbington exclaimed a bit thickly; "do you mean he saw— things like that?"

"Exactly." Vance inclined his head. "He had a slight wound when he was picked up— a shell gutter across one thigh, which was debrided and promptly healed, and save for that he didn't show a scratch. They diagnosed his case as 'shell shock' partly because of his subsequent condition and partly because they learned that he had been bowled over by a shell burst, during the attack by the Twelfth on an enemy position in which he had taken part. They sent him to a base and kept him there till his leg healed, and waited for his other symptoms to clear up. But they didn't. There weren't any, as a matter of fact, except the one I've mentioned, and that stuck. They transferred him to us, with an addendum to the diagnosis to the effect that he was suffering from visual hallucinations, which was natural enough, even though it undershot the truth."

"What was the truth?" Carnick asked all of a sudden.

Vance looked him in the eye. "I think I've pretty clearly indicated that by my remark that Stinson woke up in a world of ghosts," he said slowly. "It depends on how one looks at it, of course."

"You mean— he saw—"

"The living dead," said Vance. "He described it to me as I've said. It was rather weird. He likened his condition to that of a man viewing the movements of a number of mute actors through the medium of a violet tinted glass. He was normal in every way except for that one thing in so far as his conversation went— as shown by every known test we applied. He was a man of more than average education. He could understand after a time the effect he was having on everybody else. He had hard work holding himself together right at the first; in getting along in the borderland existence which had suddenly become his.

"You see it was hard for him to realize what had happened— that he was still corporeally alive in so far as his creature needs were involved, and yet perfectly capable of perceiving the stage of existence those of his fellow men, who had died. It was a sort of No Man's Land in which he found himself— a place peopled with souls which had been violently torn out of their bodies, or had slipped out of them after a due course of dissolution. He saw men die— actually *saw* something leave their bodies. Day after day and night after night he saw that thing happen in the wards. He saw the life, if you wish to call it that, steal forth from them and pass him. What is it the orientals say—that they hear their souls bidding their bodies farewell? Well —Stinson *saw* that happen, and after a time he came to realize that it was only the bodies of those men that had died, and that the men themselves were still alive— that they had simply shaken off the body which was no longer essential to their continued life.

"That, however, was later, when he had gained a better appreciation of his condition. The first time he saw it happen, it upset him, and he called the nurse on duty and told her that something was coming out of another man's body. That man died, and the nurse was terribly impressed. She was on edge. There were times when the corps in the hospitals were overworked as a matter of course. She reported the matter and the result was that Stinson was pretty closely watched. That's how the 'visual hallucinations' got tacked onto his diagnosis before he came to us.

"I've told you he was intelligent, however, and by the time I first saw him he had accepted his condition, and it had made a most remarkable change in the man himself. You see, he had come, by then, regardless of the opinion of others, or the questions they had asked him after they got an inkling of what they believed he thought he was seeing, to consider the whole thing as a visual demonstration— an irrefutable proof of a definite existence on the other side of the grave. The thing had lifted him out of the depression one would have naturally expected, into a state of something like a spiritual exaltation. He was a

man with his feet on the earth and his head in the skies— wholly convinced of the truth of what he was seeing."

"So is the man with hallucinations— the victim of a monomania," said Carnick. "They're absolutely convinced of the truth of their convictions— dead sure they're right!"

Vance's eyes twinkled.

"Meaning that you want proof," he said.

Carnick chuckled. "Well, yes. I'm from Missouri. Outside the fact of your observation, which I'm not doubting, and the man's own say-so, which I'm willing to admit as genuine in so far as his own belief, where does it get you, any more than the statement of these writers in the magazines that so and so received a message from some one who has passed on, through a medium or one of these automatic writers who claim to set down what simply flows off their pencil or pen?"

Abbington nodded. "Carnick's right," he seconded his friend. "Listing Stinson's alleged ability as a very interesting matter from your viewpoint, doctor, how are you going to nail it down?"

I looked at Vance to see how he was taking their questions.

He was smiling again. "I think the proof lies in the fact that Stinson fell in love before he came to us," he returned.

"Fell in love?" Carnick started. "With a ghost— a soul— a spirit?"

Vance shook his head. "Not at first. Lieutenant Stinson fell in love with the sound of a voice, the touch of a hand, a pair of violet eyes— or let us say their color. Hold on—" as the broker would have interrupted. "I've been laying for you, Carnick. I've held out this part of my story for the last. Now let us review briefly Stinson's case. He could hear, feel, taste, touch, smell, anything in normal fashion. He could see violet as the one remaining elementary color in the everyday scale— and Allison Towne, United States Army nurse, had violet eyes. More than that, she was on duty at the base to which Stinson was sent first,"

Abbington dragged his chair a little closer. The movement seemed to say he intended missing no word. Carnick pursed out his lips again.

Vance went on: "Stinson was under her charge. Day after day he saw those spots of violet bending above him— came to associate the voice behind them with the woman whose eyes he knew they were, because he asked her if that was their color— came to associate their presence with her touch— the fragrance of her feminine presence. And remember that those twin pools of living light were the binding links which in those days, when he was trying to adjust himself to the change that had come upon him, seemed to hold the man to earth. She talked with him at times, told him her name, and some other trivial details, sympathized with him, and he confided to her a great deal about himself and the experience he was undergoing, after the first edge of the thing had

worn off. Particularly was that true after his so-called hallucinations had become general knowledge.

"Then came the influenza epidemic— the second big break out— and the girl was taken sick. One night, lying in his bed, Stinson saw her pass.

"The next morning he asked about her, and learned that she had died, and the hour of her death. The information merely confirmed his fears, because he had felt that the form he had seen drifting wraithlike past him was her spiritual entity suddenly freed from her body— and now, although he had never been able to see more than the color of her eyes while she was physically living, he knew absolutely— had a full and vivid perception of how she appeared, and described her to the nurse he had questioned with a clearness that moved the woman to tears.

"That settled the thing for Stinson. He missed the girl immensely; but, as he said to me, he came out of the experience with the settled knowledge that no matter what might have happened to her body, Allison Towne was as much as ever alive, and that he loved her— so that you see, Carnick, in the end the boy was literally in love with a shade as you suggested. It was rather odd."

"Odd, yes," Carnick assented. "But what does it prove?"

"Nothing," Vance said. "It merely lays the foundation for what followed, brings out the point that Stinson never saw the girl while she was physically alive, and gained his entire picture of her only after the change which we denominate death, but which he came to feel assured was merely a change and nothing worse. But wait.

"I told you I watched his case for weeks. We got to be pretty good friends in those days. I think I convinced him of my interest, and we used to take short walks about the grounds in the evenings. He liked to get out then, because of the peculiar violet quality in the twilight. He was always seeking for something of a violet color, with very much the same avidity that the average child will seize on anything that is red. During the time he was in our institution, I made several attempts to tune him down as it were, but with no success. In the end he was sent home unimproved, and I lost track of him completely, until the other day, when he walked into my office with his vision normally restored."

"Normally— he could see things the same as before?" said Carnick.

"Even as you and I," said Vance, and smiled.

"What happened?" Abbingdon asked.

"Heaven only knows," Vance said, "though of course, we may assume that whatever process lifted his vision to a temporarily higher scale of perceptivity, and maintained it there through a period of months, was by some means removed."

"Something let down the bridge," Carnick suggested, harking back to the doctor's first comparison anent the violin.

Vance nodded. "Yes. Stinson told me what happened, of course. When he left us, they put him aboard a transport and brought him across. The trip was uneventful, until the steamer docked. He was slated for a hospital on this side and was loaded with some of the others into an ambulance, because, of his condition, though he was a 'sitting' case.

"Something went wrong after they started for the hospital, and the ambulance motor caught fire. Quick work got the passengers out— and just about that time the machine blew up.

"Stinson wasn't hurt a bit, but all the same he fainted, or lost consciousness at the instant of the explosion. When he came to he was in a hospital again, and a nurse was bending over his bed. He looked up into Allison Towne's face— or that's what he thought at first. One can imagine that he was pretty well shaken both by the face into which he was looking and the fact that he had regained his normal sight.

"He tried to speak. 'You— you! Miss Towne!'

"For a moment he says he couldn't for the life of him determine whether he had finally died and the girl was really Allison herself, or was alive and had dreamed everything that went before that moment. But he hadn't been injured, and although his brain was whirling, he came up quickly. He hitched himself up on an elbow, and kept on staring into the face of the nurse. And he found it wide-eyed, rather startled, as it might be by his sudden recognition.

" 'You are Miss Towne, aren't you?' he asked, because the girl beside him was as like to the spirit, soul, wraith, or whatever you like to call it, of Allison Towne as two peas from the same pod.

"She nodded. 'Yes, I am Miss Towne,' she said. 'But how do you know? I don't think I've ever seen you.'

"Stinson let himself back on the pillow. You must remember that Allison Towne had told him a bit about herself.

" 'You were born in Paterson?' he said in a sudden flash of comprehension.

"She assented.

" 'You had a sister? Her name was Allison?' said Stinson.

"She nodded again.

"Then Stinson knew the truth. 'You're very much like her in appearance, aren't you?' he said.

" 'Why, yes.' The girl had grown a trifle pale. 'Allison and I looked a great deal alike, except that I'm a bit younger. But—'

" 'Wait,' Stinson interrupted. 'I know what you're going to say, Miss Towne, because— I knew your sister. She was very good to me. She told me about you. Your name is Arline. I've— Miss Towne, I've been through a most remarkable experience, and I've come back out of it to find— you.'

"Then he told her exactly what had occurred. 'That's why it startled me so,' he said at the last, 'when I looked up just now and saw your face. It is like hers—like the face of the woman I never really saw, until after, as men say, she had died. It—it was as though I had suddenly waked up and found that I had been caught in the toils of some nightmare, and you had wakened me again to life. For a moment it baffled me, and then I remembered she had told me she had a sister, who was also a nurse.'

" 'I know,' said the girl. 'Allison wrote me about you. She— she believed you saw what you said. She said she wouldn't be afraid of death if it came to her after talking to you, because—she felt sure that what had happened to you was proof of a—a future life. I—I think she loved you, Lieutenant Stinson. I— I think that's why you saw her after she had passed. I think she let you see her true self.' "

Vance smiled again as he came to the end of his story. "There, Carnick," he said, "is your proof. Stinson recognized the younger girl by her likeness to the sister he had known but had never been able to see in her physical life."

Carnick sat frowning. "I don't know," he said at last.

"None of us know— really." Once more Vance smiled.

"That wasn't the end of it, was it?" Abbington asked.

Vance laughed. "Hardly. You see Stinson had been living for months in a world of ghosts. The explosion of the ambulance did something to undo the work of the shell burst, of course. And the first thing he saw when he came back to the world he had formerly known, was Arline Towne's face. The other day when he came to my office, he brought me—this." He reached into an inner pocket and produced an envelope of heavy texture, handing it to the banker.

Abbington thrust his fingers inside it and drew out a— wedding invitation. He read it: "Arline Towne— to— Lieutenant Edward Stinson," and gave it back.

Vance took it. "Render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's," he said.

"Meaning?" Abbington grumbled.

"Meaning," said Vance, "that man, as man, lives within the limitations of his sensory perceptions, and that Arline Towne is a charming girl. I had luncheon with her and Stinson the other day."

6: Eight Stone Six

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

The Bulletin, 27 Jun 1928

Mining engineer, Australian parliamentarian, author and traveller

PHYSICAL greatness and heavy financial tonnage were the features of that meeting in the board-room of the Hematite Range Mining Company. Only the secretary was small, and he would have been bigger than the average in a community of normal human beings. All five directors were very big men; tall and massive and big boned and bearded men of great presence; of gigantic frames and girth almost Falstaffian. They had all been raised in the open had lived to manhood outside of cities, most of them in the Central or Far North. They had grown on the limestone of the great plains that grow bone in horses and men; the free winds of wide, open spaces had expanded their lungs; the long days in the saddle provided the appetite, and three meat meals a day satisfied it.

There was Mailey, who at sixty looked forty, a big, boyish-mannered man, keen and thorough; Bowles, who had left the management of a million sheep to manage the industry of five thousand men; Templeton, who had surveyed great areas of the continent until a share in a world-beater mine had caused him to abandon chain and theodolite for ever; and Baxter, broad, big, blue-eyed, optimistic as spring, light-hearted as a boy despite difficulties that seemed endless— although nearly seventy, a white-bearded boy, who refused to grow up; also a man of swift understanding of character, swift sympathies and able to call the best out of others. Which is to say that he had imagination. The other director was McNair, also a man who did things. He had begun in a little Victorian town with a lathe and a horse-gear for power and had grown to great stature, with work as food and tonic, until his engineering works covered forty acres or so, and the single horse-gear had become thousands of horsepower and his one anvil the father of two hundred forges. They were all men whose small beginnings had made them masters of detail, as their growth had made them rulers of great affairs.

The Hematite Range Promised to be a worthy addition to their string. A great mineralised hill in slate carrying rich copper in bands in a channel two hundred feet across and a mile long, and between the bands ore, comparatively low grade, but yet payable. The freak of an iron range in a great plain of saltbush and salt lake and claypan; almost in Central Australia, with a railway still hundreds of miles away and crawling to it slowly, but quickly enough to meet the end of development, as yet scarcely begun.

"There's three or four years dead work in it," he said "And we've seen too many big shows handled in the little way that means waste. Hematite range is big enough to call for a big man at the beginning. This chap— what's his name?— Fawcett-Brown, is probably only good enough for a prospecting show. He doesn't look big enough to me. About eight stone six."

"He's little, but I think he's good," said Mailey. "I met him only once, and he didn't seem to have the conceit that most little men use to make up for size." Templeton and McNair didn't think that the little man was big enough for the job of general manager now that the mine was to be developed for big production, and they said so. Baxter said it all depended on whether Fawcett-Brown had imagination, or not; and the others, hearing the word imagination" for the thousandth time, smiled. At the last they decided to invite applications, which could include Fawcett-Brown if he desired, and before the applications were considered Baxter, as chairman of directors, should visit the distant mine— in itself a serious expedition— and on his return the question of management should be answered.

The meeting dispersed, and Baxter remained with the secretary to arrange details of the visit and wire to the railhead for transport into the wilderness. The secretary showed the last letter from the manager signed "J. H. J. Fawcett-Brown."

"He's got full weight in his name, anyhow," said Baxter, "even if he goes only eight stone six on the weighbridge. But a big mine wants a big man— although a big mine makes a big man, just as a good horse makes a good jockey."

BAXTER left the railhead in a solid-tired bug-mobile, a high-swung buggy with a good engine; around the sides and the back of it narrow tanks of new galvanised plain iron holding eighty gallons of water. At a distance this quaint vehicle seemed made of by the sunlight reflected from the new iron. With its high body the bug-mobile travelled safely over gutters and low scrub, and, as Baxter said, it was a great steeplechaser. So at sunset on the fourth day they approached the range that had been steel blue the forenoon, and then cobalt blue at noon, and purple at three o'clock and was now black and green with a thin feather of smoke rising from the hidden camp in the mulga at its foot

Baxter, with twenty years slipped from him in the divine air, asked him if that was Fawcett-Brown's camp, and the driver replied that it was the only possible camp for a hundred miles, Fawcett-Brown having thrown a rough dam across the lowest of a series of rock holes, impounding enough water to see him through to the next rain

the dark masses of the iron range rising four hundred feet above the plain were gloomy and forbidding in the growing dusk and the contrast of the smoke of the camp made a home in the wilderness. The quaint motor struck a dusty

cart track through the mulga, and the plain wind died as they entered the scrub. A dog barked as the bug-mobile turned the last bend in the track that curled to avoid tree roots as a creek twists to evade rocks, and there before the bough shed that served as a dining-room stood a lithe, wiry little man shaven as if he were in the city, his curly little moustaches trimmed to leave his mouth clear. J. H. Fawcett-Brown, M.I.M.M., M.I.M.E.

"Mr. Baxter?"

"Yes. And Mr. Fawcett-Brown? Glad to meet you and glad to be here. Had a fine trip, but four days but four days is just about enough. Solid tyres are all right, but we have no springs to brag about."

"You've been the shock absorber, Mr Baxter," said the engineer, laughing pleasantly.

Baxter laughed with him, warmed to him, knew even in that half light that he had a good eye.

A black boy lighted the hurricane lamps in the bough shed, and came forward with another; and Fawcett-Brown conducted the Chairman of directors to a roomy half-tent half-building with a boarded floor. And then he showed Baxter a bathroom with a shower home-made, of a perforated kerosene can and later fed him and smoked with him until Baxter dozed almost standing; so he withdrew early and was asleep as soon as his head found the pillow. Baxter's last thoughts that night were "Good chap, very pleasant. All right for a prospecting show, but not big enough for a great business. Eight Stone Six hasn't enough imagination."

The morning showed him that Eight Stone Six (as he mentally labelled the Engineer as being shorter than alphabetical Brown) had order. The camp below the dam, the tents of the men in almost street order, all the camp rubbish to the fire. After breakfast they scaled the short range, walked its length and saw the many pot-holes and costeens sunk by Eight Stone Six; three small prospecting shafts in course of sinking in the eastern slope of the hill; great precipices of low-grade ore and boulders of very rich copper.

"All of it can go to the smelters one of these days," said Fawcett-Brown. "Meantime I'm getting the lay of the rich runs— all on the eastern side they are. We'll go down the shafts to-morrow, and there's going to be a big body of rich stuff further north when we hit the great mass of the iron. At least I think so. This is the cave that really found the copper. It's iron oxide, and the niggers have come here for centuries and from hundreds of miles away to get pigments to paint themselves for war or tribal initiation, or merely for dances. They brought a bit of copper-glace back on one trip and the prospectors got on to it that way."

The three days of Baxter's stay made them very friendly, but Baxter had already made up his mind that Eight Stone Six was too light for an administrator.

He liked him, but Fawcett-Brown's future position seemed that of sub-manager. Baxter had been strengthened in that belief by the fact of Fawcett-Brown's opposition to Baxter's plan of development.,

"No," said the engineer, as if his opinion settled it. "No big shafts for production yet. I've taken up a double depth of block leases east and the working scheme is tunnels and open-cuts."

They were in the westerly crosscut from the bottom of the central shaft, which had cut at twenty feet a great body of glance that filled the shaft and extended into the crosscut. It was banded with graphite, which had made a negro of the dapper little engineer and blackened his grey moustache, and had dyed the white beard of Baxter and patched his face with black as if he were a chimney-sweep.

"Tunnels are too slow for the proofs we want."

"But why, Mr. Baxter? We've plenty of time before the railway gets here. What's the use of proving ore with an elaborate and costly series of shafts and crosscuts and winzes when we can put in adits and keep the little prospecting shafts cheap and efficient, moving down to the tunnel-levels for ventilation."

Baxter was too big for that. In his mind he saw the drives and crosscuts of a subterranean town in metal, and he said again of Eight Stone Six— "Little miner— no imagination."

So with all his liking for the little man he had definitely decided against him, when on the last night of his stay they sat smoking in that clearing which was a mere white pocket of air in the black and breathless mulga. Above them the marvellous Central Australian sky sown with stars as a fertile field grows wheat, and all that soaring light deepening the darkness of the violet sky about it with the rays of millionous stars falling to earth gently in a rain of illumination. Then Baxter suddenly discovered a fine thing in this little man— the clean hobby in the study of a miracle that lifted him.

Said the engineer suddenly: "D'ye know Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mr. Baxter— American poet, you know?"

"No, I can't say I do."

"I don't know much of him, but when I sit out here at night I can't forget four lines of his:

*Teach me your mood, ye patient stars,
That nightly climb the distant sky;
Leaving on Time's old face no scars,
No trace of age —no fear to die."*

"That's very good," said Baxter, rather lamely, he thought himself. "Read much poetry?"

"Not a great deal, but somehow all that is about the stars sticks to me. We came from them, I suppose. Our world is only compacted stardust and the residuals of gases now escaped, and some instinct tells us we belong. That's why men in all ages have dreamed of the stars, and tried to measure them, even to reach them; and when a real poet talks of the stars he gets a bit of their majesty. I remember a line or two— don't know whose: 'The god Thor sitting naked as a child, seven stars in his right hand and Charles's Wain.' That doesn't fit this hemisphere, of course— it's the northern; but a thing like that sticks."

"I never knew any stars but the Evening star when I was making camp late at night; and the Morning star when I was moving around among restless cattle, and the good old reliable Southern Cross."

"The Portuguese call it the Virgin's Brooch, saying that it fell from her cloak as she was ascending to Heaven; and after Vanderdecken it was called the Dutchman's Hope as a sign that the Flying Dutchman would find forgiveness one day. But legends about the stars are waste of time because the facts have more romance than the human mind can hold. See that big fellow? That's Sirius. His light takes twenty years and more to reach the earth. So if Sirius was suddenly extinguished twenty years ago we wouldn't know it for six months yet."

He stopped as if he felt he talked too much, and Baxter encouraged him to it again with, "The Milky Way must be longer than from here to the railhead; but I'll swear it's not as bumpy."

"It's length is into the hundreds of thousands of millions of miles. There's a tribe here in Central Australia that believe it's the mother of everything, and their belief is like the old Roman myth of it being milk that flowed from Juno when she thrust Hercules away from the breast. I talk a lot of this. The loneliness here makes a man think and study, and there's nothing more beautiful than the sky."

"Go on," said Baxter, and the engineer went on...

Baxter, silent in that little pocket of light in the darkness of the great continent that surrounded it, felt his insignificance the more in feeling the relation of that continent to the limitless space above and around, its serried ranks of light, its girdled constellations and its black gulfs. The moon rose above the mulga, a flattened orange of golden red, and they watched it lifting in the sky, changing shape and color as it soared above the heats and mists of earth. The engineer spoke again and said something that made Baxter gasp ; and then, as if he felt he had bored Baxter, he turned to commonplaces and went to bed early.

Baxter at parting next morning pressed the engineer to call on him whenever he found himself south, and they parted with great regard for each other.

"Good Eight Stone Six," said Baxter, looking back at Fawcett-Brown with something like affection. "Multum in Parvo's his new name."

"NEVER MIND the applications," said Baxter at the board meeting called the day after his return. "There's only one to be considered— Fawcett-Brown's the man."

"What you say goes," said Templeton.

"You've seen him and you've seen the show, and you know. But what makes you stand for him particularly "

"I found he had imagination."

They laughed and Bowles said: "We don't want him to write the prospectus."

"Prospectus be damned! He's got imagination. He can see the mine plan before there's a foot sunk. He's no little man. He's great on quantities. D'ye know what he said to me on the night before I left? We'd been talking about the stars— at least he had, and I'd been listening. Did you know the earth is a few times bigger than the moon? Well, so did I, in a general way; but not to know really. We were sitting out in that little pocket in the mulga scrub, and the moon rose. A big golden-red moon that seemed twice the size it looks down here in the south. I've only seen it bigger once and that was coming up to Manila, and it seemed to fill the sky. And what do you think that little Eight Stone Six said to me?"

"Well, what?"

"He said 'By God! Wouldn't it be fine to be on the moon and see the earth rise!' See the earth rise! That settled me. I said to myself: 'He's our man! A man who can measure the Milky Way on four sides and think of a moon as big as the earth is just the man we want for shifting two million yards of muck.'"

"What you say you say," said Bowles. "Minute the appointment of Eight Stone Six."

7: The Perfect Way

Achmed Abdullah

1881-1945

Telling Tales, Sep 1921.

The author's past is obscure, although he does seem to have been born in Yalta, on the south coast of Crimea. At various times he has given his actual name as Alexander Nickolayevich Romanoff or Achmed Abdullah Nadir Khan el-Durani el-Iddrissyeh. He arrived in the USA in 1915, already fluent in English. He wrote several stories set in Pell Street, the heart of New York's Chinatown.

HERE, WHERE PELL STREET jutted out from the Bowery, there was not even a trace of the patina of antiquity, that bitter and morose grace which clings about old houses like the ghosts of dead flowers. There was nothing here except the marks of the present— hard, gray, scabbed, already rotting before having lived overmuch.

The noises of the street seethed in frothy, brutal streaks: the snarling whine of Russian Jews bartering over infinitesimal values; the high, clipped tenor of metallic, Italian vernaculars; the gliding sing-song of Chinese coolies; and only occasionally an English word, sharp and lonely and nostalgic. There was the rumbling overtone of the Elevated around the corner on Chatham Square; the sardonic hooting of a four-ton motor dray; the ineffectual tinkle-tinkle of a peddler's bell. Rain came and joined in the symphony; spluttering in the leaky eaves-troughs, dripping through the huddled, greasy alleys, mumbling angrily in the brown, clogged gutters.

And Yu Ching sat there by the window and stared with cold, black eyes into the cold, wet evening, neither seeing nor hearing. Behind him shadows coiled, blotchy, inchoate, purplish-black, with just a fitful dancing of elfin high-lights on a teakwood screen, its tight, lemon silk embroidered with japonica, fluttering their silvered petals, and on a small crystal statue of Confucius that squatted amid the smoking incense sticks.

The corner lamp flared up, mean and yellow. The light stabbed in and mirrored on the fingernails of his pudgy right hand. The hand was very still. Still was the man's face— large, hairless, butter-colored.

The rain spluttered and stammered. The street cries belched defiantly. The peace in Yu Ching's heart was perfect, exquisite.

Momentarily, there came to him fleeting memories of the days when his own life, too, had been an integral and not unimportant part of that cosmic Pell Street energy, when he had been a shrewd and respected merchant, who had contributed his share of wisdom and gossip to the evening gatherings of his countrymen in the liquor store of the Chin Sor Company— the "Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment."

Came memories of his wife, Marie Na Liu, sweet with lissome, unformed sweetness of sixteen years, tiny and soft and high-breasted, with the golden hair of a Danish mother and the creamy, waxen skin, the sloe-black eyes of a Chinese father.

Across the poetry of her youth had lain the stony drag and smother, the subtle violence, the perfumed dirt of the bastard Pell Street world. She had been like a rainbow bubble floating on the stinking puddles of Chinatown vice. But he had loved her dearly. His love for her had burned away the caked, black cinders, the dross and the dirt.

HER LOVE for him—? There were classic, scholarly traditions in his clan; one of his ancestors had been a poet of no mean repute in the days of the Ta Tsing Kwoh, the "Great-Pure Kingdom"; and so Yu Ching had compared Marie Na Liu's love to a dewdrop on a willow spray, a flaunting of fairy pennons, and the sound of a silver bell in the green mists of twilight— smiling, with kindly intent, at the last simile; for he had been forty-seven years of age and she sixteen when he had married her, quite respectably, with a narrow gold ring, a bouquet of cabbagy, wired roses, a proper, monumental wedding cake, a slightly shocked Baptist clergyman mumbling the words of the blessed ritual, and at the organ a yellow, half-caste boy introducing wailing Cantonese dissonances into the "Voice that breathed o'er Eden."

Down at the "Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment," the comment had been brutally unflattering.

"You are old, and she is young!" had said Nag Hong Fah, the paunchy restaurant proprietor, fluttering his paper fan. "Hayah! On the egg combating with the stone, the yolk came out, O wise and older brother!"

"The ass went seeking for horns— and lost its ears!" Yung Lung, the wholesale grocer, had darkly suggested.

And Yu Chang, the priest of the joss temple, had added with pontifical unction:

"When I see the sun and the moon delivered up by the eclipse to the hands of the demons; when I perceive the bonds that fasten an elephant; and when I behold a wise man surrendering— ah— to the foolish abominations of the flesh, the thought forces itself upon me: How mighty is the power of evil!..."

Thus, at the time of their marriage, had run the gliding, malicious gossip of Chinatown. But when, quite casually, Yu Ching had repeated it to his wife, who was busying herself amongst the cook pots of their neat little Pell Street flat, she had given him a rapid kiss.

"You sh'd worry, yer fat old sweetness!" she had laughed. "Them Chinks is just plain jealous. You treat me on th' level— and I'll retain the compliment,

see? Besides, I'm stuck on yer snoozly old phiz! I ain't goin' t'waste no time huntin for thrills, as long as ye're true to me! I'm a good Christian— I am—"

"And I am a good Buddhist, Plum Blossom!"

"Hell's bells—wot's the difference, sweetness?"

THEY had been happy. And today he had forgotten her. He had completely forgotten her; and he knew— subconsciously, for he never reflected on the subject— that she had been faithful to him; that never, either by word or deed, had she caused him to lose faith; that she had lived up, straight and clean, to the words of the ritual: love, honor, obey.

He knew— subconsciously— that he had broken her heart when he walked out of her life, three years ago.

Very impersonally, he wondered what had become of her. Then he cut off the wondering thought. He smiled. He said to himself that she, too, had been an illusion, a mirroring of shadows in the dun dusk of his soul.

She did not matter.

Why— he put his fingers together, delicately, tip against tip— nothing mattered....

OUTSIDE, more lights sprang up against the violet of the sky, spotting the gloom. The noises grew as, with night, grew and heaved the dark-smoldering passions of the city. A pint pocket flask dropped, smashed against a stone. A foul curse was answered by throaty, malign laughter. Came the tail-end of a gutter song; a shouted, obscene joke, old already when the world was young; more curses and laughter; a sailor's sodden, maudlin mouthings; a woman's gurgling contralto:

"Aw— chase yerself! Wottya mean, yer big stiff?"

The drama of the city. The comedy. The vital, writhing entrails. Life, clouting, breathing, fighting eternally.

But Yu Ching did not see, nor hear. His heart was as pure as the laughter of little children, as pure as a gong of white jade. There was hardly a trace of the outer world, dimly, on the rim of his conscious ness.

His soul had reached the end of its pilgrimage. Calm, serene, passionless like the Buddha, it sat enthroned beyond the good and the evil.

"All forms are only temporary!"— there was the one great truth.

He smiled. Mechanically, his thin lips formed the words of the Buddha's Twenty-Third Admonition:

"Of all attachments unto objects of desire, the strongest is the attachment to form. He who cannot overcome this desire, for him to enter the Perfect Way of Salvation is impossible...."

The rain had ceased. A great slow wind walked braggingly through the skies. The Elevated, a block away, rushed like the surge of the sea. The Bowery leered up with a mawkish, tawdry face.

The noises of the street blended and clashed, blended and clashed. A thousand people came and went, people of all races, all faiths gulping down life in greedy mouthfuls.

And still the peace in Yu Ching's heart was perfect and exquisite. Still he smiled. Still, mechanically, his lips mumbled the words of the Buddha:

"By day shineth the sun. By night shineth the moon. Shineth also the warrior in harness of war. But the Buddha, at all times by day and by night, shineth ever the same, illuminating the world, calm, passionless, serene—"

The end of his soul's pilgrimage....

And presently today, tomorrow, next year, ten years from now his body would die, and his spirit would leap the dragon gate, would blend its secret essence with the eternal essence of the Buddha's soul.... And what else mattered?

He bent his head.

"Fire and night and day art Thou," he whispered, "and the fortnight of waxing moon— and the months of the sun's northern circuit—"

The end of his pilgrimage!

And the beginning had been hard. For he had loved Marie Na Liu. He had not wanted to harm her.

But the Voice had spoken to him in the night, asking him to arise and throw off the shackles of desire, the fetters of the flesh; to forget the illusions; telling him that, whatever meritorious results might be attained by prayers and sacrifices, by austerities and gifts, there was no sacrifice to be compared with that of a man's own heart. Such a sacrifice was the excellent sanctifier— exhaustless in result.

"Sure," had said Bill Devoy, a detective of Second Branch and detailed to the Pell Street beat of opium and sewer gas and yellow man and white; he had caught on to the gossip in the course of a murder investigation that had nothing whatsoever to do with the pilgrimage of Yu Ching's soul— "that Chink's got religion— wot he calls religion. I don't know if a yaller Billy Sunday's come down to Pell and Mott, but I do know as that there Yu Ching's hittin' the trail to salvation— as them Chinks hit it— sittin' all day like a bump on a log, just smilin', and never sayin' a damn word. Meditatin' they calls it. Gee! He gives me the creeps, he does—"

At first, Marie Na Liu had laughed.

"Say— wottya mean, sweetness?" she had asked. "Leave me? Goin' t'leave— me?" Then her voice had risen a hectic octave. "Is there another skoit? For if there is— say—"

"No, Plum Blossom. There is no other woman— never will be. Woman is an illusion—"

"Wottya handin' me?"

"The flesh is an illusion. There is just my soul— the Buddha has spoken to me in the night—"

"You've been eatin' Welsh rabbit again down to the Dutchman's! You know it never agrees with yer!"

"No, no!"

He had smiled, gently and patiently. Gently and patiently, he had tried to explain to her, had tried to make her understand.

"But— sweetness— listen' t'me! Yer can't leave me— oh, yer can't...."

She had argued, cajoled, threatened. But nothing she could say had made any impression on him. It had seemed to her, suddenly, as if she had never really known this man; this man with whom she had lived in the close physical and mental intimacy of married life in a little, box-like flat. She had felt— looking at him, serene, passionless, calm— as if an alien life, an alien existence, was enfolding him; enfolding him away from her, in an incomprehensible and inhuman quietude.

He had seemed to her far away— so far away— and her narrow, white hands had stretched out. helplessly, appealingly; had touched the crinkly, dark-blue silk of his blouse.

"Aw— come on, sweetness—"

Again he had tried to explain; and, finally, while she had not seen the tremendous and elemental force, ancient and racial, that was driving him on to his decision, she had understood the result.

He was going to leave her! Yu Ching, her man, was going to leave her!

"Aw— Gee!"

She had cursed. Then her gutter flow of words had floundered in the eddy of her hurt love and pride and vanity, her sheer amazement.

"Ye're goin' to—? Ye're really, really goin' to—?"

"I must. The Buddha has spoken to me. I must break the shackles of the flesh, the ropes of illusion—ahee!—the ropes of sand! It is a most meritorious act."

"Meritorious, is it?" Swiftly her passion had turned into an icy sneer.

"Meritorious, is it— to break a goil's heart? To trample on her— and spit on her— to—?"

He had sighed, a little wearily.

"I shall leave you suitably provided for. I shall only take along a couple of thousand dollars. All the rest is yours— the money— the business— everything."

"Money? Business? Who cares?" She had come close to him, smiling up at him, piteously, with her broad, crimson, generous mouth, the black, somber orbit of her eyes dimmed with tears. "I don't want money! I want you, sweetness! You, you, you! Aw— Gee— don't yer see?"

But he had not moved; had patiently continued smiling. And then she had understood that she might as well plead with some immense and stony sending of fate, and her passion had leaped out in a splattering stream of abuse:

"Yer damned Chink! Ye'll pay fer this— say— ye'll pay fer this someday! Aw— yer damned, yaller hop-head of a Chink!"

She had laughed hysterically, her soft little oval of a face twisted into a terrible grimace.

"I hate yer! I despise yer! Clear outa here! I don't wanta ever see yer ugly mug again! Clear out! I hate yer— yer damned, fat Chink!"

And so he had left her.

So he had left Pell Street, its warm, tame conveniences, its pleasant, snug reek, its zest and tang of shrewd barter and shrewd gossip, his friends, his Tong, his life as he had known it and savored it these many years.

So he had gone on pilgrimage, seeking for release from illusion, from attachment to objects of desire, seeking the Buddha's Perfect Way, wandering here and there, even returning to China where he made the sengaji circuit of the thousand and three blessed shrines.

In lonely wayside temples he had sat, talking to gentle priests about the faith and the hope that were his, thinking ever of release from fleshly bondage, turning his eyes toward the mazed depths of his soul, and meditating on the mysterious way which is Life. And when at times the air had been heavy with the musk of remembrance and regret, of passion and longing, when his subconscious fancy had peopled his brain cells with pictures of his former existence— Pell Street, his friends sipping their tea and smoking their crimson-tasseled pipes in the "Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment," Marie Na Liu, her white smile flashing through the purple night— he had done penance, submitting to the supreme physical ordeals, gradually subduing his body and his mind.

Thus, finally, he had found peace, perfect, exquisite; and then somehow, he never knew why or how— "that, too, was Fate," he used to say afterwards, "I but followed the way of my Fate. Who can avoid what is written on the forehead in the hour of birth?"— he had returned to New York, and so he sat there by the window and looked out upon the shrill Babel of the Pell Street night— calm, serene, passionless.

Just below the window, an elderly Chinese was arguing with a countryman, quoting the polished and curiously insincere phrases of Mandarin sages, in a stammering falsetto:

"Pa nien jou chi i tien jou ki—"

A policeman whistled shrilly. A barrel-organ creaked a nostalgic, Sicilian melody....

Yu Ching neither saw nor heard.

These people— what did they matter? They were only cosmic atoms whirling aimlessly in the wind of desire, like formless swarming snatches of dreams. No! Nothing mattered, nothing was real, except the soul.

He smiled, and whispered praises to the Buddha, and then, suddenly, yet imperceptibly, like the shadow of a leaf through summer dusk, he felt that he was not alone in the room, that eyes were staring at him.

He turned, just a little startled.

The door was open.

From the fluttering gas jet in the outer hall, a wedge of light streamed in. Sharply outlined in its bluish-green rays, Marie Na Liu stood there, her face pale and drawn. She stood silent and motionless, but as though charged with some kind of elemental force that was inexhaustible.

Yu Ching twisted in his chair. For a moment, something reached out and touched his soul, leaving the chill of an indescribable uneasiness. For a moment, he thought of his former life; thought of it in terms of a new life, a future life; it opened before him, holding immense and measureless perspectives.

Then, with slow deliberation, he turned his back upon his wife.

"O Buddha!" he mumbled. "All forms are only temporary— illusions of the flesh! Thou knowest! I know!"

Outside, the wind shrieked. The Elevated cars blundered along their steely spider's web, like weary creatures seeking shelter.

"Say! Yu Ching! Listen t'me!"

He did not turn.

"Buddha!" he prayed. "Permit me to withdraw my senses wholly into meditation!"

"Looka here!" came Marie Na Liu's voice, strident and challenging.

She closed the door and stepped into the room. He could hear the rustle of her garments, could smell a faint perfume.

He bent his head on his chest; tried to conquer his senses.

"I wanta talk t'yer!"

He did not move; did not speak.

Peace, perfect, exquisite— there was the secret of life, the way of salvation. He had reached it once, had felt it once; like the stillness of dawn in a lonely place, like the quiet hush of unseen stars. He had reached it and felt it. He did not want to lose it again. The pilgrimage had been hard, hard.

Deliberately, he gathered his soul into an inner fold of his consciousness.

And then, as from very far off, across illimitable distances, he heard again his wife's voice low, appealing; presently leaping out extraordinarily strong, with a sweep of utter abandon.

"Bill Devoy— 'member the plain-clothes cop?— slips me woid that ye've retained. And well....

"Say! When y' left me, three years ago, I sed to myself I'd never forgive yer— never wanted t'see yer mug again. Told yer I hated yer, didn't I? Gee— I was sure some sore! But," she gave a little throaty, embarrassed laugh, "well— here I am— see?"

Silence. He could hear her breath coming in sibilant, staccato sobs. Again her voice:

"Y make it hard fer a feller, don't yer? Say! Sweetness! I got my pride— I'm a woman, ain't I?"

Her voice broke a little.

"Sweetness! Aw— Gawd! Why don't yer speak t'me?"

The words wavered, sank, rose again.

"Why don't yer say somethin? Anything oh anything! Just toin and look at me, won't ye? Coise me! Swear at me! Tell me to clear outa here! But—please— speak! Aw— sweetness— won't yer talk t'me— please?"

Yu Ching felt words rising in his throat. He choked them back. All this— Pell Street, the noises of the night, his wife— was an illusion in a sea of illusions. It was not real. It was taking place in an alien world of dreams. There was only his own soul, safe in some inner and secret sanctuary of eternity, where the riot and tumult of external life dared not intrude.

He smiled, very gently.

Somewhere, quite close to him, there was the sweet passion and pain of long, exquisite suffering, some in tense yearning. But, surely, it was not in his own body, his own heart. It was just the remote experience of a life which he had once known which he would never know again.

"All forms are only temporary— only temporary—" he mumbled.

"So yer won't talk t'me— eh?"

The question came with a harsh, vindictive grating, and something beyond fear stole with a freezing touch upon Yu Ching's placid soul. He conquered the feeling, sent it reeling back to the undergrowth of his stilled, half-remembering consciousness.

Came silence.

It seemed eternities until once more Marie Na Liu's harsh words dropped into the great, open void.

"Well— don't talk, if yer don't feel like it! But— ye'll listen't me, awright, awright, yer damned Chink! Sure Mike! Ye'll listen—"

The voice plunged on, piercing, high-pitched.

" 'Member young Nag Gin Lee? Ol' Nag Hong Fah's nephew from Frisco, who came here t' learn the business? Young feller— 'member?— more my own age. Swell lookin' guy, and some classy dresser, 'member him? Say, yer damned fat old Chink! D'yer remember him? Yer don't? Well—I do! Yes, sir, I do! And d'yer know why? D'yer wanta know?"

She spoke through her teeth. Her words clicked and broke like dropping icicles.

She rushed up to her husband. She gripped his shoulders with frantic hands. She forced him to turn and look up until she could stare straight into his black, oblique eyes, her own eyes blazing fire and hate.

"Not that ye'll care! Not that ye'll give a damn! But— yer might as well know. Me and young Nag— me and him—"

She burst into gurgling, hysterical laughter that shook her whole body.

"Me and him— me and him—"

He rose; trembled.

Marie Na Liu's last words had staggered him like a blow between the eyes.

He tried to control himself.

Peace, perfect, exquisite! The peace of the soul, calm, passionless, serene, in a world of illusions— ropes of illusions— ropes of sand....

His thoughts groped, slipped.

Peace— the Buddha's peace— the end of his soul's pilgrimage. But— and an extraordinary revulsion caught him, flashed upon him like a sheet of black fire— what did it matter his soul's pilgrimage? What did anything matter, except—

Marie Na Liu!

Golden-haired— sloe-eyed.... Her little feet had crushed his heart....

He felt a terrible weakness in his knees, and a catch in his throat. For a tenth part of a second his memory turned back. He thought of a day, a spring day. He had come home rather earlier than usual, had found young Nag sitting across from his wife, close to her. He had heard them laugh as he came up the stairs— had heard mumbled words.

He stood there, a deep sob shaking his massive frame, and Marie Na Liu was still laughing, loudly, hysterically.

"Sure! Me and him— me and him—"

She rushed to the door, opened it, stood on the threshold.

"Me and him— yer poor fish! And yer never knew— yer never guessed!"

Her words came like the lash of a whip. Yu Ching sank back in his chair. He heard the door close.

His wife— and young Nag! His wife— and young Nag!

The words repeated themselves in his thoughts. They expanded and multiplied. They were in his veins, in his bones, in the roots of his hair. They seemed to fill every nook and cranny of his brain.

He looked out of the window. The night had thickened. Mist wreaths pointed with long, bloodless fingers. Above them a heavy cloud-bank lumbered clumsily in, the lilt of the wind.

Somebody laughed below the window. Somebody cursed.

Life was down there; passion and desire, love and hate and ambition life, real life. His own soul, he thought, had dared sublime achievement; it had failed, had plunged him into an abyss.

He slumped in his chair; he cried, with cracked, high-pitched sobs, as strong men cry.

He did not hear the rattling of the door knob. He did not see the melting and dimming of the bluish-green gas jet in the outer hall, as the door opened and closed again.

But, suddenly, a faint scent of flowers was in his nostrils. Suddenly he felt, close to him, at his knees, a yielding form; heard soft, broken words:

"Aw— sweetness! Don't yer believe wot I sed! I lied! Honest t'Gawd, I lied! Yer know I lied— don't yer— don't yer, sweetness?"

And his arms folded about her, and she nestled like a tired bird.

Then he smiled, very gently, very patiently.

"Peace," he whispered. "Ah peace— perfect, exquisite...."

8: The Affair of Mrs. Lotus Leaf

Peter Cheyney

Reginald Evelyn Peter Southouse Cheyney, 1896-1951

Age, Melbourne, 14 April 1928

Before he achieved success in the late 30s with hard-boiled crime novels featuring Slim Callaghan and Lemmy Caution, and his wartime secret service series of "Dark" novels (Dark Wanton, Dark Interlude, The Stars are Dark, etc) Cheyney wrote many short stories, often featuring protagonists with mix-and-match names like Etienne MacGregor and Alonzo MacTavish. This is the first Etienne MacGregor story.

IN SPITE of the mist, which, approaching from the direction of the palace, was slowly enveloping the Green Park in a greeny-grey cloud, and in spite of the drizzling rain, the face of the Mr. Etienne MacGregor bore that cherubic and philosophic expression which had so often impressed people with the mistaken idea that he had nothing to worry about. He sat on a seat immediately facing the band stand. The park was deserted, except for one or two pedestrians, who, under the shelter of umbrellas and rain coats, hurried to catch their last trains. The fact that the seat was rapidly assuming an uncomfortable dampness was increasingly borne upon Mr. MacGregor as each minute passed. But he sat there with a faint smile upon his round countenance, looking at the band stand as if concentration upon that structure would in some mysterious manner solve his difficulty.

Things were not well with Mr. MacGregor. There was not the slightest doubt about that. If one had been able to see beneath his tightly-buttoned rain coat one would have been aware of the fact that his clothes were well cut and well kept, but an investigation of his well-polished shoes would have informed the close observer that the sole of the right shoe was becoming less on speaking terms with the upper at every moment.

Not that he minded being hard up. He had been hard up for most of his 28 years, but there had always been methods of procuring money at difficult moments. At least there had been one method— his uncle. But the letter which reposed in his breast pocket had even nullified that source of income.

He drew it out from his pocket and read it for the tenth time, as if one more perusal might help in the solution of the difficulty. The letter read: —

142 Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.

Dear Mr. MacGregor, —

With reference to your application for a further loan from your uncle, we regret to inform you that this is impossible, owing to the regrettable fact that he died last Tuesday.

We have pleasure in informing you that you are his sole heir, and under his will you inherit his fortune of about £25,000, but under certain conditions. These conditions are that you supply us with the answers to thirteen questions.

Those questions will be given to you singly, and the answer must be brought by you to this office within one week from the time you receive the question.

In the event of your not answering a question within the time stated, the whole of your inheritance passes to the son of your uncle's partner — Mr. Suan Chi Leaf.

In the meantime, our instructions are to render you no financial assistance whatsoever, as your uncle was of opinion that this method of leaving you his money would give you some chance of satisfying what he describes as your "insatiable curiosity," and that if you succeed in answering the thirteen questions and remain alive he thought that you would have more than earned the money.

The first question to which we must request your answer within seven days is:— Who is Mrs. Lotus Leaf?

*We are, dear sir,
your obedient servants,
RUDDER, FOAL and RUDDER, Solicitors.*

MacGregor replaced the letter in his pocket and ruminated upon the hardness of the world, and more especially upon his old curmudgeon of an uncle. How could he answer questions of this description? The bit at the end, too, about remaining alive did not sound too hopeful. He realised that there had been but little love lost between himself and his uncle, and probably the old boy had taken more than usual care to ensure that the questions should be practically unanswerable. MacGregor was so engrossed with the proposition that he failed to observe the odd-looking individual who had seated himself upon the end of the seat, and who was regarding MacGregor with more than usual interest.

Etienne got up from the damp seat and commenced to walk in the direction of Piccadilly. So did the odd-looking stranger. As they approached the park gates the seedy individual came close to MacGregor and touched his arm.

"Excuse me, sir," he said in a wheezy voice, "but I think that you are in a little difficulty— a difficulty in which my assistance might be useful. My name is Gubbs."

Etienne regarded the stranger for a moment, reflecting that his appearance certainly was not prepossessing.

"Well, Mr. Gubbs," he said, after the scrutiny, "and may I ask how you intend to help me?"

"Well, Mr. MacGregor," said the man, wheezing more than ever. "You want to find Mrs. Lotus Leaf, don't you? And I can tell you just where you will find her."

"Now, look here," said MacGregor, stopping suddenly; "look here, friend Gubbs. How do you know that I want to find Mrs. Lotus Leaf?"

The man smiled rather sadly. "It's my business— knowing things, sir," he said. "You see I used to be one of your uncle's head clerks in China, until I was

dismissed. I know the conditions under which you will, or will not, inherit the money."

MacGregor thought hard for a moment. When he looked up his smile was more cherubic than ever.

"What do you expect to get out of this, Mr. Gubbs," he asked.

Gubbs looked pained. "I don't want anything, sir," he said, "nothing at all. I thought I'd like to do something for my old master's heir, that's all."

"I see," said MacGregor, quietly. "Just doing it out of kindness, er, friend Gubbs? Well, that being so, just where is Mrs. Lotus Loaf?"

Gubbs smiled. "You'll find her at the Three Leaves Club; in Slater-street, Limehouse, Mr. MacGregor. But if you want to see her you'd better go down right away. She's leaving for Paris tomorrow, but if you go down there at once you'll find her all right. I'll put you on the right bus. I'm walking down Piccadilly myself."

In vain did Mr. MacGregor point out to the persistent Gubbs that he knew the Limehouse bus routes quite well, for that worthy insisted on accompanying the curious Etienne, and it was only when he was safely ensconced on the front seat of a Limehouse bus that Mr. Gubbs, with a flourish of his dilapidated hat, faded away.

It was characteristic of MacGregor that immediately Mr. Gubbs disappeared he got off the bus with alacrity, and walked quickly to his rooms in Mortimer-street.

Mrs. Hands, the housekeeper, who opened the door, gazed at him in astonishment.

"I never expected to see you, Mr. MacGregor," she said. "At least, not so soon after getting your note!"

MacGregor smiled. "So you got a note from me, did you, Mrs. Hands?" he said. "Brought, I suppose, about ten minutes ago by a seedy-looking gentleman by the name of Gubbs. Can I see it?"

Mrs. Hands produced the note and handed it to MacGregor. It was signed with a very fair imitation of his own signature, and stated that he had been forced to leave suddenly for Paris; that he might not be back for some time, and requesting Mrs. Hands to forward his clothes to the cloak room at the Gare St. Lazare, Paris. MacGregor folded the note and placed it in his pocket.

For some moments after Mrs. Hands returned to her domain in the basement he stood motionless in the hall, immersed in thought. It was only when the housekeeper's fourteen-year-old son, Tommy, ascending the basement stairs, sneezed violently that MacGregor came out of his reverie.

"Hallo, Tommy!" said MacGregor. "Your cold doesn't seem to have improved."

"It ain't the cold I mind, Mr. MacGregor," said Tommy. "It's the stuff she gives me for it. It's awful."

His face registered disgust.

MacGregor looked at the boy for a moment. Then his face broke into an amused grin. "Listen, Tommy, my lad," said he. "I rather think that we are going to have an adventure together. Incidentally, we are going to make use of that cold of yours. In some ways I think it constitutes an extraordinary improvement on your speaking voice. We will repair to the nearest teashop, and over a dish of cream buns discuss a blood-curdling plot. Are you game?"

"I'm game," said Tommy darkly. "There ain't been any excitement round here since the boy next door got run over last June."

It was quite dark when the pair sallied out and made for the nearest Lyons. Here, over a huge dish of cream cakes which brought joy to the heart of Tommy Hands, MacGregor unfolded his plot, and fifteen minutes later he hurried off to catch the Limehouse bus, leaving his accomplice to finish the cream buns and to reflect on the wonderful adventure which had come his way at last.

IT WAS half-past ten when Etienne found himself in Slater-street, Limehouse, looking left and right for the entrance to the Three Leaves Club. He found it eventually, situated in a dirty alley which led off the main street. The place seemed deserted and dismal, and it was only when he had pushed open the battered door and descended a flight of stone steps that he was able to hear the strains of the indifferent jazz band which was one of the "features" of The Three Leaves Club.

At the bottom of the stairs was a dingy office, and as he approached a bullet head protruded and asked him his business.

"My name is MacGregor," said Etienne amicably, "and I wish to see Mrs. Lotus Leaf."

"You just wait a minute," replied the villainous-looking doorkeeper, "an' I'll see if she's in."

Mrs. Lotus Leaf was in, and two minutes afterwards Etienne found himself following the doorman along a stone passage which ran alongside the dance hall. A glance into the main club room assured Etienne that the Three Leaves Club was no ordinary health resort. Full-blooded "blue" niggers, rubbed shoulders with Lascars and Chinamen, and exchanged greetings with the white scum of Limehouse.

At the end of the passage was a door, and after knocking upon this Etienne's guide indicated that he might enter. MacGregor pushed open the door, stepped inside, and stood transfixed.

The room was in absolute contradiction to the rest of the place. The furniture was antique and valuable, and the carpet on which he stood was of the

finest quality, but it was the woman who sat at the desk facing the door, and who rose as he entered, who was responsible for Etienne's lack of breath.

She was Chinese— and beautiful. Her skin, unlike the usual Asiatic complexion, was pale, and her hair, dressed in European fashion, and piled high on her head, gave her added height. She bowed to Etienne and indicated a vacant chair which faced the desk. A young man, also Chinese, and dressed, in the height of fashion, appeared from the end of the room and stood by her side.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. MacGregor," she said softly. "May I present my son, Mr. Suan Chi Leaf."

Mr. Suan Chi Leaf bowed. Round the corners of his mouth appeared the ghost of a cynical smile. MacGregor noticed it, and his own smile became more cherubic. "I am honored to meet you and your son, Mrs. Lotus Leaf — by the way, isn't that a pretty name—" said MacGregor. Incidentally, I ought to explain to you that my uncle having died and left me his money, providing that I can answer certain questions, I am compelled to seek your assistance, the first question being, 'Who is Mrs. Lotus Leaf?' I shouldn't have known where to start except for the kindness of a certain Mr. Gubbs."

"Exactly," murmured the woman. "I arranged that 'kindness' on Mr. Gubbs's part. Your uncle had a peculiar sense of humor, Mr. MacGregor, which both my son and myself appreciate. As you are aware, in the event of your not answering the questions within the time stated, the money goes to my son, and I think your uncle's rather cynical sense of humor was responsible for setting you to match your wits against us. Unfortunate— for you— that sense of humor, I am afraid."

"Really," murmured Etienne. "May I ask why?"

She smiled. "Certainly," she said. "Because, Mr. Mr. MacGregor in an hour's time you will be dead! You must realise that from our point of view you are better out of the way. You will not leave this place alive! A note from you has already been delivered to your housekeeper, who thinks that you have left for Paris. You will leave for Paris. For my son will take your body across tonight in our motor launch. Possibly in two or three weeks' time the body of Mr. Etienne MacGregor will be found floating somewhere on the Seine, and there will be nothing in the way of my son's inheritance."

She looked at him with a cool smile.

MacGregor yawned— politely— behind his hand.

"You are very beautiful, Mrs. Lotus Leaf, he said; "but, really, I don't think you are nice to know. Or your jolly old son either! But I'm afraid that this awfully clever idea of yours isn't coming off. You see, I'm very curious, and I wanted to why dear old Gubbs was so awfully keen on actually seeing me on to that Limehouse bus. That's why I got off and went home! I thought that as he knew so much about me he'd probably know my address, too. I read the note he left,

and then I thought of a bright idea. I thought that you might like to write a note for me to take to my uncle's lawyers telling them that I know all about Mrs. Lotus Leaf, and before I came down here I arranged with K Division police station to ring up here at ten past eleven and ask for me, and unless I'm back at the police station by eleven-thirty I'm afraid they might come along and kick up a fuss. So perhaps you'll write that letter. Incidentally, if you've got a few ten pound notes about the place they'd be awfully useful at the moment!"

The eyes of Mrs. Lotus Leaf narrowed. She was about to speak when the telephone beside her rang. She answered the call, and handed the instrument to Etienne without a word.

"Hallo, inspector," he said. "Thanks for phoning. I'll be with you in twenty minutes. I'm just staying on for a bit to collect a letter and some cash from my dear old friend Mrs. Lotus Leaf— such a sweet woman! I hope your cold is better, inspector— you sound quite hoarse! One day when you've time you must let me introduce you to Mrs. Lotus Leaf and her son. He's a great fellow— a motor launch enthusiast, I believe. Yes, I very nearly went across to France with him tonight, but I thought it was a bit too cold! Goodbye, inspector; goodbye!"

ONE HOUR LATER Mr. Etienne MacGregor expounded the ethics of arithmetic to Tommy Hands.

"Tommy," said he, "your voice as the inspector was excellent, thanks to that cold of yours. It sounded most manful. All of which goes to prove that my curiosity plus your cold and some brains equals one question answered and fifty pounds for me and unlimited cream buns for a month for you!"

9: The House by the River

Capel Boake

Doris Boake Kerr, 1889-1944
Weekly Times (Vic.), 22 April 1922

THERE WERE only three hills on the wide plains stretching from Wahroonga to the sea and the old homestead of Wahroonga stood on one of them. At its foot flowed the river. David Blair looked up at it with frowning eyes. He could see the grey stone house with its square cobbled courtyard and green shutters drawn against the afternoon sun. There was the long avenue of pines which his father had planted; the terraced garden, the quince trees along the river's bank— he remembered them well— and beyond that the miles of grassy plain where MacKenzie's sheep grazed.

Wahroonga homestead! The name was as familiar to him as his own. He had been born in that old grey house by the river, and now it belonged to Mackenzie. What was it the man at the hotel had said? That Wahroonga was the show place of the district and Tom Mackenzie a good boss and a white man. A white man! Blair smiled bitterly. It seemed that people had short memories for some things. Well, perhaps he could find a way of reminding them.

The pad of horse's hoofs along the soft red road aroused him. He moved aside, then snatched off his hat as the rider drew rein and looked down at him with puzzled eyes in which the light of recognition was dawning. She was a fair, pretty girl and sat her horse with an alert, boyish air which her khaki riding suit and trim little cap accentuated.

"I think we've met before, haven't we?" she asked. "Just a moment, and I'll tell you your name." She hesitated, then smiled. "I know. It's Blair— David Blair. Aren't I right?"

"Yes."

Frantically Blair searched his memory. What was her name? Or had he ever heard it? Now he came to think of it, the introduction had been hastily made, and he hadn't caught it. But he remembered the girl distinctly and the impression she had made on him. He had determined that somehow he would see her again, but business had taken him to Sydney, and when he returned it had been too late.

"I do believe you've forgotten me, but you're too polite to admit it."

Though she smiled, there was a note of disappointment in her voice, and Blair hastened to reassure her.

"My memory is quite as good as yours," he retorted. "It was at a theatre party, and I had been asked at the last moment to fill a vacant seat. I remember I was bored at the thought of it, and then— I sat next to you. I don't know what the play was, but in the intervals we talked about trees and horses, and the

country, and pleasant things like that. Then the curtain went down for the last time, and we all left the theatre, and— I never saw you again, though I wanted to very much."

Something in his voice and the expression of his dark eyes brought the color to the girl's cheek. She leant hastily forward and stroked the shining neck of her horse.

"I remember our conversation very well," she said softly, "and I often wondered if we should meet again. I never thought it would be here, though," she went on. "What's brought you to the Western district? You're a lawyer, aren't you, so you haven't come to buy sheep?"

At her careless words a shadow crossed Blair's face. He looked past her to the old grey house by the river.

"I'm here on a holiday," he returned evasively.

"A holiday!" The girl's eyes widened a little. "People never come here for a holiday. Unless you ride there's not much to do, is there. Of course, I like it, but then I was born here. Strangers hate it. There's nothing but plains and sheep, and then enore plains and sheep."

"I like it, too." Blair's expression changed. His keen, dark face lost its sombre look, and became boyish again. He gazed across the wide plains stretching out to meet the far horizon. "There was some chap— who was it?— who wrote something about 'the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended.' I feel like that about them. There's a beauty in their bareness and a fascina tion in their vastness. They teach you the world's a very big place, and man only a tiny speck." He broke off with a nervous little laugh. "You'll think an awful fool talking like this."

"No, I don't." The girl held out her hand frankly. "We both love the plains, so let's be friends. That's a bond between us."

"Thanks." He held her hand tightly for a moment, then let it drop with a sudden, cold feeling at his heart. He remembered he did not know her name. a ridiculous position and what a fool she would" think him if be ad-ivuttet it. But he would not do that, somehow he would discover it without letting her know what he was after.

"Mr Blair!" There was rather a quizzical note in the girl's voice, and David looked, at her quickly. For a moment he got the impression that she ttas aware of his dilemma, and that it amused her. Then he decided he was mistaken, her expression was so demure. "Where are you staying."

"At the hotel."

"At the hotel!" There was real consternation in her voice. "But that's a terrible place. I thought, of course, you were staying at one of the stations. Old Lang's quite a dear when he's sober, but then he never ls. You won't get any meals there, unless you cook them yourself."

"That sounds rather alarming," laughed Blair. "But I daresay I can pull through."

"You're not going to get the chance, wow that we've sworn eternal friendship you have to do everything I tell you! Go back to the hotel, get your bag, and then come over to us. Dad will love to have you, and you'll love him too. He's such a dear. There's only the two of us now that mother is dead, and we're great pals."

"Oh, I say, that's awfully good of you." Blair flushed with pleasure. "But I can't thrust myself on you like that"

The girl held up an admonitory finger. "In the sacred name of our friendship!" she laughed. "You can't refuse the first thing I've asked you."

She gathered the reins tighter in her gloved hand.

"We'll expect you then any time before dinner."

"But—" Blair hesitated. He had not had time to exercise his diplomacy and was reduced to a straight question. "Er— where is your place?"

"Don't you know?" She turned in her saddle and pointed with her whip. "Why, Wahroonga, of course."

"Wahroonga!" Blair started as though he had been struck.

"Why, yes," the girl went on, "I'm Molly MacKenzie of Wahroonga. Confess, now. You didn't remember my name."

"I don't think I ever heard it," Blair said mechanically.

"I suspected as much. Well, you hide it very cleverly." She pulled her horse's head and wheeled him around.

"Good-bye for the present," she called gaily.

Blair watched her out of sight, then slowly returned to the hotel.

He had wanted a pretext for entering Wahroonga. and now the way was clear. His mouth set in a line of bitter disgust at the thought of the trick that fate had played him. He could not enter the house under the guise of friendship and stab the father through the girl. The only decent thing to do was to return to Melbourne.

Then the turn of the road brought Wahroonga into view, and his anger surged in him again. He would stay and see it through, and play his hand as it suited him. MacKenzie had had no mercy on his people and he would have none in his turn.

This black mood still held Blair when he reached Wahroonga homestead late that afternoon. The place looked charming in the mellow light, and his bitterness increased. His father had planted out these gardens, and here his mother had walked. That room with its wide windows overlooking the river had been hers. As a child he had known every nook and cranny of the old house, and now it was given over to strangers, for in his bitterness even Molly seemed a stranger.

She joined him on the lawn, and with an effort he threw off his moodiness. But some thing had gone out of their intercourse. Blair was painfully aware of it, but he knew that he would not be at ease until he had met MacKenzie.

It was just before dinner that Blair saw for the first time the man who had wronged his father. As they shook hands, it seemed to Blair that MacKenzie flinched a little. Did he perhaps trace some likeness?

Molly hung on to her father's arm and looked at Blair with something like appeal in her eyes. Her instinct had sensed a constraint between the two men. The cold reserve on Blair's part lasted through dinner, though MacKenzie did his best to draw him out. He had a keen intellect and a witty manner, and Blair grudgingly admitted the man's charm. If he had not been MacKenzie he would have liked him, and as it was he had to keep reminding himself of the fact. MacKenzie must have married late in life, for Blair guessed that he was well over sixty while Molly was barely twenty.

After dinner MacKenzie took his guest out to the verandah, where they settled themselves in two deck chairs.

"Sing something, Molly," he said.

"Very well, Daddy. What would you like?"

"Oh, anything. Her voice soothes me," he added, turning to David, "and we can talk and listen at the same time. Have a cigar?"

"No thanks." David felt for his cigarette case. "I've got my own smoke here."

"Well, please yourself. Personally, I prefer a pipe." He took it out of his pocket and filled it. "You interest me, Mr Blair."

"Really?" David struck a match and lit his cigarette.

"Yes." The elder man sat upright with a jerk. "May I ask how old you are?"

David slowly expelled a mouthful of smoke. "Thirty-two."

"I see." There was a short pause, and David smiled. Evidently the other's mind was a little uneasy.

"Have you ever been in this district before?" MacKenzie went on.

"Yes, years ago when I was a boy I lived here." MacKenzie's pipe fell with a clatter to the floor. David picked it up and returned it to him with a bow. "But I fancy that was before your time, Mr MacKenzie," he said softly.

"Very probably." With an effort MacKenzie recovered himself. His face had paled, but though his hand shook a little his voice was quite steady.

"You, too, interest me," David went on in a quiet, level voice.

"Indeed!" MacKenzie drawled.

"Yes. They tell me in the village that you have the show place of the district."

MacKenzie yawned behind his hand. "I believe I have that reputation." "You also have the reputation of being a white man— or so one of your enthusiastic admirers told me."

"Really?" MacKenzie raised his eye brows. "How very interesting!"

"Very." The red tip of David's cigarette glowed suddenly in the half darkness. "A reputation is a hard thing to build up, but it is easy enough to destroy."

MacKenzie leant forward and knocked out his pipe against the heel of his boot. His voice was quite nonchalant.

"May I ask exactly what you mean by that remark, Mr Blair?"

"Nothing," returned David carelessly, "absolutely nothing at all. It was merely casual conversation." He rose easily to his feet. "Excuse me, won't you? I'll join Miss MacKenzie at the piano."

"He's afraid," David thought exultantly. "He's in my hands now. He's afraid of what I might say to Molly."

For the next few days the two men watched each other covertly, while MacKenzie grew visibly paler and more fragile looking. His age began to show and he lost the air of robust health that had distinguished him. David was quite content to wait; he knew his time would come. He laughed and talked with Molly, but for the time being she had ceased to exist except as the instrument of his revenge. His whole mind was fixed on her father. He had seen enough of the love between them to be aware that the bitterest blow he could give MacKenzie was to destroy Molly's faith and trust in him.

It was Molly herself who made the opportunity. The maid had brought the afternoon tea on to the lawn and they were having it beneath the trees. Molly sat between the two men and her mouth looked a little wistful. She could not understand the change that had come over David and it was making her unhappy. His visit had not been a success and she had hoped such great things from it. She could hardly believe he was the same man who had shaken hands with her that day they had promised to be friends! Then he had been interested in her; now she was aware that he was barely conscious of her existence. She looked at him. He was sitting up, with his hands clasped across his knees, and there was a hard brightness in his eyes.

"What are you thinking of, Mr. Blair?" she asked rather timidly. She was always nervous now when she addressed him; her old confidence had gone. He looked at her quickly, then smiled a little— a cruel smile she thought it was.

"I was thinking how these old places change hands," he said slowly. "I happened to come across a curious story some time ago. Would you care to hear it?"

"Of course we should."

"What about you, Mr MacKenzie?" David turned to the other man. "It won't bore you, I hope?"

"Certainly not." MacKenzie's mouth twitched, and he moved his chair so that his face was hidden from David.

"Well—" David rolled over on his elbow and lay facing the father and daughter. "It's a very common story of treachery and broken friendship— no

doubt you have often come across a similar case in your experience, Mr MacKenzie?"

He paused, but MacKenzie did not reply, only he lifted his hand to shade his eyes. David waited a moment, then went on.

"There was a homestead, something like this," he waved his hand, "with trees and a river and the wide plains. There was a small boy who was born in that place and loved it. Then the droughts came and bush fires swept the plains and the sheep died in hundreds. His father raised mortgage after mortgage, for it was a valuable property, and then— he died suddenly. The mother struggled on, striving to keep the place for the sake of her boy. If she had been allowed a little more time she could have done it, but one man had bought up the mortgages, and he was remorseless. They were turned out of their home, the small boy and his mother. She died in poverty of a broken heart, and the boy was left to struggle on as best he could. Afterward, long years afterward, he discovered that the holder of the mortgage was his father's best friend. This man married and came to live at the homestead. Of course, legally the place was his, but morally—" He shrugged his shoulders. "What do you think of that story, Mr MacKenzie?"

A deep sigh shook the old man. He dropped his hand and looked straight at David.

"It is not pleasant," he said slowly, "but perhaps he tried unsuccessfully to find the people he had wronged and make amends."

David flushed. "No amends could have been possible," he said hoarsely. He turned to Molly. "What do you think, Miss MacKenzie?"

"I think— it is terrible."

Molly's voice trembled and there was a mist of tears in her eyes.

"Daddy!" She turned to her father. "If it had been us! If we had had to go out and leave this place. That poor little boy. It would kill me to leave Wahroonga. My dear old home. Why, it is a part of me. I was born here."

"And so was I."

The words rose to David's lips, but they were never spoken. Something stopped him. Perhaps it was the divine pity in her face or the passionate tenderness with which she spoke of her home. He looked at her as though he were seeing her for the first time after a long, long absence. The hard barrier of hatred and revenge melted away, and his heart was free again. Why, what ! a fool he had been. He loved her and he could not hurt the girl he loved. For her sake he could even forgive. He sprang to his feet with a laugh.

"Why, you silly girl. What are you crying for? It was only an old, old story I was trying out on you. I thought one day I might write it up, but it has no existence except in my imagination."

He held out his hand and took hers. "Come, let's go for a walk under the quince trees."

Molly was like a creature transformed. This was the man she had known back again, and she was happy.

"Wait a moment," she said, "until I get my garden hat."

Mackenzie waited until she was out of sight, then he rose.

"Thank you, Blair," he said, "for holding your hand."

"I found I could not harm her," David muttered, "and now if you please we will forget the matter."

The old man bent his head. "You have had your revenge after all," he said quietly, "for you are taking my daughter away from me."

Then Molly came dancing out of the house, and David went to meet her. Together they walked down the path leading to the river.

10: O'Callaghan-O'Brien's Secret

Richard Dowling

1846-1898

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 24 Dec 1881

O'CALLAGHEN-O'BRIEN, of Holywell House, or, as he was universally called in the neighborhood, Brien, of Holywell, was a rich man for a county gentleman in Ireland in the days when to be an Irish landlord was to be someone. He owned two thousand acres of good Tipperary land. He was an easy landlord, and during the 13 years he had been master of Holywell House he never advanced the rent of a tenant. The tenants looked up to him with filial affection, and he looked on them with paternal eyes. Not that he was a free or communicative man. On the contrary, he was solitary and taciturn; but his desire for seclusion and silence did not spring from any morbid dislike to his race, or any aversion from his fellow man. His words, when he did speak, were always kindly, and his actions more kindly than his words. He had never done a harsh deed in his life, and a mere list of his good actions would take an hour to rehearse.

He would roam over the farms of his estate, and say a few words to the workmen in the fields, and drop into the farmers' parlours, and have a chat, and may be "the laist taist in life in a dhrop of whisky, yer honour" to keep the cold out, if it were cold, and to keep a chill off if it were warm. He would talk of cattle and sheep and horses and pigs and crops and fallows and pasturage, and all the ills that farm-flesh, and blade, and grain are heirs to.

Once he said to Fahey, of Moonamintrah, "Fahey, that barn is in bad order. It would be only throwing away money to try and patch it up. I don't want you to rebuild it all by yourself; but if you will pay half I will pay the other half, although, by right, I ought not to lay out a penny on the estate."

"Thank you kindly, your honour," said Fahey, gratefully. "And I'll be very glad to put down my half. I won't keep anything dark from your honour, but I have a trifle of money in the bank, and my belief, sir, is, it would be to more advantage on the farm than in the bank."

"You are quite right, Fahey. I am not going to run up the rent on you because I see you are keeping yourself and your place tidy. Never grudge your wife a cloak, or your haggard a gate, because you are afraid if I see you taking care of your family and the farm I'll think of raising the rent. Good-bye, Fahey."

"Good-bye, and God save you kindly, your honour; and may you be long spared to us. Amen. And when Miss Attie comes to be our mistress—"

"Ay, ay, ay. All right, Fahey. I'll send a builder to look about the barn. The old stones will do over again, and any more you want you can send to my own quarry for, and take them, but you'll have to draw the stones with your own cart and horses. And you can have lime and sand from the kilns and the pit in the

same way. They are thinning the Cloona plantation, but that wood will not be seasoned in time. But I'll ask old Connolly what seasoned timber he has in the wood yard, and try if he can't manage it somehow, so that we'll have to divide the cost of only a few hundred of bricks, the slates, and the labour; for mind, I'll have no more thatched roofs on the estate; and the half won't come heavy on either of us."

And he walked away, making a gesture commanding silence.

Fahey stood looking after his landlord for a long time, and when the figure of the owner disappeared, Fahey hit his thigh a powerful blow with his open palm, exclaiming, "Well, now I see that!" Which expression, although very vulgar, was no more in Fahey's mind than an uttered note of exclamation after profound unexpressed emotions of admiration, gratitude, and loyalty.

ANOTHER day O'Callaghan-Brien met old Billy Quann.

"Quann," said he, "why don't you try and do something with that wet bottom under the well?"

"It's bog, rank bog, your honour."

"It is not bog," said the owner, "and you know that as well as any man on the estate. It is only a wet bottom. You are making no use of it now, are you?"

"In the summer, when it's dry, I turn in the cows there for a bit, and maybe they got a mouthful, and maybe they don't."

"How much is there in that bottom?"

"Better than five acres."

"And how much do you pay me for it?"

"Three half-crowns an acre a year."

"But it's not worth that to you?"

"No, your honour; but to speak yon fair, the other land is profitable, and makes up for the bottom."

"How much do you think it would cost to run a drain from the lap of the bottom to the stream just above Ryan's mill?"

"Well, I asked that question of Ned Doherty, a most knowledgable man, and he said it would take every ghost of a hundred pounds."

"Now, look here, Quann; if you cut the trenches in the bottom, I'll bring a pipe from Ryan's, although if I thought only of justice I ought not to sink sixpence on the land. Of course your rent will be as now."

"The Lord be good to you, sir; and may you long live to rule over us. I'll cut the trenches with all my heart, and a hundred thousand blessings on you for what you say about the rent; and it is proud I am to think that what little service I may do with the trenches will be there when may it be— a long day off— Miss Attie comes into the—"

"All right now, Quann. Get to work at once. I'm going into Kilcash next Wednesday, and I'll order the pipes at Maher's, if you call over between this and then with the length we want. Good day."

And before old Billy Quann could say another word the owner of Holywell was out of hearing.

On more occasions than these the master of Holywell had said he ought not, in justice, to spend any money on the property. People could in no way understand what he meant by these vague speeches, for, of course, they said the land would go to Miss Attie when the old man dropped.

O'CALLAGHAN-BRIEN was a popular man in the county, but there was around his daughter Attie a feeling so intense and loyal that it reached the chivalric. She was more comely than beautiful, more lovely than comely, more amiable than all. She was, they said, her father's child, with all the softness and engaging sweetness of her dead mother added.

Attie was two-and-twenty years of age, and had been motherless since her infancy. The present owner of Holywell House had married comparatively late in life, and under circumstances which had never been fully understood in the neighborhood. He had been an only son, and it was well known he had greatly displeased his father by his marriage. Nothing could have been in stronger contrast with another than the present and the former owner of the Holywell estate. The old man had been a positive scourge to the place. He always wore top boots, always carried a riding whip, and was always in a passion. There was a vague rumour he had killed a man. Everyone said he had killed his wife by inches. No servants would stop in his house. The out-doormen employed upon the home farm were continually leaving. He was a bad landlord, a harsh father, and a cruel husband. He was an undersized, bow-legged man, looking less of a gentleman than his own stable boy. The contrast between father and son was never so striking as when the young man brought his wife, the wife he had married against his father's consent, on a visit to the old house. The son was then a tall, slender, handsome man of five-and-thirty, dignified and kindly in his manner and exceptionally amiable. The father was a gross, vulgar, boisterous, tyrannical man, 62 years of age. The young man and his bride did not stay long at the house; he took his pretty wife away with him to Dublin, where they lived in a very poor way until she died, when Attie, their only child, was two years old. Father and son never spoke after their parting at the House, no letter ever passed between them, and when the old man died suddenly it was well known he had not forgiven his son, and that he would keep him out of the property if he had the power to do so; but he had not, and upon old O'Callaghan-Brien's death the son came into possession as a matter of course, and as a matter of course, also, when the present owner died the acres would go to Miss

O'Callaghan-Brien, for the land had not at any time gone of necessity to a male heir, but to the heir male or female.

Attie herself knew nothing about business and cared less. She was devotedly attached to her father, and he to her. She was contented with the days as they went by, and with her position. Let the future take care of itself.

Yes, until she had just reached her twenty-second year she had never troubled herself about the future, and even now business was the thing furthest from her mind. She knew that, compared to Lord Fenner, her father was a poor man.

Lord Fenner lived at Glenire Castle, one of the finest houses in Ireland, and she had heard her father say his Irish estate and his English mines gave him an income of at least twenty thousand a year. She knew very little about money, but she understood twenty thousand a year was a respectable income for an Irish viscount.

She would in all likelihood not even then have thought of twenty thousand a year in connection with the title but for the fact that she knew Lord Fenner very well, had met him frequently of late and that she had in her desk three letters signed "Fenner," and one of later date signed "Edward," this being in the same handwriting as the other three, and Edward Waller Longford being Lord Fenner's name.

There was another reason why Attie's mind was now a good deal occupied with Lord Fenner.

Of course she had heard people say what a good match young Lord Fenner would be for any girl in the country, and when at first he had singled her out at the few houses where he and she met, she could in no way account for it except by supposing he had chosen her because he felt there could be no danger of his falling in love with her, for all agreed he had exhibited no disposition towards matrimony. But as the weeks went by and the young lord showed an unmistakable preference for her society, it began to dawn on her that he was making love to her.

At first she was startled, and tried to draw back, but the more she shunned him the more hotly he pursued, until, when it had come to be winter, she had given up all thought of resistance, and allowed herself to drift along the current and come and go as he asked her. Nothing definite had yet passed between the young people, but it was quite plain to all the country round that one of those days, if no accident happened, sweet Attie would become Lady Fenner, of Glenire Castle. "What could stop the marriage?" asked people, argumentatively. "Nothing," they answered; "for Lord Fenner was free to please himself, and, of course, no father in Tipperary, in Ireland, would think of refusing to accept such a son-in-law."

Although there were many fathers and mothers who were sorry they had missed the chance of calling the young lord son-in-law, O'Callaghan-Brien and his laughter were so popular that even the most envious scarcely begrudged them their good luck.

But there was one man who watched the lovers with profound uneasiness, and that man was O'Callaghan-Brien himself. He loved his daughter most devotedly. He was sensible enough to know that he was no longer a young man, that he was drawing near his sixtieth year, and that it was most desirable Attie should be settled before he died, and that young Fenner was a very good fellow, and one of the best matches in the whole country. But still he dreaded the day when that man would ask him for his daughter's hand. He would freely have laid down his life for his daughter's happiness, and he now believed her happiness was wound up in young Fenner. But there was one great obstacle in the way, and of that obstacle neither of the young people knew anything. It had been the one secret of his latter life. Some time or other it would have to be told, and he shrank back from the thought of that day, for then he knew the happiness of his darling daughter would hang in the balance.

The Fenner and Brien estates adjoined, and when the rumour of an attachment between the daughter of Brien and the lord of Glenire got abroad every one said what a pleasant thing it was that the properties of the masters of Glenire and Holywell were so conveniently situated, A few had hinted at this to old Brien, but he had always shown a most marked aversion to the subject, and plainly indicated that to dwell upon it would be most distasteful to him.

Meanwhile, the relations between Lord Fenner and Attie became more distinct, and at length, towards the end of December, he took her hand in his one day and asked her if she would leave it where it lay for ever, and she did not answer or take it away. Then he told her he would forthwith communicate with her father.

Lord Fenner was by no means a shy young man. He had not been in the world for eight-and-twenty years without finding the advantage of a title and twenty thousand a year. He was a bold, fearless, straight-forward country gentleman with the faults and infirmities common to his class. Wild he had been, no doubt, a few years after he came of age. He had long been the minor Viscount of Fenner, and on attaining his majority and coming into the large accumulations made while he was under age, he went to Paris, and managed to spend all the savings and get forty thousand pounds in debt in a couple of years. But since then he had not only lived a rational life, but had paid off the forty thousand, and devoted as much time and care to his estate as any middle-aged landlord in the country.

But notwithstanding the straightforwardness of the young man, and notwithstanding, moreover, that he was by no means skilled in composition, he resolved to place his case before O'Callaghan-Brien in writing.

The second day after the last meeting a letter came from Lord Fenner, to O'Callaghan-Brien. It was brief and to the point. He loved Attie— had loved her a considerable time— and begged to offer himself to O'Callaghan-Brien as a son-in-law, on the condition that all business arrangements would be satisfactory.

The letter arrived by hand, and late at night, after Attie had retired, and while the old man sat alone in the library before a blazing fire. When he had finished reading he put the letter down on the table, and fell into a profound reverie.

"At last," he thought on waking up. "At last. It has come at last. They both must now be told all. I pray to Heaven the happiness of my child may not be wrecked in this explanation a thousand times I have blamed myself, and yet I do not see how I could have done better under the unhappy circumstances. There would have been no earthly good in telling my darling before, and when I first saw a little more than friendship springing up between Fenner and her, if I had gone to the young man and told him all, it would look as if he had already committed himself. There is no necessity for the facts to be generally known, and now I find I must explain all when my darling's heart has been given to him; of course, she has given away her heart, gentle soul. So like her mother, so like her mother every way, only her mother was better looking. I'll ride over to Glenire to-morrow morning and tell all to Fenner. But I must tell Attie first— Ah, no, she is not nearly so beautiful as the old Attie, my other Attie."

He rose, and taking the shaded lamp with him went to an escritoire which stood by one of the windows. He opened the escritoire and took out a jewel-case. This he opened with slow, trembling fingers, and drew from within it a thin plait of golden hair and a plain gold ring.

"They said the hair was not her own, and they said she had no right to wear the ring, my Attie. But I cut this from her head when she lay cold and I put this ring on her finger in church when the parson told me. My Attie! They may talk as they will, but I know all. No one knew her well as I. Who could? No one loved her as well I. And she loved me, my Attie. When I meet her hereafter, I wonder shall I be bent and broke in body and mind, as I am now, or shall I joyous and full of vigour, as I was then! Who can tell?"

He pressed the tress and the ring to his lips and returned them to the place he had taken them from, locked up the escritoire, and went to bed.

Next morning, after breakfast, he said to his daughter, "Come into the library, Attie, I have something to say to you."

She guessed what this formal invitation had to do with, rose, and followed her father. He placed a chair for her by the fire, and setting one for himself, sat down.

The old man had risen and dressed early for his ride, but since he had got up it had been snowing continually, and now the country, as far as the eye could see, was covered more than a foot deep in snow. As father and daughter sat at the fire the escritoire lay open at their back. He had been in the room before breakfast and had opened the escritoire, and placed his whip and cap on a stool close by.

The father began—

"Last night, after you had gone to bed, I got a letter from Lord Fenner about you. Can you guess the nature of that letter?"

"I— I think I can, father."

"He told you he intended writing to me?"

"Yes, father."

"My dear Attie, we ought both to feel very much flattered by his lordship's offer, and I may tell you at once that, although I should be very sorry to lose my daughter, the only relative I have on earth for whom I care, there is no one I would more gladly see her married to than Lord Fenner. But, my dear Attie, I fear there may be a difficulty in the way, and I am now going to tell you what you never heard; before— the full history of your mother."

The girl glanced up with a look of curiosity and surprise.

"You have known, as long since you were able to know anything of the kind, that my marriage with your mother was not an ordinary one, and that my father and I did not get on well together towards the end of his life, or, indeed, at all.

"I do not wish to say anything harsh about your grandfather, but I find it necessary to say some things in order that you may know how matters came about, and how they now stand,

"As I told you, your grandfather and I never got on well together. We had different views on nearly every subject. When I was a young man people said I had some cleverness. I wished to try my fortune in politics. My father would not hear of such a thing. He wished me to go into the army, and marry an heiress. Well, Attie child, neither of us would give way, and we could not agree upon any third course, so he settled four hundred a year on me, and told me I might shift for myself as best I could on it, and that he would not give me another penny, and would not pay a penny of debt I might happen to contract. Well, such an allowance did not make it possible for me to go into politics. So I am sorry to say, my dear child, I did nothing at all, but wasted the best years of my life in travelling idly from place to place until I was well past 30, when I met your mother in London."

"In London!"

"In London, child... And now I am about to tell you what you never heard before. You must be prepared for a shock. But you must make no hasty

inference from what I am about to say. The first place I saw your mother was in a theatre."

"Yes, father."

"On the stage of a theatre."

"Was my mother an actress, father?"

"Yes, my child; but she was as good a woman as ever lived."

"I am sure of that—my dear, dear father."

"You must not now speak of it to anyone. You know how strong popular prejudices are against actresses. We were very careful then and ever afterwards. You know, those who play upon the stage often, almost always, are known to the public by names which are not their own. Fortunately, even those most intimate with your mother in her connection with the stage did not know her real name; and when we agreed to be married we resolved that she should immediately, leave London, sever herself for ever from her stage name and acquaintances, and come to live in some quiet part of Ireland, far out of the track of actors, until I had arranged matters about our marriage with your grandfather. Well, my dear child, I need not go into detail that was distracting then, and would be painful to me now. Your grandfather would not hear of my marrying your mother. He told me he looked on me as a hopeless fool, and that if it pleased me to marry as I had told him, I might do so, but that not only would he not hear of it, but that he would stop my allowance, and take care—"

Here the old man paused, and took his daughter's hand in his, and stroked it caressingly, apologetically.

"Yes, my father."

"Now child, I am going to tell you a very painful thing— a thing which has aged me and bent me down before my time."

Again he paused.

"What is it, father?"

"You must try to forgive me, Attie. I have done you a grievous wrong."

"You, father! You, father, done me a wrong! Why, in all the world, there is not a kinder or a better father than you. It hurts me to hear you say such a thing. Oh, my father, my father, say you did not mean it! Say you did not mean what you said last."

She had risen and gone to him, and thrown her arm around him, and pressed her head against him.

The father's voice trembled, but he went on resolutely:

"Your grandfather said that if I married your mother he could not keep the property from coming to me, but he could prevent it coming to my children. I loved your mother more than anything else then in the world. I married her in spite of his threat—"

He rose, drew his daughter towards the window, and taking out the hair and the ring, placed the latter on the slide of the escritoire, and holding the former in his disengaged hand, said, sadly,

"That is your mother's wedding ring, Attie, and this is her hair, and you are a pauper."

The girl took the tress tenderly in her hand, and raised it reverentially to her lips.

"You do not speak, child," he said, after a few seconds. "You will forgive me?"

"Forgive you, father! For what? I do not understand."

"Because I beggared you, child, before you were born."

She looked up in his face, with a smile. "Is not Edward rich?"

"Yes, Attie. Fenner is rich enough, but he thinks the land will go with you. The two estates adjoin, and although he might hope to marry a richer wife than you would be if Holywell had been yours, still this place would be a useful addition to his property, and I would not have the feeling of leaving my only child almost penniless; for, Attie, I have not saved nearly so much as I should since I came into the place. You know I was not young when your grandfather died, and I have been easy with the tenant, and although the land was going away from you to some cousin of whom I have hardly heard, I could not see the place in ruins, or neglected, or racked; I have a few thousands laid by, and I shall not be able to give you more than my savings."

"But, father, you told me a moment ago that Edward is rich."

"Yes, Attie, but when I go over to him to-day the first thing I shall have to tell him is about your mother, and then about the property not coming to you. I will go now, my child. I know your heart will be with me. The snow is rather heavy, but Sarsfield has faced many a worse day under me. I hope to Heaven I may succeed. If I fail, it will not be for want of will. Goodbye, darling; good bye."

He raised her face, and bent over her, and kissed her tenderly, tearfully, and then went out of the room with an uncertain step.

WHEN he had gone she left the room and wandered hither and thither through the house. She could not rest. She had heard the history of her mother that day, and heard the story of her fortune. Like others, she had always thought the land would come to her some time, a long way off, when she was as old as her father now. This thought was vague as thoughts of death to the strong. Even now, when she was told she should have no such dowry as all had expected, she put that thought away from her as trivial. But the story and the account of her father's early days wrought strangely upon her, and disturbed undreamed-of depths in her nature, and she could in no way rest.

What would he (Edward) think of the story her father had to tell him? She knew he loved her for her own sake; but what would Edward think? What would Edward do? Oh, it was such dreary work waiting! Would the hours never go on? In such snow it would take an hour to ride over. Very likely father would lunch with Edward. That would take an hour, and then an hour to ride back. It would be dusk when her father returned.

The dismal, dull day wore away slowly, but at length the light began to fade, and Attie stole secretly to a window overlooking the way that led to Glenire.

At last she saw upon the level waste of snow the figures of two, not one man, riding towards the house. As they drew nearer she could not doubt that they were her father and lover. All had gone well, and her father had asked Edward to dine with them that evening. Oh, her heart, how it beat with joy! Her lover, her gallant sweetheart, her unselfish darling had thought nothing of all that tale when it was placed beside his love for her!

As the two horsemen drew near she left her place at the window and sought her own room. In a few minutes a servant knocked and said Mr. O'Callaghan-Brien wished to see Miss O'Callaghan-Brien in the library. When she entered the room she found her father alone. He went hastily to her, took her in his arms, and said,

"My darling Attie, I shall be very sorry to lose you, but he is a fine young fellow. I told him all, child, and he said that if your mother was good enough to be my wife, she was good enough to be the mother of his wife, and that he had intended, if the property here had come with you, he would have settled it on you during your life for pin-money, left it with a couple of thousand a year as jointure when he died, but that now you would have to trust to his generosity for pin money, and manage on the two thousand when he is gone. But here he is. He will tell you all the rest himself, I am off to the stables. The horses want to be looked after."

11: The Black Poodle

F. Anstey

Thomas Anstey Guthrie, 1856-1934

Longman's Magazine, Nov 1882

Collected in: *The Black Poodle and Other Tales*, 1884

I HAVE SET myself the task of relating in the course of this story, without suppressing or altering a single detail, the most painful and humiliating episode in my life.

I do this, not because it will give me the least pleasure, but simply because it affords me an opportunity of extenuating myself which has hitherto been wholly denied to me.

As a general rule I am quite aware that to publish a lengthy explanation of one's conduct in any questionable transaction is not the best means of recovering a lost reputation; but in my own case there is one to whom I shall never more be permitted to justify myself by word of mouth— even if I found myself able to attempt it. And as she could not possibly think worse of me than she does at present, I write this, knowing it can do me no harm, and faintly hoping that it may come to her notice and suggest a doubt whether I am quite so unscrupulous a villain, so consummate a hypocrite, as I have been forced to appear in her eyes.

The bare chance of such a result makes me perfectly indifferent to all else: I cheerfully expose to the derision of the whole reading world the story of my weakness and my shame, since by doing so I may possibly rehabilitate myself somewhat in the good opinion of one person.

Having said so much, I will begin my confession without further delay:—

My name is Algernon Weatherhead, and I may add that I am in one of the Government departments; that I am an only son, and live at home with my mother.

We had had a house at Hammersmith until just before the period covered by this history, when, our lease expiring, my mother decided that my health required country air at the close of the day, and so we took a 'desirable villa residence' on one of the many new building estates which have lately sprung up in such profusion in the home counties.

We have called it 'Wistaria Villa.' It is a pretty little place, the last of a row of detached villas, each with its tiny rustic carriage gate and gravel sweep in front, and lawn enough for a tennis court behind, which lines the road leading over the hill to the railway station.

I could certainly have wished that our landlord, shortly after giving us the agreement, could have found some other place to hang himself in than one of our attics, for the consequence was that a housemaid left us in violent hysterics

about every two months, having learnt the tragedy from the tradespeople, and naturally 'seen a somethink' immediately afterwards.

Still it is a pleasant house, and I can now almost forgive the landlord for what I shall always consider an act of gross selfishness on his part.

In the country, even so near town, a next-door neighbour is something more than a mere numeral; he is a possible acquaintance, who will at least consider a new-comer as worth the experiment of a call. I soon knew that 'Shuturgarden,' the next house to our own, was occupied by a Colonel Currie, a retired Indian officer; and often, as across the low boundary wall I caught a glimpse of a graceful girlish figure flitting about amongst the rose-bushes in the neighbouring garden, I would lose myself in pleasant anticipations of a time not far distant when the wall which separated us would be (metaphorically) levelled.

I remember— ah, how vividly!— the thrill of excitement with which I heard from my mother on returning from town one evening that the Curries had called, and seemed disposed to be all that was neighbourly and kind.

I remember, too, the Sunday afternoon on which I returned their call— alone, as my mother had already done so during the week. I was standing on the steps of the Colonel's villa waiting for the door to open when I was startled by a furious snarling and yapping behind, and, looking round, discovered a large poodle in the act of making for my legs.

He was a coal-black poodle, with half of his right ear gone, and absurd little thick moustaches at the end of his nose; he was shaved in the sham-lion fashion, which is considered, for some mysterious reason, to improve a poodle, but the barber had left sundry little tufts of hair which studded his haunches capriciously.

I could not help being reminded, as I looked at him, of another black poodle which Faust entertained for a short time, with unhappy results, and I thought that a very moderate degree of incantation would be enough to bring the fiend out of this brute.

He made me intensely uncomfortable, for I am of a slightly nervous temperament, with a constitutional horror of dogs and a liability to attacks of diffidence on performing the ordinary social rites under the most favourable conditions, and certainly the consciousness that a strange and apparently savage dog was engaged in worrying the heels of my boots was the reverse of reassuring.

The Currie family received me with all possible kindness: 'So charmed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Weatherhead,' said Mrs. Currie, as I shook hands. 'I see,' she added pleasantly, 'you've brought the doggie in with you.' As a matter of fact, I had brought the doggie in at the ends of my coat-tails, but it was evidently no unusual occurrence for visitors to appear in this undignified

manner, for she detached him quite as a matter of course, and, as soon as I was sufficiently collected, we fell into conversation.

I discovered that the Colonel and his wife were childless, and the slender willowy figure I had seen across the garden wall was that of Lilian Roseblade, their niece and adopted daughter. She came into the room shortly afterwards, and I felt, as I went through the form of an introduction, that her sweet fresh face, shaded by soft masses of dusky brown hair, more than justified all the dreamy hopes and fancies with which I had looked forward to that moment.

She talked to me in a pretty, confidential, appealing way, which I have heard her dearest friends censure as childish and affected, but I thought then that her manner had an indescribable charm and fascination about it, and the memory of it makes my heart ache now with a pang that is not all pain.

Even before the Colonel made his appearance I had begun to see that my enemy, the poodle, occupied an exceptional position in that household. It was abundantly clear by the time I took my leave.

He seemed to be the centre of their domestic system, and even lovely Lilian revolved contentedly around him as a kind of satellite; he could do no wrong in his owner's eyes, his prejudices (and he was a narrow-minded animal) were rigorously respected, and all domestic arrangements were made with a primary view to his convenience.

I may be wrong, but I cannot think that it is wise to put any poodle upon such a pedestal as that. How this one in particular, as ordinary a quadruped as ever breathed, had contrived to impose thus upon his infatuated proprietors, I never could understand, but so it was— he even engrossed the chief part of the conversation, which after any lull seemed to veer round to him by a sort of natural law.

I had to endure a long biographical sketch of him—what a Society paper would call an 'anecdotal photo'— and each fresh anecdote seemed to me to exhibit the depraved malignity of the beast in a more glaring light, and render the doting admiration of the family more astounding than ever.

'Did you tell Mr. Weatherhead, Lily, about Bingo' (Bingo was the poodle's preposterous name) 'and Tacks? No? Oh, I *must* tell him that— it'll make him laugh. Tacks is our gardener down in the village (d'ye know Tacks?). Well, Tacks was up here the other day, nailing up some trellis-work at the top of a ladder, and all the time there was Master Bingo sitting quietly at the foot of it looking on, wouldn't leave it on any account. Tacks said he was quite company for him. Well, at last, when Tacks had finished and was coming down, what do you think that rascal there did? Just sneaked quietly up behind and nipped him in both calves and ran off. Been looking out for that the whole time! Ha, ha!— deep that, eh?'

I agreed with an inward shudder that it was very deep, thinking privately that, if this was a specimen of Bingo's usual treatment of the natives, it would be odd if he did not find himself deeper still before— probably *just* before—he died.

'Poor faithful old doggie!' murmured Mrs. Currie; 'he thought Tacks was a nasty burglar, didn't he? he wasn't going to see Master robbed, was he?'

'Capital house-dog, sir,' struck in the Colonel. 'Gad, I shall never forget how he made poor Heavisides run for it the other day! Ever met Heavisides of the Bombay Fusiliers? Well, Heavisides was staying here, and the dog met him one morning as he was coming down from the bath-room. Didn't recognise him in "pyjamas" and a dressing-gown, of course, and made at him. He kept poor old Heavisides outside the landing window on the top of the cistern for a quarter of an hour, till I had to come and raise the siege!'

Such were the stories of that abandoned dog's blunderheaded ferocity to which I was forced to listen, while all the time the brute sat opposite me on the hearthrug, blinking at me from under his shaggy mane with his evil bleared eyes, and deliberating where he would have me when I rose to go.

This was the beginning of an intimacy which soon displaced all ceremony. It was very pleasant to go in there after dinner, even to sit with the Colonel over his claret and hear more stories about Bingo, for afterwards I could go into the pretty drawing-room and take my tea from Lilian's hands, and listen while she played Schubert to us in the summer twilight.

The poodle was always in the way, to be sure, but even his ugly black head seemed to lose some of its ugliness and ferocity when Lilian laid her pretty hand on it.

On the whole I think that the Currie family were well disposed towards me; the Colonel considering me as a harmless specimen of the average eligible young man— which I certainly was— and Mrs. Currie showing me favour for my mother's sake, for whom she had taken a strong liking.

As for Lilian, I believed I saw that she soon suspected the state of my feelings towards her and was not displeased by it. I looked forward with some hopefulness to a day when I could declare myself with no fear of a repulse.

But it was a serious obstacle in my path that I could not secure Bingo's good opinion on any terms. The family would often lament this pathetically themselves. 'You see,' Mrs. Currie would observe in apology, 'Bingo is a dog that does not attach himself easily to strangers'— though for that matter I thought he was unpleasantly ready to attach himself to *me*.

I did try hard to conciliate him. I brought him propitiatory buns— which was weak and ineffectual, as he ate them with avidity, and hated me as bitterly as ever, for he had conceived from the first a profound contempt for me and a distrust which no blandishments of mine could remove. Looking back now, I am

inclined to think it was a prophetic instinct that warned him of what was to come upon him through my instrumentality.

Only his approbation was wanting to establish for me a firm footing with the Curries, and perhaps determine Lilian's wavering heart in my direction; but, though I wooed that inflexible poodle with an assiduity I blush to remember, he remained obstinately firm.

Still, day by day, Lilian's treatment of me was more encouraging; day by day I gained in the esteem of her uncle and aunt; I began to hope that [10] soon I should be able to disregard canine influence altogether.

Now there was one inconvenience about our villa (besides its flavour of suicide) which it is necessary to mention here. By common consent all the cats of the neighbourhood had selected our garden for their evening reunions. I fancy that a tortoiseshell kitchen cat of ours must have been a sort of leader of local feline society— I know she was 'at home,' with music and recitations, on most evenings.

My poor mother found this interfered with her after-dinner nap, and no wonder, for if a cohort of ghosts had been 'shrieking and squealing,' as Calpurnia puts it, in our back garden, or it had been fitted up as a *crèche* for a nursery of goblin infants in the agonies of teething, the noise could not possibly have been more unearthly.

We sought for some means of getting rid of the nuisance: there was poison of course, but we thought it would have an invidious appearance, and even lead to legal difficulties, if each dawn were to discover an assortment of cats expiring in hideous convulsions in various parts of the same garden.

Firearms, too, were open to objection, and would scarcely assist my mother's slumbers, so for some time we were at a loss for a remedy. At last, one day, walking down the Strand, I chanced to see (in an evil hour) what struck me as the very thing— it was an air-gun of superior construction displayed in a gunsmith's window. I went in at once, purchased it, and took it home in triumph; it would be noiseless, and would reduce the local average of cats without scandal— one or two examples, and feline fashion would soon migrate to a more secluded spot.

I lost no time in putting this to the proof. That same evening I lay in wait after dusk at the study window, protecting my mother's repose. As soon as I heard the long-drawn wail, the preliminary sputter, and the wild stampede that followed, I let fly in the direction of the sound. I suppose I must have something of the national sporting instinct in me, for my blood was tingling with excitement; but the feline constitution assimilates lead without serious inconvenience, and I began to fear that no trophy would remain to bear witness to my marksmanship.

But all at once I made out a dark indistinct form slinking in from behind the bushes. I waited till it crossed a belt of light which streamed from the back kitchen below me, and then I took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

This time at least I had not failed— there was a smothered yell, a rustle— and then silence again. I ran out with the calm pride of a successful revenge to bring in the body of my victim, and I found underneath a laurel, no predatory tom-cat, but (as the discerning reader will no doubt have foreseen long since) the quivering carcase of the Colonel's black poodle!

I intend to set down here the exact unvarnished truth, and I confess that at first, when I knew what I had done, I was *not* sorry. I was quite innocent of any intention of doing it, but I felt no regret. I even laughed—madman that I was— at the thought that there was the end of Bingo at all events; that impediment was removed, my weary task of conciliation was over for ever!

But soon the reaction came; I realised the tremendous nature of my deed, and shuddered. I had done that which might banish me from Lilian's side for ever! All unwittingly I had slaughtered a kind of sacred beast, the animal around which the Currie household had wreathed their choicest affections! How was I to break it to them? Should I send Bingo in with a card tied to his neck and my regrets and compliments? That was too much like a present of game. Ought I not to carry him in myself? I would wreath him in the best crape, I would put on black for him— the Curries would hardly consider a taper and a white sheet, or sackcloth and ashes, an excessive form of atonement— but I could not grovel to quite such an abject extent.

I wondered what the Colonel would say. Simple and hearty as a general rule, he had a hot temper on occasions, and it made me ill as I thought, would he and, worse still, would *Lilian* believe it was really an accident? They knew what an interest I had in silencing the deceased poodle— would they believe the simple truth?

I vowed that they *should* believe me. My genuine remorse and the absence of all concealment on my part would speak powerfully for me. I would choose a favourable time for my confession; that very evening I would tell all.

Still I shrank from the duty before me, and as I knelt down sorrowfully by the dead form and respectfully composed his stiffening limbs, I thought that it was unjust of Fate to place a well-meaning man, whose nerves were not of iron, in such a position.

Then, to my horror, I heard a well-known ringing tramp on the road outside, and smelt the peculiar fragrance of a Burmese cheroot. It was the Colonel himself, who had been taking out the doomed Bingo for his usual evening run.

I don't know how it was exactly, but a sudden panic came over me. I held my breath, and tried to crouch down unseen behind the laurels; but he had seen me, and came over at once to speak to me across the hedge.

He stood there, not two yards from his favourite's body! Fortunately it was unusually dark that evening.

'Ha, there you are, eh?' he began heartily; 'don't rise, my boy, don't rise.' I was trying to put myself in front of the poodle, and did not rise— at least, only my hair did.

'You're out late, ain't you?' he went on; 'laying out your garden, hey?'

I could not tell him that I was laying out his poodle! My voice shook as, with a guilty confusion that was veiled by the dusk, I said it was a fine evening— which it was not.

'Cloudy, sir,' said the Colonel, 'cloudy— rain before morning, I think. By the way, have you seen anything of my Bingo in here?'

This was the turning point. What I *ought* to have done was to say mournfully, 'Yes, I'm sorry to say I've had a most unfortunate accident with him— here he is— the fact is, I'm afraid I've *shot* him!'

But I couldn't. I could have told him at my own time, in a prepared form of words— but not then. I felt I must use all my wits to gain time and fence with the questions.

'Why,' I said with a leaden airiness, 'he hasn't given you the slip, has he?'

'Never did such a thing in his life!' said the Colonel, warmly; 'he rushed off after a rat or a frog or something a few minutes ago, and as I stopped to light another cheroot I lost sight of him. I thought I saw him slip in under your gate, but I've been calling him from the front there and he won't come out.'

No, and he never *would* come out any more. But the Colonel must not be told that just yet. I temporised again: 'If,' I said unsteadily, 'if he had slipped in under the gate, I should have seen him. Perhaps he took it into his head to run home?'

'Oh, I shall find him on the doorstep, I expect, the knowing old scamp! Why, what d'ye think was the last thing he did, now?'

I could have given him the very latest intelligence; but I dared not. However, it was altogether too ghastly to kneel there and laugh at anecdotes of Bingo told across Bingo's dead body; I could not stand that! 'Listen,' I said suddenly, 'wasn't that his bark? There again; it seems to come from the front of your house, don't you think?'

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'I'll go and fasten him up before he's off again. How your teeth are chattering— you've caught a chill, man— go indoors at once and, if you feel equal to it, look in half an hour later about grog time, and I'll tell you all about it. Compliments to your mother. Don't forget— about grog time!' I had got rid of him at last, and I wiped my forehead, gasping with relief. I would go round in half an hour, and then I should be prepared to make my melancholy announcement. For, even then, I never thought of any other course, until suddenly it flashed upon me with terrible clearness that my miserable shuffling

by the hedge had made it impossible to tell the truth! I had not told a direct lie, to be sure, but then I had given the Colonel the impression that I had denied having seen the dog. Many people can appease their consciences by reflecting that, whatever may be the effect their words produce, they did contrive to steer clear of a downright lie. I never quite knew where the distinction lay, morally, but there *is* that feeling— I have it myself.

Unfortunately, prevarication has this drawback, that, if ever the truth comes to light, the prevaricator is in just the same case as if he had lied to the most shameless extent, and for a man to point out that the words he used contained no absolute falsehood will seldom restore confidence.

I might of course still tell the Colonel of my misfortune, and leave him to infer that it had happened after our interview, but the poodle was fast becoming cold and stiff, and they would most probably suspect the real time of the occurrence.

And then Lilian would hear that I had told a string of falsehoods to her uncle over the dead body of their idolised Bingo— an act, no doubt, of abominable desecration, of unspeakable profanity in her eyes!

If it would have been difficult before to prevail on her to accept a bloodstained hand, it would be impossible after that. No, I had burnt my ships, I was cut off for ever from the straightforward course; that one moment of indecision had decided my conduct in spite of me— I must go on with it now and keep up the deception at all hazards.

It was bitter. I had always tried to preserve as many of the moral principles which had been instilled into me as can be conveniently retained in this grasping world, and it had been my pride that, roughly speaking, I had never been guilty of an unmistakable falsehood.

But henceforth, if I meant to win Lilian, that boast must be relinquished for ever! I should have to lie now with all my might, without limit or scruple, to dissemble incessantly, and 'wear a mask,' as the poet Bunn beautifully expressed it long ago, 'over my hollow heart.' I felt all this keenly— I did not think it was right— but what was I to do?

After thinking all this out very carefully, I decided that my only course was to bury the poor animal where he fell and say nothing about it. With some vague idea of precaution I first took off the silver collar he wore, and then hastily interred him with a garden-trowel and succeeded in removing all traces of the disaster.

I fancy I felt a certain relief in the knowledge that there would now be no necessity to tell my pitiful story and risk the loss of my neighbours' esteem.

By-and-by, I thought, I would plant a rose-tree over his remains, and some day, as Lilian and I, in the noontide of our domestic bliss, stood before it

admiring its creamy luxuriance, I might (perhaps) find courage to confess that the tree owed some of that luxuriance to the long-lost Bingo.

There was a touch of poetry in this idea that lightened my gloom for the moment.

I need scarcely say that I did not go round to Shuturgarden that evening. I was not hardened enough for that yet— my manner might betray me, and so I very prudently stayed at home.

But that night my sleep was broken by frightful dreams. I was perpetually trying to bury a great gaunt poodle, which would persist in rising up through the damp mould as fast as I covered him up.... Lilian and I were engaged, and we were in church together on Sunday, and the poodle, resisting all attempts to eject him, forbade our banns with sepulchral barks.... It was our wedding-day, and at the critical moment the poodle leaped between us and swallowed the ring.... Or we were at the wedding-breakfast, and Bingo, a grizzly black skeleton with flaming eyes, sat on the cake and would not allow Lilian to cut it. Even the rose-tree fancy was reproduced in a distorted form— the tree grew, and every blossom contained a miniature Bingo, which barked; and as I woke I was desperately trying to persuade the Colonel that they were ordinary dog-roses.

I went up to the office next day with my gloomy secret gnawing my bosom, and, whatever I did, the spectre of the murdered poodle rose before me. For two days after that I dared not go near the Curries, until at last one evening after dinner I forced myself to call, feeling that it was really not safe to keep away any longer.

My conscience smote me as I went in. I put on an unconscious easy manner, which was such a dismal failure that it was lucky for me that they were too much engrossed to notice it.

I never before saw a family so stricken down by a domestic misfortune as the group I found in the drawing-room, making a dejected pretence of reading or working. We talked at first— and hollow talk it was— on indifferent subjects, till I could bear it no longer, and plunged boldly into danger.

'I don't see the dog,' I began. 'I suppose you— you found him all right the other evening, Colonel?' I wondered as I spoke whether they would not notice the break in my voice, but they did not.

'Why, the fact is,' said the Colonel, heavily, gnawing his grey moustache, 'we've not heard anything of him since: he's—he's run off!'

'Gone, Mr. Weatherhead; gone without a word!' said Mrs. Currie, plaintively, as if she thought the dog might at least have left an address.

'I wouldn't have believed it of him,' said the Colonel; 'it has completely knocked me over. Haven't been so cut up for years— the ungrateful rascal!'

'Oh, Uncle!' pleaded Lilian, 'don't talk like that; perhaps Bingo couldn't help it— perhaps some one has s-s-shot him!'

'Shot!' cried the Colonel, angrily. 'By heaven! if I thought there was a villain on earth capable of shooting that poor inoffensive dog, I'd— Why *should* they shoot him, Lilian? Tell me that! I— I hope you won't let me hear you talk like that again. *You* don't think he's shot, eh, Weatherhead?'

I said— Heaven forgive me!— that I thought it highly improbable.

'He's not dead!' cried Mrs. Currie. 'If he were dead I should know it somehow— I'm sure I should! But I'm certain he's alive. Only last night I had such a beautiful dream about him. I thought he came back to us, Mr. Weatherhead, driving up in a hansom cab, and he was just the same as ever— only he wore blue spectacles, and the shaved part of him was painted a bright red. And I woke up with the joy— so, you know, it's sure to come true!'

It will be easily understood what torture conversations like these were to me, and how I hated myself as I sympathised and spoke encouraging words concerning the dog's recovery, when I knew all the time he was lying hid under my garden mould. But I took it as a part of my punishment, and bore it all uncomplainingly; practice even made me an adept in the art of consolation— I believe I really was a great comfort to them.

I had hoped that they would soon get over the first bitterness of their loss, and that Bingo would be first replaced and then forgotten in the usual way; but there seemed no signs of this coming to pass.

The poor Colonel was too plainly fretting himself ill about it; he went pottering about forlornly— advertising, searching, and seeing people, but all of course to no purpose, and it told upon him. He was more like a man whose only son and heir had been stolen, than an Anglo-Indian officer who had lost a poodle. I had to affect the liveliest interest in all his inquiries and expeditions, and to listen to, and echo, the most extravagant eulogies of the departed, and the wear and tear of so much duplicity made me at last almost as ill as the Colonel himself.

I could not help seeing that Lilian was not nearly so much impressed by my elaborate concern as her relatives; and sometimes I detected an incredulous look in her frank brown eyes that made me very uneasy. Little by little, a rift widened between us, until at last in despair I determined to know the worst before the time came when it would be hopeless to speak at all. I chose a Sunday evening as we were walking across the green from church in the golden dusk, and then I ventured to speak to her of my love. She heard me to the end, and was evidently very much agitated. At last she murmured that it could not be, unless— no, it never could be now.

'Unless what?' I asked. 'Lilian—Miss Roseblade, something has come between us lately: you will tell me what that something is, won't you?'

'Do you want to know *really*?' she said, looking up at me through her tears. 'Then I'll tell you: it— it's Bingo!'

I started back overwhelmed. Did she know all? If not, how much did she suspect? I must find out that at once! 'What about Bingo?' I managed to pronounce, with a dry tongue.

'You never loved him when he was here,' she sobbed; 'you know you didn't!'

I was relieved to find it was no worse than this.

'No,' I said candidly; 'I did not love Bingo. Bingo didn't love *me*, Lilian; he was always looking out for a chance of nipping me somewhere. Surely you won't quarrel with me for that!'

'Not for that,' she said; 'only, why do you pretend to be so fond of him now, and so anxious to get him back again? Uncle John believes you, but *I* don't. I can see quite well that you wouldn't be glad to find him. You could find him easily if you wanted to!'

'What do you mean, Lilian?' I said hoarsely. 'How could I find him?' Again I feared the worst.

'You're in a Government office,' cried Lilian and if you only chose, you could easily get G-Government to find Bingo! What's the use of Government if it can't do that? Mr. Travers would have found him long ago if I'd asked him!'

Lilian had never been so childishly unreasonable as this before, and yet I loved her more madly than ever; but I did not like this allusion to Travers, a rising barrister, who lived with his sister in a pretty cottage near the station, and had shown symptoms of being attracted by Lilian.

He was away on circuit just then, luckily, but at least even he would have found it a hard task to find Bingo— there was comfort in that.

'You know that isn't just, Lilian,' I observed 'But only tell me what you want me to do?'

'Bub— bub— bring back Bingo!' she said.

'Bring back Bingo!' I cried in horror. 'But suppose I *can't*— suppose he's out of the country, or— dead, what then, Lilian?'

'I can't help it,' she said; 'but I don't believe he *is* out of the country or dead. And while I see you pretending to Uncle that you cared awfully about him, and going on doing nothing at all, it makes me think you're not quite— quite *sincere*! And I couldn't possibly marry any one while I thought that of him. And I shall always have that feeling unless you find Bingo!'

It was of no use to argue with her; I knew Lilian by that time. With her pretty caressing manner she united a latent obstinacy which it was hopeless to attempt to shake. I feared, too, that she was not quite certain as yet whether she cared for me or not, and that this condition of hers was an expedient to gain time.

I left her with a heavy heart. Unless I proved my worth by bringing back Bingo within a very short time, Travers would probably have everything his own way. And Bingo was dead!

However, I took heart. I thought that perhaps if I could succeed by my earnest efforts in persuading Lilian that I really was doing all in my power to recover the poodle, she might relent in time, and dispense with his actual production.

So, partly with this object, and partly to appease the remorse which now revived and stung me deeper than before, I undertook long and weary pilgrimages after office hours. I spent many pounds in advertisements; I interviewed dogs of every size, colour, and breed, and of course I took care to keep Lilian informed of each successive failure. But still her heart was not touched; she was firm. If I went on like that, she told me, I was certain to find Bingo one day— then, but not before, would her doubts be set at rest.

I was walking one day through the somewhat squalid district which lies between Bow Street and High Holborn, when I saw, in a small theatrical costumier's window, a handbill stating that a black poodle had 'followed a gentleman' on a certain date, and if not claimed and the finder remunerated before a stated time, would be sold to pay expenses.

I went in and got a copy of the bill to show Lilian, and although by that time I scarcely dared to look a poodle in the face, I thought I would go to the address given and see the animal, simply to be able to tell Lilian I had done so.

The gentleman whom the dog had very unaccountably followed was a certain Mr. William Blagg, who kept a little shop near Endell Street, and called himself a bird-fancier, though I should scarcely have credited him with the necessary imagination. He was an evil-browed ruffian in a fur cap, with a broad broken nose and little shifty red eyes, and after I had told him what I wanted, he took me through a horrible little den, stacked with piles of wooden, wire, and wicker prisons, each quivering with restless, twittering life, and then out into a back yard, in which were two or three rotten old kennels and tubs. 'That there's him,' he said, jerking his thumb to the farthest tub; 'follered me all the way 'ome from Kinsington Gardings, *he* did. Kim out, will yer?'

And out of the tub there crawled slowly, with a snuffling whimper and a rattling of its chain, the identical dog I had slain a few evenings before!

At least, so I thought for a moment, and felt as if I had seen a spectre; the resemblance was so exact— in size, in every detail, even to the little clumps of hair about the hind parts, even to the lop of half an ear, this dog might have been the '*doppel-gänger*' of the deceased Bingo. I suppose, after all, one black poodle is very like any other black poodle of the same size, but the likeness startled me.

I think it was then that the idea occurred to me that here was a miraculous chance of securing the sweetest girl in the whole world, and at the same time atoning for my wrong by bringing back gladness with me to Shuturgarden. It

only needed a little boldness; one last deception, and I could embrace truthfulness once more.

Almost unconsciously, when my guide turned round and asked, 'Is that there dawg yourn?' I said hurriedly, 'Yes, yes— that's the dog I want, that— that's Bingo!'

'He don't seem to be a puttin' of 'isself out about seein' you again,' observed Mr. Blagg, as the poodle studied me with a calm interest.

'Oh, he's not exactly *my* dog, you see,' I said; 'he belongs to a friend of mine!' He gave me a quick furtive glance. 'Then maybe you're mistook about him,' he said: 'and I can't run no risks. I was a goin' down in the country this 'ere werry evenin' to see a party as lives at Wistaria Willa,— he's been a hadwertisin' about a black poodle, *he* has!'

'But look here,' I said, 'that's *me*.'

He gave me a curious leer. 'No offence, you know, guv'nor,' he said, 'but I should wish for some evidence as to that afore I part with a vallyable dawg like this 'ere!'

'Well,' I said, 'here's one of my cards; will that do for you?'

He took it and spelt it out with a pretence of great caution, but I saw well enough that the old scoundrel suspected that if I had lost a dog at all, it was not this particular dog. 'Ah,' he said, as he put it in his pocket, 'if I part with him to you, I must be cleared of all risks. I can't afford to get into trouble about no mistakes. Unless you likes to leave him for a day or two, you must pay accordin', you see.'

I wanted to get the hateful business over as soon as possible. I did not care what I paid— Lilian was worth all the expense! I said I had no doubt myself as to the real ownership of the animal, but I would give him any sum in reason, and would remove the dog at once.

And so we settled it. I paid him an extortionate sum, and came away with a duplicate poodle, a canine counterfeit which I hoped to pass off at Shuturgarden as the long-lost Bingo.

I know it was wrong— it even came unpleasantly near dog-stealing— but I was a desperate man. I saw Lilian gradually slipping away from me, I knew that nothing short of this could ever recall her, I was sorely tempted, I had gone far on the same road already, it was the old story of being hung for a sheep. And so I fell.

Surely some who read this will be generous enough to consider the peculiar state of the case, and mingle a little pity with their contempt.

I was dining in town that evening and took my purchase home by a late train; his demeanour was grave and intensely respectable; he was not the animal to commit himself by any flagrant indiscretion— he was gentle and tractable, too, and in all respects an agreeable contrast in character to the

original. Still, it may have been the after-dinner workings of conscience, but I could not help fancying that I saw a certain look in the creature's eyes, as if he were aware that he was required to connive at a fraud, and rather resented it.

If he would only be good enough to back me up! Fortunately, however, he was such a perfect facsimile of the outward Bingo, that the risk of detection was really inconsiderable.

When I got him home, I put Bingo's silver collar round his neck—congratulating myself on my forethought in preserving it, and took him in to see my mother. She accepted him as what he seemed, without the slightest misgiving; but this, though it encouraged me to go on, was not decisive, the spurious poodle would have to encounter the scrutiny of those who knew every tuft on the genuine animal's body!

Nothing would have induced me to undergo such an ordeal as that of personally restoring him to the Curries. We gave him supper, and tied him up on the lawn, where he howled dolefully all night, and buried bones.

The next morning I wrote a note to Mrs. Currie, expressing my pleasure at being able to restore the lost one, and another to Lilian, containing only the words, 'Will you believe *now* that I am sincere?' Then I tied both round the poodle's neck and dropped him over the wall into the Colonel's garden just before I started to catch my train to town.

I HAD an anxious walk home from the station that evening; I went round by the longer way, trembling the whole time lest I should meet any of the Currie household, to which I felt myself entirely unequal just then. I could not rest until I knew whether my fraud had succeeded, or if the poodle to which I had entrusted my fate had basely betrayed me; but my suspense was happily ended as soon as I entered my mother's room. 'You can't think how delighted those poor Curries were to see Bingo again,' she said at once; 'and they said such charming things about you, Algy—Lilian, particularly—quite affected she seemed, poor child! And they wanted you to go round and dine there and be thanked to-night, but at last I persuaded them to come to us instead. And they're going to bring the dog to make friends. Oh, and I met Frank Travers; he's back from circuit again now, so I asked him in too, to meet them!'

I drew a deep breath of relief. I had played a desperate game—but I had won! I could have wished, to be sure, that my mother had not thought of bringing in Travers on that of all evenings— but I hoped that I could defy him after this.

The Colonel and his people were the first to arrive; he and his wife being so effusively grateful that they made me very uncomfortable indeed; Lilian met me with downcast eyes, and the faintest possible blush, but she said nothing just then. Five minutes afterwards, when she and I were alone together in the

conservatory, where I had brought her on pretence of showing a new begonia, she laid her hand on my sleeve and whispered, almost shyly, 'Mr. Weatherhead— Algernon! Can you ever forgive me for being so cruel and unjust to you?' And I replied that, upon the whole, I could.

We were not in that conservatory long, but, before we left it, beautiful Lilian Roseblade had consented to make my life happy. When we re-entered the drawing-room, we found Frank Travers, who had been told the story of the recovery, and I observed his jaw fall as he glanced at our faces, and noted the triumphant smile which I have no doubt mine wore, and the tender dreamy look in Lilian's soft eyes. Poor Travers, I was sorry for him, although I was not fond of him. Travers was a good type of the rising young Common Law barrister; tall, not bad-looking, with keen dark eyes, black whiskers, and the mobile forensic mouth, which can express every shade of feeling, from deferential assent to cynical incredulity; possessed, too, of an endless flow of conversation that was decidedly agreeable, if a trifle too laboriously so, he had been a dangerous rival. But all that was over now— he saw it himself at once, and during dinner sank into dismal silence, gazing pathetically at Lilian, and sighing almost obtrusively between the courses. His stream of small talk seemed to have been cut off at the main.

'You've done a kind thing, Weatherhead,' said the Colonel. 'I can't tell you all that dog is to me, and how I missed the poor beast. I'd quite given up all hope of ever seeing him again, and all the time there was Weatherhead, Mr. Travers, quietly searching all London till he found him! I shan't forget it. It shows a really kind feeling.'

I saw by Travers's face that he was telling himself he would have found fifty Bingos in half the time— if he had only thought of it; he smiled a melancholy assent to all the Colonel said, and then began to study me with an obviously depreciatory air.

'You can't think,' I heard Mrs. Currie telling my mother, 'how really *touching* it was to see poor dear Bingo's emotion at seeing all the old familiar objects again! He went up and sniffed at them all in turn, quite plainly recognising everything. And he was quite put out to find that we had moved his favourite ottoman out of the drawing-room. But he *is* so penitent, too, and so ashamed of having run away; he hardly dares to come when John calls him, and he kept under a chair in the hall all the morning— he wouldn't come in here either, so we had to leave him in your garden.'

'He's been sadly out of spirits all day,' said Lilian; 'he hasn't bitten one of the tradespeople.'

'Oh, *he's* all right, the rascal!' said the Colonel, cheerily; 'he'll be after the cats again as well as ever in a day or two.'

'Ah, those cats!' said my poor innocent mother. 'Algy, you haven't tried the air-gun on them again lately, have you? They're worse than ever.'

I troubled the Colonel to pass the claret; Travers laughed for the first time. 'That's a good idea,' he said, in that carrying 'bar-mess' voice of his; 'an air-gun for cats, ha, ha! Make good bags, eh, Weatherhead?' I said that I did, *very good bags*, and felt I was getting painfully red in the face.

'Oh, Algy is an excellent shot— quite a sportsman,' said my mother. 'I remember, oh, long ago, when we lived at Hammersmith, he had a pistol, and he used to strew crumbs in the garden for the sparrows, and shoot at them out of the pantry window; he frequently hit one.'

'Well,' said the Colonel, not much impressed by these sporting reminiscences, 'don't go rolling over our Bingo by mistake, you know, Weatherhead, my boy. Not but what you've a sort of right after this—only don't. I wouldn't go through it all twice for anything.'

'If you really won't take any more wine,' I said hurriedly, addressing the Colonel and Travers, 'suppose we all go out and have our coffee on the lawn? It— it will be cooler there.' For it was getting very hot indoors, I thought.

I left Travers to amuse the ladies— he could do no more harm now; and taking the Colonel aside, I seized the opportunity, as we strolled up and down the garden path, to ask his consent to Lilian's engagement to me. He gave it cordially. 'There's not a man in England,' he said, 'that I'd sooner see her married to after to-day. You're a quiet steady young fellow, and you've a good kind heart. As for the money, that's neither here nor there; Lilian won't come to you without a penny, you know. But really, my boy, you can hardly believe what it is to my poor wife and me to see that dog. Why, bless my soul, look at him now! What's the matter with him, eh?'

To my unutterable horror I saw that that miserable poodle, after begging unnoticed at the tea-table for some time, had retired to an open space before it, where he was now industriously standing on his head.

We gathered round and examined the animal curiously, as he continued to balance himself gravely in his abnormal position. 'Good gracious, John,' cried Mrs. Currie, 'I never saw Bingo do such a thing before in his life!'

'Very odd,' said the Colonel, putting up his glasses; 'never learnt that from *me*.'

'I tell you what I fancy it is,' I suggested wildly. 'You see, he was always a sensitive, excitable animal, and perhaps the— the sudden joy of his return has gone to his head— *upset* him, you know.'

They seemed disposed to accept this solution, and indeed I believe they would have credited Bingo with every conceivable degree of sensibility; but I felt myself that if this unhappy animal had many more of these accomplishments I was undone, for the original Bingo had never been a dog of parts.

'It's very odd,' said Travers, reflectively, as the dog recovered his proper level, 'but I always thought that it was half the *right* ear that Bingo had lost?'

'So it is, isn't it?' said the Colonel. 'Left, eh? Well, I thought myself it was the right.'

My heart almost stopped with terror— I had altogether forgotten that. I hastened to set the point at rest. 'Oh, it *was* the left,' I said positively; 'I know it because I remember so particularly thinking how odd it was that it *should* be the left ear, and not the right!' I told myself this should be positively my last lie.

'*Why* odd?' asked Frank Travers, with his most offensive Socratic manner.

'My dear fellow, I can't tell you,' I said impatiently; 'everything seems odd when you come to think at all about it.'

'Algernon,' said Lilian later on, 'will you tell Aunt Mary and Mr. Travers, and— and me, how it was you came to find Bingo? Mr. Travers is quite anxious to hear all about it.'

I could not very well refuse; I sat down and told the story, all my own way. I painted Blagg, perhaps, rather bigger and blacker than life, and described an exciting scene, in which I recognised Bingo by his collar in the streets, and claimed and bore him off then and there in spite of all opposition.

I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing Travers grinding his teeth with envy as I went on, and feeling Lilian's soft, slender hand glide silently into mine as I told my tale in the twilight.

All at once, just as I reached the climax, we heard the poodle barking furiously at the hedge which separated my garden from the road. 'There's a foreign-looking man staring over the hedge,' said Lilian; 'Bingo always *did* hate foreigners.'

There certainly was a swarthy man there, and, though I had no reason for it then, somehow my heart died within me at the sight of him.

'Don't be alarmed, sir,' cried the Colonel, 'the dog won't bite you— unless there's a hole in the hedge anywhere.'

The stranger took off his small straw hat with a sweep. 'Ah, I am not afraid,' he said, and his accent proclaimed him a Frenchman, 'he is not enrage at me. May I ask, is it pairmeet to speak wiz Misterre Vezzered?'

I felt I must deal with this person alone, for I feared the worst; and, asking them to excuse me, I went to the hedge and faced the Frenchman with the frightful calm of despair. He was a short, stout little man, with blue cheeks, sparkling black eyes, and a vivacious walnut-coloured countenance; he wore a short black alpaca coat, and a large white cravat with an immense oval malachite brooch in the centre of it, which I mention because I found myself staring mechanically at it during the interview.

'My name is Weatherhead,' I began, with the bearing of a detected pickpocket. 'Can I be of any service to you?'

'Of a great service,' he said emphatically; 'you can restore to me ze poodle vich I see zere!'

Nemesis had called at last in the shape of a rival claimant. I staggered for an instant; then I said, 'Oh, I think you are under a mistake— that dog is not mine.'

'I know it,' he said; 'zere 'as been leetle mistake, so if ze dog is not to you, you give him back to me, *hein?*'

'I tell you,' I said, 'that poodle belongs to the gentleman over there.' And I pointed to the Colonel, seeing that it was best now to bring him into the affair without delay.

'You are wrong,' he said doggedly; 'ze poodle is my poodle! And I was direct to you—it is your name on ze carte!' And he presented me with that fatal card which I had been foolish enough to give to Blagg as a proof of my identity. I saw it all now; the old villain had betrayed me, and to earn a double reward had put the real owner on my track.

I decided to call the Colonel at once, and attempt to brazen it out with the help of his sincere belief in the dog.

'Eh, what's that; what's it all about?' said the Colonel, bustling up, followed at intervals by the others.

The Frenchman raised his hat again. 'I do not vant to make a trouble,' he began, 'but zere is leetle mistake. My word of honour, sare, I see my own poodle in your garden. Ven I appeal to zis gentilman to restore 'im he reffer me to you.'

'You must allow me to know my own dog, sir,' said the Colonel. 'Why, I've had him from a pup. Bingo, old boy, you know your master, don't you?'

But the brute ignored him altogether, and began to leap wildly at the hedge, in frantic efforts to join the Frenchman. It needed no Solomon to decide *his* ownership!

'I tell you, you 'ave got ze wrong poodle— it is my own dog, my Azor! He remember me well, you see? I lose him it is three, four days.... I see a nottage zat he is found, and ven I go to ze address zey tell me, "Oh, he is reclaim, he is gone wiz a strangaire who has advertize." Zey show me ze placard, I follow 'ere, and ven I arrive, I see my poodle in ze garden before me!'

'But look here,' said the Colonel, impatiently; 'it's all very well to say that, but how can you prove it? I give you *my* word that the dog belongs to *me*! You must prove your claim, eh, Travers?'

'Yes,' said Travers, judicially, 'mere assertion is no proof: it's oath against oath, at present.'

'Attend an instant— your poodle was he 'ighly train, had he some talents—a dog viz tricks, eh?'

'No, he's not,' said the Colonel; 'I don't like to see dogs taught to play the fool— there's none of that nonsense about *him*, sir!'

'Ah, remark him well, then. Azor, *mon chou, danse donc un peu!*'

And on the foreigner's whistling a lively air, that infernal poodle rose on his hind legs and danced solemnly about half-way round the garden! We inside followed his movements with dismay. 'Why, dash it all!' cried the disgusted Colonel, 'he's dancing along like a d—d mountebank! But it's my Bingo for all that!'

'You are not convince? You shall see more. Azor, *ici! Pour* Beesmarck, Azor!' (the poodle barked ferociously). '*Pour* Gambetta!' (he wagged his tail and began to leap with joy). '*Meurs pour la Patrie!*'— and the too-accomplished animal rolled over as if killed in battle!

'Where could Bingo have picked up so much French!' cried Lilian, incredulously.

'Or so much French history?' added that serpent Travers.

'Shall I command 'im to jomp, or reverse 'imself?' inquired the obliging Frenchman.

'We've seen that, thank you,' said the Colonel, gloomily. 'Upon my word, I don't know what to think. It can't be that that's not my Bingo after all— I'll never believe it!'

I tried a last desperate stroke. 'Will you come round to the front?' I said to the Frenchman; 'I'll let you in, and we can discuss the matter quietly.' Then, as we walked back together, I asked him eagerly what he would take to abandon his claims and let the Colonel think the poodle was his after all.

He was furious— he considered himself insulted; with great emotion he informed me that the dog was the pride of his life (it seems to be the mission of black poodles to serve as domestic comforts of this priceless kind!), that he would not part with him for twice his weight in gold.

'Figure,' he began, as we joined the others, 'zat zis gentilman 'ere 'as offer me money for ze dog! He agrees zat it is to me, you see? Ver well zen, zere is no more to be said!'

'Why, Weatherhead, have *you* lost faith too, then?' said the Colonel.

I saw that it was no good— all I wanted now was to get out of it creditably and get rid of the Frenchman. 'I'm sorry to say,' I replied, 'that I'm afraid I've been deceived by the extraordinary likeness. I don't think, on reflection, that that *is* Bingo!'

'What do you think, Travers?' asked the Colonel.

'Well, since you ask me,' said Travers, with quite unnecessary dryness, 'I never did think so.'

'Nor I,' said the Colonel; 'I thought from the first that was never my Bingo. Why, Bingo would make two of that beast!'

And Lilian and her aunt both protested that they had had their doubts from the first.

'Zen you pairmeet zat I remove 'im?' said the Frenchman.

'Certainly' said the Colonel; and after some apologies on our part for the mistake, he went off in triumph, with the detestable poodle frisking after him.

When he had gone the Colonel laid his hand kindly on my shoulder. 'Don't look so cut up about it, my boy,' he said; 'you did your best— there was a sort of likeness, to any one who didn't know Bingo as we did.'

Just then the Frenchman again appeared at the hedge. 'A thousand pardons,' he said, 'but I find zis upon my dog— it is not to me. Suffer me to restore it viz many compliments.'

It was Bingo's collar. Travers took it from his hand and brought it to us.

'This was on the dog when you stopped that fellow, didn't you say?' he asked me.

One more lie—and I was so-weary of falsehood! 'Y-yes,' I said reluctantly, that was so.'

'Very extraordinary,' said Travers; 'that's the wrong poodle beyond a doubt, but when he's found, he's wearing the right dog's collar! Now how do you account for that?'

'My good fellow,' I said impatiently, 'I'm not in the witness-box. I *can't* account for it. It—it's a mere coincidence!'

'But look here, my *dear* Weatherhead,' argued Travers (whether in good faith or not I never could quite make out), 'don't you see what a tremendously important link it is? Here's a dog who (as I understand the facts) had a silver collar, with his name engraved on it, round his neck at the time he was lost. Here's that identical collar turning up soon afterwards round the neck of a totally different dog! We must follow this up; we must get at the bottom of it somehow! With a clue like this, we're sure to find out, either the dog himself, or what's become of him! Just try to recollect exactly what happened, there's a good fellow. This is just the sort of thing I like!'

It was the sort of thing I did not enjoy at all. 'You must excuse me to-night, Travers,' I said uncomfortably; 'you see, just now it's rather a sore subject for me— and I'm not feeling very well!' I was grateful just then for a reassuring glance of pity and confidence from Lilian's sweet eyes which revived my drooping spirits for the moment.

'Yes, we'll go into it to-morrow, Travers,' said the Colonel; 'and then— hullo, why, there's that confounded Frenchman *again!*'

It was indeed; he came prancing back delicately, with a malicious enjoyment on his wrinkled face. 'Once more I return to apologise,' he said. 'My poodle 'as permit 'imself ze grave indiscretion to make a very big 'ole at ze bottom of ze garden!'

I assured him that it was of no consequence. 'Perhaps,' he replied, looking steadily at me through his keen half-shut eyes, 'you vill not say zat ven you regard ze 'ole. And you others, I spik to you: sometimes von loses a somzing vich

is quite near all the time. It is very droll, eh? my word, ha, ha, ha!' And he ambled off, with an aggressively fiendish laugh that chilled my blood.

'What the dooce did he mean by that, eh?' said the Colonel, blankly.

'Don't know,' said Travers; 'suppose we go and inspect the hole?'

But before that I had contrived to draw near it myself, in deadly fear lest the Frenchman's last words had contained some innuendo which I had not understood.

It was light enough still for me to see something, at the unexpected horror of which I very nearly fainted.

That thrice accursed poodle which I had been insane enough to attempt to foist upon the Colonel must, it seems, have buried his supper the night before very near the spot in which I had laid Bingo, and in his attempts to exhume his bone had brought the remains of my victim to the surface!

There the corpse lay, on the very top of the excavations. Time had not, of course, improved its appearance, which was ghastly in the extreme, but still plainly recognisable by the eye of affection.

'It's a very ordinary hole,' I gasped, putting myself before it and trying to turn them back. 'Nothing in it— nothing at all!'

'Except one Algernon Weatherhead, Esq., eh?' whispered Travers jocosely in my ear.

'No, but,' persisted the Colonel, advancing, 'look here! Has the dog damaged any of your shrubs?'

'No, no!' I cried piteously, 'quite the reverse. Let's all go indoors now; it's getting so cold!'

'See, there *is* a shrub or something uprooted!' said the Colonel, still coming nearer that fatal hole. 'Why, hullo, look there! What's that?'

Lilian, who was by his side, gave a slight scream. 'Uncle,' she cried, 'it looks like—like *Bingo*!'

The Colonel turned suddenly upon me. 'Do you hear?' he demanded, in a choked voice. 'You hear what she says? Can't you speak out? Is that our Bingo?'

I gave it up at last; I only longed to be allowed to crawl away under something! 'Yes,' I said in a dull whisper, as I sat down heavily on a garden seat, 'yes... that's Bingo... misfortune... shoot him... quite an accident!'

There was a terrible explosion after that; they saw at last how I had deceived them, and put the very worst construction upon everything. Even now I writhe impotently at times, and my cheeks smart and tingle with humiliation, as I recall that scene— the Colonel's very plain speaking, Lilian's passionate reproaches and contempt, and her aunt's speechless prostration of disappointment.

I made no attempt to defend myself; I was not perhaps the complete villain they deemed me, but I felt dully that no doubt it all served me perfectly right.

Still I do not think I am under any obligation to put their remarks down in black and white here.

Travers had vanished at the first opportunity— whether out of delicacy, or the fear of breaking out into unseasonable mirth, I cannot say; and shortly afterwards the others came to where I sat silent with bowed head, and bade me a stern and final farewell.

And then, as the last gleam of Lilian's white dress vanished down the garden path, I laid my head down on the table amongst the coffee-cups and cried like a beaten child.

I GOT LEAVE as soon as I could and went abroad. The morning after my return I noticed, while shaving, that there was a small square marble tablet placed against the wall of the Colonel's garden. I got my opera-glass and read— and pleasant reading it was— the following inscription:—

IN AFFECTIONATE MEMORY
OF
BINGO,
SECRETLY AND CRUELLY PUT TO DEATH,
IN COLD BLOOD;
BY A
NEIGHBOUR AND FRIEND.
JUNE, 1881

If this explanation of mine ever reaches my neighbours' eyes, I humbly hope they will have the humanity either to take away or tone down that tablet. They cannot conceive what I suffer, when curious visitors insist, as they do every day, in spelling out the words from our windows, and asking me countless questions about them!

Sometimes I meet the Curries about the village, and, as they pass me with averted heads, I feel myself growing crimson. Travers is almost always with Lilian now. He has given her a dog— a fox-terrier— and they take ostentatiously elaborate precautions to keep it out of my garden.

I should like to assure them here that they need not be under any alarm. I have shot one dog.

12: The Murder Hole

Catherine Sinclair (uncredited)

1800-1864

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Feb 1829

ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, on the estate of Lord Cassilus between Ayrshire and Galloway, lay a great moor, unrelieved by any trees or vegetation.

It was rumored that unwary travelers had been intercepted and murdered there, and that no investigation ever revealed what had happened to them. People living in a nearby hamlet believed that in the dead of night they sometimes heard a sudden cry of anguish; and a shepherd who had lost his way once declared that he had seen three mysterious figures struggling together, until one of them, with a frightful scream, sank suddenly into the earth. So terrifying was this place that at last no one remained there, except one old woman and her two sons, who were too poor to flee, as their neighbors had done. Travelers occasionally begged a night's lodging at their cottage, rather than continue their journey across the moor in the darkness, and even by day no one traveled that way except in companies of at least two or three people.

One stormy November night, a peddler boy was overtaken by darkness on the moor. Terrified by the solitude, he repeated to himself the promises of Scripture, and so struggled toward the old cottage, which he had visited the year before in a large company of travelers, and where he felt assured of a welcome. Its light guided him from afar, and he knocked at the door, but at first received no answer. He then peered through a window and saw that the occupants were all at their accustomed occupations: the old woman was scrubbing the floor and strewing it with sand; her two sons seemed to be thrusting something large and heavy into a great chest, which they then hastily locked. There was an air of haste about all this which puzzled the waiting boy outside.

He tapped lightly on the window, and they all started up, with consternation on their faces, and one of the men suddenly darted out at the door, seized the boy roughly by the shoulder and dragged him inside. He said, trying to laugh, "I am only the poor peddler who visited you last year."

"Are you alone?" cried the old woman in a harsh, deep voice.

"Alone here— and alone in the whole world," replied the boy sadly.

"Then you are welcome," said one of the men with a sneer. Their words filled the boy with alarm, and the confusion and desolation of the formerly neat and orderly cottage seemed to show signs of recent violence.

The curtains had been torn down from the bed to which he was shown, and though he begged for a light to burn until he fell asleep, his terror kept him long awake.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by a single cry of distress. He sat up and listened, but it was not repeated, and he would have lain down to sleep again, but suddenly his eye fell on a stream of blood slowly trickling under the door of his room. In terror he sprang to the door, and through a chink he saw that the victim outside was only a goat. But just then he overheard the voices of the two men, and their words transfixed him with horror. "I wish all the throats we cut were as easy," said one. "Did you ever hear such a noise as the old gentleman made last night?"

"Ah, the Murder Hole's the thing for me," said the other. "One plunge and the fellow's dead and buried in a moment."

How do you mean to dispatch the lad in there?" asked the old woman in a harsh whisper, and one of the men silently drew his bloody knife across his throat to answer.

The terrified boy crept to his window and managed to let himself down without a sound. But as he stood wondering which way to turn, a dreadful cry rang out: "The boy has escaped— let loose the bloodhound."

He ran for his life, blindly, but all too soon he heard the dreadful baying of the hound and the voices of the men in pursuit. Suddenly he stumbled and fell on a heap of rough stones which cut him in every limb, so that his blood poured over the stones. He staggered to his feet and ran on; the hound was so near that he could almost feel its breath on his back. But suddenly it smelled the blood on the stones, and, thinking the chase at an end, it lay down and refused to go farther after the same scent. The boy fled on and on till morning, and when at last he reached a village, his pitiable state and his fearful story roused such wrath that three gibbets were at once set upon the moor, and before night the three villain had been captured and had confessed their guilt. The bones of their victims were later discovered, and with great difficulty brought up from the dreadful hole with its narrow aperture into which they had been thrust.

13: The Scandal Detectives

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

The Saturday Evening Post, 28 April, 1928

Collected in: *Taps at Reveille*, 1935

IT WAS a hot afternoon in May and Mrs. Buckner thought that a pitcher of fruit lemonade might prevent the boys from filling up on ice cream at the drug store. She belonged to that generation, since retired, upon whom the great revolution in American family life was to be visited; but at that time she believed that her children's relation to her was as much as hers had been to her parents, for this was more than twenty years ago.

Some generations are close to those that succeed them; between others the gap is infinite and unbridgeable. Mrs. Buckner— a woman of character, a member of Society in a large Middle-Western city— carrying a pitcher of fruit lemonade through her own spacious back yard, was progressing across a hundred years. Her own thoughts would have been comprehensible to her great-grandmother; what was happening in a room above the stable would have been entirely unintelligible to them both. In what had once served as the coachman's sleeping apartment, her son and a friend were not behaving in a normal manner, but were, so to speak, experimenting in a void. They were making the first tentative combinations of the ideas and materials they found ready at their hand— ideas destined to become, in future years, first articulate, then startling and finally commonplace. At the moment when she called up to them they were sitting with disarming quiet upon the still unhatched eggs of the mid-twentieth century.

Riply Buckner descended the ladder and took the lemonade. Basil Duke Lee looked abstractedly down at the transaction and said, "Thank you very much, Mrs. Buckner."

"Are you sure it isn't too hot up there?"

"No, Mrs. Buckner. It's fine."

It was stifling; but they were scarcely conscious of the heat, and they drank two tall glasses each of the lemonade without knowing that they were thirsty. Concealed beneath a sawed-out trapdoor from which they presently took it was a composition book bound in imitation red leather which currently absorbed much of their attention. On its first page was inscribed, if you penetrated the secret of the lemon-juice ink: "The Book of Scandal, written by Riply Buckner, Jr., and Basil D. Lee, Scandal Detectives."

In this book they had set down such deviations from rectitude on the part of their fellow citizens as had reached their ears. Some of these false steps were those of grizzled men, stories that had become traditions in the city and were

embalmed in the composition book by virtue of indiscreet exhumations at family dinner tables. Others were the more exciting sins, confirmed or merely rumored, of boys and girls their own age. Some of the entries would have been read by adults with bewilderment, others might have inspired wrath, and there were three or four contemporary reports that would have prostrated the parents of the involved children with horror and despair.

One of the mildest items, a matter they had hesitated about setting down, though it had shocked them only last year, was: "Elwood Leaming has been to the Burlesque Show three or four times at the Star."

Another, and perhaps their favorite, because of its uniqueness, set forth that "H. P. Cramner committed some theft in the East he could be imprisoned for and had to come here"— H. P. Cramner being now one of the oldest and "most substantial" citizens of the city.

The single defect in the book was that it could only be enjoyed with the aid of the imagination, for the invisible ink must keep its secrets until that day when, the pages being held close to the fire, the items would appear. Close inspection was necessary to determine which pages had been used— already a rather grave charge against a certain couple had been superimposed upon the dismal facts that Mrs. R. B. Cary had consumption and that her son, Walter Cary, had been expelled from Pawling School. The purpose of the work as a whole was not blackmail. It was treasured against the time when its protagonists should "do something" to Basil and Riply. Its possession gave them a sense of power. Basil, for instance, had never seen Mr. H. P. Cramner make a single threatening gesture in Basil's direction but let him even hint that he was going to do something to Basil, and there preserved against him was the record of his past.

It is only fair to say that at this point the book passes entirely out of this story. Years later a janitor discovered it beneath the trapdoor, and finding it apparently blank, gave it to his little girl; so the misdeeds of Elwood Leaming and H. P. Cramner were definitely entombed at last beneath a fair copy of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The book was Basil's idea. He was more the imaginative and in most ways the stronger of the two. He was a shining-eyed, brown-haired boy of fourteen, rather small as yet, and bright and lazy at school. His favorite character in fiction was Arsène Lupin, the gentleman burglar, a romantic phenomenon lately imported from Europe and much admired in the first bored decades of the century.

Riply Buckner, also in short pants, contributed to the partnership a breathless practicality. His mind waited upon Basil's imagination like a hair trigger and no scheme was too fantastic for his immediate "Let's do it!" Since the school's third baseball team, on which they had been pitcher and catcher, decomposed after an unfortunate April season, they had spent their afternoons

struggling to evolve a way of life which should measure up to the mysterious energies fermenting inside them. In the cache beneath the trapdoor were some "slouch" hats and bandanna handkerchiefs, some loaded dice, half of a pair of handcuffs, a rope ladder of a tenuous crochet persuasion for rear-window escapes into the alley, and a make-up box containing two old theatrical wigs and crêpe hair of various colors— all to be used when they decided what illegal enterprises to undertake.

Their lemonades finished, they lit Home Runs and held a desultory conversation which touched on crime, professional baseball, sex and the local stock company. This broke off at the sound of footsteps and familiar voices in the adjoining alley.

From the window, they investigated. The voices belonged to Margaret Torrence, Imogene Bissel and Connie Davies, who were cutting through the alley from Imogene's back yard to Connie's at the end of the block. The young ladies were thirteen, twelve and thirteen years old respectively, and they considered themselves alone, for in time to their march they were rendering a mildly daring parody in a sort of whispering giggle and coming out strongly on the finale: "Oh, my dar -ling Clemon -tine."

Basil and Riply leaned together from the window, then remembering their undershirts sank down behind the sill.

"We heard you!" they cried together.

The girls stopped and laughed. Margaret Torrence chewed exaggeratedly to indicate gum, and gum with a purpose. Basil immediately understood.

"Whereabouts?" he demanded.

"Over at Imogene's house."

They had been at Mrs. Bissel's cigarettes. The implied recklessness of their mood interested and excited the two boys and they prolonged the conversation. Connie Davies had been Riply's girl during dancing-school term; Margaret Torrence had played a part in Basil's recent past; Imogene Bissel was just back from a year in Europe. During the last month neither Basil nor Riply had thought about girls, and, thus refreshed, they become conscious that the centre of the world had shifted suddenly from the secret room to the little group outside.

"Come on up," they suggested.

"Come on out. Come on down to the Whartons' yard."

"All right."

Barely remembering to put away the Scandal Book and the box of disguises, the two boys hurried out, mounted their bicycles and rode up the alley.

The Whartons' own children had long grown up, but their yard was still one of those predestined places where young people gather in the afternoon. It had many advantages. It was large, open to other yards on both sides, and it could be entered upon skates or bicycles from the street. It contained an old seesaw, a

swing and a pair of flying rings; but it had been a rendezvous before these were put up, for it had a child's quality— the thing that makes young people huddle inextricably on uncomfortable steps and desert the houses of their friends to herd on the obscure premises of "people nobody knows." The Whartons' yard had long been a happy compromise; there were deep shadows there all day long and ever something vague in bloom, and patient dogs around, and brown spots worn bare by countless circling wheels and dragging feet. In sordid poverty, below the bluff two hundred feet away, lived the "micks"— they had merely inherited the name, for they were now largely of Scandinavian descent— and when other amusements palled, a few cries were enough to bring a gang of them swarming up the hill, to be faced if numbers promised well, to be fled from into convenient houses if things went the other way.

It was five o'clock and there was a small crowd gathered there for that soft and romantic time before supper— a time surpassed only by the interim of summer dusk thereafter. Basil and Riply rode their bicycles around abstractedly, in and out of trees, resting now and then with a hand on someone's shoulder, shading their eyes from the glow of the late sun that, like youth itself, is too strong to face directly, but must be kept down to an undertone until it dies away.

Basil rode over to Imogene Bissel and balanced idly on his wheel before her. Something in his face then must have attracted her, for she looked up at him, looked at him really, and slowly smiled. She was to be a beauty and belle of many proms in a few years. Now her large brown eyes and large beautifully shaped mouth and the high flush over her thin cheek bones made her face gnome-like and offended those who wanted a child to look like a child. For a moment Basil was granted an insight into the future, and the spell of her vitality crept over him suddenly. For the first time in his life he realized a girl completely as something opposite and complementary to him, and he was subject to a warm chill of mingled pleasure and pain. It was a definite experience and he was immediately conscious of it. The summer afternoon became lost in her suddenly— the soft air, the shadowy hedges and banks of flowers, the orange sunlight, the laughter and voices, the tinkle of a piano over the way— the odor left all these things and went into Imogene's face as she sat there looking up at him with a smile.

For a moment it was too much for him. He let it go, incapable of exploiting it until he had digested it alone. He rode around fast in a circle on his bicycle, passing near Imogene without looking at her. When he came back after a while and asked if he could walk home with her, she had forgotten the moment, if it had ever existed for her, and was almost surprised. With Basil wheeling his bicycle beside her, they started down the street.

"Can you come out tonight?" he asked eagerly. "There'll probably be a bunch in the Whartons' yard."

"I'll ask mother."

"I'll telephone you. I don't want to go unless you'll be there."

"Why?" She smiled at him again, encouraging him.

"Because I don't want to."

"But why don't you want to?"

"Listen," he said quickly, "what boys do you like better than me?"

"Nobody. I like you and Hubert Blair best."

Basil felt no jealousy at the coupling of this name with his. There was nothing to do about Hubert Blair but accept him philosophically, as other boys did when dissecting the hearts of other girls.

"I like you better than anybody," he said deliriously.

The weight of the pink dappled sky above him was not endurable. He was plunging along through air of ineffable loveliness while warm freshets sprang up in his blood and he turned them, and with them his whole life, like a stream toward this girl.

They reached the carriage door at the side of her house.

"Can't you come in, Basil?"

"No." He saw immediately that that was a mistake, but it was said now. The intangible present had eluded him. Still he lingered. "Do you want my school ring?"

"Yes, if you want to give it to me."

"I'll give it to you tonight." His voice shook slightly as he added, "That is, I'll trade."

"What for?"

"Something."

"What?" Her color spread; she knew.

"You know. Will you trade?"

Imogene looked around uneasily. In the honey-sweet silence that had gathered around the porch, Basil held his breath. "You're awful," she whispered. "Maybe.... Good-by."

ii

IT WAS the best hour of the day now and Basil was terribly happy. This summer he and his mother and sister were going to the lakes and next fall he was starting away to school. Then he would go to Yale and be a great athlete, and after that— if his two dreams had fitted onto each other chronologically instead of existing independently side by side— he was due to become a

gentleman burglar. Everything was fine. He had so many alluring things to think about that it was hard to fall asleep at night.

That he was now crazy about Imogene Bissel was not a distraction, but another good thing. It had as yet no poignancy, only a brilliant and dynamic excitement that was bearing him along toward the Whartons' yard through the May twilight.

He wore his favorite clothes— white duck knickerbockers, pepper-and-salt Norfolk jacket, a Belmont collar and a gray knitted tie. With his black hair wet and shining, he made a handsome little figure as he turned in upon the familiar but now re-enchanted lawn and joined the voices in the gathering darkness. Three or four girls who lived in neighboring houses were present, and almost twice as many boys; and a slightly older group adorning the side veranda made a warm, remote nucleus against the lamps of the house and contributed occasional mysterious ripples of laughter to the already overburdened night.

Moving from shadowy group to group, Basil ascertained that Imogene was not yet here. Finding Margaret Torrence, he spoke to her aside, lightly.

"Have you still got that old ring of mine?"

Margaret had been his girl all year at dancing school, signified by the fact that he had taken her to the cotillion which closed the season. The affair had languished toward the end; none the less, his question was undiplomatic.

"I've got it somewhere," Margaret replied carelessly. "Why? Do you want it back?"

"Sort of."

"All right. I never did want it. It was you that made me take it, Basil. I'll give it back to you tomorrow."

"You couldn't give it to me tonight, could you?" His heart leaped as he saw a small figure come in at the rear gate. "I sort of want to get it tonight."

"Oh, all right, Basil."

She ran across the street to her house and Basil followed. Mr. and Mrs. Torrence were on the porch, and while Margaret went upstairs for the ring he overcame his excitement and impatience and answered those questions as to the health of his parents which are so meaningless to the young. Then a sudden stiffening came over him, his voice faded off and his glazed eyes fixed upon a scene that was materializing over the way.

From the shadows far up the street, a swift, almost flying figure emerged and floated into the patch of lamplight in front of the Whartons' house. The figure wove here and there in a series of geometric patterns, now off with a flash of sparks at the impact of skates and pavement, now gliding miraculously backward, describing a fantastic curve, with one foot lifted gracefully in the air, until the young people moved forward in groups out of the darkness and

crowded to the pavement to watch. Basil gave a quiet little groan as he realized that of all possible nights, Hubert Blair had chosen this one to arrive.

"You say you're going to the lakes this summer, Basil. Have you taken a cottage?"

Basil became aware after a moment that Mr. Torrence was making this remark for the third time.

"Oh, yes, sir," he answered — "I mean, no. We're staying at the club."

"Won't that be lovely?" said Mrs. Torrence.

Across the street, he saw Imogene standing under the lamp-post and in front of her Hubert Blair, his jaunty cap on the side of his head, maneuvering in a small circle. Basil winced as he heard his chuckling laugh. He did not perceive Margaret until she was beside him, pressing his ring into his hand like a bad penny. He muttered a strained hollow good-by to her parents, and weak with apprehension, followed her back across the street.

Hanging back in a shadow, he fixed his eyes not on Imogene but on Hubert Blair. There was undoubtedly something rare about Hubert. In the eyes of children less than fifteen, the shape of the nose is the distinguishing mark of beauty. Parents may call attention to lovely eyes, shining hair or gorgeous coloring, but the nose and its juxtaposition on the face is what the adolescent sees. Upon the lithe, stylish, athletic torso of Hubert Blair was set a conventional chubby face, and upon this face was chiseled the piquant, retroussé nose of a Harrison Fisher girl.

He was confident; he had personality, uninhibited by doubts or moods. He did not go to dancing school— his parents had moved to the city only a year ago— but already he was a legend. Though most of the boys disliked him, they did homage to his virtuosic athletic ability, and for the girls his every movement, his pleasantries, his very indifference, had a simply immeasurable fascination. Upon several previous occasions Basil had discovered this; now the discouraging comedy began to unfold once more.

Hubert took off his skates, rolled one down his arm and caught it by the strap before it reached the pavement; he snatched the ribbon from Imogene's hair and made off with it, dodging from under her arms as she pursued him, laughing and fascinated, around the yard. He cocked one foot behind the other and pretended to lean an elbow against a tree, missed the tree on purpose and gracefully saved himself from falling. The boys watched him noncommittally at first. Then they, too, broke out into activity, doing stunts and tricks as fast as they could think of them until those on the porch craned their necks at the sudden surge of activity in the garden. But Hubert coolly turned his back on his own success. He took Imogene's hat and began setting it in various quaint ways upon his head. Imogene and the other girls were filled with delight.

Unable any longer to endure the nauseous spectacle, Basil went up to the group and said, "Why, hello, Hube," in as negligent a tone as he could command.

Hubert answered: "Why, hello, old— old Basil the Boozle," and set the hat a different way on his head, until Basil himself couldn't resist an unwilling chortle of laughter.

"Basil the Boozle! Hello, Basil the Boozle!" The cry circled the garden. Reproachfully he distinguished Riply's voice among the others.

"Hube the Boob!" Basil countered quickly; but his ill humor detracted from the effect, though several boys repeated it appreciatively.

Gloom settled upon Basil, and through the heavy dusk the figure of Imogene began to take on a new, unattainable charm. He was a romantic boy and already he had endowed her heavily from his fancy. Now he hated her for her indifference, but he must perversely linger near in the vain hope of recovering the penny of ecstasy so wantonly expended this afternoon.

He tried to talk to Margaret with decoy animation, but Margaret was not responsive. Already a voice had gone up in the darkness calling in a child. Panic seized upon him; the blessed hour of summer evening was almost over. At a spreading of the group to let pedestrians through, he maneuvered Imogene unwillingly aside.

"I've got it," he whispered. "Here it is. Can I take you home?"

She looked at him distractedly. Her hand closed automatically on the ring.

"What? Oh, I promised Hubert he could take me home." At the sight of his face she pulled herself from her trance and forced a note of indignation. "I saw you going off with Margaret Torrence just as soon as I came into the yard."

"I didn't. I just went to get the ring."

"Yes, you did! I saw you!"

Her eyes moved back to Hubert Blair. He had replaced his roller skates and was making little rhythmic jumps and twirls on his toes, like a witch doctor throwing a slow hypnosis over an African tribe. Basil's voice, explaining and arguing, went on, but Imogene moved away. Helplessly he followed. There were other voices calling in the darkness now and unwilling responses on all sides.

"All right, mother!"

"I'll be there in a second, mother."

"Mother, can't I please stay out five minutes more?"

"I've got to go," Imogene cried. "It's almost nine."

Waving her hand and smiling absently at Basil, she started off down the street. Hubert pranced and stunted at her side, circled around her and made entrancing little figures ahead.

Only after a minute did Basil realize that another young lady was addressing him.

"What?" he demanded absently.

"Hubert Blair is the nicest boy in town and you're the most conceited," repeated Margaret Torrence with deep conviction.

He stared at her in pained surprise. Margaret wrinkled her nose at him and yielded up her person to the now-insistent demands coming from across the street. As Basil gazed stupidly after her and then watched the forms of Imogene and Hubert disappear around the corner, there was a low mutter of thunder along the sultry sky and a moment later a solitary drop plunged through the lamplit leaves overhead and splattered on the sidewalk at his feet. The day was to close in rain.

iii

IT CAME quickly and he was drenched and running before he reached his house eight blocks away. But the change of weather had swept over his heart and he leaped up every few steps, swallowing the rain and crying "Yo-o-o!" aloud, as if he himself were a part of the fresh, violent disturbance of the night. Imogene was gone, washed out like the day's dust on the sidewalk. Her beauty would come back into his mind in brighter weather, but here in the storm he was alone with himself. A sense of extraordinary power welled up in him, until to leave the ground permanently with one of his wild leaps would not have surprised him. He was a lone wolf, secret and untamed; a night prowler, demoniac and free. Only when he reached his own house did his emotion begin to turn, speculatively and almost without passion, against Hubert Blair.

He changed his clothes, and putting on pajamas and dressing-gown descended to the kitchen, where he happened upon a new chocolate cake. He ate a fourth of it and most of a bottle of milk. His elation somewhat diminished, he called up Riply Buckner on the phone.

"I've got a scheme," he said.

"What about?"

"How to do something to H. B. with the S. D."

Riply understood immediately what he meant. Hubert had been so indiscreet as to fascinate other girls besides Miss Bissel that evening.

"We'll have to take in Bill Kampf," Basil said.

"All right."

"See you at recess tomorrow.... Good night!"

iv

FOUR DAYS later, when Mr. and Mrs. George P. Blair were finishing dinner, Hubert was called to the telephone. Mrs. Blair took advantage of his absence to speak to her husband of what had been on her mind all day.

"George, those boys, or whatever they are, came again last night."

He frowned.

"Did you see them?"

"Hilda did. She almost caught one of them. You see, I told her about the note they left last Tuesday, the one that said, 'First warning, S. D.,' so she was ready for them. They rang the back-door bell this time and she answered it straight from the dishes. If her hands hadn't been soapy she could have caught one, because she grabbed him when he handed her a note, but her hands were soapy so he slipped away."

"What did he look like?"

"She said he might have been a very little man, but she thought he was a boy in a false face. He dodged like a boy, she said, and she thought he had short pants on. The note was like the other. It said 'Second warning, S. D.'"

"If you've got it, I'd like to see it after dinner."

Hubert came back from the phone. "It was Imogene Bissel," he said. "She wants me to come over to her house. A bunch are going over there tonight."

"Hubert," asked his father, "do you know any boy with the initials S. D.?"

"No, sir."

"Have you thought?"

"Yeah, I thought. I knew a boy named Sam Davis, but I haven't seen him for a year."

"Who was he?"

"Oh, a sort of tough. He was at Number 44 School when I went there."

"Did he have it in for you?"

"I don't think so."

"Who do you think could be doing this? Has anybody got it in for you that you know about?"

"I don't know, papa; I don't think so."

"I don't like the looks of this thing," said Mr. Blair thoughtfully. "Of course it may be only some boys, but it may be —"

He was silent. Later, he studied the note. It was in red ink and there was a skull and crossbones in the corner, but being printed, it told him nothing at all.

Meanwhile Hubert kissed his mother, set his cap jauntily on the side of his head, and passing through the kitchen stepped out on the back stoop, intending to take the usual short cut along the alley. It was a bright moonlit night and he paused for a moment on the stoop to tie his shoe. If he had but known that the telephone call just received had been a decoy, that it had not come from Imogene Bissel's house, had not indeed been a girl's voice at all, and that shadowy and grotesque forms were skulking in the alley just outside the gate, he would not have sprung so gracefully and lithely down the steps with his

hands in his pockets or whistled the first bar of the Grizzly Bear into the apparently friendly night.

His whistle aroused varying emotions in the alley. Basil had given his daring and successful falsetto imitation over the telephone a little too soon, and though the Scandal Detectives had hurried, their preparations were not quite in order. They had become separated. Basil, got up like a Southern planter of the old persuasion, was just outside the Blairs' gate; Bill Kampf, with a long Balkan mustache attached by a wire to the lower cartilage of his nose, was approaching in the shadow of the fence; but Riply Buckner, in a full rabbinical beard, was impeded by a length of rope he was trying to coil and was still a hundred feet away. The rope was an essential part of their plan; for, after much cogitation, they had decided what they were going to do to Hubert Blair. They were going to tie him up, gag him and put him in his own garbage can.

The idea at first horrified them— it would ruin his suit, it was awfully dirty and he might smother. In fact the garbage can, symbol of all that was repulsive, won the day only because it made every other idea seem tame. They disposed of the objections— his suit could be cleaned, it was where he ought to be anyhow, and if they left the lid off he couldn't smother. To be sure of this they had paid a visit of inspection to the Buckners' garbage can and stared into it, fascinated, envisaging Hubert among the rinds and eggshells. Then two of them, at last, resolutely put that part out of their minds and concentrated upon the luring of him into the alley and the overwhelming of him there.

Hubert's cheerful whistle caught them off guard and each of the three stood stock-still, unable to communicate with the others. It flashed through Basil's mind that if he grabbed Hubert without Riply at hand to apply the gag as had been arranged, Hubert's cries might alarm the gigantic cook in the kitchen who had almost taken him the night before. The thought threw him into a state of indecision. At that precise moment Hubert opened the gate and came out into the alley.

The two stood five feet apart, staring at each other, and all at once Basil made a startling discovery. He discovered he liked Hubert Blair— liked him well as any boy he knew. He had absolutely no wish to lay hands on Hubert Blair and stuff him into a garbage can, jaunty cap and all. He would have fought to prevent that contingency. As his mind, unstrung by his situation, gave pasture to this inconvenient thought, he turned and dashed out of the alley and up the street.

For a moment the apparition had startled Hubert, but when it turned and made off he was heartened and gave chase. Out-distanced, he decided after fifty yards to let well enough alone; and returning to the alley, started rather precipitously down toward the other end— and came face to face with another small and hairy stranger.

Bill Kampf, being more simply organized than Basil, had no scruples of any kind. It had been decided to put Hubert into a garbage can, and though he had nothing at all against Hubert, the idea had made a pattern on his brain which he intended to follow. He was a natural man— that is to say, a hunter— and once a creature took on the aspect of a quarry, he would pursue it without qualms until it stopped struggling.

But he had been witness to Basil's inexplicable flight, and supposing that Hubert's father had appeared and was now directly behind him, he, too, faced about and made off down the alley. Presently he met Riply Buckner, who, without waiting to inquire the cause of his flight, enthusiastically joined him. Again Hubert was surprised into pursuing a little way. Then, deciding once and for all to let well enough alone, he returned on a dead run to his house.

Meanwhile Basil had discovered that he was not pursued, and keeping in the shadows, made his way back to the alley. He was not frightened— he had simply been incapable of action. The alley was empty; neither Bill nor Riply was in sight. He saw Mr. Blair come to the back gate, open it, look up and down and go back into the house. He came closer. There was a great chatter in the kitchen— Hubert's voice, loud and boastful, and Mrs. Blair's, frightened, and the two Swedish domestics contributing bursts of hilarious laughter. Then through an open window he heard Mr. Blair's voice at the telephone:

"I want to speak to the chief of police.... Chief, this is George P. Blair.... Chief, there's a gang of toughs around here who —"

Basil was off like a flash, tearing at his Confederate whiskers as he ran.

v

IMOGENE Bissel, having just turned thirteen, was not accustomed to having callers at night. She was spending a bored and solitary evening inspecting the month's bills which were scattered over her mother's desk, when she heard Hubert Blair and his father admitted into the front hall.

"I just thought I'd bring him over myself," Mr. Blair was saying to her mother. "There seems to be a gang of toughs hanging around our alley tonight."

Mrs. Bissel had not called upon Mrs. Blair and she was considerably taken aback by this unexpected visit. She even entertained the uncharitable thought that this was a crude overture, undertaken by Mr. Blair on behalf of his wife.

"Really!" she exclaimed. "Imogene will be delighted to see Hubert, I'm sure.... Imogene!"

"These toughs were evidently lying in wait for Hubert," continued Mr. Blair. "But he's a pretty spunky boy and he managed to drive them away. However, I didn't want him to come down here alone."

"Of course not," she agreed. But she was unable to imagine why Hubert should have come at all. He was a nice enough boy, but surely Imogene had seen enough of him the last three afternoons. In fact, Mrs. Bissel was annoyed, and there was a minimum of warmth in her voice when she asked Mr. Blair to come in.

They were still in the hall, and Mr. Blair was just beginning to perceive that all was not as it should be, when there was another ring at the bell. Upon the door being opened, Basil Lee, red-faced and breathless, stood on the threshold.

"How do you do, Mrs. Bissel? Hello, Imogene!" he cried in an unnecessarily hearty voice. "Where's the party?"

The salutation might have sounded to a dispassionate observer somewhat harsh and unnatural, but it fell upon the ears of an already disconcerted group.

"There isn't any party," said Imogene wonderingly.

"What?" Basil's mouth dropped open in exaggerated horror, his voice trembled slightly. "You mean to say you didn't call me up and tell me to come over here to a party?"

"Why, of course not, Basil!"

Imogene was excited by Hubert's unexpected arrival and it occurred to her that Basil had invented this excuse to spoil it. Alone of those present, she was close to the truth; but she underestimated the urgency of Basil's motive, which was not jealousy but mortal fear.

"You called me up, didn't you, Imogene?" demanded Hubert confidently.

"Why, no, Hubert! I didn't call up anybody."

Amid a chorus of bewildered protestations, there was another ring at the doorbell and the pregnant night yielded up Riply Buckner, Jr., and William S. Kampf. Like Basil, they were somewhat ruffled and breathless, and they no less rudely and peremptorily demanded the whereabouts of the party, insisting with curious vehemence that Imogene had just now invited them over the phone.

Hubert laughed, the others began to laugh and the tensivity relaxed. Imogene, because she believed Hubert, now began to believe them all. Unable to restrain himself any longer in the presence of this unhoped-for audience, Hubert burst out with his amazing adventure.

"I guess there's a gang laying for us all!" he exclaimed. "There were some guys laying for me in our alley when I went out. There was a big fellow with gray whiskers, but when he saw me he ran away. Then I went along the alley and there was a bunch more, sort of foreigners or something, and I started after'm and they ran. I tried to catchem, but I guess they were good and scared, because they ran too fast for me."

So interested were Hubert and his father in the story that they failed to perceive that three of his listeners were growing purple in the face or to mark

the uproarious laughter that greeted Mr. Bissel's polite proposal that they have a party, after all.

"Tell about the warnings, Hubert," prompted Mr. Blair. "You see, Hubert had received these warnings. Did you boys get any warnings?"

"I did," said Basil suddenly. "I got a sort of warning on a piece of paper about a week ago."

For a moment, as Mr. Blair's worried eye fell upon Basil, a strong sense not precisely of suspicion but rather of obscure misgiving passed over him. Possibly that odd aspect of Basil's eyebrows, where wisps of crêpe hair still lingered, connected itself in his subconscious mind with what was bizarre in the events of the evening. He shook his head somewhat puzzled. Then his thoughts glided back restfully to Hubert's courage and presence of mind.

Hubert, meanwhile, having exhausted his facts, was making tentative leaps into the realms of imagination.

"I said, 'So you're the guy that's been sending these warnings,' and he swung his left at me, and I dodged and swung my right back at him. I guess I must have landed, because he gave a yell and ran. Gosh, he could run! You'd ought to of seen him, Bill— he could run as fast as you."

"Was he big?" asked Basil, blowing his nose noisily.

"Sure! About as big as father."

"Were the other ones big too?"

"Sure! They were pretty big. I didn't wait to see, I just yelled, 'You get out of here, you bunch of toughs, or I'll show you!' They started a sort of fight, but I swung my right at one of them and they didn't wait for any more."

"Hubert says he thinks they were Italians," interrupted Mr. Blair. "Didn't you, Hubert?"

"They were sort of funny-looking," Hubert said. "One fellow looked like an Italian."

Mrs. Bissel led the way to the dining room, where she had caused a cake and grape juice supper to be spread. Imogene took a chair by Hubert's side.

"Now tell me all about it, Hubert," she said, attentively folding her hands.

Hubert ran over the adventure once more. A knife now made its appearance in the belt of one conspirator; Hubert's parleys with them lengthened and grew in volume and virulence. He had told them just what they might expect if they fooled with him. They had started to draw knives, but had thought better of it and taken to flight.

In the middle of this recital there was a curious snorting sound from across the table, but when Imogene looked over, Basil was spreading jelly on a piece of coffee cake and his eyes were brightly innocent. A minute later, however, the sound was repeated, and this time she intercepted a specifically malicious expression upon his face.

"I wonder what you'd have done, Basil," she said cuttingly. "I'll bet you'd be running yet!"

Basil put the piece of coffee cake in his mouth and immediately choked on it— an accident which Bill Kampf and Riply Buckner found hilariously amusing. Their amusement at various casual incidents at table seemed to increase as Hubert's story continued. The alley now swarmed with malefactors, and as Hubert struggled on against overwhelming odds, Imogene found herself growing restless— without in the least realizing that the tale was boring her. On the contrary, each time Hubert recollected new incidents and began again, she looked spitefully over at Basil, and her dislike for him grew.

When they moved into the library, Imogene went to the piano, where she sat alone while the boys gathered around Hubert on the couch. To her chagrin, they seemed quite content to listen indefinitely. Odd little noises squeaked out of them from time to time, but whenever the narrative slackened they would beg for more.

"Go on, Hubert. Which one did you say could run as fast as Bill Kampf?"

She was glad when, after half an hour, they all got up to go.

"It's a strange affair from beginning to end," Mr. Blair was saying. "I don't like it. I'm going to have a detective look into the matter tomorrow. What did they want of Hubert? What were they going to do to him?"

No one offered a suggestion. Even Hubert was silent, contemplating his possible fate with certain respectful awe. During breaks in his narration the talk had turned to such collateral matters as murders and ghosts, and all the boys had talked themselves into a state of considerable panic. In fact each had come to believe, in varying degrees, that a band of kidnapers infested the vicinity.

"I don't like it," repeated Mr. Blair. "In fact I'm going to see all of you boys to your own homes."

Basil greeted this offer with relief. The evening had been a mad success, but furies once aroused sometimes get out of hand. He did not feel like walking the streets alone tonight.

In the hall, Imogene, taking advantage of her mother's somewhat fatigued farewell to Mr. Blair, beckoned Hubert back into the library. Instantly attuned to adversity, Basil listened. There was a whisper and a short scuffle, followed by an indiscreet but unmistakable sound. With the corners of his mouth falling, Basil went out the door. He had stacked the cards dexterously, but Life had played a trump from its sleeve at the last.

A moment later they all started off, clinging together in a group, turning corners with cautious glances behind and ahead. What Basil and Riply and Bill expected to see as they peered warily into the sinister mouths of alleys and around great dark trees and behind concealing fences they did not know— in all

probability the same hairy and grotesque desperadoes who had lain in wait for Hubert Blair that night.

vi

A WEEK later Basil and Riply heard that Hubert and his mother had gone to the seashore for the summer. Basil was sorry. He had wanted to learn from Hubert some of the graceful mannerisms that his contemporaries found so dazzling and that might come in so handy next fall when he went away to school. In tribute to Hubert's passing, he practised leaning against a tree and missing it and rolling a skate down his arm, and he wore his cap in Hubert's manner, set jauntily on the side of his head.

This was only for a while. He perceived eventually that though boys and girls would always listen to him while he talked, their mouths literally moving in response to his, they would never look at him as they had looked at Hubert. So he abandoned the loud chuckle that so annoyed his mother and set his cap straight upon his head once more.

But the change in him went deeper than that. He was no longer sure that he wanted to be a gentleman burglar, though he still read of their exploits with breathless admiration. Outside of Hubert's gate, he had for a moment felt morally alone; and he realized that whatever combinations he might make of the materials of life would have to be safely within the law. And after another week he found that he no longer grieved over losing Imogene. Meeting her, he saw only the familiar little girl he had always known. The ecstatic moment of that afternoon had been a premature birth, an emotion left over from an already fleeting spring.

He did not know that he had frightened Mrs. Blair out of town and that because of him a special policeman walked a placid beat for many a night. All he knew was that the vague and restless yearnings of three long spring months were somehow satisfied. They reached combustion in that last week— flared up, exploded and burned out. His face was turned without regret toward the boundless possibilities of summer.

14: The Romance of Captain Duffy

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

The Popular Magazine, 7 May 1929

North of Natuna and nearly in the latitude of Lalan lies Fovea, a little, lost island inhabited mostly by butterflies, orchids, flying foxes and spirit crabs.

These white and spectral crabs are not found, I think, in the islands round about. The butterflies and moths also present remarkable specimens for the consideration of the collector— or would if a collector ever came.

"No one ever comes here." That is what Fovea says to you after you have become acquainted. Words spoken by the wind in the mangroves and the beating of the blue and patient sea on the little beach facing eastward, from which you can see sometimes the smoke of the Malacca-Hongkong mail boats on the far horizon.

I was there only two days and the place struck me so much that I chanced to mention it to a man I met at Chale's Hotel, Malacca.

A gentleman by the name of Duffy. Mr. Duffy was a very rough diamond. He had started in life as a cabin boy and was proud of the fact; sailing ship, steamship, cable, salvage work— he had been through the lot, emerging at the age of fifty or so with the honorary title of captain, an unquenchable thirst and a little fortune scraped together somehow out of tin— also a face forcibly carved and steadfast looking as the face of a figurehead.

The captain moved uneasily in his creaking basket chair, then, calling the native boy who was on the hotel veranda, he pointed to the empty glasses on the table by which we were sitting.

"*Macham Taddy*," said he, which, translated means "the same again." Then: "Fovea? Oh, yes, I know the place. Ought to." He hung in irons for a minute till the drinks came along. "Funny, you talking of that place, and of being there two days. Well, I've stuck it there near three weeks; hove on the beach as you might say. It's not more than a hundred yards before the trees begin north and south of that lump of rock above the tide marks, and I reckon I know every yard of that hundred. Remember that lump of rock near the middle standing there like a bollard? I've put in many an hour sitting on that rock, wishing for ships.

"You see, there's no harbor, so the junks don't come— though Saigon's only a biscuit toss off; there's no copra, there's no rubber and there's no tin. Against all that there's no mosquitoes or Dutchmen; against that there's no bars.

Remember that little trickle of water that comes down from the trees and makes a sink by the big tree fern? That's the long bar of Fovea and many a drink I've had there, lying on my face like Nebuchadrezzar.

"What I'm saying happened only a few years ago. I was in Canton. I'd gone there to see a Chinaman over a tin proposition that turned out trumps, and I was full of buck and beans, at a loose end as you may say, and looking for fun. I went into Charlie Brent's to look for it, and there at the bar was standing Captain Bill Travers.

"That chap ought to have been born a bishop; sure as death if he put foot on a ship he'd sink her or she'd catch alight or lose her sticks or start a butt or bust her boilers. But it was never, somehow or other, his fault, and the companies didn't spot him for a hoodoo till he broke the back of the *Ararat*, seventeen-hundred-ton freighter, on the Paracels. Then they fired him and marked him 'dangerous' among themselves, and he went hunting for another ship— which was like hunting hell for violets— and here he was in Charlie Brent's.

"'Hullo, Bill,' I says. 'What are you doing now?'

"'Pigs,' says he. He was captain of a pig boat, chink owned and manned and running from Canton.

"And one hour after meeting him, I'd booked to come along with him as passenger, for fun— you can get a lot of drinks into an hour, with a chap like Bill to do the talking and Charlie to do the mixing. Also, you can hear a pig boat near as far as you can smell it. A cargo of grunTERS is better'n a siren and you've only got to twist one of their tails to set the whole lot off.

"I reckon they could have heard us at Hongkong as we put out of the Canton River and a rat got loose among them. Night it was, and when they weren't 'hrrumfing' and snoring, off they'd go like half a million cartwheels wanting greasing.

"'You'll get used to it in time,' says Travers. But the time never came, for next night the chinks rose and took the ship, knocked Travers on the head and hove him over— and they bottled me in the glory hole where paint and carpenters' tools were kept; then they took the ship's money and half a boatload of prog, opened the sea cocks and left her to scuttle.

"I didn't cut my way out till morning, and there we were, down by the head, all the pigs drowned, and the water washing inside of her like the washing of a beach every time she moved to the swell.

"There were bulkheads that kept her still floating and Fovea showed right ahead to s'th'ard. Nothing to push off in but an old collapsible that the brutes had left by chance, and nothing to take off in her but half a ham we'd had for supper and was still on the table with biscuits and butter, though the floor of the cabin was six inches deep in water— lazaret flooded, of course.

"Well, sir, I got that collapsible together and got her over on the starboard side. The ship was listed so that there wasn't more than four foot of free board, so, getting over the boat was easy. I waited while the drift took us along closer

to the island, and then, all of a sudden, came a bang which was a bulkhead giving, and following that came a noise like an elephant gargling his throat.

"I didn't wait— I pushed off in the old floating umbrella just in time to get clear of the suck of her, and then I watched her sink, funnel under, truck under— gone!

"Bad to look at, even though she was what she was— four hundred ton of rusted plates and an engine that an old flivver would have sneezed at. But a ship for all that. It's bad to look at a ship going under. I've seen it three times and every time I've been near sick in my stomach."

"How far were you from Fovea?" I asked.

"A matter of two miles nor'-nor'-east," replied the captain. "Current with me, so I wasn't long getting to the beach. The sight of that stream coming down eased me a lot. I was mostly fearing there wouldn't be water. Trees don't always spell free water, but there it was, and beyond in the wood I saw custard, apples and bananas— same as you may have seen them right back beyond that big tree fern.

"That's how I was fixed with crabs and shellfish for grub— a blessed fruit shop with nothing to offset it but a few biscuits and half a ham. Lucky I had been able to bring off a boxful of matches so's I could roast the crabs; but I've never wanted to look at a ham again.

"There I was, and you can imagine— nothing to do after I'd made a tour of the place and woods, nothing to do but sit and wait for a ship and wonder what sort of damn fool I was for signing articles as you may say with Travers. A free man linking on to a hoodoo like that, and I'd have felt worse in my mind if I'd known I hadn't done with him yet.

"The only bright spot in the ointment was the fact that the chinks hadn't searched me and taken my money. I'd managed to brain two of them with a clinker bar before they shoved me into the paint shop, and then I reckon they were too scared of me to let me out. Twenty-two hundred dollars I had on me in American notes, and I'd sit and count them and count them till common sense came along and clapped me on the shoulder and said, as plain as the parakeets screeching in the trees: 'Bill Duffy, give over fooling like this or you'll go bughouse and imagine yourself a bank teller. Go and build a shack for yourself among the trees— never mind if you don't want it, it's something to do and something to keep your mind busy.'

"So I did.

"I built a shack, cutting branches with my knife and twisting canes to make the walls, and thatching it with palm leaves. I built it in that little clearing by the water sink, and when I'd put the topknot on I laughed. Guess what that thing fetched up in my mind. Well, I'll tell you. Did you ever see the house a bower

bird builds? Well, that was it, same as if it had been photographed and made ten times bigger.

"I've seen the chap dancing before it to attract the hens. The chap I saw had laid out a little garden with shells and blossoms and such, and there he was dancing in it and the hens sitting round.

"Well, there's the shack finished,' I said to myself, 'and nothing more to do.' And right on that, common sense comes along again and claps me on the shoulder and says: 'Bill Duffy, if you want to keep the madness off you, do what the A'mighty had in His mind for you to do when He showed you that bird away there in Borneo. He knew what was coming to you: He's sent me to give you the hint. And you take it, and put your back into it and made a garden.'

"Pretty dangerous advice, mister, for if things hadn't happened as they did, the next ship coming along might have found me imagining myself a bower bird instead of a bank teller. However I made the garden, fetching shells from the beach and laying them out, and getting blossoms and sticking them in the ground.

"I hadn't no more notion of making a garden than you'd have of making an airplane. I just did what the bird had showed me what to do, which shows that birds may sometimes teach humans. And pretty it looked when I'd finished with it, notwithstanding that it came to me all of a sudden I'd nothing more to do— unless I started on another shack.

"Why,' I says to myself, 'if I go on making shacks and gardens all over the place, next ship that comes along will maybe find me imagining myself a house builder 'n' decorator. What about that?' I says to Common Sense, but she'd hove off. Not a word from her, and down I lay that night and dreamed I was a beaver— same as I've seen them by Moose Lake— and I was building and building, putting in hot-water pipes so that the bower birds mightn't feel the cold— a man all the time, but a beaver— you know the sort of sludge— till all of a sudden I was woke up by a clap of thunder.

"I heard it rolling over the sea, and then I heard the crying of sea gulls. Then I lay waiting for the wind and rain which didn't come.

"There are no sea birds round Fovea, as you know, but I didn't think of that. Time wasn't more than midnight, I reckoned, for the first thing Nature gives a chap on his lonesome like me is a watch which hasn't got no second hands but can tell him noon and midnight pretty accurate.

"Funny,' says I; then I was asleep again, solid."

Captain Duffy reached for his glass, finished it and put up his thumb to the waiter who had appeared again on the veranda.

"*Macham Taddy*," said I, indicating mine.

Then I waited for the story to go on.

But the captain seemed up against an obstacle.

Then I saw that it was not a kink in the story that was holding him, but some vision of memory. It was evident that the hotel veranda and the sunlight and the palms of the hotel garden and the table by which we were sitting and myself were, for him for the moment, nonexistent.

Then he came back to himself with a jolt.

"Solid— till I woke with the parakeets screeching in my face and it an hour after sunup, as innocent as a babe of all that had been happening in the night.

"What had been happening in the night began in China where the fighting was going on and where they wanted ammunition. Six cases of gelignite the French mail boat from Rangoon to Canton had aboard her in the forehold, labeled 'chocolate,' and some Frog must have gone smoking a cigarette there or something— though how he got there is beyond me, unless they'd taken the hatch cover off. Anyhow a fire must have started and she blew up and went down like an old tin can. It all came out afterward.

"That was the clap of thunder I'd heard, not knowing that the screeching of the sea gulls was the passengers clinging to spars and drowning— all but one.

"All but one— and when I came out on the beach that morning, there she was.

"A young female dressed for dancing same as you see them on board the liners. I didn't know there'd been a dance on board the hooker; I didn't know any damn ship had blown up. I just came out on the beach and there she was, and an elephant playing the fiddle wouldn't have given me a greater setback. Then I saw a big spar half beached by the falling tide and I began to tumble to the situation.

"I came toward her, but she didn't heed me. She was sitting there and seemed to be talking to the sea, all dithery and waving her hands for all the world like a girl I'd seen acting at Portsmouth in a play where a chap poisons his uncle pouring stuff in his ears and—"

" 'Hamlet'?"

"That's her— and one shoe off, lying on the sand. She'd been drenched, but the sun had dried her, and there she was, wild as a coot, clean out of her mind for the moment and minding me no more than if I hadn't been there.

"I picks up her shoe.

"Now, then,' I says to her, same as if she'd been a child, 'come, put it on,' just as if we'd been shipmates. And at the sound of my voice she seemed to come together a bit and she looked at the shoe and then she looked at me and then back at the shoe; and then she gets up all tottery and holds out her hands like so, as if she was calling on the saints to see her and the fix she was in; and then something caught back in her throat and— off she went.

"It was like a dam bursting— laughing and crying, crying and laughing, and when I got a hold of her it was like holding an earthquake till she went limp so's I could have hung her over one arm like an overcoat.

"I got her to the shack and laid her out with my coat under her head. She'd gone right bang asleep. I've seen a chap do that after he'd been beat up by a lot of chinks; I reckon Nature just steps in and pulls down the blinds.

"Anyhow, there she was, shut-eye for twenty-four hours, and she came to next morning bright and herself again.

"I tell you I'd had a night of it— afraid to wake her, afraid she wouldn't wake up, crawling on my hands and knees to listen if she was alive and breathing; and when she woke up, maybe you'll believe me or not, she had no more idea of what had happened than a child unborn.

"She remembered coming on deck after dinner to dance, but she was cut off from there at the waist, so to speak. I had to tell her I reckoned the ship she was on had blown up and she'd come ashore clinging to the spar. She gave me her own name and the name of the ship; she'd been traveling alone from Malacca to Canton there to meet her people. She was as sane and sensible as you or me, but she couldn't remember the blow-up.

"Brains are queer things; a chap gets a belt on the head and he doesn't remember getting it, nor he doesn't remember anything from maybe half an hour before he got it— I've seen that myself. Same with her in a way.

"That girl must have seen things and heard them, too— enough to raise the hair on your head, but the A'mighty had just snuffed the recollection of them out.

"I didn't grumble. She recollected enough of that ship to give me no end of trouble inventing lies. You see, naturally, being warm-hearted, she was anxious to know what had become of the captain and crew and the other passengers; and I said they were sure to have got off on a raft, what folks didn't get off in the ship's boats.

"She asked why they hadn't come to the island; and I told her there was a big current that would make it easier for the boats to push west for the mainland. She took it all in, trusting as a kitten, settling down as you may say, in her basket and beginning to take notice of things.

"I gave her a custard apple and some bananas and then I went off into the woods to hunt for some avocados I'd seen the day before, telling her I wouldn't be more than half an hour gone and reckoning she'd settle down better alone.

"Up on the high ground— if you took notice— there's a bald patch where the trees don't grow. I didn't bother about the avocados; I just sat down there on an old stump to get my bearings and see what was best to be done.

"The thing had hit me in the eye, so to speak— you can imagine. A young girl in that rig-out and me alone with her and she as innocent as what you please, and the whole thing coming of a sudden.

"I fixed it in my mind that she'd keep the shack and I'd build myself another away at the other end of the beach, and when I'd got that straight there wasn't much else to think about— except food.

"Well, I couldn't do more for her than I was doing for myself, and what between crabs and custard apples and bananas and such, she'd have to make out— so she did, and never grumbled."

Captain Duffy paused and seemed plunged in reverie for a moment— a dream happy yet unhappy.

"That next three days wasn't like— well, it was like the biggest lie a man ever imagined. You'd know if you could have seen her— never a grumble, always smiling, happy as a child. And yet a woman all the time— and such a woman! A man doesn't know what a woman is till he has to fend for her and get her food and be all alone with her.

"She'd come and watch me building my shack— and, 'Aren't you going to put a little garden to it?' says she one day. She'd been greatly hit by the garden with the shells and truck. I hadn't told her what had put it in my head and I didn't want to, but it came to me as she said that, that things were shaping that way if I didn't look out.

"But I needn't have worried.

"The lease was up. If I'd been alone on that damn place I'd be there still, maybe, but being as I was, wanting nothing more in this world or kingdom come, the lease was up.

"That rent was owing, and the brokers coming in, and they came in a damn old trading schooner, the last of her kind and the worst, owned by McCallums of Singapore and bound for Canton. Water she wanted, and fruit.

"When I saw her standing in and sure to be full of gaping ballyhoos, the first instinct that came to me was to cover the girl.

"I told you how she was rigged— all right for a dance room on a ship, but even there pretty much wanting, especially under the arms, so I got her into my coat. It was Shantung silk; I'd bought the suit new at Canton, and you may judge by my size that it fitted her. And so I put her into it. She looked up into my eyes, raising her chin— —

"Gosh!" He broke off and reached for his glass.

"Did you?" said I.

"Did I what? No, I didn't— no, there was no kiss. I reckon hell's full of chaps sitting round and wagging their heads and saying: 'No, I didn't— might have done, but didn't!' " Then, after a pause:

"What stood between me and her all through was that rig-out she was in, I believe. If she'd been an ordinary female dressed as such, things might have been otherwise. You see it had put up a sort of bar between us— as it might have been saying: 'Here's a lady in distress.' And not only that, but it seemed all the time to be punching in the fact of the difference between the likes of her and me. I'm not anything more than the A'mighty made me. A rope's end taught me all the dancing I know, and I learned French swabbing decks on an old drifter out of Cherbourg. We weren't the same brand of goods. She was a lady— all the same, things might have been different if it hadn't been for that."

I took it that he was speaking of the dance dress, which had evidently cranked up his inferiority complex in some curious way.

"Or maybe not," he went on. "Anyhow, there was the schooner coming in and she dropped a boat and took us off. McRimmon, the captain, had his wife on board and the next thing was she and the girl were clacking and throwing their arms round one another, and Mac— he'd got a long white beard and so took advantage of it, as you may say— kissed her."

"His wife?"

"No, the girl. Well, he wasn't the chap to give something for nothing, and so he charged me ten dollars, he did, for the lift to Canton, and bunked me in the fo'c's'le, seeing that the girl had the only spare place aft.

"She'd come up in that mail boat to meet her people at Canton.

"She'd told me all about herself at Fovea and how her father was in business at Shanghai. She'd left Shanghai and come down to visit her aunt or some one who was living at Malacca, and the arrangement was she was to be met on her return by her people at Hollyers Hotel, Canton.

"Well, sir, when we fetched Canton, and I'd paid McRimmon his ten dollars for the lift, and got her into a cab and took her to the hotel, there was no people to meet her, only a telegraph from Shanghai saying they were delayed and giving the date of their arrival— adding up which I found I'd have her two days to myself and no McRimmons to butt in.

"So I left her at the hotel, where I booked a room for myself as well, and bunked off and got a shave and haircut and a new suit from Silver's, and a panama and a malacca cane; saw the shipping people and gave evidence about the blow-up— and back I gets to the hotel, only to find that the damn ball dress had fetched me in the eye again.

"She'd gone to bed.

"She'd landed in a mix-up of what she'd wore at Fovea and what Mrs. McRimmon had lent her. There wasn't much to notice to my mind; but she thought different and she'd done a dive between the sheets till the milliners had time to fix her up. The hotel manageress told me they were working double shifts and reckoned to have her fitted by the day after to-morrow.

"Day after to-morrow!

"Well, what did it matter to me? I was saying we weren't the same brand of goods— and that's the truth. All the same, feelings have nothing to do with that. I wanted her— yes, sir, I'd have gone through hell 'n' fire for that woman, and I'd have yanked her with me through a hedge of relations half a mile thick and her clinging to me and tellin' them all to go to blazes. But I hadn't a chance, so it seemed to me as I stood in the hall with the hotel manageress telling me that.

"I sent word up to her, hoping she was all right, and she sent word down to me saying she was, with kind regards. And I sat in the lounge waiting, hoping every time I saw a bell hop it might be another word from her, but nothing came but newspaper men— chaps from the *Canton News* and the Shanghai what's-its-name, all wanting the story of how it happened.

"I tell you by next day the whole wide world was wanting to know how it happened, not meaning so much the blow-up of the mail boat, but the girl's escape. It was going round and round the world like a squirrel in a cage, that yarn, how Captain Duffy had saved her and how they were on an island together. McRimmon and his crowd had been talking and the slosh journalists from hell to Hakodate had got the whisper— — Well, you can think!

"I was close as an oyster about myself; but McRimmon wasn't. And next day, opening the *Canton News*, I found myself in print a yard long. I was Captain Duffy, a fine, good-looking, upstanding feller full of chivalry, but so modest that it was hard to get me to speak of my doings. It gave the lie to facts and the looking-glass, but I swallowed it. I reckon it fed some hungry spot.

"I said to myself that night— she was still in her room— I said to myself that when her people came, if she was not down before then, I'd run up the flag and tell 'em straight: 'Duffy's the man who's going to have your girl. He's got forty thousand dollars in the Hongkong-Shanghai Bank. He mayn't be a scholar, but he's a fine, good-looking, upstanding feller, full of chivalry but not too modest to claim the woman he wants.'

"That's what I told myself not knowing I was still being trailed by that ball dress and those milliners and their delays.

"If I could have got that girl alone that night I could have done the trick and she'd have hauled down her colors; but the fitters and riggers held her, as I was saying, and when she come out of harbor next day— Well, it was just like this:

"I was sitting in the lounge just at noon when the glass swing doors flung open and in came her people— dad, mother, and a young chap with pomatumed hair and an eyeglass, followed by chinks carrying their luggage. And at the selfsame minute, like a thing in a stage play, down the stairs comes she in a white dress looking like a snowdrop, as you might say. And that young feller with the eyeglass runs to her and gives her a kiss you could have heard all over the shop.

"And she hadn't any brothers or sisters; she'd told me that when we were talking of her family.

"When a gun's bust, you can't fire it again. There's things that can't be done twict if you don't do them once, and Captain Duffy he took his hat and went out on the hotel front to look at the weather— which was fine. He didn't go back to that hotel. Didn't bother about having his luggage sent for; took the Rangoon boat which was due out that afternoon, and left them to hunt for the fine, good-looking, upstanding feller that was too modest to wait for thanks.

"Do you believe in that yarn about Adam 'n' Eve? I don't. 'Pears to me if he'd been the same sort of mug as me and waiting for that girl till she was dressed, he'd have been waiting— anyhow, that's my personal experience and opinion."

15: Shanghai Explosive

William J. Makin

1894-1944

Blue Book, Dec 1938

IT is, perhaps, the most astonishing feature of living China: the disposal of the dead. Travel in the Shanghai Express, and the landscape is a whirling, dusty graveyard, the humps of earth telling their own tale.

Skipper Jake Blystone was. thinking only of the living and his particular burly self when he presented a check to the moon-spectacled Chinese clerk behind the grille of the Anglo-American Bank in Shanghai. Expressionless, the clerk eyed the check, the dirty-white-suited figure, and then his yellow fingers pushed a wad of notes through the grille.

"One thousand— five— ten thousand dollars," counted Jake Blystone.

"A nice little sum, Blystone," drawled a voice at his elbow.

The skipper of the freighter *Maureen* turned a scowling and weathered face toward the voice. It came from a khaki-clad officer of the Shanghai police.

"Ah, Captain Carruthers! Didn't expect to see you here."

"I'm sure you didn't. What about a drink?"

"Now that's just too bad. There's a shipping-agent I promised—"

"I must insist, Blystone."

The skipper went a shade pale beneath his tan.

"Okay! Where's the pub?"

"That's better," drawled Carruthers. "I know a quiet place near by where we can talk without interruption."

But it seemed Jake Blystone was in anything but a talkative mood. He sea-rolled. the pavement alongside the sun-helmeted. officer, and only opened his mouth to curse an importuning rickshaw coolie. |

"THERE is the place," encouraged Carruthers, diving into a doorway over which hung a sign in Chinese characters. He led the way to a room where tables and chairs cluttered: the floor, and the windows gave out upon the Bund and the congestion of junks, sampans and freighters riding the slight swell of the Yellow: Sea.

"Fascinating panorama, eh?" nodded Carruthers. "'What's your poison?"

"Whisky sour."

"Make it two," ordered Carruthers to the blue-clad Chinese waiter. Then to Blystone: "Landed all your cargo?"

"Some of it. I've another port of call— probably Macao."

"Same cargo?"

"Yes. Agricultural machinery."

"Useful stuff. You don't happen to have any T.N.T. aboard by any chance?"

"Explosives! Not me."

"Of course. You wouldn't be anchored in the harbor and you *would* be flying the danger-flag if you had, eh? And the Japanese would be in charge."

"No need to tell me the regulations, Carruthers."

"Of course not. But it's queer that my agents tell me that a quantity of T.N.T. was landed from your ship— the *Maureen*— twenty-four hours ago."

"It's a damned lie!" growled Blystone.

"But that check, which you cashed as soon as the bank opened today. Ten thousand dollars. A comfortable trading sum."

"That's my business."

"Of course it is. I was only interested in the signature to the check— Tao Chen."

"What of it?"

"Tao Chen is a dangerous Chinaman."

"He's fighting for his country."

Carruthers shook his head.

"He's fighting for himself. We know he's in the pay of the Japanese. And nothing would suit their book better than to create an incident in the International Settlement of Shanghai. Following upon an incident, their troops would try to march in to prevent further disturbances. Then the balloon would go up."

"Seems to me if that were true, the Japs would supply him with the dynamite themselves."

Carruthers shook his head.. "The innocence of a two-fisted scoundrel like you!" he exclaimed. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven! Listen: The Japanese are using explosives of their own. Any competent European chemist could hang it on them from the traces afterward. And if Tao Chen slips up, they'd have material for an 'incident' just in the secret landing of T.N.T. here. Good Lord, man, do you think you'd ever have got through with that stuff, if the Japs hadn't wanted you to?"

"I'm not interested in politics," growled Blystone.

"But I'm interested when Tao Chen buys explosives and pays over a check of ten thousand dollars to you."

"Are you accusing me of selling the stuff to the Chink?"

"I am."

"What d'you propose to do?"

Carruthers gazed through the window at the maze of shipping.

"I've sufficient information to' seize your ship, the *Maureen*, and hold her on a charge of contraband. And at the same time, I could provide you with accommodation ashore— in the jail."

Blystone swallowed his drink at a gulp.

"Well, why don't you go ahead?"

Carruthers leaned forward.

"Because I don't want your damned ship. Or your own ugly person. I want the explosives that you landed. These Chinese are too fond of fireworks to be left to play with T.N.T. Where did you dump the stuff?"

John Blystone wiped the sweat from his dishonest brow.

"At the Chink's house, of course," he admitted.

Carruthers shook his head.

"No, you didn't," he said sternly. "I raided the house of Tao Chen last night. There wasn't even a Chinese cracker in the place."

A gleam of cunning came to the rheumy eyes of the skipper.

"Well, then—" he began jovially.

THE rest of his sentence was drowned in noise. The uproar came from the Bund below. Staring from the open window, the two men saw a Chinese cavalcade— a Shanghai funeral. It proceeded slowly and deliberately to a cacophony of beating cymbals, blown trumpets, and lamenting white-robed figures of mourners. First came the professional mourners and painted boys, travesties in red and reen. They stalked and attitudinized in the fashion of figures in slow-motion movies. They trailed their white robes in the dust and filth of the road.

They were followed by a noisy and blatant brass band. The Chinese musicians, out of tune and tempo, were blaring forth an old Spanish-American war melody:

*Good-by, Dolly, I must leave you,
Though it breaks my heart to go.
Something tells me I must leave you,
For the front to fight the foe—*

Swaying to the tune and grief, behind the band came the family mourners. Then the coffin followed—an enormous palanquin affair voluminously draped. A series of poles held the palanquin, and beneath them sweated and toiled a dozen ragged coolies. These pall-bearers seemed bowed and broken in their progress. At moments, one of the mourners would leave the ranks and join the bearers. The pall-bearers were specially numerous.

"Some very important Chinaman is dead," mused Carruthers. "Who is it?" he asked the Chinese waiter who had been downstairs. The waiter placed a handbill printed in Chinese on the table. Carruthers glanced at it.

"Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Blystone idly, lighting a cheroot and feeling more comfortable.

"Listen to this," said Carruthers, translating from the handbill:

"The family of Tao Chen, overwhelmed with grief, beg to inform that their father, uncle and brother died in his bed at Shanghai at one o'clock in the morning on the first moon at the age of forty-five years. The body is to be buried by his sorrowing family, who lament that they were not able to keep Tao Chen alive.

"Titles of the deceased: General. By Imperial Decree authorized to wear the fur of the great rat. Authorized to ride on horseback into the Forbidden City of Peking. Often invited to dinner at the Palace. Has received from the Emperor Wang Chao panels written in his august handwriting, cakes, handkerchiefs—"

"Tao Chen dead! Holy smoke, but that's sudden," exclaimed Blystone.

Carruthers narrowed his eyes at the slowly progressing funeral cavalcade.

"When did you last see him alive?" he asked.

"Yesterday noon," said Blystone. "He handed me that check."

"I saw him alive later. At midnight, when I raided the villa. He was in perfect health."

"D'you think he killed himself, to save face?" asked Blystone.

"Tao Chen had lost face years ago," said Carruthers bitterly. "I can't believe the scoundrel is dead."

Blystone had poked his head out of the window to get a better glimpse of the shuffling pall-bearers. A soft breeze wafted the draperies of the coffin.

"That coffin!" he said aloud.

"What of it?"

"It looks uncommonly like the wooden box into which I dumped the— er— consignment, at the orders of Tao Chen."

Carruthers leaped to his feet.

"The T.N.T. They're carrying explosives into the heart of Shanghai! It isn't the body of Tao Chen at all. Now, what is in that devil's mind?"

Blystone had gone visibly pale.

"Tao Chen has an old house, overlooking the Central Square of the International Settlement," he mumbled. "That's where I took the stuff in rickshaws yesterday. And Tao Chen has a habit of sitting on his roof looking down into the square."

Carruthers stared hard at him.

"And maybe he has a rifle there too," he said. "One shot into that coffin as it reaches the center of the Settlement— and my God!"

Jake Blystone was already out of his chair and across the room.

"Where you going?" shouted Carruthers.

"To see if Tao Chen is sitting on his roof."

"You're too late. The procession will be nearly there."

"I'll take a chance."

He scrambled down the stairs, hurled himself into a rickshaw, and left a distracted police officer visualizing carnage and an incident that would make Shanghai again a war-center of the East... .

It was a mad, foreign devil who urged a rickshaw coolie with curses and blows along the Bund of Shanghai and through the sacred congestion of a funeral procession. They arrived in Central Square. Leaving the panting, sweating coolie bowed in exhaustion between the shafts, Blystone entered a house and plunged up a steep staircase. A servant tried to bar his way, but was left stunned at the foot of the stairs.

Emerging upon the red-tiled roof of the high house, the skipper gazed about him. In the distance he could hear the advancing funeral procession. Then he saw the shaven-headed Tao Chen, who was garbed in a black robe, crouching against the edge of the roof. A rifle nestled against his cheek, and was slanting downward. The oblique eyes had narrowed into slits, and were sighted on the advancing coffin and its crowd of sweating, staggering coolies.

A lean yellow finger was crooked about the trigger of the rifle.

Blystone leaped. He was on Tao Chen before the Chinaman had a chance to use his rifle. They grappled and swayed. The blaring of the band was in their ears.

Tao Chen tried to use his strangler's hands, but the skipper of the *Maureen* was taking no chances. He brought his knee with a jerk into the stomach of the Chinaman. With a whine of agony, Tao Chen doubled up, swayed—and the next moment had plunged with a scream into the square beneath.

Panting, Blystone lay flat on the tiles. At last he forced himself to the edge and gazed below. The funeral procession had stopped; the painted boys and the professional mourners were staring in astonishment at a dead and broken Tao Chen who had fallen from the blue sky.

With sighs of relief the pall-bearers had put down the coffin....

"WELL, you saved your face, anyhow," said Carruthers later, to the skipper. "I'm giving you clearing orders for your ship, but I'm not certain that I shouldn't hold you on a charge of murder."

Blystone indicated the handbill which lay on the police officer's desk.

"You can't murder a dead man," he said. "And so far as you know, Tao Chen died at one o'clock this morning."

16: The Blue Scarab

R. Austin Freeman

1862-1943

Pearson's Magazine Jan 1923

Collected in: *Dr Thorndyke's Case-Book*, 1923

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

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

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

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

"The building— which I used partly as a lumber store and partly as a workshop— was well alight and the whole household was already on the spot, the boy working the pump and the two maids carrying the buckets and throwing water on the fire. My daughter and I joined the party and helped to carry the buckets and take out what goods we could reach from the burning building. But it was nearly half an hour before we got the fire completely extinguished, and then my daughter and I went to our rooms to wash and tidy ourselves up. We returned to the study together, and when I had shut the French window my daughter proposed that we should resume our interrupted occupation.

Thereupon I took out of my pocket the key of the deed-box and turned to the cabinet on which the box always stood.

"But there was no deed-box there!

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

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

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

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

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

"And the scarab?"

"That may have been lapis lazuli, but more probably it was a blue glass imitation. In any case it was of no considerable value. It was about an inch and a half long. But before you come to any conclusion, I had better finish the story. The robbery was on Tuesday, the 7th of June. I gave information to the police, with a description of the missing property, but nothing happened until Wednesday, the 15th, when I received a registered parcel bearing the Southampton postmark. On opening it I found, to my astonishment, the entire contents of the deed-box, with the exception of the scarab, and this rather mysterious communication."

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

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

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

Thorndyke looked quickly at our client with an expression of surprise. "But," he asked, "don't you recognize the hieroglyphics on it?"

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

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

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

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

Dear old pal,

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

*Your ever affectionate,
Rudolpho.*

"Who is Rudolpho?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is just a family tradition," Mr. Blowgrave said deprecatingly. "Probably it is all nonsense."

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

Thus urged, Mr. Blowgrave hemmed a little shyly and began:

"The story concerns my great-grandfather, Silas Blowgrave, and his doings during the war with France. It seems that he commanded a privateer, of which he and his brother Reuben were the joint owners, and that in the course of their last cruise, they acquired a very remarkable and valuable collection of jewels. Goodness knows how they got them; not very honestly, I suspect, for they appear to have been a pair of precious rascals. Something has been said about the loot from a South American church or cathedral, but there is really nothing known about the affair. There are no documents. It is mere oral tradition and very vague and sketchy. The story goes that when they had sold off the ship, they came down to live at Shawstead in Hertfordshire, Silas occupying the manor house— in which I live at present— and Reuben a farm-house adjoining. The bulk of the loot they shared out at the end of the cruise, but the jewels were kept apart to be dealt with later— perhaps when the circumstances under which they had been acquired had been forgotten. However, both men were inveterate gamblers, and it seems— according to the testimony of a servant of Reuben's who overheard them— that on a certain night when they had been playing heavily, they decided to finish up by playing for the whole collection of jewels as a single stake. Silas, who had the jewels in his custody, was seen to go to the manor house and return to Reuben's house carrying a small, iron-bound chest.

"Apparently they played late into the night, after every one else but the servant had gone to bed, and the luck was with Reuben, though it seems probable that he gave luck some assistance. At any rate, when the play was finished and the chest handed over, Silas roundly accused him of cheating, and we may assume that a pretty serious quarrel took place. Exactly what happened is not clear, for when the quarrel began Reuben dismissed the servant, who retired to her bedroom in a distant part of the house. But in the morning it was discovered that Reuben and the chest of jewels had both disappeared, and there were distinct traces of blood in the room in which the two men had been playing. Silas professed to know nothing about the disappearance; but a

strong— and probably just— suspicion arose that he had murdered his brother and made away with the jewels. The result was that Silas also disappeared, and for a long time his whereabouts was not known even by his wife. Later it transpired that he had taken up his abode, under an assumed name, in Egypt, and that he had developed an enthusiastic interest in the then new science of Egyptology— the Rosetta Stone had been deciphered only a few years previously. After a time he resumed communication with his wife, but never made any statement as to the mystery of his brother's disappearance. A few months before his death he visited his home in disguise and he then handed to his wife a little sealed packet which was to be delivered to his only son, William, on his attaining the age of twenty-one. That packet contained the scarab and the letter which you have taken from the envelope."

"Am I to read it?" asked Thorndyke.

"Certainly, if you think it worth while," was the reply.

Thorndyke opened the yellow sheet of paper and, glancing through the brown and faded writing, read aloud:

Cairo, 4th March, 1833.

My dear Son,

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

Farewell!

Your affectionate father,

Silas Blowgrave.

As Thorndyke laid down the letter he looked inquiringly at our client.

"Well," he said, "here are some plain instructions. How have they been carried out?"

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

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

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

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

"No," said Mr. Blowgrave, in answer to Thorndyke's look of inquiry. "The position is quite clear now. Reuben's grandson, my cousin Arthur, has died recently, and as he had no children, he has dispersed his property. The old farmhouse and the bulk of his estate he has left to a nephew, but he made a small bequest to my daughter and named her as the residuary legatee. So that whatever rights Reuben had to the jewels are now vested in her, and on my death she will be Silas's heir, too. As a matter of fact," Mr. Blowgrave continued, "we were discussing this very question on the night of the robbery. I may as well tell you that my girl will be left pretty poorly off when I go, for there is a heavy mortgage on our property and mighty little capital. Uncle Reuben's jewels would have made the old home secure for her if we could have laid our hands on them. However, I mustn't take up your time with our domestic affairs."

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

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

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

"Whenever you like," said Blowgrave. "I am delighted that you are willing to undertake the inquiry. I have heard so much about you from my friend Stalker, of the Griffin Life Assurance Company, for whom you have acted on several occasions."

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

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

WHEN OUR VISITORS had gone we discussed the bearings of the case.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Up to this point I had been careful to manipulate the letter with forceps (although it had been handled by at least three persons, to my knowledge), and I now proceeded to examine it for finger-prints. As I could detect none by mere

inspection, I dusted the back of the paper with finely-powdered fuchsin, and distributed the powder by tapping the paper lightly. This brought into view quite a number of finger-prints, especially round the edges of the letter, and though most of them were very faint and shadowy, it was possible to make out the ridge pattern well enough for our purpose. Having blown off the excess of powder, I took the letter to the room where the large copying camera was set up, to photograph it before developing the finger-prints on the front. But here I found our laboratory assistant, Polton, in possession, with the sealed envelope fixed to the copying easel.

"I shan't be a minute, sir," said he. "The doctor wants an enlarged photograph of this seal. I've got the plate in."

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, Jervis," he replied, "there is the robber, for instance; he came from somewhere and he went somewhere. A study of the map may give us a hint as

to his movements. But here comes Polton 'with the documents,' as poor Miss Flite would say. What have you got for us, Polton?"

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

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

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

"What are you grinning at?" he demanded.

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

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

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

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



Thorndyke's tracing of the impression of the Scarab

"He will be the better medical jurist if he is," was the reply, of which I made a mental note for my future guidance. But meanwhile Thorndyke's proceedings were, to me, perfectly incomprehensible. What was his object in making this minute tracing? The seal itself was sufficient for identification. I lingered awhile hoping that some fresh development might throw a light on the mystery. But his next proceeding was like to have reduced me to stupefaction. I saw him go to the bookshelves and take down a book. As he laid it on the table I glanced at the title, and when I saw that it was Raper's "Navigation Tables" I stole softly out into the lobby, put on my hat and went for a walk.

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

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

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

By taking an informal lunch in the train, we arrived at Shawstead Manor by half-past two. Our approach up the drive had evidently been observed, for Blowgrave and his daughter were waiting at the porch to receive us. The former

came forward with outstretched hand, but a distinctly woebegone expression, and exclaimed: "It is most kind of you to come down; but alas! you are too late."

"Too late for what?" demanded Thorndyke.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We are in luck. None of these trees interferes with our bearings." He took from the research-case a surveyor's arrow, and sticking it in the ground under the tripod, added: "That is the spot. But we may have to dig a good way round it, for a compass is only a rough instrument."

At this moment Mr. Blowgrave staggered up, breathing hard, and flung down on the ground three picks, two shovels and a spade. "I won't hinder you, Doctor, by asking for explanations," said he, "but I am utterly mystified. You must tell us what it all means when we have finished our work."

This Thorndyke promised to do, but meanwhile he took off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves, seized the spade and began cutting out a large square of turf. As the soil was uncovered, Blowgrave and I attacked it with picks and Miss Blowgrave shovelled away the loose earth.

"Do you know how far down we have to go?" I asked.

"The body lies six feet below the surface," Thorndyke replied; and as he spoke he laid down his spade, and taking a telescope from the research-case, swept it round the margin of the meadow and finally pointed it at a farm-house some six hundred yards distant, of which he made a somewhat prolonged inspection, after which he took the remaining pick and fell to work on the opposite corner of the exposed square of earth.

For nearly half an hour we worked on steadily, gradually eating our way downwards, plying pick and shovel alternately, while Miss Blowgrave cleared the loose earth away from the edges of the deepening pit. Then a halt was called and we came to the surface, wiping our faces.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes," replied Blowgrave, "but still, we didn't want any spectators. That is Harold Bowker," he added, steadying the telescope against a tree, "my cousin Arthur's nephew, whom I told you about as having inherited the farm-house. He seems mighty interested in us; but small things interest one in the country."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, that was quite simple," replied Thorndyke with unexpected geniality. "I'll show you the plan." He climbed up to the surface and returned in a few moments with the three tracings and his letter-case. "This is how we located the spot." He handed the plan marked No. 3 to Bowker, who took it from him and stood looking at it with a puzzled frown.

"But this isn't the place," he said at length.

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

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

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

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

Thorndyke looked at him steadily and said in an ominously quiet tone:

"Now, listen to me, Mr. Bowker. Let us have an end of this nonsense. You have played a risky game and you have lost. How much you have lost I can't say until I know whether Mr. Blowgrave intends to prosecute."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There's a deed-box on the cabinet behind you," said Thorndyke.

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

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

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

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

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

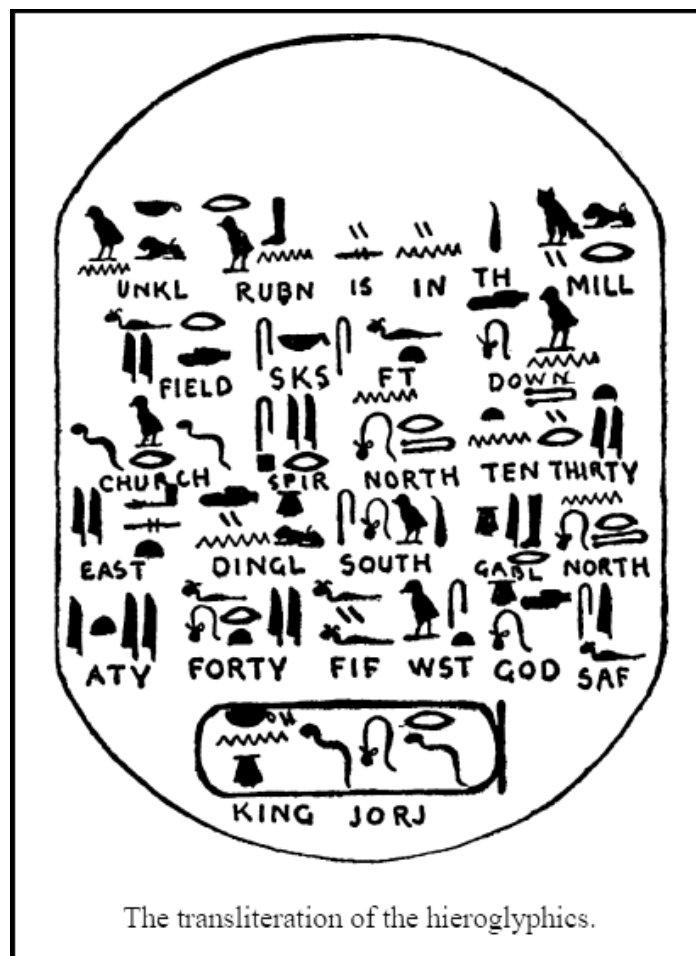
Thorndyke chuckled. "His descendants were certainly a little lacking in enterprise," he admitted. "Silas's instructions were perfectly plain and explicit. Whoever would find the treasure must first acquire some knowledge of Egyptian lore and must study the scarab attentively. It was the broadest of hints, but no one— excepting Harold Bowker, who must have heard about the scarab from his Uncle Arthur— seems to have paid any attention to it."

"Now it happens that I have just enough elementary knowledge of the hieroglyphic characters to enable me to spell them out when they are used

alphabetically; and as soon as I saw the seal, I could see that these hieroglyphics formed English words. My attention was first attracted by the second group of signs, which spelled the word 'Reuben,' and then I saw that the first group spelled 'Uncle.' Of course, the instant I heard Miss Nellie speak of the connection between the scarab and Uncle Reuben, the murder was out. I saw at a glance that the scarab contained all the required information. Last night I made a careful tracing of the hieroglyphics and then rendered them into our own alphabet. This is the result."

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

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



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

"Not at all," replied Thorndyke. "Any intelligent person could master the Egyptian alphabet in an hour. The language, of course, is quite another matter. The spelling of this is a little crude, but it is quite intelligible and does Silas great credit, considering how little was known in his time."

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

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

"Very little. Practically not at all."

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

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

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

ON THE FOLLOWING morning I escorted the deed-box, filled with the booty and tied up and sealed with the scarab, to Mr. Blowgrave's bank. And that ended our connection with the case; excepting that, a month or two later, we attended by request the unveiling in Shawstead churchyard of a fine monument

to Reuben Blowgrave. This took the slightly inappropriate form of an obelisk, on which were cut the name and approximate dates, with the added inscription: "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return after many days"; concerning which Thorndyke remarked dryly that he supposed the exhortation applied equally even if the bread happened to belong to some one else.

17: The Bron's Bog Debating Society

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 6 Dec 1910

THE OBJECT in starting a debating society at Bron's Bog was to provide some relief from the woeful agricultural depression that was characteristic of the district. Agricultural depression was chronic at Bron's Bog. It had lasted ever since the original Bron, having bogged in Pig Creek, and being too dispirited to dig the dray out again, decided to settle right there, and make the wilderness blossom like a rose. Many other settlers had wandered in since, and had settled in a perfunctory sort of way, with a like intention; but the wilderness had not yet blossomed to any observable extent.

The inhabitants of Bron's Bog seemed to earn an honest, if humble, crust by dragging great logs and stumps into heaps, with the assistance of a despondent and ungainly old grey horse (always the same horse), and then burning the heaps. It is perhaps not astonishing that the settlers should have sought relief from the awful tedium of the Bog, although it may be remarkable that they resolved on a debating society as a suitable distraction, bearing in mind the fact that the residents were of a brooding, taciturn disposition, and little given to argument and disputation.

On a dull Sunday afternoon several men were perched on the dog-leg fence by the mail track pensively chewing grass straws and splinters, according to taste, and breaking long bursts of silence with fragmentary meteorological observations, when Scobie startled the company with this proposal:

"Who's on fer a debatin' society?"

Six pairs of eyes rolled towards Scobie. The settlers surveyed the man with cow-like steadiness for two painful minutes. It was Parkes broke the oppressive silence.

"Huh!" he said.

"A debatin' society," Scobie explained. "You know, one o' them things where yell have discussions, and— and— discussions."

"Discussions?" queried Haines. "What of, fer instans?"

"Oh," said Scobie brightly, suddenly remembering his book, "science, art, literature, and the drammer."

This intellectual landslip silenced the meeting for a few minutes, during which time the men ruminated gravely.

"Don't see why not," said Thompson. "S'pose it won't cost nothin' fer a license?"

"I'm on," Callaglian chipped in bravely.

"So'm I."

"So'm I."

WITHIN A WEEK the Bron's Bog Debating Society was an established fact. The promoters had taken over an abandoned hut, furnished it with bush stools and a bush table, and hung out a shingle bearing the bright device:

BRON'S BOG
HALL OF SCIANCE.

The opening night was advertised by word of mouth. The subject chosen was suggested by Scobie, "Should We Abolish War?"

The whole thing provoked extraordinary interest throughout the district, the general opinion being cloudy as to details, but satisfied that there was to be something to eat and drink. The people of the Bog were in attendance at the appointed time.

The Hall of "Sciance" was illuminated with three candles and a slush lamp. Twelve members of the new society solemnly took their places at the table, on which was a bottle containing water for the refreshment of the orators, in addition to those serving as candlesticks. Clutterbuck had appropriated the Chairmanship by virtue of his years, and the fact that he was the first man to put in a crop of turnips at Bron's.

"Besides," he said, "I gave the chair, yeh know."

This was not to be gainsaid. Stephen had contributed the only chair the society possessed. "And I'm the on'y man what knows how to sit in it without comin' down."

As the chair had only two good legs, this, too, was a consideration.

Chairman Clutterbuck was a small, hard, weazened man, with a long grey beard like the unravelled whisp of hemp on the end of a rope. He had also a remarkable nose, shaped like a saveloy, and as red as a rose, one of nature's little ironies, for Stephen was a man of bigoted morality and undeviating sobriety. He possessed a local reputation for owlsh wisdom, which he was in no danger of losing, since he was one of the most silent men upon whom heaven had wasted speech.

The other members of the society were awkward, dumb individuals, with large hands, and feet that occupied a great deal of space. They were miserable as objects of public interest. The audience filled the hall, and a few sheepish young men hung about the doorway, while a dozen boys sprawled on the roof, peering down through the cracks in the stringy-bark, filled with great expectations.

Ten painful minutes passed, and the debating society was still debating inwardly. The members sat in constrained silence, looking; from one to the other, fidgetting their hands and feet, and uttering pathetic little coughs.

"Stand on yer 'ead, Clutterbuck!"

The boys on the roof were offering impertinent advice.

"Mr. Scobie'll give us a selection on the boomerang," ejaculated a second bush humourist.

Thompson, feeling that he must do something or perish in his seat, broke a splinter from the rough table top, and carried it to his mouth. The others followed his example. For another ten minutes the society chewed in a deep, brown study.

At the end of half an hour nothing had happened. The situation had become unbearable, and Reakes, driven to desperation, arose abruptly, and said:

"Seems to me we won't have no more rain this moon."

Then he sat down again.

Thompson felt encouraged; he arose, and ejaculated : "Not without there's a change."

Ellis bobbed up. "Me neither," he said, and sat down again.

The rest looked at each other uneasily, but in their position of unaccustomed publicity they were incapable of doing justice to even the staple subjects of Bron's Bog conversation. Silence fell again, saving for the impertinences that dripped through the roof.

Scobie came to the rescue once more. "I move that the debate be now adjourned," he said.

Scobie had attended political meetings in his time; he was an authority on forms and precedents. No one responded for fully three minutes, then Thompson raised himself on his hands slowly and fearfully, like a man who did not know what the awful consequences of his action might be, and said with a jerk: "Carried unananimus."

A feeble cheer greeted this effort, and the first meeting of the Bron's Bog Debating Society petered out dismally.

THE SUBJECT for the following Thursday's debate was, "Is Marriage a Failure?"

This meeting was not open to the general public, consequently the conversation ran with a certain amount of freedom, and although there was no feast of reason or flow of soul, opinions were boldly exchanged re the state of the weather, the prospective price of onions, a new cure for gall in horses, and Andy Burn's public-spirited action in sowing down a half-acre of "taters" in spite of the accepted belief that "taters" would not prosper in the Bog. In fact, members were almost as eloquent as they were wont to be on the dog-leg

fence, but the success or failure of matrimonial ventures was not even mentioned.

Every Thursday night for a month the society met in the "new" Hall of Science," and sat and smoked in thoughtful silence, broken by brief, bashful comments on the condition of the "crick," or the possibility of a rabbit invasion at Bron's Bog. Each night the meeting broke up without having thrown the feeblest ray of light on the selected theme; but that did not prevent the grave selection of a subject for the subsequent evening.

Meanwhile, the Bog held its debating society in profound reverence, believing that the social, political and scientific problems of the century were being thrashed out in the bark hut, and that the world would presently hear of Scobie, and Salter, and Burns, and Thompson and the others to its inestimable advantage.

On the fifth night there was a revolution in the society's methods. Mr. Joseph Veal had returned from Melbourne, where he had been moving the Government, to the Government's enormous disgust. Mr. Veal was a short, portly, energetic, fatuous man, with a fad and a grievance. He was the only man on the Bog who shaved and wore a hard hat, and that gave him a sort of standing. He was understood to lead public opinion, and if ever a member of Parliament ventured within twenty miles, it was always Veal who organised and headed the deputation to waylay him, and make public life a misery to him. These deputations never quite understood what they wanted, but Veal, Esq., was always extremely indignant about something, and ever on the point of upsetting the Government.

More particularly did Mr. Veal represent public opinion on the burning question of the proposed route of the Bungunyah railway. For it had been a cherished superstition at the Bog that such a line was on the eve of being constructed. Devil's Elbow was supposed to be moving heaven and other influential centres to have the line to Bungunyah run right into its back door. For this reason Bron's Bog loathed Devil's Elbow, and poured withering scorn on its pretensions, describing it as a one-horse locality, without hope, or enterprise, or common morals.

Mr. Veal was regarded as a distinct acquisition to the debating society, and great things were expected of him on the occasion of his first appearance. "Are Shakespeare's Works Bacon's?" was the chosen subject. Thompson selected the theme from a printed list. Joseph Veal did not disappoint the society. He took the floor early, and he held it all the evening. His discourse evaded the issue, and left the literary pretensions of Bacon precisely where they were.

Joseph talked of the Bungunyah line, and his actions while in Melbourne "a-movin' of the Gov'ment." Throughout a month's stay in the metropolis Joseph had been chasing Ministers, and disturbing all sorts of people in the interests of

the Bog route for a line nobody there had ever heard of. He pounded on the table with his stick, and grew purple with wrath and excitement as his story proceeded.

"I sez to the Gov'ment, 'Look 'ere,' I sez, 'it's the Bog route or the Devil's Elber— one 'r the other. Bron's Bog is a risin', thrivin' place, a centre iv enlightenment, and a home iv liberty; whereas, Devil's Elber is jist a 'ole in a hill, with no energy, no prospects, no religion, no nothin' worth mentionin'. Choose,' I sez, 'and choose quick; but send that line through Devil's Elber and youse plunge this fair land in rooin,' sez I; 'and, what's more, you'll have Bron's Bog to deal with.' I put it to the Gov'ment straight, and the Gov'ment was moved. It was visibly moved, and showed it."

Joseph Veal had really used this portentous language to a small, petrified Civil Servant in an office in the Lands Department— an amazed small boy with a ringworm.

The patriot went on with increasing animation to describe his moving of the Government on a second occasion. The Government was represented on this occasion by a uniformed usher, strategically cornered in a corridor in the Treasury.

" 'I'm tellin' yeh,' I sez, 'Bron's Bog is gettin' roused. Bron's Bog is bein' stirred to its centre,' I sez; 'it won't stand your hanky-panky much longer, Mister Gov'ment. Unless you set. about this 'ere line to Bungunyah, via Bron's Bog, right away, out you go, neck and crop, the lot iv yeh.' "

The startled usher committed a violent assault on Mr. Veal's left eye, under the delusion that Joseph was a dangerous lunatic, and, escaping, hid himself in a fire and burglar-proof safe. It was shown by Mr. Veal that he presently became an object of hatred and fear to politicians and every employe in the departments. Clerks fled before him, Ministers ran into holes, ushers and pther officials took to the sewers and trees, and ordinary members ran for the roof when scouts arrived with news of the approach of the Wild Man of Bron's Bog. To complete his martyrdom, Joseph was ignominiously clubbed in the street by a policeman, whom he had attacked as an official of an unscrupulous Government. Mr. Veal was taken to the lock-up in an insensible condition, and was subsequently fined £2 for being drunk and disorderly, and using impious language in a public place. This moving story was finished with a roar of anguish, and Joseph smote the table a blow that shivered it to fragments.

The debating society, stirred to tremendous enthusiasm, cheered wildly, and then gave three hollow groans for the Government. It was realised that at length the society had justified itself. At last it was about to shine in the intellectual world. Members were proud and elated, each feeling that now that the thing was fairly afloat he, too, would show the Bog and the universe what bubbling springs of eloquence were secreted in his homely bosom.

"Should women sit in Parliament?" was the chosen theme for the following Thursday evening. Veal was again conspicuous, and before his rivals could pull themselves together was up and away telling the tale of his great embassy all over again. This time the story dragged. Others yearned to be eloquent, and failing to break the flow of Veal's oratory, were hurt and indignant.

Again, on the third Thursday after his return, Joseph was first off the mark. He repeated his initial address, with all the original effects, to the marked disgust of his colleagues.

For the Thursday after this the subject was, "Does Hanging Deter?" Nothing was said about capital punishment, however. Joseph Veal was afloat once more on a sea of verbiage, and his theme was the insulting treatment the delegate of Bron's Bog received at the hands of a venal Government in Melbourne. This was too much. The society rebelled, and interjections and interruptions were frequent and vehement.

Suddenly, when the orator was working through one of his most telling items, gesticulating fiercely, flushed, wild-eyed, and frothing, Scobie bounded on him from behind, and bore him to the floor.

"Look out, boys!" yelled Scobie. "Get something, quick; he's in a fit!"

The prostrate member opened his mouth to enter a vigorous protest, but Scobie thrust the water-bottle into it, and poured about a pint of creek water down Joseph's throat, and Mr. Veal gasped, and spluttered, and fought the air. When he was on the point of becoming articulate again, two frenzied members arrived with a bucket, and tumbled the contents on the writhing figure of the victim.

Veal struggled manfully, but Thompson and Burns sat on his legs, there was a stout member on each of his arms, and Scobie held his head with one hand and the water-bottle with the other, alert to drown the delegate's complaints the moment his mouth should open.

"Bring more water," cried Scobie, finding the struggles continued. "Tear open his shirt."

Eager hands tore at Veal's shirt. Henderson lopped water on his body, other members rubbed, and pounded, and knuckled for twenty minutes or more.

"It's the on'y way to cure them fits," said Scobie. "If he don't stop presently we'll have to shave his head."

This finished poor Joseph; he became quite calm, and was helped to a chair, where he sat, panting, collecting his energies for a murderous attack on Scobie.

"You crimson idiot!" he squealed, "I wasn't in no fit."

"Oh, yes you was, Joe," replied Scobie indulgently. "Yes you was, old man, a fearful bad kind of fit, too. Wasn't he, boys?"

"My oath," replied each, with honest gravity.

Veal argued, and raved, and swore, but when Scobie talked anxiously of a relapse, he wisely buttoned up and went home, shivering, threatening, and bubbling profanity at every step.

This painful experience did not keep Joseph from the next meeting. Neither did it deter him from attempting to monopolise the time and attention of the society with a painful repetition of his verbose harangue. But Scobie was waiting for him, and when he was worked up to the roaring stage once more Peter fell upon him from the rear.

"Boys, he's off again," cried Scobie. Joseph fought like a tiger ; but he had the full strength of the society to contend with. He was pinned to the floor, and flooded with water, and subjected to many remedies of an unpleasant nature, while Scobie stifled his cries with creek water and tadpoles, as before.

The wrath of Mr. Veal was terrible to behold. He thirsted for blood, he bit, and raved, and kicked, and clawed, but Scobie treated every demonstration as a relapse, and the victim was mangled afresh with a cart-horse kind of massage, and afflicted with a more copious form of hydropathic treatment. "I tell you, I wasn't in a fit!" screamed Veal. "I never had a fit in my life."

"Think I don't know them apple-leptic fits?" retorted Scobie. "Better take him home, you fellers, and take particular care he don't murder nobody on the way."

Mr. Veal was not expected at the next meeting, but he arrived early, and sat in sullen silence for fifteen minutes. The subject for the evening was "The Chemistry of Coal," but the company was as reticent on this as on all former subjects.

Then Veal, still sitting, offered a few opinions on the Bog route for the Bungunyah line. He was halting and suspicious, but no objections being forthcoming, he continued, keeping, however, a wary eye on Scobie. Presently his uneasiness wore off, his suspicions were forgotten, and within ten minutes he was on his feet at the table, pounding away at the old theme, the Bungunyah line, and the pains and penalties endured by him in his noble efforts to move the "Gov'ment."

"He's got 'em again!"

Scobie's rush came too late this time. Veal ducked, and bolting for the door fled into the night.

"After him," cried Scobie. Six or seven younger members of the society, satisfied by this that poor Veal was pitiably afflicted, fearing he might do himself an injury, or attack the cattle, or bite the children, followed in hot pursuit.

The chase lasted half the night. Veal made for his home, but was headed off, and hunted up the creek round the lagoon, and into the hills. The young men treed him in a big gum at the foot of the mount. Joseph had taken refuge in a

hollow butt, and refused to come down. The hunters tried cajolery, threats and entreaties in vain.

"We'll have to smoke him out, that s what," said Ben Reddy. "If we leave him he might get inter the big timber, and become an old man of the woods, same ez Buckley done."

It was a desperate case, calling for a desperate remedy.

They smoked Joseph out. He resisted for a long time, and only abandoned the position when half-stifled. Then he tumbled down the trunk, and conducted himself so like a raging maniac that Reddy concluded the fits had developed into permanent mania.

"We gotter tie him up, and send fer the police and the doctor," said Reddy. So Mr. Joseph Veal was tied to a tree, and Reddy and another stood guard over him while the rest went off in different directions, seeking the mounted constable situated at Coomra, and to bring the doctor from Devil's Elbow.

In this way it came about that Mr. Veal was taken to the lock-up at Coomra, and imprisoned as a dangerous idiot and a menace to society.

With the retirement of Veal ended the debating society's one chance of distinguishing itself in dialectics. Scobie seized the opportunity to introduce a diversion in the shape of twin bottles of whisky, a vicious original liquor of his own invention. Scobie's whisky was simply blue devils in solution.

"What we want," said the ingenuous inventor, "is a drop of drink to spur our ideas. This here society won't never be a distinguished success, like the House of Commons or the Commonwealth Parleymint, till we have a refreshment bar, and what I propose is that each member pays in so much weekly to establish a Debatin' Society Refreshment Fund, and I'll supply spirits fer the use of members only."

Constable McFee, from Coomra, developed a sneaking interest into the doings of the society at about this time, and was seen prowling in its vicinity. The boosy exuberance of the orators puzzled him. He wondered what the impulse might be, what spirit was behind this fervour, conjecturing that it might be illicit. Members still chose inspiring subjects for discussion, or at least Scobie did. Scobie was a crude sort of humourist, and his subjects generally had a teetotal impulse, although the debates were never temperate.

When the subject was "The Relation of Alcohol and Madness," Thompson and Quinn fought their way clean through the walls of the "Hall of Sciance," and their battle raged for an hour after and covered two and a half acres of ploughed land. It was the most spirited debate the society had yet witnessed.

A peculiar effect of Scobie's innovation was the rapid gravitation of the portable wealth of Bron's Bog into the hands of that enterprising resident. Scobie did not complain if some of the contributions to the refreshment fund were in kind. Once sober and trustworthy settlers started making away with the

domestic eggs and household butter; they pinched the fowls and even purloined an occasional pig. Eventually members were found to be spending- time hauling and hewing for Scobie, building his fences, and digging his dam, and they looked for no monetary reward.

One night Thompson went missing, and was found after a two days' search lurking in a hollow log, with his head poked out of a knothole. He declared solemnly that he was a ring-tailed 'possum, and refused to come out when requested to do so.

"That ain't no way to treat a 'possum " said Thompson. "You gotter get an axe and cut me out. Then the dogs'll catch me. I'm a possum, and I'm goin' to be treated as such."

Thompson stood out for his rights as a 'possum; so they had to humour him, and he was cut out, and then the dogs were sent after him, and he gave them a run, finally taking refuge on Barton's barn. When captured he wanted to be put in a box and fed on gum leaves. He was fully a week recovering from this delusion.

Strange things continued to happen at the Thursday night meetings of the Bron's Bog Debating Society, and Constable McFee grew more curious, and the women of the Bog more furious, till at length thei latter rose in revolt.

Before this, McFee had made two raids on the "Hall of Sciance." He found the debaters prett well tight but no sign of external liquor.

In fact, Scobie had his little barrel of illegal whisky up an adjacent hollow tree, hidden from view. An ordinary hose led from this barrel down to the ground, and passed up a hollow upright of the hut. In this upright there was a small trap door. When drinks were called on Scobie opened his trap door, produced the nozzle of his hose, and customers drank from it on a time limit.

The women of the Bog were less respectful of legal quibbles than the zealous and intelligent McFee. They resolved upon drastic measures, and the object of their antipathy was Scobie. They quietly prepared a fairly life-like effigy of their enemy, and fifteen angry but cautious women descended on the "Hall of Sciance" one Thursdav night, when the debating club was in full blast.

At a word from Mrs. Thompson, who had constituted herself leader of the punitive expedition, the women advanced again. They placed a small ladder against the hut, one stole up it, a dummy was passed up to her, and she carefully placed it astride the ridge-pole, and returned to earth. Then of. a sudden a dozen matches were applied to the walls, and the hut was enveloped in flame as if by magic.

The women lit torches at the fire, and making a ring round the burning building danced like she demons, and sang a blood-curdling refrain. The amazed debaters, running over each other pell-mell from the flaming hut, were horrified to behold it surrounded by dancing devils in female apparel and with ghastly

faces. In fact, the wives of Bron's Bog had painted awe-inspiring aboriginal designs on their cheeks, and in the glow of the fire they looked inhuman and monstrous.

The fire was an immense success; but the women had a bigger sensation than they bargained for. A shrill scream from Mrs. Callaghan thrilled them all. She ran from the circle, pointing and screaming. Astride the ridge-pole were two figures, and they were apparently engaged in a death struggle, regardless of the flames leaping around them.

To and fro the enemies rolled, and the women, chilled to silence and stricken with fear, watched the unearthly contest. As they stared the two figures swayed from the ridge, and, bursting through the bark roof, disappeared into the blazing hut. Only one man came forth, a singed, smoke - stained wretch, whom no one recognised. He scattered one terrified glance at the weird crowd, and giving a yell of horror fled into the bush.

Still silent, transfixed with alarm, the women waited and watched for the appearance of the second man. He never came.

Suddenly Mrs. Thompson realised the necessity of drastic action.

"Put out the fire," she screamed. The women fought like heroines, hoping to save that man, whoever he might be. They tore off the burning bark, they scrambled to and from the creek with buckets, they beat the flames with green boughs, and at length had the fire sufficiently under to enable Mrs. Thompson to make a dash in, and drag out the smouldering remains.

She spread the blackened figure on the grass. The others gathered round. The thing looked truly awful lying there, blackened and smouldering, with scarcely any human semblance left.

"He's dead!" wailed Mrs. Burns. "He's dead! We've killed him! They'll hang us!"

She put up an awful scream, and fell into violent hysterics. Other women screamed, several wept dismally, one fainted.

"Le-let us hide the kuck-kuck-corpse," whimpered Mrs. Green.

This seemed a wise suggestion. The horrified women took gingerly hold of the body, and dragged it, into the scrub, where they hid it under boughs and clods of earth.

Then the wives of Bron's Bog stole home, too terrified to reason, eager only to creep somewhere where they could hide their heads.

Next morning the women drifted together again like the guilty things they were. Nobody was reported missing.

"Oh, I've spent an awful night," moaned Mrs. Thompson. "I must make sure, or I shall go mad. Let us go and look at it again. We may be able to recognise it in the daylight."

Most of the women were afraid, but three volunteered to accompany her, and these went cautiously and circuitously to the spot where they had concealed the evidence or their ghastly crime. Even now they were afraid to approach the fearful thing, but clung together, tremulous, and weeping dismally.

"It's th-th-there," sobbed Mrs. Burns, pushing Mrs. Thompson.

"I know it's the poor policeman," wailed Mrs. Haines; "I saw his face just before he fell through the roof."

She, too, pushed behind Mrs. Thompson, and so the party progressed, Mrs. Thompson in the van, the others pushing behind, and all weeping miserably, till they came within a few feet of the body, and then their leader's courage failed her again, and uttering a piercing shriek she broke away, and fled back towards her home.

There was no other course left for the miserable women— they agreed to confide in the men. Each wife went to her husband, and with tears and sobs and an occasional touch of hysterics told her guilty story. The result was a foregathering of residents of Bron's Bog at the three corners, and a whitefaced, weebegone, anxious party it was.

"I saw him," murmured Haines, his mouth dry with terror; "it's Scobie all right."

Scobie had not turned up, and this opinion was generally accepted.

The party went slowly and reluctantly towards the spot where the "Hall of Sciance" had stood, more slowly and with even greater reluctance to the place in the scrub where the body of the victim lay.

"You gotter pull him out, Dari," said Haines.

"Why hev I gotter ?" queried Thompson with pitiable resentment. "Coz your wife done it," Haines replied.

This led to a long and most miserable barney, but at length Thompson agreed to drag out the body, on the distinct understanding that the action involved no responsibility. He went forward gingerly, the others following at a respectful distance. He made one or two approaches to the dreadful singed leg showing from under the bushes, and at length, with desperate courage, seized the limb, and dragged the dreadful thing into the light of day.

It was the dummy!

In the great consternation that assailed them on witnessing the disastrous termination of the fight on the roof, the women had not given one thought to the dummy. The fact was, Constable McFee had been in hiding on the other slope of the roof of the hut, watching through a crack for evidence of illicit traffic in drink, and was too absorbed in his task to notice anything till the outbreak of fire, and then he turned, only to find himself in the arms of one he took to be a deadly enemy.

There and then the brave policeman entered into a life and death struggle with the dummy, with the shocking consequences already known to the reader.

Scobie turned up, sound and well, when he knew that the illegal dealings in alcoholic beverages were not to be brought up to his detriment, and Constable McFee arrived home considerably scorched, but otherwise unharmed.

There were no more meetings of the Bron's Bog Debating Society. The Bog relapsed into sobriety and silence, and the male inhabitants and that old grey horse are still drearily hauling large gum logs into heaps, as if the hauling of logs were the end and aim of man's mortal being.

18: His Last Ship

Vernon Ralston

fl 1900-1921

Kerang New Times (Victoria) 24 March 1908

Almost certainly a "house name" of publisher Harry Shurey's magazines The Weekly Teller and Yes or No. Stories by this author appeared in almost every issue, and were also syndicated to overseas newspapers.

CAPTAIN NORRIS lounged idly on the Valparaiso quays. He waited in hope that some acquaintance would heave in sight— some captain or first or second officer who would be good for a drink— or after dark even, he would accept the hospitality of a man before the mast, or a steward. His thirst had overpowered his sense of the dignity of a man who had commanded numberless vessels on the high seas. And now times were, particularly hard. After the collision of the *Amoor* with the *Nancy Bell*, which caused a paralysing amount of perjury at the Board of Trade inquiry, the captain's certificate had been suspended for a year. At the end of that time a wily ship owner, knowing that Captain Norris was a fine sailor and could he got cheaply, had given him another chance. But the shipowner's agent in Valparaiso, on finding that the captain had never been sober during the voyage out, had cabled to Liverpool and had him discharged.

So now Captain Norris was without a ship, or the prospect of a ship, without friends, without money, stranded on Valparaiso Quay.

Night was falling, and no one came whom the captain knew. He had sold all his possessions save the clothes he stood in. The fiendish thirst gripped him by the throat. He was even now wondering if he proffered to ship as an able seaman whether some crimp would advance him enough money for one big drink.

Suddenly a tall man strolled past and glanced casually at him.

"Captain Norris, I declare, ain't it?" said the stranger.

"Yes; but I can't put a name to you," grunted the captain.

"That's no account— come and split a drink, captain."

Captain Norris would have gone anywhere with anybody for a drink at that moment, so he eagerly accepted the invitation.

The stranger led him, not to a bar, but to an office at a short distance from the quay. A glance at the doorplate informed the captain that it was the office of Stevens and Teran, shipowners.

"Don't be backward, captain," said the stranger, as the captain paused at the door, "there's plenty of liquor here."

Directly they were in the office the stranger produced a bottle of whisky and glasses from a cupboard, and said:

"Now, captain, help yourself."

Norris swallowed a glass of whisky in a gulp, and then held out his glass to be refilled. "I wanted that drink badly," he said.

"Much as you like, captain— jest get yourself settled, and then, we'll talk business."

The second glass made Captain Norris feel himself again.

He looked at the stranger and said: "You'll be Mr. Stevens, I suppose?"

The tall man nodded.

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"Look hyar, captain; I want to talk straight to you. You're right up against it. Lost your ship, lost your reputation. Do you think there's a shipowner on the West Coast who'd trust you with a vessel?"

"Give me some more whisky and tell me something fresh," grunted the captain.

"Well, you're fight up against it— you can't get a berth— you're dying for the drink, and you can't get that. For all I know, you've folk dependent on you somewhere."

The captain wriggled as he listened to this last sentence. He thought of his wife and three children at Poplar, and wondered what she thought when she heard from the owners that he had been discharged and that she could no longer draw against his pay.

"Now, I can give you a chance— the command of a ship, and as much drink as you like shipped aboard, for the drunker you are the better it will suit."

"What's the game?" thundered Norris, slamming his fist down on the table.

"There's a ship of ours loading at the jetty. Could you take her to Maranaibo?"

"There ain't a ship sailing that I Couldn't take anywhere," roared the captain.

"That's what I thought," said Mr: Stevens; "have some more whisky, captain?"

"As much as you like— it makes me feel a man again."

"Well, this particular vessel isn't what you might call a profitable speculation, captain. She's old and cranky, and won't last many voyages more. Already the underwriters are sniffing at her. So I thought that you, being a first-class seaman With a liking for drink might, while you were on the bust, pile the ship up on Maranaibo Bar."

"Heavens!" cried the captain; "see what drink brings a man to. Last night I cadged drinks from a steward, and to-day a derved Yankee asks me to lose my first ship."

The shipowner rose quickly- from his seat.

"H'yar, captain, if you can get a vessel from any other firm, go and get it; but take care how you talk about this firm. My partner's a Spaniard, and touchy— he

might see you got a bowie in your back. Though, after all, what you say won't be of much account. Who'd take any notice of the ravings of a drunken, discharged captain?"

Captain Norris glared at Stevens.

"I didn't say I wouldn't do your dirty work. Only it ain't pleasant for a man to know how low he's got. But mind you, if I agree to sell myself I want my price. What does it mean to me if I pile this vessel up?— the loss of my certificate. Never will I command a ship again. What does that mean to you? The full value of a rotten ship and all you can get from a faked cargo. I know you wreckers' dodges. It'll be ten or twenty thousand pounds in your pockets. Now, it's money down I want. I fancy myself coming to you when the job's done for my pay and getting kicked out of this office as a denied blackmailer. Give me five hundred pounds down, and I'll scuttle her or pile her up, or do what you wish with your rotten

"It's a lot of money," said the ship-owner, shaking his head.

"Five years ago I'd have laid any man out who offered me fifty thousand pounds to sink any ship I commanded."

"We might arrange for you to have half the dollars in advance and half, when the job's done."

"That's like offering me half my price. No; if I risk my certificate and my life and the lives of twenty better men than me it'll be for money down— cash, no credit."

"Well, we won't quarrel about the amount. Now, captain, let me tell you what we want you to do. You must . keep fairly sober till the vessel sails. Give us the chance of saying you've sort of reformed. When she's out of harbor the more you drink the better. There'll be a supercargo aboard."

"Never had I a supercargo on ship of mine yet," groaned, the captain.

The shipowner ignored the interruption.

"He will protest against your drinking habits," he said.

"I'll clap him in irons if he does."

"Then we think it would be as well not to scuttle the ship. Sailormen talk when a vessel springs a sudden leak at sea, and the underwriters might turn rusty. So you'll be drunk when running in Maranaibo Harbor."

"You needn't explain to me. Don't I know that any ship that touches there goes to pieces inside of half an hour, and that the out-drift from the harbor keeps wreckage from washing up? Aye, Maranaibo Bar was made to suit shipowning sharks."

"Well, about the money, captain?"

"I want paying what's due to me in English sovereigns or American dollars— none of your bills or, cheques which won't be met."

"Well, where are you staying now?"

"Last night I slept on some cases on the quay."

"That won't do now you're in my employ. See, captain, I'll advance you a couple of hundred dollars to-night. Smart yourself up a bit. Stay at a decent hotel. We want you to look like the sort of man we could employ. So don't drink till you are out of The harbor. Now, shake hands on our bargain."

Captain Norris surveyed the proffered hand contemptuously, and then, making an effort, extended his hand and' gripped it. Then the shipowner counted out two hundred dollars, and they left the office together.

During the next few days the captain's acquaintances were astonished to see him in a comparatively prosperous state. They were even more surprised to find that he declined all invitations to have a drink. It was generally agreed that if Captain Norris had thrown up the rum for good and all, he was pretty sure to get a ship soon. They did not know that the captain secretly smuggled whisky into the bedroom at his hotel, and made up for his sober days by drinking all the night.

The money agreed upon was paid down the next evening.

"Now, captain," said the shipowner, "don't make a fool of yourself by swanking those dollars about. People might wonder how you got them."

The captain glared at his employer. "What do you think I'm going to do with this money? Every penny of it is going to be paid into a British bank to be sent to a little woman at Poplar. It it weren't for that little woman you'd have to look a sight further for a man to pile up your rotten tub."

After a few days Mr. Stevens let it slip that as Captain Norris had reformed he had offered him the command of the *Oregon*. One or two wily persons who knew Stevens' way of doing business smiled at the news; but most people agreed that, as Norris had turned over a new leaf, Stevens and Teran were lucky to get him— especially as having a black mark against him he would come cheap.

At last the *Oregon* was ready for sea, and the captain heaved a sigh of relief. Now he could give up the miserable abstinence which had made his days a burden. He could let his chief officer look after the ship, whilst he himself could spend his time in an unceasing fuddle.

All went well for the-first few weeks of the voyage. The captain kept his cabin, and rarely appeared on deck. The weather was so favorable that even a leaky old tub like the *Oregon* gave no trouble. It was not till the vessel was within a day's sail of Maranaibo that anything untoward happened. Then a heavy south-westerly gale sprang up. When the chief officer consulted the captain, the only answer he got was, "Run before it."

So the *Oregon* sped on her course, and early the next morning the lookout sighted Maranaibo lights.

The gale had become a hurricane, and the chief officer lost his nerve. He went down to the cabin and demanded the captain's presence on deck. With some difficulty Norris was made to understand the situation. He staggered on deck, and the air sobered him a little. He saw the Maranaibo Bar in the distance— one mass of foaming breakers.

The supercargo stepped up to the captain and whispered:

"Not to-day, or every soul will be lost."

Instantly the captain swung round, and with one blow of his fist struck the unfortunate supercargo to the deck.

"Set three men at the wheel," cried the captain, "a man like me ain't afraid of Maranaibo Bar."

The crew hesitated, but the captain pulled out a revolver and ordered them to their posts. The chief officer murmured an expostulation; and was ordered below, at the revolver's point. Then whilst great seas smote the vessel and she trembled through every rotten timber, her head was set for

the line of breakers which showed Maranaibo Bar.

The crew were frantic with terror; some cast off their oilskins and seaboots so that they, might stand a chance when the smash came. But much as they dreaded the angry seas, they dreaded the angry captain more. There he stood, clinging to the rail with one hand, holding his revolver with the other— now roaring his orders so that they could be heard even above the storm, now singing in sheer exultation at the fight with the tempest before him.

The vessel came nearer and nearer to the mass of foam. The captain covered the men at the wheel with his revolver. If one of them had shrunk from his post he would have shot him.

A blind mass of foam and spume surged over the vessel's deck, the ship was turned and tossed about by the waves as if she were a plaything; out of the flurry on the port side a great, mass of rock rose not five yards from the ship's quarter. Then came a final smother, the vessel turned nearly on her beam-ends, and then all at once it was in the smooth waters of Maranaibo Bay, and sailormen on the quays and on vessels in harbor were cheering the plucky captain who had faced the deadly bar.

As the *Oregon* took up her moorings in the harbor two boats sped out from the quay. In one the harbor-master and Lloyd's agent came to congratulate the captain' on his feat of pluck. Captain Norris was standing on the bridge, whisky bottle in hand; He accepted their congratulations as if they were no more than his due. When they had left him he noticed a small, dark Spaniard whispering eagerly to the supercargo.

The next moment the Spaniard came up to the captain.

"I am Senor Teran, part owner of this ship. What does this mean? We paid you five hundred pounds to wreck the ship, and here she is safe in harbor."

Captain Norris struck his forehead with his hand.

"That's the worst of whisky— makes a man forget things so. I knew there was something all the time I had to do, but I couldn't call it to mind. Now, I'm a man of my word. I'd give you your money back if I hadn't sent every penny of it to the old girl at Poplar. But as I can't do that, I'll tell you what I will do. I'll take your derved ship out and pile her up for you— properly this time. I can't treat you fairer than that, can I?"

The Spaniard gave him an ominous glance, but left him without saying a word.

That night Captain Norris spent ashore in Maranaibo drinking. It was past midnight when he staggered down to the quay to go aboard his ship. He was singing loudly as he swayed his way down, and never heard the stealthy footsteps behind him. Then came a sudden knife-thrust in the dark, and a slight splash in the harbor.

The next morning the chief officer of the *Oregon*, leaning idly over the ship's side, saw a body floating in the water. The receding tide brought it alongside. He started with horror when he saw the face.

It was Captain Norris's return to his last ship.

19: On the Brighton Road

Richard Middleton

1882-1911

In: *The Ghost Ship*, 1912

SLOWLY THE SUN HAD CLIMBED up the hard white downs, till it broke with little of the mysterious ritual of dawn upon a sparkling world of snow. There had been a hard frost during the night, and the birds, who hopped about here and there with scant tolerance of life, left no trace of their passage on the silver pavements. In places the sheltered caverns of the hedges broke the monotony of the whiteness that had fallen upon the coloured earth, and overhead the sky melted from orange to deep blue, from deep blue to a blue so pale that it suggested a thin paper screen rather than illimitable space. Across the level fields there came a cold, silent wind which blew a fine dust of snow from the trees, but hardly stirred the crested hedges. Once above the skyline, the sun seemed to climb more quickly, and as it rose higher it began to give out a heat that blended with the keenness of the wind.

It may have been this strange alternation of heat and cold that disturbed the tramp in his dreams, for he struggled for a moment with the snow that covered him, like a man who finds himself twisted uncomfortably in the bed-clothes, and then sat up with staring, questioning eyes. "Lord! I thought I was in bed," he said to himself as he took in the vacant landscape, "and all the while I was out here." He stretched his limbs, and, rising carefully to his feet, shook the snow off his body. As he did so the wind set him shivering, and he knew that his bed had been warm.

"Come, I feel pretty fit," he thought. "I suppose I am lucky to wake at all in this. Or unlucky— it isn't much of a business to come back to." He looked up and saw the downs shining against the blue, like the Alps on a picture-postcard. "That means another forty miles or so, I suppose," he continued grimly. "Lord knows what I did yesterday. Walked till I was done, and now I'm only about twelve miles from Brighton. Damn the snow, damn Brighton, damn everything!" The sun crept higher and higher, and he started walking patiently along the road with his back turned to the hills.

"Am I glad or sorry that it was only sleep that took me, glad or sorry, glad or sorry?" His thoughts seemed to arrange themselves in a metrical accompaniment to the steady thud of his footsteps, and he hardly sought an answer to his question. It was good enough to walk to.

Presently, when three milestones had loitered past, he overtook a boy who was stooping to light a cigarette. He wore no overcoat, and looked unspeakably fragile against the snow, "Are you on the road, gov'nor?" asked the boy huskily as he passed.

"I think I am," the tramp said.

"Oh! then I'll come a bit of the way with you if you don't walk too fast. It's bit lonesome walking this time of day."

The tramp nodded his head, and the boy started limping along by his side.

"I'm eighteen," he said casually. "I bet you thought I was younger."

"Fifteen, I'd have said."

"You'd have backed a loser. Eighteen last August, and I've been on the road six years. I ran away from home five times when I was a little 'un, and the police took me back each time. Very good to me, the police was. Now I haven't got a home to run away from."

"Nor have I," the tramp said calmly.

"Oh, I can see what you are," the boy panted; "you're a gentleman come down. It's harder for you than for me." The tramp glanced at the limping, feeble figure and lessened his pace.

"I haven't been at it as long as you have," he admitted.

"No, I could tell that by the way you walk. You haven't got tired yet. Perhaps you expect something at the other end?"

The tramp reflected for a moment. "I don't know," he said bitterly, "I'm always expecting things."

"You'll grow out of that;" the boy commented. "It's warmer in London, but it's harder to come by grub. There isn't much in it really."

"Still, there's the chance of meeting somebody there who will understand—"

"Country people are better," the boy interrupted. "Last night I took a lease of a barn for nothing and slept with the cows, and this morning the farmer routed me out and gave me tea and toke because I was so little. Of course, I score there; but in London, soup on the Embankment at night, and all the rest of the time coppers moving you on."

"I dropped by the roadside last night and slept where I fell. It's a wonder I didn't die," the tramp said. The boy looked at him sharply.

"How did you know you didn't?" he said.

"I don't see it," the tramp said, after a pause.

"I tell you," the boy said hoarsely, "people like us can't get away from this sort of thing if we want to. Always hungry and thirsty and dog-tired and walking all the while. And yet if anyone offers me a nice home and work my stomach feels sick. Do I look strong? I know I'm little for my age, but I've been knocking about like this for six years, and do you think I'm not dead? I was drowned bathing at Margate, and I was killed by a gypsy with a spike; he knocked my head and yet I'm walking along here now, walking to London to walk away from it again, because I can't help it. Dead! I tell you we can't get away if we want to."

The boy broke off in a fit of coughing, and the tramp paused while he recovered.

"You'd better borrow my coat for a bit, Tommy," he said, "your cough's pretty bad."

"You go to hell!" the boy said fiercely, puffing at his cigarette; "I'm all right. I was telling you about the road. You haven't got down to it yet, but you'll find out presently. We're all dead, all of us who're on it, and we're all tired, yet somehow we can't leave it. There's nice smells in the summer, dust and hay and the wind smack in your face on a hot day— and it's nice waking up in the wet grass on a fine morning. I don't know, I don't know—" he lurched forward suddenly, and the tramp caught him in his arms.

"I'm sick," the boy whispered— "sick."

The tramp looked up and down the road, but he could see no houses or any sign of help. Yet even as he supported the boy doubtfully in the middle of the road a motor car suddenly flashed in the middle distance, and came smoothly through the snow.

"What's the trouble?" said the driver quietly as he pulled up. "I'm a doctor." He looked at the boy keenly and listened to his strained breathing.

"Pneumonia," he commented. "I'll give him a lift to the infirmary, and you, too, if you like."

The tramp thought of the workhouse and shook his head "I'd rather walk," he said.

The boy winked faintly as they lifted him into the car.

"I'll meet you beyond Reigate," he murmured to the tramp. "You'll see." And the car vanished along the white road.

All the morning the tramp splashed through the thawing snow, but at midday he begged some bread at a cottage door and crept into a lonely barn to eat it. It was warm in there, and after his meal he fell asleep among the hay. It was dark when he woke, and started trudging once more through the slushy roads.

Two miles beyond Reigate a figure, a fragile figure, slipped out of the darkness to meet him.

"On the road, guv'nor?" said a husky voice. "Then I'll come a bit of the way with you if you don't walk too fast. It's a bit lonesome walking this time of day."

"But the pneumonia!" cried the tramp, aghast.

"I died at Crawley this morning," said the boy.

20: Things

Alice Duer Miller

1874-1942

Scribner's Magazine, Dec 1913

THE GREAT ALIENIST sat down at his desk, and having emptied his mind of all other impressions, held it up like a dipper for his new patient to fill. Large, blond, and handsome, she was plainly accustomed to being listened to. Before she had fairly undone her furs and folded her hands within her muff, the doctor's lateral vision had told him that, whatever her problems, it was not about her own nervous system that she had come to consult him.

Not too quickly her story began to take shape. Her household, her husband, her four children— three small boys and an older daughter, a girl of seventeen....

"My only thought has been my children, Dr. Despard."

"Your *only* thought, Mrs. Royce?"

She assented. The daughter was the problem— the daughter of seventeen.

"She and I have been such friends; I have always been a friend to my children, I hope, as well as a parent. And Celia's little arrangements, her clothes and her small parties, have been as much my interests as hers— more, perhaps. The bond between us has been peculiarly close until the last year or so. Lately a rebellious spirit has begun to develop. I have tried to make allowances, but naturally there are certain questions of manners and deportment— small but important— about which one cannot yield. I am almost ashamed to confess how unaffectionate are the terms that we have reached. The situation will strike you as a strange one between a mother and daughter—"

He shook his head. "You are by no means the only mother and daughter whose relations are unsatisfactory."

"Ah, the young people of to-day!" she sighed. "What *is* the matter with them, with the age, Dr. Despard? They are so hard, so individualistic. I myself was one of a large family, and we lived in the house with my grandparents and aunts. My life was made up of little duties for older people— duties I never thought of questioning. They were a pleasure to me. But if I ask Celia to go on an errand for me— or even to attend to something for herself—I am met by the look of a martyr or a rebel. But that is not the worst. At times, Dr. Despard, her language to me is violent— is— actually profane. I cannot help looking on this as an abnormal manifestation. At last I saw her case was pathological. No nice girl swears at her mother, and"— Mrs. Royce smiled— "my daughter is a nice girl."

It seemed to him that Mrs. Royce must be a very nice mother indeed. Soft, serious, and eminently maternal, she appealed profoundly to all his bachelor ideals.

“And your husband?” he asked. “How does he get on with his daughter?”

“Admirably,” she returned warmly; “they hardly see each other.”

He glanced quickly at her to see if her intention were humorous, but something mechanical in her smile had already warned him that her mind was bent on other of life’s aspects than the comic. Now she was quite serious, and he replied with equal gravity:

“It is often the solution.”

They decided, at length, that he was to spend a few days with them in the country. To bring the girl to his office would be useless. He would find her a gentle, well-behaved little creature, perhaps too much interested in her books. The exigencies of the children’s education kept the Royces in town during the week, but they spent Saturday and Sunday at the old Royce place on the Hudson. Here Despard promised to come at the first opportunity.

She thanked him, and held out a strong, firm hand.

No, he thought when she had gone, he could not understand a girl’s swearing at such a mother— at once so affectionate and so intelligent, for, with pardonable egotism, Despard reckoned her bringing the problem to him a proof of rare domestic intelligence. Most women would have made it the subject of anger or tears.

He himself held no special brief for youth. The younger generation did not attract him. His own nephews and nieces never made him return disgusted to his loneliness, but rather raised his enjoyment of his solitude.

Before he admitted his next patient he stood a moment contemplating the sacrifices made by a parent. “It’s stupendous, it’s too much,” he thought; and smiled to think that, if he had married, a child of his might now be conducting him to a doctor’s office, for of the two he would undoubtedly have been the first to swear.

After a week particularly crowded with the concerns of other people Despard arrived, at high noon of a day in early April, at the Royces’ place. Never, he thought, had he seen peace so clearly embodied. A dense, fresh lawn sloped down to the hazy river; splendid old trees were everywhere; the serious stone house had been built with the simple notions of comfort that existed a hundred years ago.

Mr. Royce, who met him at the station, seemed a peaceful sort of person, too— a man whose forebears had been more like fairy god-parents than ordinary ancestors, for they had given him a handsome, healthy body, a fair fortune, a respected name, and, best of all, an unquestioning belief in all the institutions of his own time, such as matrimony, the ten commandments, and the blessings of paternity.

Despard turned the conversation toward the daughter, but was soon aware that he was getting a mere echo of Mrs. Royce’s opinions.

"The child has worked herself into an abnormal frame of mind," said her father.

"You draw this from your own observations?"

"Well, more from her mother's. I leave that sort of thing to my wife. She has great cares, great responsibilities. She takes life almost too seriously." He sighed. The next instant his face lighted up in pointing out to Despard a giant chestnut-tree just saved from a blighting disease. For a few minutes he spoke on the subject with extraordinary vividness.

Despard was quick to recognize expert knowledge, and Royce, with something approaching a blush, admitted that he did understand the care of native trees. "I have sometimes thought of writing a book about it," he said timidly.

"You certainly should."

"Ah, it's so difficult to find time."

Despard smiled. Who had leisure if this favored being had not? He himself, without one hour in the twenty-four that he could call his own, was already at work on his third.

He met the whole family assembled at luncheon: a pale German governess, three little boys, and the dark-eyed Celia, sweet-mouthed but sullen-browed.

Despard, who had had no breakfast, thought more than he would have confessed about the victuals set before him. Any family ought to be amiable, he thought, on food at once so simple and delicious. His opinion of Mrs. Royce rose still higher.

Within the next hour he came to the conclusion that, in spite of his extended knowledge of American interiors, he had never before been in a really well-appointed house— a house, that is, where one wise and affectionate person directed every detail. Mrs. Royce, he found, knew every aspect of her home. She not only knew her flowers almost as individuals, but she knew the vase and the place where each appeared to the best advantage. She knew better than her husband which chair he liked, where he kept his cigars, and which little table would be best at his elbow. Nor was her consideration confined to her own family. She had thought of a tired doctor's special needs. She had given him "a little room, where he could be quiet and get a glimpse of the river."

Shut in this room, not so very little after all, he walked to the writing-table to make a memorandum. It had more than once happened to him to find, in a house accounted luxurious, only a dry, encrusted inkstand in the spare room. Not so here. Never was ink so fluidly, greenly new; never was blotting-paper so eagerly absorbent. He noticed, besides three sizes of paper and envelopes, that there were cable blanks, telegraph blanks, and postal cards, as well as stamps of all varieties.

It was not Despard's habit to notice life quite as much in detail as this, but now it amused him to pursue the subject. Luxury he knew; but this effective consideration he rated as something higher.

HE HAD ARRIVED on a Friday, and on Sunday at five— things were apt to happen by a schedule in the Royce household— he was to give his report on Celia.

He entered the library— the spot designated by Mrs. Royce— by one door as Churchley, the butler, came in at the other to serve tea.

The dark, shining little table was brought out, noiselessly opened, covered with a cloth— the wrong cloth, Mrs. Royce indicated. Churchley whisked away and returned incredibly quickly with the right one. The tray, weighted with silver and blossoming with the saffron flame of the tea-kettle, was next put before her, and then another little structure of shelves was set at her right hand. Her eye fell on this.

"I said *brown-bread* toast, Churchley." The man murmured and again whisked away.

All this time Despard had not sat down, although between orders Mrs. Royce had more than once urged him to do so. He stood, having shut the door behind him, leaning the point of his shoulder against the wall.

Utterly undisturbed by his calm eyes fixed upon her, Mrs. Royce said:

"Poor Churchley, he has been with us for six years, but I'm afraid I can't keep him. He forgets everything."

"He's on the edge of a nervous breakdown," answered Despard coolly, and he added: "The housemaid is a pronounced neurasthenic. As for your daughter—"

"Ah, Celia, poor, dear child! Must we send her away?" her mother asked, but before the doctor had time to answer, Churchley, by a miracle of celerity, again entered, this time bearing toast of the desired complexion.

After he had finally disappeared, Mrs. Royce busied herself with flame and kettle and tea-caddy before she repeated her question, and her voice had in it a faint sediment of these preoccupations:

"I hope you do not think it necessary to send Celia away, Dr. Despard?"

He drew a chair forward and sat down. "No, Mrs. Royce," he said; "I think it necessary to send you away."

"Me?"

He bowed.

"But my health is excellent. Oh, I see," she smiled. "My husband has been talking to you about my responsibilities. Yes, they are great, but one is given strength to do what is required of one. I shall not have to desert my post. I am strong."

"I know you are strong, Mrs. Royce," said he, "but you are the cause of weakness in others. We need not multiply examples: your daughter, the governess, Churchley—"

She broke in— "Of course, I admit their weakness. But don't you see how I protect and support them? How could you imagine that I was the cause?"

"Isn't it suggestive that practically every one with whom you come in contact—"

"My husband," she retorted, quoting an instance against him.

"Your husband has great natural calm, and spends eight hours a day out of the house. You have made this home, this really wonderful home, for those you love. No one admires the achievement more than I do. But you have sacrificed too much of yourself in doing it; and I'm not speaking of your physical strength. In this library, in which you are so fond of sitting, how many books have you ever read?"

"I was a great reader as a girl," she answered.

"Which of these have you read in the last ten years?"

She murmured that he perhaps hardly understood the demands upon her time.

"You never read. You can't," he returned. "Since my first hour here I have been watching you, not your daughter. Her case is simple enough. You don't read, Mrs. Royce, not because you have no time, but because you have no concentration. This is one of the many sacrifices you have made to your household— a serious one, and we must face the results. I have watched you each day carrying the morning papers about with you until evening, and then, if you read the headlines, it is as much as you can accomplish."

She had been staring at him as though in a trance, but now she came to, with a laugh.

"My dear Dr. Despard," she said, "if you were the mother of four children and the head—"

He held up his hand. "You must let me finish," he said. "You have made this home, and you administer it with consummate ability; and yet no one is really happy in it, least of all yourself. Why? Well, I need not remind you that no one is made happy merely by things. Some continuity of inner life is absolutely necessary, not only to happiness but to health. Remember, I am speaking as a nerve specialist. You, Mrs. Royce, are an enemy to continuity. You dispel concentration as a rock dispels a wave. Even I find no little difficulty, when in your presence, in pursuing a consecutive train of thought, and, as for you yourself, such a thing has long been impossible for you. Even now, on this matter so immensely important to you, you have not been able to give me your undivided attention. Other facts have kept coming up in your consciousness— that a bell rang somewhere; that the hearth has not been swept up. Acutely

aware as I am of your point of view, these breaks in your attention have been breaks in mine, too; but I have been able to overcome them, and follow my ideas to the end, because I have been trained to do so, and, besides, I've been here only two days. In two days more I would not answer for myself. I should begin to see things, things, things, and to believe that all life was merely a question of arrangements. Even your religion, Mrs. Royce, in which most people find some continuity, is a question of things— of Sunday-schools and altar decoration. That poor little clergyman who lunched here to-day— he came emanating a certain spiritual peace; but he went away crushed by your poor opinion of him as an executive. At this moment he is probably breaking up the current of his life by a conscientious attention to things."

Deeply protesting as she was in her heart, something in his hard, clear look kept her silent, and he went on:

"Your daughter is— to use a big word— an intellectual. For the time being she is interested only in things of the mind. New ideas, books, poetry are the great adventures of life to her at present. To all this you are an obstructionist—"

"There, at least, you are utterly at fault," cried the poor lady, with a passion she had not known for years. "I have done everything in my power to help. I am very ambitious in regard to my children's education. Their schools, their teachers—"

"Ay," said Despard, "you have set out the counters for them but you have never let them play the game. You were interested in making the arrangements, but you had no interest at all in the state of mind which could take advantage of them. Your daughter knows, not only that you take no thought for such matters yourself, but that every phase of your contact with her demands her attention for other matters— clothes, manners, hours, and dates. You have no respect for her preoccupations. Not once, not twice, but fifty times a day, you interrupt her, with a caress, or an errand, or more often a reproof. Yesterday, when she was obviously absorbed in reading that bit of verse to her father, you sent her upstairs to change her shoes—"

"They were wet; she would have caught cold."

"If you had listened you would have seen she had only four more lines to read. You do all this, not only when she is in your domain, at meals and in the drawing-room, but you follow her to her own room and go in without knocking. I venture to say that that child works at night, for the simple reason that to work in this house during the daytime is impossible."

"Really," said Mrs. Royce, "with the best will in the world I do not understand you. Celia's friends sometimes seem to feel that I ought to neglect her manners and pronunciation, ought to allow her to become selfish and self-centred, so that she may—" She broke off as if words failed her. "But I have never heard a grown person suggest that such a course would be right."

“Ask your clergyman what is right,” answered Despard. “I am here to tell you what is healthy; I am here to prescribe. Now, notice, please, I do not tell you to change. I don’t think you could. The reactions have taken place too many times. I tell you to go away. We can call it a rest cure. You shall have beautiful surroundings, comfort, and, above all that leisure that recent years have failed to give you. In return I shall ask you to concentrate your mind for a certain number of hours each day.”

“You talk,” she cried bitterly, “as if I enjoyed the treadmill of my daily life.”

“You have unusual executive ability, and most of us enjoy the use of our powers.”

“The best refutation of all that you have said is that I am eager to go,” she returned. “Ah, I cannot tell you how inviting such a prospect seems to me— not to order dinner, not to have to decide and arrange for every one, not to be the pivot of the whole structure. Ah, Dr. Despard, I would so gladly go, but—”

“But?”

“But what would happen to my family without me?”

“They must try looking out for themselves,” he answered. He glanced at his watch, for he was to take a train that afternoon; and Mrs. Royce collected herself enough to touch the bell— it always hung within tempting reach of her hand—and gave Churchley orders to send for the motor and have the doctor’s bags brought down.

During this interval Despard walked to the window and stood looking out. It is not always so easy to apply the knife psychologically as physically. He wondered if he could have been more gentle and equally effective. As he stood there Celia came sauntering across the lawn, her head bent, her hands deep in the pockets of an enveloping dun-colored coat. The brow which had first seemed sulky to him appeared now simply thoughtful.

THE STRENGTH OF MRS. ROYCE’S character was shown by the fact that she obeyed— she actually went. She went almost gladly— a state of mind induced by the extraordinary activity of her last days at home. In one brilliant flash of prophecy and power she foresaw and forestalled every contingency that could arise in her absence. She departed in a condition of exhaustion fully justifying the doctor’s story of a needed rest.

Her weariness lasted through the first few days at the sanatorium. She was well content to lie in bed and think of nothing. But by the fifth or sixth day she began to wonder where she had left the key of the cedar closet; and several possibilities of error in the arrangements she had made to reach from garret to cellar began to creep into her consciousness. Her elder boy was subject to throat trouble; her younger was subtly averse to bathing. She had not, perhaps,

sufficiently emphasized these two dangers. She had, however, given her promise not to communicate with her household except in case of necessity.

Conscientious in her determination to do what she had set out to do, she took out some of the books she had brought with her, but they seemed an unsatisfactory lot: the novels, trashy; the essays, dull; the history, heavy. Strange, she thought, how people will recommend books which really did not even hold one's attention.

The word attention, bringing with it the recollection of Despard's speech, recalled her to her obligations. Heavy or not, she was resolved to make her way through the volume.

She read: "It has been argued that the too rapid introduction of modern political machinery, and the too rapid unification of such different populations as those—" Had she told them not to keep the house too hot in these first spring days? Overheated houses, in her opinion, were a fruitful source of ill health. "—though these may with more justice be ascribed to deep-seated sociological causes stretching back through two thousand years—" This was the season for putting away the furs. If, in her absence, moths should attack her husband's sable-lined overcoat! Ah, she put down her book; this was serious.

Fifteen minutes later she went out, trying to walk off the haunting presence of that fur coat.

There was something not a little heroic in her struggle with temptations—staying on while every notion she had heretofore considered righteous called to her to go back. Hideous pictures of ruin and discomfort at home floated before her mind. She had to admit she found a certain grim satisfaction in such visions. They would at least prove to Despard how little the modern family is able to dispense with the services of the old-fashioned mother.

She was human enough to be eager to prove him wrong in essentials, for in minor matters he had shown himself terribly accurate. With unlimited leisure on her hands she was surprised to find how little enjoyment she derived from her books. She read herself to sleep with a novel every night, but it was enough for her to open one of the more serious works for her mind to rush back to the old domestic problems. Her eyes alone would read the printed page.

Her life seemed hideously vacant—empty, as she put it, of all affection; but it was also empty of all machinery—perhaps the greater change of the two. She had no small duties, no orders to give, no mistakes to correct.

She was not forbidden to communicate with Despard, and at the end of a week she telegraphed him that she was going home. He came to her at once.

"I am doing what I know to be wrong," she broke out. "I am neglecting my family."

"You are doing what your medical adviser orders."

“Yes,” she answered, “but can you guarantee that nothing will happen in my absence? Will it be any comfort to me, if things go wrong, to say that I was obeying orders?”

He did not directly answer this question, which had been largely rhetorical in intention. Instead, he said:

“Yes, I suppose you are dreadfully bored.”

She checked an impulse toward complete denial. He had stated half the truth. She was bored, but she tried to make him see that there was more than that in her attitude. He, a man and a bachelor, could hardly realize how serious might be the results of a mother’s protracted absence.

He had at times a trick— irritating to Mrs. Royce— of replying to something slightly different from the thought one had expressed. He did so now.

“And if they do miss you,” he said, “won’t that be a help?”

Yes, certainly, it would be a help, and it was perhaps that thought which kept her on day after day— the thought that they were missing her in every detail of life, the belief that the daily service, the common-place sacrifice of an existence like hers could only be realized by its cessation.

One reward she had. Her books began to grow more interesting. “It grows better as you get into it,” she explained to one of the nurses, but in her heart she knew the improvement was not in the book.

At last a night came when she had a dream, more poignant, more vivid than any material message could have been— a dream of disaster at home. She was not a superstitious woman, but the impression already in her mind was immensely deepened. She was needed at home; that was her place. What madness it had been for her to go away, and what a selfish madness, made up partly of desire to rest and partly of a wish to prove Despard wrong! She might have cause to reproach herself for the remainder of her life. She could forgive him all that she herself had suffered, removed from her work, deprived of all occupation and happy home activities, but if anything had gone wrong with those she loved—

That very afternoon she went home.

Once inside her own gates she began to see signs of her three weeks’ absence. Although the grounds were nominally her husband’s charge, the standards since her departure had evidently been lowered. The gutters were but half cleared and the gravel unraked. The appearance of the house confirmed her fears. The window curtains had not been changed. Sixty-two dirty window curtains seemed to her to offer but a dreary welcome.

In spite of sunshine, the rainy-day door mat greeted her, left from the day before, which had been rainy; and the brasses of the door, though not actually tarnished, lacked that elysian brightness on which she herself insisted.

As she mounted the steps two of the boys came running up— hugging and clawing at her with hands on which she caught a glimpse of the lustrous veneer of dirt. They were so glad to see her; and little Lewis had been ill. Her heart stood still— oh, only a cold. Where was he? she asked them, and when they said— oh, horror!— out with the governess in the pony cart, she sent them racing after him.

The darkest forebodings filled her mind as to what she would find within. She rang and, after an interval too long by several minutes, Churchley opened the door. For an instant his appearance drove all other thoughts away.

“Why, Churchley,” she cried, “you have been putting on weight!”

Churchley acknowledged the imputation with a smile that approached dangerously near a dimple.

“Yes, madame,” he said, “I’ve taken a great turn for the better,” and he asked sympathetically after her own health.

She made no answer, but, turning her head away from the staircase, in whose crevices she had already detected faint gray lines of dust, she moved toward the library door, which Churchley quietly opened for her.

She saw with a shock that the arrangement of the furniture— an arrangement sanctified by twenty years of habit— had been altered. Two desks had been drawn near the windows without any respect for symmetry, and at these, back to back, her husband and daughter were sitting.

That Celia should bring her school-books to the library, though unusual, was not unnatural, but the sight of Royce at work on page after page of foolscap was something requiring an explanation.

The room was perfectly quiet except for the scratch of his pen and the ticking of the clock; and Mrs. Royce decided that she would stand there silent until some other interruption occurred. It could not be very long before a servant entered or they themselves would weary of this work.

But the silence continued. Once Royce took out a book and glanced at some reference. Once Celia got up and lighted the lamps for both, but neither of them spoke.

For a long time Mrs. Royce stood there, transfixed by a curious conviction that came to her as she watched— the conviction that this silence carried with it a more perfect companionship than all her long talks with her husband had ever brought. Of course, she had long since realized that, as gradually as one season melts into another, her relationship to her husband had changed—changed inevitably, she had imagined, from the poetry of first love into something that resembled the prose of a business partnership. To her the change was not altogether to be regretted; in her eyes the business of being the head of a man’s house and the mother of his children was still charged with the romantic idea. But for the first time it now occurred to her to ask whether the change had been

equally satisfactory to him. Ah, she admitted that a certain charm, a certain stimulation had gone from their affection, but never before had she thought, as she was thinking now, that the quality most conspicuously absent was intimacy. How was such a thing possible when she had lived twenty years of her life with him in perfect amity?

Yet, standing there, she saw that for many years she had not had the least conception of what had been going on in his mind. She had used the word business partnership, and, naturally, when they were together they often discussed the details of the business, only now she remembered that it was always in *her* department that the problems for discussion arose. Royce seemed to be able to manage his end of it without consultation. Why was this?

She tried desperately to see the thing clearly. Her whole life was built on the belief that she existed solely to be depended upon; and yet she saw that her husband, in all his more personal interests, far from depending on her, never even mentioned them to her. What did that mean? And why had she never observed this contradiction before? Could it be that, after all, she was not dependable, or had some unreckoned factor in his life rendered Royce more self-reliant than he had been in the early days of their marriage?

And at this point, before she realized her intention, she heard her own voice saying: "Celia, my dear, your lamp is flaring."

Well, there was no question of the welcome with which both pairs of eyes lit up. "Mother, *dear!*" cried the girl. Both overwhelmed her with solicitude about her health. She did not have to ask after theirs. Never were two rosier, more unlined faces than theirs.

After a moment she asked what it was that her husband was writing, and he answered, almost timidly, that it was a book on trees; he had had the idea in his mind for a number of years but had never had the energy to begin it before.

"Why not?" she asked almost sharply, but before he had time to answer—and it was evident he himself had no idea of the real answer—Celia broke in:

"And what do you think, mother? I've won the prize for composition at school. I had the idea the very night you went away, and I've worked and worked over it, and they all say that it is much better than anything I ever did before. Aren't you glad?"

Yes, her mother was glad, but a strain of bitterness mingled with her rejoicing. Was it, indeed, her absence that had released all the vital energy?

One hope lingered unacknowledged in her breast. She turned to her husband.

"And have they made you comfortable since I went?" she asked.

"Oh, perfectly," he replied. "Everything has gone without a hitch, thanks to your arrangements."

“Yes,” Celia chimed in, “the servants have been too wonderful; they’ve done everything just as if you were at home, only better.”

Mrs. Royce looked round the room, where to her eye everything was wrong— the corners dusty, the lamps ill-cared for, the sofa pillows rumped, and the tea-tray, which ought to have been removed, still standing disordered in a corner.

She stretched her hand toward the bell to ring and order it taken away; and then, checking herself, she sank back and folded her hands idly in her lap. Her husband had begun to tell her something about his book.

21: The Lenton Croft Robberies

Arthur Morrison

1863-1945

The Strand Magazine, March 1894

Collected in: *Martin Hewitt, Investigator*, 1894

THOSE who retain any memory of the great law cases of fifteen or twenty years back will remember, at least, the title of that extraordinary will case, "Bartley v. Bartley and others," which occupied the Probate Court for some weeks on end, and caused an amount of public interest rarely accorded to any but the cases considered in the other division of the same court. The case itself was noted for the large quantity of remarkable and unusual evidence presented by the plaintiff's side— evidence that took the other party completely by surprise, and overthrew their case like a house of cards. The affair will, perhaps, be more readily recalled as the occasion of the sudden rise to eminence in their profession of Messrs. Crellan, Hunt & Crellan, solicitors for the plaintiff— a result due entirely to the wonderful ability shown in this case of building up, apparently out of nothing, a smashing weight of irresistible evidence. That the firm has since maintained— indeed enhanced— the position it then won for itself need scarcely be said here; its name is familiar to everybody. But there are not many of the outside public who know that the credit of the whole performance was primarily due to a young clerk in the employ of Messrs. Crellan, who had been given charge of the seemingly desperate task of collecting evidence in the case.

This Mr. Martin Hewitt had, however, full credit and reward for his exploit from his firm and from their client, and more than one other firm of lawyers engaged in contentious work made good offers to entice Hewitt to change his employers. Instead of this, however, he determined to work independently for the future, having conceived the idea of making a regular business of doing, on behalf of such clients as might retain him, similar work to that he had just done with such conspicuous success for Messrs. Crellan, Hunt & Crellan. This was the beginning of the private detective business of Martin Hewitt, and his action at that time has been completely justified by the brilliant professional successes he has since achieved.

His business has always been conducted in the most private manner, and he has always declined the help of professional assistants, preferring to carry out himself such of the many investigations offered him as he could manage. He has always maintained that he has never lost by this policy, since the chance of his refusing a case begets competition for his services, and his fees rise by a natural process. At the same time, no man could know better how to employ casual assistance at the right time.

Some curiosity has been expressed as to Mr. Martin Hewitt's system, and, as he himself always consistently maintains that he has no system beyond a judicious use of ordinary faculties, I intend setting forth in detail a few of the more interesting of his cases in order that the public may judge for itself if I am right in estimating Mr. Hewitt's "ordinary faculties" as faculties very extraordinary indeed. He is not a man who has made many friendships (this, probably, for professional reasons), notwithstanding his genial and companionable manners. I myself first made his acquaintance as a result of an accident resulting in a fire at the old house in which Hewitt's office was situated, and in an upper floor of which I occupied bachelor chambers. I was able to help in saving a quantity of extremely important papers relating to his business, and, while repairs were being made, allowed him to lock them in an old wall-safe in one of my rooms which the fire had scarcely damaged.

The acquaintance thus begun has lasted many years, and has become a rather close friendship. I have even accompanied Hewitt on some of his expeditions, and, in a humble way, helped him. Such of the cases, however, as I personally saw nothing of I have put into narrative form from the particulars given me.

"I consider you, Brett," he said, addressing me, "the most remarkable journalist alive. Not because you're particularly clever, you know, because, between ourselves, I hope you'll admit you're not; but because you have known something of me and my doings for some years, and have never yet been guilty of giving away any of my little business secrets you may have become acquainted with. I'm afraid you're not so enterprising a journalist as some, Brett. But now, since you ask, you shall write something— if you think it worth while."

This he said, as he said most things, with a cheery, chaffing good-nature that would have been, perhaps, surprising to a stranger who thought of him only as a grim and mysterious discoverer of secrets and crimes. Indeed, the man had always as little of the aspect of the conventional detective as may be imagined. Nobody could appear more cordial or less observant in manner, although there was to be seen a certain sharpness of the eye— which might, after all, only be the twinkle of good humor.

I *did* think it worth while to write something of Martin Hewitt's investigations, and a description of one of his adventures follows.

AT THE HEAD of the first flight of a dingy staircase leading up from an ever-open portal in a street by the Strand stood a door, the dusty ground-glass upper panel of which carried in its center the single word "Hewitt," while at its right-hand lower corner, in smaller letters, "Clerk's Office" appeared. On a morning when the clerks in the ground-floor offices had barely hung up their hats, a

short, well-dressed young man, wearing spectacles, hastening to open the dusty door, ran into the arms of another man who suddenly issued from it.

"I beg pardon," the first said. "Is this Hewitt's Detective Agency Office?"

"Yes, I believe you will find it so," the other replied. He was a stoutish, clean-shaven man, of middle height, and of a cheerful, round countenance. "You'd better speak to the clerk."

In the little outer office the visitor was met by a sharp lad with inky fingers, who presented him with a pen and a printed slip. The printed slip having been filled with the visitor's name and present business, and conveyed through an inner door, the lad reappeared with an invitation to the private office. There, behind a writing-table, sat the stoutish man himself, who had only just advised an appeal to the clerk.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lloyd— Mr. Vernon Lloyd," he said, affably, looking again at the slip. "You'll excuse my care to start even with my visitors— I must, you know. You come from Sir James Norris, I see."

"Yes; I am his secretary. I have only to ask you to go straight to Lenton Croft at once, if you can, on very important business. Sir James would have wired, but had not your precise address. Can you go by the next train? Eleven-thirty is the first available from Paddington."

"Quite possibly. Do you know any thing of the business?"

"It is a case of a robbery in the house, or, rather, I fancy, of several robberies. Jewelry has been stolen from rooms occupied by visitors to the Croft. The first case occurred some months ago— nearly a year ago, in fact. Last night there was another. But I think you had better get the details on the spot. Sir James has told me to telegraph if you are coming, so that he may meet you himself at the station; and I must hurry, as his drive to the station will be rather a long one. Then I take it you will go, Mr. Hewitt? Twyford is the station."

"Yes, I shall come, and by the 11.30. Are you going by that train yourself?"

"No, I have several things to attend to now I am in town. Good-morning; I shall wire at once."

Mr. Martin Hewitt locked the drawer of his table and sent his clerk for a cab.

At Twyford Station Sir James Norris was waiting with a dog-cart. Sir James was a tall, florid man of fifty or thereabout, known away from home as something of a county historian, and nearer his own parts as a great supporter of the hunt, and a gentleman much troubled with poachers. As soon as he and Hewitt had found one another the baronet hurried the detective into his dog-cart. "We've something over seven miles to drive," he said, "and I can tell you all about this wretched business as we go. That is why I came for you myself, and alone."

Hewitt nodded.

"I have sent for you, as Lloyd probably told you, because of a robbery at my place last evening. It appears, as far as I can guess, to be one of three by the same hand, or by the same gang. Late yesterday afternoon—"

"Pardon me, Sir James," Hewitt interrupted, "but I think I must ask you to begin at the first robbery and tell me the whole tale in proper order. It makes things clearer, and sets them in their proper shape."

"Very well! Eleven months ago, or thereabout, I had rather a large party of visitors, and among them Colonel Heath and Mrs. Heath— the lady being a relative of my own late wife. Colonel Heath has not been long retired, you know— used to be political resident in an Indian native state. Mrs. Heath had rather a good stock of jewelry of one sort and another, about the most valuable piece being a bracelet set with a particularly fine pearl— quite an exceptional pearl, in fact— that had been one of a heap of presents from the maharajah of his state when Heath left India.

"It was a very noticeable bracelet, the gold setting being a mere feather-weight piece of native filigree work— almost too fragile to trust on the wrist— and the pearl being, as I have said, of a size and quality not often seen. Well, Heath and his wife arrived late one evening, and after lunch the following day, most of the men being off by themselves— shooting, I think— my daughter, my sister (who is very often down here), and Mrs. Heath took it into their heads to go walking— fern-hunting, and so on. My sister was rather long dressing, and, while they waited, my daughter went into Mrs. Heath's room, where Mrs. Heath turned over all her treasures to show her, as women do, you know. When my sister was at last ready, they came straight away, leaving the things littering about the room rather than stay longer to pack them up. The bracelet, with other things, was on the dressing-table then."

"One moment. As to the door?"

"They locked it. As they came away my daughter suggested turning the key, as we had one or two new servants about."

"And the window?"

"That they left open, as I was going to tell you. Well, they went on their walk and came back, with Lloyd (whom they had met somewhere) carrying their ferns for them. It was dusk and almost dinner-time. Mrs. Heath went straight to her room, and— the bracelet was gone."

"Was the room disturbed?"

"Not a bit. Everything was precisely where it had been left, except the bracelet. The door hadn't been tampered with, but of course the window was open, as I have told you."

"You called the police, of course?"

"Yes, and had a man from Scotland Yard down in the morning. He seemed a pretty smart fellow, and the first thing he noticed on the dressing-table, within

an inch or two of where the bracelet had been, was a match, which had been lit and thrown down. Now nobody about the house had had occasion to use a match in that room that day, and, if they had, certainly wouldn't have thrown it on the cover of the dressing-table. So that, presuming the thief to have used that match, the robbery must have been committed when the room was getting dark— immediately before Mrs. Heath returned, in fact. The thief had evidently struck the match, passed it hurriedly over the various trinkets lying about, and taken the most valuable."

"Nothing else was even moved?"

"Nothing at all. Then the thief must have escaped by the window, although it was not quite clear how. The walking party approached the house with a full view of the window, but saw nothing, although the robbery must have been actually taking place a moment or two before they turned up.

"There was no water-pipe within any practicable distance of the window, but a ladder usually kept in the stable-yard was found lying along the edge of the lawn. The gardener explained, however, that he had put the ladder there after using it himself early in the afternoon."

"Of course it might easily have been used again after that and put back."

"Just what the Scotland Yard man said. He was pretty sharp, too, on the gardener, but very soon decided that he knew nothing of it. No stranger had been seen in the neighborhood, nor had passed the lodge gates. Besides, as the detective said, it scarcely seemed the work of a stranger. A stranger could scarcely have known enough to go straight to the room where a lady— only arrived the day before— had left a valuable jewel, and away again without being seen. So all the people about the house were suspected in turn. The servants offered, in a body, to have their boxes searched, and this was done; everything was turned over, from the butler's to the new kitchen-maid's. I don't know that I should have had this carried quite so far if I had been the loser myself, but it was my guest, and I was in such a horrible position. Well, there's little more to be said about that, unfortunately. Nothing came of it all, and the thing's as great a mystery now as ever. I believe the Scotland Yard man got as far as suspecting *me* before he gave it up altogether, but give it up he did in the end. I think that's all I know about the first robbery. Is it clear?"

"Oh, yes; I shall probably want to ask a few questions when I have seen the place, but they can wait. What next?"

"Well," Sir James pursued, "the next was a very trumpery affair, that I should have forgotten all about, probably, if it hadn't been for one circumstance. Even now I hardly think it could have been the work of the same hand. Four months or thereabout after Mrs. Heath's disaster— in February of this year, in fact— Mrs. Armitage, a young widow, who had been a school-fellow of my daughter's, stayed with us for a week or so. The girls don't trouble about the London

season, you know, and I have no town house, so they were glad to have their old friend here for a little in the dull time. Mrs. Armitage is a very active young lady, and was scarcely in the house half an hour before she arranged a drive in a pony-cart with Eva— my daughter— to look up old people in the village that she used to know before she was married. So they set off in the afternoon, and made such a round of it that they were late for dinner. Mrs. Armitage had a small plain gold brooch— not at all valuable, you know; two or three pounds, I suppose— which she used to pin up a cloak or anything of that sort. Before she went out she stuck this in the pin-cushion on her dressing-table, and left a ring— rather a good one, I believe— lying close by."

"This," asked Hewitt, "was not in the room that Mrs. Heath had occupied, I take it?"

"No; this was in another part of the building. Well, the brooch went— taken, evidently, by some one in a deuce of a hurry, for, when Mrs. Armitage got back to her room, there was the pin-cushion with a little tear in it, where the brooch had been simply snatched off. But the curious thing was that the ring— worth a dozen of the brooch— was left where it had been put. Mrs. Armitage didn't remember whether or not she had locked the door herself, although she found it locked when she returned; but my niece, who was indoors all the time, went and tried it once— because she remembered that a gas-fitter was at work on the landing near by— and found it safely locked. The gas-fitter, whom we didn't know at the time, but who since seems to be quite an honest fellow, was ready to swear that nobody but my niece had been to the door while he was in sight of it— which was almost all the time. As to the window, the sash-line had broken that very morning, and Mrs. Armitage had propped open the bottom half about eight or ten inches with a brush; and, when she returned, that brush, sash, and all were exactly as she had left them. Now I scarcely need tell *you* what an awkward job it must have been for anybody to get noiselessly in at that unsupported window; and how unlikely he would have been to replace it, with the brush, exactly as he found it."

"Just so. I suppose the brooch, was really gone? I mean, there was no chance of Mrs. Armitage having mislaid it?"

"Oh, none at all! There was a most careful search."

"Then, as to getting in at the window, would it have been easy?"

"Well, yes," Sir James replied; "yes, perhaps it would. It was a first-floor window, and it looks over the roof and skylight of the billiard-room. I built the billiard-room myself— built it out from a smoking-room just at this corner. It would be easy enough to get at the window from the billiard-room roof. But, then," he added, "that couldn't have been the way. Somebody or other was in the billiard-room the whole time, and nobody could have got over the roof

(which is nearly all skylight) without being seen and heard. I was there myself for an hour or two, taking a little practice."

"Well, was anything done?"

"Strict inquiry was made among the servants, of course, but nothing came of it. It was such a small matter that Mrs. Armitage wouldn't hear of my calling in the police or anything of that sort, although I felt pretty certain that there must be a dishonest servant about somewhere. A servant might take a plain brooch, you know, who would feel afraid of a valuable ring, the loss of which would be made a greater matter of."

"Well, yes, perhaps so, in the case of an inexperienced thief, who also would be likely to snatch up whatever she took in a hurry. But I'm doubtful. What made you connect these two robberies together?"

"Nothing whatever— for some months. They seemed quite of a different sort. But scarcely more than a month ago I met Mrs. Armitage at Brighton, and we talked, among other things, of the previous robbery— that of Mrs. Heath's bracelet. I described the circumstances pretty minutely, and, when I mentioned the match found on the table, she said: 'How strange! Why, *my* thief left a match on the dressing-table when he took my poor little brooch!'"

Hewitt nodded. "Yes," he said. "A spent match, of course?"

"Yes, of course, a spent match. She noticed it lying close by the pin-cushion, but threw it away without mentioning the circumstance. Still, it seemed rather curious to me that a match should be lit and dropped, in each case, on the dressing-table cover an inch from where the article was taken. I mentioned it to Lloyd when I got back, and he agreed that it seemed significant."

"Scarcely," said Hewitt, shaking his head. "Scarcely, so far, to be called significant, although worth following up. Everybody uses matches in the dark, you know."

"Well, at any rate, the coincidence appealed to me so far that it struck me it might be worth while to describe the brooch to the police in order that they could trace it if it had been pawned. They had tried that, of course, over the bracelet without any result, but I fancied the shot might be worth making, and might possibly lead us on the track of the more serious robbery."

"Quite so. It was the right thing to do. Well?"

"Well, they found it. A woman had pawned it in London— at a shop in Chelsea. But that was some time before, and the pawnbroker had clean forgotten all about the woman's appearance. The name and address she gave were false. So that was the end of that business."

"Had any of the servants left you between the time the brooch was lost and the date of the pawn ticket?"

"No."

"Were all your servants at home on the day the brooch was pawned?"

"Oh, yes! I made that inquiry myself."

"Very good! What next?"

"Yesterday— and this is what made me send for you. My late wife's sister came here last Tuesday, and we gave her the room from which Mrs. Heath lost her bracelet. She had with her a very old-fashioned brooch, containing a miniature of her father, and set in front with three very fine brilliants and a few smaller stones. Here we are, though, at the Croft. I'll tell you the rest indoors."

Hewitt laid his hand on the baronet's arm. "Don't pull up, Sir James," he said. "Drive a little farther. I should like to have a general idea of the whole case before we go in."

"Very good!" Sir James Norris straightened the horse's head again and went on. "Late yesterday afternoon, as my sister-in-law was changing her dress, she left her room for a moment to speak to my daughter in her room, almost adjoining. She was gone no more than three minutes, or five at most, but on her return the brooch, which had been left on the table, had gone. Now the window was shut fast, and had not been tampered with. Of course the door was open, but so was my daughter's, and anybody walking near must have been heard. But the strangest circumstance, and one that almost makes me wonder whether I have been awake to-day or not, was that there lay *a used match* on the very spot, as nearly as possible, where the brooch had been— and it was broad daylight!"

Hewitt rubbed his nose and looked thoughtfully before him. "Um— curious, certainly," he said, "Anything else?"

"Nothing more than you shall see for yourself. I have had the room locked and watched till you could examine it. My sister-in-law had heard of your name, and suggested that you should be called in; so, of course, I did exactly as she wanted. That she should have lost that brooch, of all things, in my house is most unfortunate; you see, there was some small difference about the thing between my late wife and her sister when their mother died and left it. It's almost worse than the Heaths' bracelet business, and altogether I'm not pleased with things, I can assure you. See what a position it is for me! Here are three ladies, in the space of one year, robbed one after another in this mysterious fashion in my house, and I can't find the thief! It's horrible! People will be afraid to come near the place. And I can do nothing!"

"Ah, well, we'll see. Perhaps we had better turn back now. By-the-by, were you thinking of having any alterations or additions made to your house?"

"No. What makes you ask?"

"I think you might at least consider the question of painting and decorating, Sir James— or, say, putting up another coach-house, or something. Because I should like to be (to the servants) the architect— or the builder, if you please— come to look around. You haven't told any of them about this business?"

"Not a word. Nobody knows but my relatives and Lloyd. I took every precaution myself, at once. As to your little disguise, be the architect by all means, and do as you please. If you can only find this thief and put an end to this horrible state of affairs, you'll do me the greatest service I've ever asked for— and as to your fee, I'll gladly make it whatever is usual, and three hundred in addition."

Martin Hewitt bowed. "You're very generous, Sir James, and you may be sure I'll do what I can. As a professional man, of course, a good fee always stimulates my interest, although this case of yours certainly seems interesting enough by itself."

"Most extraordinary! Don't you think so? Here are three persons, all ladies, all in my house, two even in the same room, each successively robbed of a piece of jewelry, each from a dressing-table, and a used match left behind in every case. All in the most difficult— one would say impossible— circumstances for a thief, and yet there is no clue!"

"Well, we won't say that just yet, Sir James; we must see. And we must guard against any undue predisposition to consider the robberies in a lump. Here we are at the lodge gate again. Is that your gardener— the man who left the ladder by the lawn on the first occasion you spoke of?"

Mr. Hewitt nodded in the direction of a man who was clipping a box border.

"Yes; will you ask him anything?"

"No, no; at any rate, not now. Remember the building alterations. I think, if there is no objection, I will look first at the room that the lady— Mrs.—" Hewitt looked up, inquiringly.

"My sister-in-law? Mrs. Cazenove. Oh, yes! you shall come to her room at once."

"Thank you. And I think Mrs. Cazenove had better be there."

They alighted, and a boy from the lodge led the horse and dog-cart away.

Mrs. Cazenove was a thin and faded, but quick and energetic, lady of middle age. She bent her head very slightly on learning Martin Hewitt's name, and said: "I must thank you, Mr. Hewitt, for your very prompt attention. I need scarcely say that any help you can afford in tracing the thief who has my property— whoever it may be— will make me most grateful. My room is quite ready for you to examine."

The room was on the second floor— the top floor at that part of the building. Some slight confusion of small articles of dress was observable in parts of the room.

"This, I take it," inquired Hewitt, "is exactly as it was at the time the brooch was missed?"

"Precisely," Mrs. Cazenove answered. "I have used another room, and put myself to some other inconveniences, to avoid any disturbance."

Hewitt stood before the dressing-table. "Then this is the used match," he observed, "exactly where it was found?"

"Yes."

"Where was the brooch?"

"I should say almost on the very same spot. Certainly no more than a very few inches away."

Hewitt examined the match closely. "It is burned very little," he remarked. "It would appear to have gone out at once. Could you hear it struck?"

"I heard nothing whatever; absolutely nothing."

"If you will step into Miss Norris' room now for a moment," Hewitt suggested, "we will try an experiment. Tell me if you hear matches struck, and how many. Where is the match-stand?"

The match-stand proved to be empty, but matches were found in Miss Norris' room, and the test was made. Each striking could be heard distinctly, even with one of the doors pushed to.

"Both your own door and Miss Norris' were open, I understand; the window shut and fastened inside as it is now, and nothing but the brooch was disturbed?"

"Yes, that was so."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cazenove. I don't think I need trouble you any further just at present. I think, Sir James," Hewitt added, turning to the baronet, who was standing by the door—"I think we will see the other room and take a walk outside the house, if you please. I suppose, by the by, that there is no getting at the matches left behind on the first and second occasions?"

"No," Sir James answered. "Certainly not here. The Scotland Yard man may have kept his."

The room that Mrs. Armitage had occupied presented no peculiar feature. A few feet below the window the roof of the billiard-room was visible, consisting largely of skylight. Hewitt glanced casually about the walls, ascertained that the furniture and hangings had not been materially changed since the second robbery, and expressed his desire to see the windows from the outside. Before leaving the room, however, he wished to know the names of any persons who were known to have been about the house on the occasions of all three robberies.

"Just carry your mind back, Sir James," he said. "Begin with yourself, for instance. Where were you at these times?"

"When Mrs. Heath lost her bracelet, I was in Tagley Wood all the afternoon. When Mrs. Armitage was robbed, I believe I was somewhere about the place most of the time she was out. Yesterday I was down at the farm." Sir James' face broadened. "I don't know whether you call those suspicious movements," he added, and laughed.

"Not at all; I only asked you so that, remembering your own movements, you might the better recall those of the rest of the household. Was anybody, to your knowledge— *anybody*, mind— in the house on all three occasions?"

"Well, you know, it's quite impossible to answer for all the servants. You'll only get that by direct questioning— I can't possibly remember things of that sort. As to the family and visitors— why, you don't suspect any of them, do you?"

"I don't suspect a soul, Sir James," Hewitt answered, beaming genially, "not a soul. You see, I can't suspect people till I know something about where they were. It's quite possible there will be independent evidence enough as it is, but you must help me if you can. The visitors, now. Was there any visitor here each time— or even on the first and last occasions only?"

"No, not one. And my own sister, perhaps you will be pleased to know, was only there at the time of the first robbery."

"Just so! And your daughter, as I have gathered, was clearly absent from the spot each time— indeed, was in company with the party robbed. Your niece, now?"

"Why hang it all, Mr. Hewitt, I can't talk of my niece as a suspected criminal! The poor girl's under my protection, and I really can't allow—"

Hewitt raised his hand, and shook his head deprecatingly.

"My dear sir, haven't I said that I don't suspect a soul? *Do* let me know how the people were distributed, as nearly as possible. Let me see. It was your, niece, I think, who found that Mrs. Armitage's door was locked— this door, in fact— on the day she lost her brooch?"

"Yes, it was."

"Just so— at the time when Mrs. Armitage herself had forgotten whether she locked it or not. And yesterday— was she out then?"

"No, I think not. Indeed, she goes out very little— her health is usually bad. She was indoors, too, at the time of the Heath robbery, since you ask. But come, now, I don't like this. It's ridiculous to suppose that *she* knows anything of it."

"I don't suppose it, as I have said. I am only asking for information. That is all your resident family, I take it, and you know nothing of anybody else's movements— except, perhaps, Mr. Lloyd's?"

"Lloyd? Well, you know yourself that he was out with the ladies when the first robbery took place. As to the others, I don't remember. Yesterday he was probably in his room, writing. I think that acquits *him*, eh?" Sir James looked quizzically into the broad face of the affable detective, who smiled and replied:

"Oh, of course nobody can be in two places at once, else what would become of the *alibi* as an institution? But, as I have said, I am only setting my facts in order. Now, you see, we get down to the servants— unless some stranger is the party wanted. Shall we go outside now?"

Lenton Croft was a large, desultory sort of house, nowhere more than three floors high, and mostly only two. It had been added to bit by bit, till it zigzagged about its site, as Sir James Norris expressed it, "like a game of dominoes." Hewitt scrutinized its external features carefully as they strolled around, and stopped some little while before the windows of the two bedrooms he had just seen from the inside. Presently they approached the stables and coach-house, where a groom was washing the wheels of the dog-cart.

"Do you mind my smoking?" Hewitt asked Sir James. "Perhaps you will take a cigar yourself— they are not so bad, I think. I will ask your man for a light."

Sir James felt for his own match-box, but Hewitt had gone, and was lighting his cigar with a match from a box handed him by the groom. A smart little terrier was trotting about by the coach-house, and Hewitt stooped to rub its head. Then he made some observation about the dog, which enlisted the groom's interest, and was soon absorbed in a chat with the man. Sir James, waiting a little way off, tapped the stones rather impatiently with his foot, and presently moved away.

For full a quarter of an hour Hewitt chatted with the groom, and, when at last he came away and overtook Sir James, that gentleman was about re-entering the house.

"I beg your pardon, Sir James," Hewitt said, "for leaving you in that unceremonious fashion to talk to your groom, but a dog, Sir James— a good dog— will draw me anywhere."

"Oh!" replied Sir James, shortly.

"There is one other thing," Hewitt went on, disregarding the other's curtness, "that I should like to know: There are two windows directly below that of the room occupied yesterday by Mrs. Cazenove— one on each floor. What rooms do they light?"

"That on the ground floor is the morning-room; the other is Mr. Lloyd's— my secretary. A sort of study or sitting-room."

"Now you will see at once, Sir James," Hewitt pursued, with an affable determination to win the baronet back to good-humor—"you will see at once that, if a ladder had been used in Mrs. Heath's case, anybody looking from either of these rooms would have seen it."

"Of course! The Scotland Yard man questioned everybody as to that, but nobody seemed to have been in either of the rooms when the thing occurred; at any rate, nobody saw anything."

"Still, I think I should like to look out of those windows myself; it will, at least, give me an idea of what *was* in view and what was not, if anybody had been there."

Sir James Norris led the way to the morning-room. As they reached the door a young lady, carrying a book and walking very languidly, came out. Hewitt

stepped aside to let her pass, and afterward said interrogatively: "Miss Norris, your daughter, Sir James?"

"No, my niece. Do you want to ask her anything? Dora, my dear," Sir James added, following her in the corridor, "this is Mr. Hewitt, who is investigating these wretched robberies for me. I think he would like to hear if you remember anything happening at any of the three times."

The lady bowed slightly, and said in a plaintive drawl: "I, uncle? Really, I don't remember anything; nothing at all."

"You found Mrs. Armitage's door locked, I believe," asked Hewitt, "when you tried it, on the afternoon when she lost her brooch?"

"Oh, yes; I believe it was locked. Yes, it was."

"Had the key been left in?"

"The key? Oh, no! I think not; no."

"Do you remember anything out of the common happening— anything whatever, no matter how trivial— on the day Mrs. Heath lost her bracelet?"

"No, really, I don't. I can't remember at all."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No, nothing. I don't remember anything."

"Thank you," said Hewitt, hastily; "thank you. Now the morning-room, Sir James."

In the morning-room Hewitt stayed but a few seconds, doing little more than casually glance out of the windows. In the room above he took a little longer time. It was a comfortable room, but with rather effeminate indications about its contents. Little pieces of draped silk-work hung about the furniture, and Japanese silk fans decorated the mantel-piece. Near the window was a cage containing a gray parrot, and the writing-table was decorated with two vases of flowers.

"Lloyd makes himself pretty comfortable, eh?" Sir James observed. "But it isn't likely anybody would be here while he was out, at the time that bracelet went."

"No," replied Hewitt, meditatively. "No, I suppose not."

He stared thoughtfully out of the window, and then, still deep in thought, rattled at the wires of the cage with a quill toothpick and played a moment with the parrot. Then, looking up at the window again, he said: "That is Mr. Lloyd, isn't it, coming back in a fly?"

"Yes, I think so. Is there anything else you would care to see here?"

"No, thank you," Hewitt replied; "I don't think there is."

They went down to the smoking-room, and Sir James went away to speak to his secretary. When he returned, Hewitt said quietly: "I think, Sir James— I *think* that I shall be able to give you your thief presently."

"What! Have you a clue? Who do you think? I began to believe you were hopelessly stumped."

"Well, yes. I have rather a good clue, although I can't tell you much about it just yet. But it is so good a clue that I should like to know now whether you are determined to prosecute when you have the criminal?"

"Why, bless me, of course," Sir James replied, with surprise. "It doesn't rest with me, you know— the property belongs to my friends. And even if they were disposed to let the thing slide, I shouldn't allow it— I couldn't, after they had been robbed in my house."

"Of course, of course! Then, if I can, I should like to send a message to Twyford by somebody perfectly trustworthy— not a servant. Could anybody go?"

"Well, there's Lloyd, although he's only just back from his journey. But, if it's important, he'll go."

"It is important. The fact is we must have a policeman or two here this evening, and I'd like Mr. Lloyd to fetch them without telling anybody else."

Sir James rang, and, in response to his message, Mr. Lloyd appeared. While Sir James gave his secretary his instructions, Hewitt strolled to the door of the smoking-room, and intercepted the latter as he came out.

"I'm sorry to give you this trouble, Mr. Lloyd," he said, "but I must stay here myself for a little, and somebody who can be trusted must go. Will you just bring back a police-constable with you? or rather two— two would be better. That is all that is wanted. You won't let the servants know, will you? Of course there will be a female searcher at the Twyford police-station? Ah— of course. Well, you needn't bring her, you know. That sort of thing is done at the station." And, chatting thus confidentially, Martin Hewitt saw him off.

When Hewitt returned to the smoking-room, Sir James said, suddenly: "Why, bless my soul, Mr. Hewitt, we haven't fed you! I'm awfully sorry. We came in rather late for lunch, you know, and this business has bothered me so I clean forgot everything else. There's no dinner till seven, so you'd better let me give you something now. I'm really sorry. Come along."

"Thank you, Sir James," Hewitt replied; "I won't take much. A few biscuits, perhaps, or something of that sort. And, by the by, if you don't mind, I rather think I should like to take it alone. The fact is I want to go over this case thoroughly by myself. Can you put me in a room?"

"Any room you like. Where will you go? The dining-room's rather large, but there's my study, that's pretty snug, or—"

"Perhaps I can go into Mr. Lloyd's room for half an hour or so; I don't think he'll mind, and it's pretty comfortable."

"Certainly, if you'd like. I'll tell them to send you whatever they've got."

"Thank you very much. Perhaps they'll also send me a lump of sugar and a walnut; it's— it's a little fad of mine."

"A— what? A lump of sugar and a walnut?" Sir James stopped for a moment, with his hand on the bell-rope. "Oh, certainly, if you'd like it; certainly," he added, and stared after this detective with curious tastes as he left the room.

When the vehicle, bringing back the secretary and the policeman, drew up on the drive, Martin Hewitt left the room on the first floor and proceeded downstairs. On the landing he met Sir James Norris and Mrs. Cazenove, who stared with astonishment on perceiving that the detective carried in his hand the parrot-cage.

"I think our business is about brought to a head now," Hewitt remarked, on the stairs. "Here are the police officers from Twyford." The men were standing in the hall with Mr. Lloyd, who, on catching sight of the cage in Hewitt's hand, paled suddenly.

"This is the person who will be charged, I think," Hewitt pursued, addressing the officers, and indicating Lloyd with his finger.

"What, Lloyd?" gasped Sir James, aghast. "No— not Lloyd— nonsense!"

"He doesn't seem to think it nonsense himself, does he?" Hewitt placidly observed. Lloyd had sank on a chair, and, gray of face, was staring blindly at the man he had run against at the office door that morning. His lips moved in spasms, but there was no sound. The wilted flower fell from his button-hole to the floor, but he did not move.

"This is his accomplice," Hewitt went on, placing the parrot and cage on the hall table, "though I doubt whether there will be any use in charging *him*. Eh, Polly?"

The parrot put his head aside and chuckled. "Hullo, Polly!" it quietly gurgled. "Come along!"

Sir James Norris was hopelessly bewildered. "Lloyd— Lloyd," he said, under his breath. "Lloyd— and that!" "This was his little messenger, his useful Mercury," Hewitt explained, tapping the cage complacently; "in fact, the actual lifter. Hold him up!"

The last remark referred to the wretched Lloyd, who had fallen forward with something between a sob and a loud sigh. The policemen took him by the arms and propped him in his chair.

"SYSTEM?" said Hewitt, with a shrug of the shoulders, an hour or two after in Sir James' study. "I can't say I have a system. I call it nothing but common-sense and a sharp pair of eyes. Nobody using these could help taking the right road in this case. I began at the match, just as the Scotland Yard man did, but I had the advantage of taking a line through three cases. To begin with, it was plain that that match, being left there in daylight, in Mrs. Cazenove's room,

could not have been used to light the table-top, in the full glare of the window; therefore it had been used for some other purpose— *What* purpose I could not, at the moment, guess. Habitual thieves, you know, often have curious superstitions, and some will never take anything without leaving something behind— a pebble or a piece of coal, or something like that— in the premises they have been robbing. It seemed at first extremely likely that this was a case of that kind. The match had clearly been *brought in*, because, when I asked for matches, there were none in the stand, not even an empty box, and the room had not been disturbed. Also the match probably had not been struck there, nothing having been heard, although, of course, a mistake in this matter was just possible. This match, then, it was fair to assume, had been lit somewhere else and blown out immediately— I remarked at the time that it was very little burned. Plainly it could not have been treated thus for nothing, and the only possible object would have been to prevent it igniting accidentally. Following on this, it became obvious that the match was used, for whatever purpose, not *as* a match, but merely as a convenient splinter of wood.

"So far so good. But on examining the match very closely I observed, as you can see for yourself, certain rather sharp indentations in the wood. They are very small, you see, and scarcely visible, except upon narrow inspection; but there they are, and their positions are regular. See, there are two on each side, each opposite the corresponding mark of the other pair. The match, in fact, would seem to have been gripped in some fairly sharp instrument, holding it at two points above and two below— an instrument, as it may at once strike you, not unlike the beak of a bird.

"Now here was an idea. What living creature but a bird could possibly have entered Mrs. Heath's window without a ladder— supposing no ladder to have been used— or could have got into Mrs. Armitage's window without lifting the sash higher than the eight or ten inches it was already open? Plainly, nothing. Further, it is significant that only *one* article was stolen at a time, although others were about. A human being could have carried any reasonable number, but a bird could only take one at a time. But why should a bird carry a match in its beak? Certainly it must have been trained to do that for a purpose, and a little consideration made that purpose pretty clear. A noisy, chattering bird would probably betray itself at once. Therefore it must be trained to keep quiet both while going for and coming away with its plunder. What readier or more probably effectual way than, while teaching it to carry without dropping, to teach it also to keep quiet while carrying? The one thing would practically cover the other.

"I thought at once, of course, of a jackdaw or a magpie— these birds' thievish reputations made the guess natural. But the marks on the match were much too wide apart to have been made by the beak of either. I conjectured,

therefore, that it must be a raven. So that, when we arrived near the coach-house, I seized the opportunity of a little chat with your groom on the subject of dogs and pets in general, and ascertained that there was no tame raven in the place. I also, incidentally, by getting a light from the coach-house box of matches, ascertained that the match found was of the sort generally used about the establishment— the large, thick, red-topped English match. But I further found that Mr. Lloyd had a parrot which was a most intelligent pet, and had been trained into comparative quietness— for a parrot. Also, I learned that more than once the groom had met Mr. Lloyd carrying his parrot under his coat, it having, as its owner explained, learned the trick of opening its cage-door and escaping.

"I said nothing, of course, to you of all this, because I had as yet nothing but a train of argument and no results. I got to Lloyd's room as soon as possible. My chief object in going there was achieved when I played with the parrot, and induced it to bite a quill toothpick.

"When you left me in the smoking-room, I compared the quill and the match very carefully, and found that the marks corresponded exactly. After this I felt very little doubt indeed. The fact of Lloyd having met the ladies walking before dark on the day of the first robbery proved nothing, because, since it was clear that the match had *not* been used to procure a light, the robbery might as easily have taken place in daylight as not— must have so taken place, in fact, if my conjectures were right. That they were right I felt no doubt. There could be no other explanation.

"When Mrs. Heath left her window open and her door shut, anybody climbing upon the open sash of Lloyd's high window could have put the bird upon the sill above. The match placed in the bird's beak for the purpose I have indicated, and struck first, in case by accident it should ignite by rubbing against something and startle the bird— this match would, of course, be dropped just where the object to be removed was taken up; as you know, in every case the match was found almost upon the spot where the missing article had been left— scarcely a likely triple coincidence had the match been used by a human thief. This would have been done as soon after the ladies had left as possible, and there would then have been plenty of time for Lloyd to hurry out and meet them before dark— especially plenty of time to meet them *coming back*, as they must have been, since they were carrying their ferns. The match was an article well chosen for its purpose, as being a not altogether unlikely thing to find on a dressing-table, and, if noticed, likely to lead to the wrong conclusions adopted by the official detective.

"In Mrs. Armitage's case the taking of an inferior brooch and the leaving of a more valuable ring pointed clearly either to the operator being a fool or unable to distinguish values, and certainly, from other indications, the thief seemed no

fool. The door was locked, and the gas-fitter, so to speak, on guard, and the window was only eight or ten inches open and propped with a brush. A human thief entering the window would have disturbed this arrangement, and would scarcely risk discovery by attempting to replace it, especially a thief in so great a hurry as to snatch the brooch up without unfastening the pin. The bird could pass through the opening as it was, and *would have* to tear the pin-cushion to pull the brooch off, probably holding the cushion down with its claw the while.

"Now in yesterday's case we had an alteration of conditions. The window was shut and fastened, but the door was open— but only left for a few minutes, during which time no sound was heard either of coming or going. Was it not possible, then, that the thief was *already* in the room, in hiding, while Mrs. Cazenove was there, and seized its first opportunity on her temporary absence? The room is full of draperies, hangings, and what not, allowing of plenty of concealment for a bird, and a bird could leave the place noiselessly and quickly. That the whole scheme was strange mattered not at all. Robberies presenting such unaccountable features must have been effected by strange means of one sort or another. There was no improbability. Consider how many hundreds of examples of infinitely higher degrees of bird-training are exhibited in the London streets every week for coppers.

"So that, on the whole, I felt pretty sure of my ground. But before taking any definite steps I resolved to see if Polly could not be persuaded to exhibit his accomplishments to an indulgent stranger. For that purpose I contrived to send Lloyd away again and have a quiet hour alone with his bird. A piece of sugar, as everybody knows, is a good parrot bribe; but a walnut, split in half, is a better— especially if the bird be used to it; so I got you to furnish me with both. Polly was shy at first, but I generally get along very well with pets, and a little perseverance soon led to a complete private performance for my benefit. Polly would take the match, mute as wax, jump on the table, pick up the brightest thing he could see, in a great hurry, leave the match behind, and scuttle away round the room; but at first wouldn't give up the plunder to *me*. It was enough. I also took the liberty, as you know, of a general look round, and discovered that little collection of Brummagem rings and trinkets that you have just seen— used in Polly's education, no doubt. When we sent Lloyd away, it struck me that he might as well be usefully employed as not, so I got him to fetch the police, deluding him a little, I fear, by talking about the servants and a female searcher. There will be no trouble about evidence; he'll confess. Of that I'm sure. I know the sort of man. But I doubt if you'll get Mrs. Cazenove's brooch back. You see, he has been to London to-day, and by this time the swag is probably broken up."

Sir James listened to Hewitt's explanation with many expressions of assent and some of surprise. When it was over, he smoked a few whiffs and then said: "But Mrs. Armitage's brooch was pawned, and by a woman."

"Exactly. I expect our friend Lloyd was rather disgusted at his small luck—probably gave the brooch to some female connection in London, and she realized on it. Such persons don't always trouble to give a correct address."

The two smoked in silence for a few minutes, and then Hewitt continued: "I don't expect our friend has had an easy job altogether with that bird. His successes at most have only been three, and I suspect he had many failures and not a few anxious moments that we know nothing of. I should judge as much merely from what the groom told me of frequently meeting Lloyd with his parrot. But the plan was not a bad one— not at all. Even if the bird had been

22: At 9.30 Precisely

C. S. Montanye

1892-1948

Australian Worker 16 Nov 1938

(Possibly changed from USA to British setting for the syndication market)

FROM 8 until 9 a.m. Gorman Finley worked hard. In that hour he had to run David Schuyler's bath water, lay out his clothing, have the correct shoes ready, and make sure that Wands, the footman, would bring breakfast up the instant Mr. Schuyler's cravat was tied. Then Finley had to make certain Hobson, the chauffeur, and the limousine were at the curb outside, ready to take David Schuyler to his City office.

Also there was the matter of the inoming newspaper that had to be folded accurately to the stock quotations, the cigar and matches in the ash tray, and the carnation for Schuyler's, lapel. The other thing was the three white tablets and the half glass of water for the medicine. Schuyler had been under the doctor's care for months.

Finley 's employer had never suspected how much he loathed his menial tasks. Bad luck in the music-hall profession had sent Finley into domestic service. Once the valet had been an impersonator and mimic.

Schuyler waddled out of his dressing room. He was a huge man with a round face. A dew of perennial perspiration dampened his forehead and hands; Finley never ceased to marvel at the way his employer ate. He had never seen anyone consume food in such quantity. He was through his breakfast and had taken his medicine all within fifteen minutes.

From the window Finley watched him climb into the limousine. He turned as Wands came into the room to remove the breakfast tray. 'In a rush, wasn't he?'

Finley shrugged. 'He always is. That's why he's not going to live long.'

The valet straightened up the room. Then he put on coat and hat, took the valise in which he had packed his belongings and descended to the basement.

Morton, the butler, met him on the way out.

'Where are you going?'

'Mr. Schuyler gave me the day off,' Finley said casually.

He let himself out and took a bus to Waterloo, and put his bag into the cloakroom. He ran his hand over the bulge made by the wallet in his pocket. In it, purchased three days past, was a reservation for a second-class stateroom aboard the *Palantic*. The reservation had been made in the name of George Alexander. The ship sailed at six o'clock that day from Southampton.

Finley turned into a telephone booth. He dialled a familiar number. 'Good morning,' a cheerful feminine voice said. 'This is Loring and Stevens, stockbrokers.'

Finley pitched his voice in the exact imitation of David Schuyler's tone that had so often convulsed Wands at the house.

'Let me talk to Hugh Loring. David Schuyler speaking.'

There was another pause before a man answered; 'Hello, Dave. What's up?'

Finley spoke precisely:

'Remember those Indiana Utility bonds, the ones I gave you last week to hold? Sell them immediately. I have to have some ready cash by noon. How much can you knock down on them— approximately?'

'Oh, £2000, say!'

'That'll have, to do. Put the money in an envelope and keep it there. I'll send Finley in to pick it up around noon. You know him?'

'That thin-faced valet of yours. Sure I do. Anything else, Dave?'

'That's all. Much obliged. I'm going to a directors' meeting now and won't be back at the office until three o'clock.'

Finley rang off. He drew a deep breath of satisfaction. On the Continent he could live pretty well for a year on two thousand pounds!

A NOON whistle was shrilling somewhere when Finley entered the office of Loring and Stevens. The girl at the telephone looked up.

'Do you wish to see someone?'

'My name is Finley. Mr. Schuyler sent me up here. I'm to get an envelope from Mr. Loring.'

She plugged in on the switchboard, spoke to someone, and looked up again. Finley went through the main room and into a rear office. Hugh Loring pushed aside a sheaf of correspondence and smiled.

'Hello, Finley. How are you to-day?'

'Very well, sir. And your own health?'

'Fine. Mr. Schuyler sent you up to get an envelope. Did he say what was in it?'

'No, sir; he didn't?'

'Well, there's £2000 in cash. Better be a little careful with it.'

Loring handed over an envelope addressed to David Schuyler.

Finley walked out. He had three-quarters of an hour to reach Waterloo. Two thousand pounds! The world seemed filled with mellow sunshine.

Reaching Waterloo, he retrieved his bag, and was making his way to the platform from which the boat train would start, when a hand gripped on his shoulder. Finley turned and looked into a pair of quizzical searching eyes. The man they belonged to tightened the pressure of his fingers.

'Suppose,' he said quietly, 'the two of us take a walk back to Loring and Stevens with that money!'

For a minute Finley hesitated. Then, with a shrug, he put himself in motion.

'What is all this about?' he asked politely.

The man beside him grinned. 'Listen, smart guy. Don't try any of that innocent stuff on me. The next time you do tricks with your voice impersonate a *live* man!'

Finley's eyes widened. 'A— what?'

The man's grin disappeared. It left his face hard and cold. 'You heard me. David Schuyler dropped dead in his office at 9.30 precisely this morning.'

23: The Waters of Death

Erckman-Chatrian

É Erckmann, 1822–1899, & A Chatrian, 1826–1890

In anthology: *World's Best Mystery and Detective Stories*, 1907

Translated before c. 1890; translator unknown.

THE WARM mineral waters of Spinbronn, situated in the Hundsrück, several leagues from Pirmesens, formerly enjoyed a magnificent reputation. All who were afflicted with gout or gravel in Germany repaired thither; the savage aspect of the country did not deter them. They lodged in pretty cottages at the head of the defile; they bathed in the cascade, which fell in large sheets of foam from the summit of the rocks; they drank one or two decanters of mineral water daily, and the doctor of the place, Daniel Hâselnoss, who distributed his prescriptions clad in a great wig and chestnut coat, had an excellent practice.

To-day the waters of Spinbronn figure no longer in the "*Codex*"; in this poor village one no longer sees anyone but a few miserable woodcutters, and, sad to say, Dr. Hâselnoss has left!

All this resulted from a series of very strange catastrophes which lawyer Brêmer of Pirmesens told me about the other day.

YOU SHOULD KNOW, Master Frantz (said he), that the spring of Spinbronn issues from a sort of cavern, about five feet high and twelve or fifteen feet wide; the water has a warmth of sixty-seven degrees Centigrade; it is salt. As for the cavern, entirely covered without with moss, ivy, and brushwood, its depth is unknown because the hot exhalations prevent all entrance.

Nevertheless, strangely enough, it was noticed early in the last century that birds of the neighborhood— thrushes, doves, hawks— were engulfed in it in full flight, and it was never known to what mysterious influence to attribute this particular.

In 1801, at the height of the season, owing to some circumstance which is still unexplained, the spring became more abundant, and the bathers, walking below on the greensward, saw a human skeleton as white as snow fall from the cascade.

You may judge, Master Frantz, of the general fright; it was thought naturally that a murder had been committed at Spinbronn in a recent year, and that the body of the victim had been thrown in the spring. But the skeleton weighed no more than a dozen francs, and Hâselnoss concluded that it must have sojourned more than three centuries in the sand to have become reduced to such a state of desiccation.

This very plausible reasoning did not prevent a crowd of patrons, wild at the idea of having drunk the saline water, from leaving before the end of the day;

those worst afflicted with gout and gravel consoled themselves. But the overflow continuing, all the rubbish, slime, and detritus which the cavern contained was disgorged on the following days; a veritable bone-yard came down from the mountain: skeletons of animals of every kind— of quadrupeds, birds, and reptiles— in short, all that one could conceive as most horrible.

Hâselnoss issued a pamphlet demonstrating that all these bones were derived from an antediluvian world: that they were fossil bones, accumulated there in a sort of funnel during the universal flood— that is to say, four thousand years before Christ, and that, consequently, one might consider them as nothing but stones, and that it was needless to be disgusted. But his work had scarcely reassured the gouty when, one fine morning, the corpse of a fox, then that of a hawk with all its feathers, fell from the cascade.

It was impossible to establish that these remains antedated the Flood. Anyway, the disgust was so great that everybody tied up his bundle and went to take the waters elsewhere.

"How infamous!" cried the beautiful ladies— "how horrible! So that's what the virtue of these mineral waters came from! Oh, 'twere better to die of gravel than continue such a remedy!"

At the end of a week there remained at Spinbronn only a big Englishman who had gout in his hands as well as in his feet, who had himself addressed as Sir Thomas Hawerburch, Commodore; and he brought a large retinue, according to the usage of a British subject in a foreign land.

This personage, big and fat, with a florid complexion, but with hands simply knotted with gout, would have drunk skeleton soup if it would have cured his infirmity. He laughed heartily over the desertion of the other sufferers, and installed himself in the prettiest *châlet* at half price, announcing his design to pass the winter at Spinbronn.

(Here lawyer Brêmer slowly absorbed an ample pinch of snuff as if to quicken his reminiscences; he shook his laced ruff with his finger tips and continued:)

Five or six years before the Revolution of 1789, a young doctor of Pirmesens, named Christian Weber, had gone out to San Domingo in the hope of making his fortune. He had actually amassed some hundred thousand francs in the exercise of his profession when the negro revolt broke out.

I need not recall to you the barbarous treatment to which our unfortunate fellow countrymen were subjected at Haiti. Dr. Weber had the good luck to escape the massacre and to save part of his fortune. Then he traveled in South America, and especially in French Guiana. In 1801 he returned to Pirmesens, and established himself at Spinbronn, where Dr. Hâselnoss made over his house and defunct practice.

Christian Weber brought with him an old negress called Agatha: a frightful creature, with a flat nose and lips as large as your fist, and her head tied up in three bandanas of razor-edged colors. This poor old woman adored red; she had earrings which hung down to her shoulders, and the mountaineers of Hundsrück came from six leagues around to stare at her.

As for Dr. Weber, he was a tall, lean man, invariably dressed in a sky-blue coat with codfish tails and deerskin breeches. He wore a hat of flexible straw and boots with bright yellow tops, on the front of which hung two silver tassels. He talked little; his laugh was like a nervous attack, and his gray eyes, usually calm and meditative, shone with singular brilliance at the least sign of contradiction. Every morning he fetched a turn round about the mountain, letting his horse ramble at a venture, whistling forever the same tune, some negro melody or other. Lastly, this rum chap had brought from Haiti a lot of bandboxes filled with queer insects— some black and reddish brown, big as eggs; others little and shimmering like sparks. He seemed to set greater store by them than by his patients, and, from time to time, on coming back from his rides, he brought a quantity of butterflies pinned to his hat brim.

Scarcely was he settled in Hâselnoss's vast house when he peopled the back yard with outlandish birds— Barbary geese with scarlet cheeks, Guinea hens, and a white peacock, which perched habitually on the garden wall, and which divided with the negress the admiration of the mountaineers.

If I enter into these details, Master Frantz, it's because they recall my early youth; Dr. Christian found himself to be at the same time my cousin and my tutor, and as early as on his return to Germany he had come to take me and install me in his house at Spinbronn. The black Agatha at first sight inspired me with some fright, and I only got seasoned to that fantastic visage with considerable difficulty; but she was such a good woman— she knew so well how to make spiced patties, she hummed such strange songs in a guttural voice, snapping her fingers and keeping time with a heavy shuffle, that I ended by taking her in fast friendship.

Dr. Weber was naturally thick with Sir Thomas Hawerburch, as representing the only one of his clientele then in evidence, and I was not slow in perceiving that these two eccentrics held long conventicles together. They conversed on mysterious matters, on the transmission of fluids, and indulged in certain odd signs which one or the other had picked up in his voyages— Sir Thomas in the Orient, and my tutor in America. This puzzled me greatly. As children will, I was always lying in wait for what they seemed to want to conceal from me; but despairing in the end of discovering anything, I took the course of questioning Agatha, and the poor old woman, after making me promise to say nothing about it, admitted that my tutor was a sorcerer.

For the rest, Dr. Weber exercised a singular influence over the mind of this negress, and this woman, habitually so gay and forever ready to be amused by nothing, trembled like a leaf when her master's gray eyes chanced to alight on her.

All this, Master Frantz, seems to have no bearing on the springs of Spinbronn. But wait, wait— you shall see by what a singular concourse of circumstances my story is connected with it.

I told you that birds darted into the cavern, and even other and larger creatures. After the final departure of the patrons, some of the old inhabitants of the village recalled that a young girl named Louise Müller, who lived with her infirm old grandmother in a cottage on the pitch of the slope, had suddenly disappeared half a hundred years before. She had gone out to look for herbs in the forest, and there had never been any more news of her afterwards, except that, three or four days later, some woodcutters who were descending the mountain had found her sickle and her apron a few steps from the cavern.

From that moment it was evident to everyone that the skeleton which had fallen from the cascade, on the subject of which Hâselnoss had turned such fine phrases, was no other than that of Louise Müller. The poor girl had doubtless been drawn into the gulf by the mysterious influence which almost daily overcame weaker beings!

What could this influence be? None knew. But the inhabitants of Spinbronn, superstitious like all mountaineers, maintained that the devil lived in the cavern, and terror spread in the whole region.

NOW one afternoon in the middle of the month of July, 1802, my cousin undertook a new classification of the insects in his bandboxes. He had secured several rather curious ones the preceding afternoon. I was with him, holding the lighted candle with one hand and with the other a needle which I heated red-hot.

Sir Thomas, seated, his chair tipped back against the sill of a window, his feet on a stool, watched us work, and smoked his cigar with a dreamy air.

I stood in with Sir Thomas Hawerburch, and I accompanied him every day to the woods in his carriage. He enjoyed hearing me chatter in English, and wished to make of me, as he said, a thorough gentleman.

The butterflies labeled, Dr. Weber at last opened the box of the largest insects, and said:

"Yesterday I secured a magnificent horn beetle, the great *Lucanus cervus* of the oaks of the Hartz. It has this peculiarity— the right claw divides in five branches. It's a rare specimen."

At the same time I offered him the needle, and as he pierced the insect before fixing it on the cork, Sir Thomas, until then impassive, got up, and,

drawing near a bandbox, he began to examine the spider crab of Guiana with a feeling of horror which was strikingly portrayed on his fat vermilion face.

"That is certainly," he cried, "the most frightful work of the creation. The mere sight of it— it makes me shudder!"

In truth, a sudden pallor overspread his face.

"Bah!" said my tutor, "all that is only a prejudice from childhood—one hears his nurse cry out— one is afraid— and the impression sticks. But if you should consider the spider with a strong microscope, you would be astonished at the finish of his members, at their admirable arrangement, and even at their elegance."

"It disgusts me," interrupted the commodore brusquely. "Pouah!"

It had turned over in his fingers.

"Oh! I don't know why," he declared, "spiders have always frozen my blood!"

Dr. Weber began to laugh, and I, who shared the feelings of Sir Thomas, exclaimed:

"Yes, cousin, you ought to take this villainous beast out of the box— it is disgusting— it spoils all the rest."

"Little chump," he said, his eyes sparkling, "what makes you look at it? If you don't like it, go take yourself off somewhere."

Evidently he had taken offense; and Sir Thomas, who was then before the window contemplating the mountain, turned suddenly, took me by the hand, and said to me in a manner full of good will:

"Your tutor, Frantz, sets great store by his spider; we like the trees better— the verdure. Come, let's go for a walk."

"Yes, go," cried the doctor, "and come back for supper at six o'clock."

Then raising his voice:

"No hard feelings, Sir Hawerburch."

The commodore replied laughingly, and we got into the carriage, which was always waiting in front of the door of the house.

Sir Thomas wanted to drive himself and dismissed his servant. He made me sit beside him on the same seat and we started off for Rothalps.

While the carriage was slowly ascending the sandy path, an invincible sadness possessed itself of my spirit. Sir Thomas, on his part, was grave. He perceived my sadness and said:

"You don't like spiders, Frantz, nor do I either. But thank Heaven, there aren't any dangerous ones in this country. The spider crab which your tutor has in his box comes from French Guiana. It inhabits the great, swampy forests filled with warm vapors, with scalding exhalations; this temperature is necessary to its life. Its web, or rather its vast snare, envelops an entire thicket. In it it takes

birds as our spiders take flies. But drive these disgusting images from your mind, and drink a swallow of my old Burgundy."

Then turning, he raised the cover of the rear seat, and drew from the straw a sort of gourd from which he poured me a full bumper in a leather goblet.

When I had drunk all my good humor returned and I began to laugh at my fright.

The carriage was drawn by a little Ardennes horse, thin and nervous as a goat, which clambered up the nearly perpendicular path. Thousands of insects hummed in the bushes. At our right, at a hundred paces or more, the somber outskirts of the Rothalp forests extended below us, the profound shades of which, choked with briars and foul brush, showed here and there an opening filled with light. On our left tumbled the stream of Spinbronn, and the more we climbed the more did its silvered sheets, floating in the abyss, grow tinged with azure and redouble their sound of cymbals.

I was captivated by this spectacle. Sir Thomas, leaning back in the seat, his knees as high as his chin, abandoned himself to his habitual reveries, while the horse, laboring with his feet and hanging his head on his chest as a counterweight to the carriage, held on as if suspended on the flank of the rock. Soon, however, we reached a pitch less steep: the haunt of the roebuck, surrounded by tremulous shadows. I always lost my head, and my eyes too, in an immense perspective. At the apparition of the shadows I turned my head and saw the cavern of Spinbronn close at hand. The encompassing mists were a magnificent green, and the stream which, before falling, extends over a bed of black sand and pebbles, was so clear that one would have thought it frozen if pale vapors did not follow its surface.

The horse had just stopped of his own accord to breathe; Sir Thomas, rising, cast his eye over the countryside.

"How calm everything is!" said he.

Then, after an instant of silence:

"If you weren't here, Frantz, I should certainly bathe in the basin."

"But, Commodore," said I, "why not bathe? I would do well to stroll around in the neighborhood. On the next hill is a great glade filled with wild strawberries. I'll go and pick some. I'll be back in an hour."

"Ha! I should like to, Frantz; it's a good idea. Dr. Weber contends that I drink too much Burgundy. It's necessary to offset wine with mineral water. This little bed of sand pleases me."

Then, having set both feet on the ground, he hitched the horse to the trunk of a little birch and waved his hand as if to say:

"You may go."

I saw him sit down on the moss and draw off his boots. As I moved away he turned and called out:

"In an hour, Frantz."

They were his last words.

An hour later I returned to the spring. The horse, the carriage, and the clothes of Sir Thomas alone met my eyes. The sun was setting. The shadows were getting long. Not a bird's song under the foliage, not the hum of an insect in the tall grass. A silence like death looked down on this solitude! The silence frightened me. I climbed up on the rock which overlooks the cavern; I looked to the right and to the left. Nobody! I called. No answer! The sound of my voice, repeated by the echoes, filled me with fear. Night settled down slowly. A vague sense of horror oppressed me. Suddenly the story of the young girl who had disappeared occurred to me; and I began to descend on the run; but, arriving before the cavern, I stopped, seized with unaccountable terror: in casting a glance in the deep shadows of the spring I had caught sight of two motionless red points. Then I saw long lines wavering in a strange manner in the midst of the darkness, and that at a depth where no human eye had ever penetrated. Fear lent my sight, and all my senses, an unheard-of subtlety of perception. For several seconds I heard very distinctly the evening plaint of a cricket down at the edge of the wood, a dog barking far away, very far in the valley. Then my heart, compressed for an instant by emotion, began to beat furiously and I no longer heard anything!

Then uttering a horrible cry, I fled, abandoning the horse, the carriage. In less than twenty minutes, bounding over the rocks and brush, I reached the threshold of our house, and cried in a stifled voice:

"Run! Run! Sir Hawerburch is dead! Sir Hawerburch is in the cavern—!"

After these words, spoken in the presence of my tutor, of the old woman Agatha, and of two or three people invited in that evening by the doctor, I fainted. I have learned since that during a whole hour I raved deliriously.

The whole village had gone in search of the commodore. Christian Weber hurried them off. At ten o'clock in the evening all the crowd came back, bringing the carriage, and in the carriage the clothes of Sir Hawerburch. They had discovered nothing. It was impossible to take ten steps in the cavern without being suffocated.

During their absence Agatha and I waited, sitting in the chimney corner. I, howling incoherent words of terror; she, with hands crossed on her knees, eyes wide open, going from time to time to the window to see what was taking place, for from the foot of the mountain one could see torches flitting in the woods. One could hear hoarse voices, in the distance, calling to each other in the night.

At the approach of her master, Agatha began to tremble. The doctor entered brusquely, pale, his lips compressed, despair written on his face. A score of woodcutters followed him tumultuously, in great felt hats with wide brims—swarthy visaged— shaking the ash from their torches. Scarcely was he in the hall

when my tutor's glittering eyes seemed to look for something. He caught sight of the negress, and without a word having passed between them, the poor woman began to cry:

"No! no! I don't want to!"

"And I wish it," replied the doctor in a hard tone.

One would have said that the negress had been seized by an invincible power. She shuddered from head to foot, and Christian Weber showing her a bench, she sat down with a corpse-like stiffness.

All the bystanders, witnesses of this shocking spectacle, good folk with primitive and crude manners, but full of pious sentiments, made the sign of the cross, and I who knew not then, even by name, of the terrible magnetic power of the will, began to tremble, believing that Agatha was dead.

Christian Weber approached the negress, and making a rapid pass over her forehead:

"Are you there?" said he.

"Yes, master."

"Sir Thomas Hawerburch?"

At these words she shuddered again.

"Do you see him?"

"Yes— yes," she gasped in a strangling voice, "I see him."

"Where is he?"

"Up there— in the back of the cavern— dead!"

"Dead!" said the doctor, "how?"

"The spider— Oh! the spider crab— Oh!—"

"Control your agitation," said the doctor, who was quite pale, "tell us plainly—"

"The spider crab holds him by the throat— he is there— at the back— under the rock— wound round by webs— Ah!"

Christian Weber cast a cold glance toward his assistants, who, crowding around, with their eyes sticking out of their heads, were listening intently, and I heard him murmur:

"It's horrible! horrible!"

Then he resumed:

"You see him?"

"I see him—"

"And the spider— is it big?"

"Oh, master, never— never have I seen such a large one— not even on the banks of the Mocaris— nor in the lowlands of Konanama. It is as large as my head—!"

There was a long silence. All the assistants looked at each other, their faces livid, their hair standing up. Christian Weber alone seemed calm; having passed his hand several times over the negress's forehead, he continued:

"Agatha, tell us how death befell Sir Hawerburch."

"He was bathing in the basin of the spring—the spider saw him from behind, with his bare back. It was hungry, it had fasted for a long time; it saw him with his arms on the water. Suddenly it came out like a flash and placed its fangs around the commodore's neck, and he cried out: 'Oh! oh! my God!' It stung and fled. Sir Hawerburch sank down in the water and died. Then the spider returned and surrounded him with its web, and he floated gently, gently, to the back of the cavern. It drew in on the web. Now he is all black."

The doctor, turning to me, who no longer felt the shock, asked:

"Is it true, Frantz, that the commodore went in bathing?"

"Yes, Cousin Christian."

"At what time?"

"At four o'clock."

"At four o'clock— it was very warm, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"It's certainly so," said he, striking his forehead. "The monster could come out without fear—"

He pronounced a few unintelligible words, and then, looking toward the mountaineers:

"My friends," he cried, "that is where this mass of débris came from— of skeletons— which spread terror among the bathers. That is what has ruined you all— it is the spider crab! It is there— hidden in its web— awaiting its prey in the back of the cavern! Who can tell the number of its victims?"

And full of fury, he led the way, shouting:

"Fagots! Fagots!"

The woodcutters followed him, vociferating.

Ten minutes later two large wagons laden with fagots were slowly mounting the slope. A long file of woodcutters, their backs bent double, followed, enveloped in the somber night. My tutor and I walked ahead, leading the horses by their bridles, and the melancholy moon vaguely lighted this funereal march. From time to time the wheels grated. Then the carts, raised by the irregularities of the rocky road, fell again in the track with a heavy jolt.

As we drew near the cavern, on the playground of the roebucks, our cortége halted. The torches were lit, and the crowd advanced toward the gulf. The limpid water, running over the sand, reflected the bluish flame of the resinous torches, the rays of which revealed the tops of the black firs leaning over the rock.

"This is the place to unload," the doctor then said. "It's necessary to block up the mouth of the cavern."

And it was not without a feeling of terror that each undertook the duty of executing his orders. The fagots fell from the top of the loads. A few stakes driven down before the opening of the spring prevented the water from carrying them away.

Toward midnight the mouth of the cavern was completely closed. The water running over spread to both sides on the moss. The top fagots were perfectly dry; then Dr. Weber, supplying himself with a torch, himself lit the fire. The flames ran from twig to twig with an angry crackling, and soon leaped toward the sky, chasing clouds of smoke before them.

It was a strange and savage spectacle, the great pile with trembling shadows lit up in this way.

This cavern poured forth black smoke, unceasingly renewed and disgorged. All around stood the woodcutters, somber, motionless, expectant, their eyes fixed on the opening; and I, although trembling from head to foot in fear, could not tear away my gaze.

It was a good quarter of an hour that we waited, and Dr. Weber was beginning to grow impatient, when a black object, with long hooked claws, appeared suddenly in the shadow and precipitated itself toward the opening.

A cry resounded about the pyre.

The spider, driven back by the live coals, reëntered its cave. Then, smothered doubtless by the smoke, it returned to the charge and leaped out into the midst of the flames. Its long legs curled up. It was as large as my head, and of a violet red.

One of the woodcutters, fearing lest it leap clear of the fire, threw his hatchet at it, and with such good aim that on the instant the fire around it was covered with blood. But soon the flames burst out more vigorously over it and consumed the horrible destroyer.

SUCH, MASTER FRANTZ, was the strange event which destroyed the fine reputation which the waters of Spinbronn formerly enjoyed. I can certify the scrupulous precision of my account. But as for giving you an explanation, that would be impossible for me to do. At the same time, allow me to tell you that it does not seem to me absurd to admit that a spider, under the influence of a temperature raised by thermal waters, which affords the same conditions of life and development as the scorching climates of Africa and South America, should attain a fabulous size. It was this same extreme heat which explains the prodigious exuberance of the antediluvian creation!

However that may be, my tutor, judging that it would be impossible after this event to reestablish the waters of Spinbronn, sold the house back to

Hâselnoss, in order to return to America with his negress and collections. I was sent to board in Strasbourg, where I remained until 1809.

The great political events of the epoch then absorbing the attention of Germany and France explain why the affair I have just told you about passed completely unobserved.

24: "The Giggle" Newspaper Company

Ernest O'Ferrall (as by "Kodak")

1881-1925

The Lone Hand Feb 1908

JABBERS leant on the washstand and declaimed passionately: "A snappy weekly— *that's* what's wanted! People don't want *tripe*, they want something to *read*! Look at the thousands of people that have to buy the tripe you see on the bookstalls! What d'ye think they buy it for? Because they must have something to read, and the tripe is the only thing they can get for their money! Do you seriously think all those people would shy their money away on piffle if they could get a snappy weekly, written and illustrated by chaps like ourselves— chaps who can turn out bright stuff, with ginger in it? Eh?"

I shook my head sadly. Jabbers struck the washstand a hideous blow, and made the candle leap into the air.

"The people are *waking up*!" he declared. "I tell you the people are waking up—and they're hungry for the bright stuff. They want *your* stuff and *my* stuff, and the stuff of every chap who can drive a pen. I'll tell you what happened to me the other night. I was going home in the train, and I met Lusher. You know Lusher, of the *Daily Gabble*. Well, he had a copy of *Stodgy Cribs* with him, and he said to me, 'Jabbers, old chap, why th' devil don't you and some other chaps start a paper that people can read? People must have something to read, old man, and they might as well read good stuff, while they're at it, as this muck. Why don't you drag some fellows together and start a bright weekly?' Now that's what Lusher said, and Lusher knows what he's talking about— one of the smartest chaps on the *Gabble*. Look here!" Jabbers gripped the wash stand and glared at me wildly.

"*If I start a paper, will you do some stuff every week?*"

The mere thought of Jabbers starting a paper made me get excited and lose my head. Without knowing exactly what I was doing, I started to expostulate weakly. I pointed out that I lacked experience, was too busy, couldn't be relied on, etc., etc.

Jabbers waved my protestations aside. Then he told me to get my hat and go with him. I asked him where we were going.

He told me we were going to see two or three of the fellows, and fix up with the printer. I got my hat and went with him.

We found the other conspirators— there were three of them— in a dingy hotel, drinking inferior beer, and talking about races. The man who seemed to lead the horse conversation was a fat optimist named Totton. He was to be the sporting writer. One of his associates was a tall, pale, anxious man. Jabbers told me he knew every living soul in Australia, and had a marvellous nose for scandal.

The third gentleman wore his boxer over his eyes and talked incessantly about advertising; so I assumed he was to be the business manager.

Jabbers introduced me all round, and we sat down and plunged into the subject. Jabbers led off. "Well," he said, "we've decided that the thing is to be a bright, breezy weekly, illustrated, with political, social, sporting, and dramatic news, and so on. Price to be thrippence. We put our brains into it, and Fodgers finances and prints." A thought seemed to suddenly strike Jabbers. He rose, and peered round excitedly in the smoke. "By the way, where *is* Fodgers? Anyone seen him?"

The eminent scandal-writer shook his head mournfully.

"I'm afraid Fodgers is weakening," he remarked; "he's been avoiding us all day."

Jabbers, white with fury, leant on the table, and stared angrily at the long man. "Weakening! Why, what the devil does he *mean*?"

"I dunno— but I know he's funking it."

"Has he said anything? "

"No; not exactly."

"Hasn't anyone been able to see him?"

"No."

"Where's his place?"

"Up Little Collins-street."

Jabbers thumped the table. "Come on," he said, angrily. "Put on your hats, and we'll go up and see him!"

Somebody suggested that nine o'clock at night was not a likely hour.

Jabbers retorted, " I know what I'm talking about. Fodgers is one of these religious beggars. He prints the *Gamp of Ignorance*— or *The Lamp of Innocence*— and as the thing is published to-morrow it goes to press to-night. Come on everybody! "

We filed out obediently after Jabbers, and proceeded up Little Collins-street, past the darkened and shuttered windows of many shops, till we came to a narrow lane, at the end of which was a dimly-lighted doorway. Jabbers led us along the lane to the door, and up the steep, wooden stairs, that soared heavenward an enormous height. As we ascended, the roar and clatter of printing presses drowned the sound of our footsteps. When we spoke we had to shout in one another's ears. Jabbers pushed open the door marked "Fodgers and Blast," and beckoned us to follow.

A furtive little man, partly bald and with black sideboards, looked up as we entered. He put down the copy of *The Lamp* he had been reading, and sat gazing at us, limp with horror. Jabbers went over, caught him by the hand, and howled something in his ear.

The little man looked blank.

"How do, Fodgers?" yelled Jabbers above the mumble of the machinery. "What about *The Giggle*? I suppose it's all right, eh?"

Fodgers shook his head miserably, and screeched back ; "I'm sorry; the Bishop won't hear of it!"

Jabbers went a beautiful purple.

"What!" he thundered. "What's that!"

"The Bishop!" squealed Fodgers.

"The Bishop says he won't hear of it!"

"Who the blazes wants him to hear of it?"

Fodgers waved his inky hand at the machinery, and wailed: "The Bishop says *The Lamp* must be produced in a Christian atmosphere. He says he is afraid *The Giggle* will not be of a strictly moral tone. The Bishop feels very strongly on the subject! "

"Well, let him!" howled Jabbers. "Let him feel anything he wants to. What about *The Giggle*?"

Fodgers writhed before him. "I'm afraid!" he shouted. "Canon Ditchwater, the Bishop's secretary, told me His Grace could not promise a continuance of the contract for *The Lamp* if we published Socialistic papers!"

Jabbers made some outrageous remark about the Canon, and enquired in a mild roar if Mr. Blast was in. The word was passed along, and Mr. Blast, a mournful man, with a glittering dome of a head, came hurrying forward with a copy of *The Lamp* clutched in one hand.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Blast?" howled Jabbers, shaking him violently by the hand.

Mr. Blast bowed.

"Mr. Fodgers," yelled Jabbers— "Mr. Fodgers says he is not disposed to print *The Giggle*."

Mr. Blast put his mouth to Jabbers' ear, and moaned: "You know, Mr. Jabbers, we have had *The Lamp of Innocence* for twenty-three years. It is a highly profitable thing. We feel very doubtful—"

Jabbers instantly, and with great cheerfulness, advised him to throw up *The Lamp*, and tell the Bishop to go somewhere or other, and take the Canon with him.

"Look here!" he shouted at Blast, while Lodgers doddered miserably round the pair of them, "we're going to make money— tons of money! If you take on the printing of *The Giggle* you'll be riding in motors inside of a year, instead of falling round here getting out this tripe!"

He seized Fodgers' copy of *The Lamp*, and opened it before the scandalised junior partner. "Bazaar!" he snorted.

A bazaar in aid of the Destitute Cannibals' Handkerchief Fund will be held in St. Wren's schoolroom during the whole of next week. Parishioners are earnestly invited to attend and help along the good cause by subscriptions and gifts. A proportion of the profits will be devoted to paying off the debt of recently incurred by the guardians of St. Wren's, for the beautiful new spire.

He passed the paper to Totton, who turned the page and read out the following:

The rector of a small parish in the Far North-West has written, drawing our attention to the heart-breaking case of an aboriginal washer-lady in his district. It seems that this poor woman, until quite recently, made a small, but steady, income by washing the clothing of the miners belonging to a neighboring claim. The Bunyip River, however, since the advent of the dry season, has been so low that the people of the little settlement have, for the time being, abandoned washing, and the unfortunate woman has been compelled to subsist on charity. Our correspondent thinks that if the case is brought before the more fortunate of our friends enough money could be got to set up the innocent victim in a small business. He suggests that a circulating library would do well in the district, and it is his intention to purchase a number of second-hand copies of Hall Caine's and Marie Corelli's works. Other standard authors will be added as opportunity occurs. We recommend this appeal to our readers, and confidently anticipate a liberal response in the shape of subscriptions and gifts.

Then the advertising manager of *The Giggle* fell upon *The Lamp*, and criticised it from a business standpoint.

"Who," he demanded, "who would advertise in a thing like *this*—" He held up *The Lamp* with one hand and flipped it contemptuously with the back of the other. "What is there in it that anybody wants to read?"

He looked round, indignantly, and caught the eye of the eminent scandal-writer.

The eminent scandal-writer shook his head and observed, gloomily, that there didn't seem to be a smart personal paragraph in the whole thing. "You must spice your stuff," he growled. "Must spice your stuff, or it won't go!"

Fodgers burst into the conversation with a cry of anguish. (Blast had, some little time before, disappeared between a line of clashing machines, and turned off the current. The big presses, with their skeleton steel fingers arrested in mid-air, stood motionless, and furtive printers tip-toed about in the strange silence, and pretended to arrange the paper, while they listened to the conference of the Powers.)

"This paper," gasped Fodgers, rescuing the thing from the hands of the advertising manager-to-be of the future *Giggle*, "This paper is not a secular publication, at all! We don't want personal paragraphs! The Bishop holds very strong views on the matter. He says—"

Jabbers told him to be quiet. "Look here," he said, taking hold of Fodgers by the arm, "you're on the wrong track altogether! You've got confused! We *don't want* to waste any brains on the *The Lamp*; we want to put our brains into *The Giggle! Now— are— you— prepared— to— take— on— The— Giggle?* Yes, or no?"

Fodgers took a deep breath, and said "No!"

Jabbers looked at him in amazement, and yelled, "What!"

Fodgers shuffled his feet, glanced in a sidelong fashion at Blast, and shook his head. Blast turned, and shouted to the foreman, "Right!"

"Look here, Fodgers," said Jabbers, as the current was switched on again, and the machines started their preliminary clacking, "I've given you a chance to make money, and you've simply thrown it away— just chucked it in the gutter. This paper of ours is going to go, my friend! Don't forget that, it's going to go!"

The big presses here burst into full speed with a deep-toned roar, and the giant steel arms, propelled by electricity, rose and fell at an amazing rate, lifting copies of the *Lamp of Innocence* from the spinning rollers. Watchful printers moved about, seeing that the machines licked up the sheets safely, and youths staggered round with enormous bundles of the number containing the touching appeals for the Destitute Cannibals' Handkerchief Fund and the Aboriginal Washer-lady.

Jabbers looked on at the busy scene for a minute and gritted his teeth.

"Look at 'em!" he shouted, indignantly, above the thunder of the machinery. "Look at 'em getting out that tripe, when they might be printing *The Giggle!*"

We looked at them, as requested— looked at them as we might have looked at a gang of lunatics; but the spectacle was too melancholy to dwell on, and we drifted towards the door.

Jabbers bullied Fodgers to the very last. When the door was open, and as we waited in a line below him on the staircase, he patted Fodgers condescendingly on the shoulder, and yelled— he had to yell to make himself heard above the opulent crashing of the presses— "Well, good-bye, old man! Don't forget I gave you the chance, and remember what I say. *The— Giggle— will— go!* Good-bye, old chap!"

The door closed, and, turning round, we descended to the street, where the rumble of Fodgers and Blast's establishment became merely a mocking undertone, muttering of fame and fortune high up in the night.

Jabbers took off his hat and wearily mopped his brow. It had been very hot and close up in the printing-room, and the interview had been trying.

"Well," he muttered, "of all the fools I ever met, he's th' worst!"

We all murmured assent.

"I showed him we'd make money! Wasn't it plain to all you fellows that we'd make money!"

Again we all murmured in chorus. It sounded like a solemn ritual.

"And didn't I tell him *The Giggle* would go?"

"You did!" we answered.

"And so it shall!" concluded Jabbers, furiously. "That paper is going to go if I have to break my neck! Come and have a drink!"

We followed our leader into the hotel just opposite, and there, most wonderful to relate, Fate delivered into our hands an ambitious printer with a little money, who wanted to be associated with men of genius.

By 11:30 we had concluded all arrangements for the bringing out of the first issue, and as we swept down the silent street on our way home, we stopped and howled some insulting remarks through the keyhole of Fodgers and Blast's deserted establishment.

The Giggle "went"— even as Jabbers had predicted. It "went" so high and so far that it took the ambitious printer with it, and, so far as I know, he never came down again.

Precisely which one of the eighteen libel actions destroyed *The Giggle* Newspaper Co. would be hard to say, but the eminent scandal-writer—while deploring the fate of *The Giggle*—took the public outcry against it and its untimely end as a tribute to the accuracy of what he called "his inside information." Jabbers certainly set great value on the "Personal" column in *The Giggle*, and an examination of the one and only complete file of the paper— now in my possession— will disclose the bones of more of the scandals of '93 than an ordinary painstaking historian could fish out in a life time. *The Giggle* is a very dead publication now, but there is not in the whole Commonwealth a more flourishing firm of printers than Messrs. Fodgers and Blast, publishers of *The Lamp of Innocence*, *Ecclesiastical Dogstealer*, *Mosque Mutterings*, etc., etc.

Jabbers fled the country some years back over some private unpleasantness, and the rest of the staff have mercifully been dispersed by time and tide. I am humbly engaged in commercial pursuits, and take but a faint interest in journalism. One other survivor, however, is still on the trail, and often instances *The Giggle* as one of the slaughtered innocents of Australian literature. He is forever deploring the early death of that painfully outspoken print, and has developed an intense hatred— which nothing can abate— for the respected firm of Fodgers and Blast, whom, for some totally insufficient reason, he chooses to regard as part-murderers of his beloved paper.

If you happen to see any scathing references in the *Snorting News* to "a firm of huckstering humbugs— publishers of certain church organs— who have done their very utmost to dam the springs of native genius," you will recognise the hand of the avenger— that able journalist and implacable foe of all evil-doing— the eminent scandal-writer.

25: The Mystery of the Dog's Tooth Cliff

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

The London Magazine, Christmas 1923

THE Man in the Corner was more than usually loquacious that day; he had a great deal to say on the subject of the strictures which a learned judge levelled against the police in a recent murder case.

"Well deserved," he concluded with his usual self-opinionated emphasis, "but not more so in this case than in many others, where blunder after blunder is committed and the time of the courts wasted without either judge or magistrate, let alone the police, knowing where the hitch lies."

"Of course you always know," I remarked drily.

"Nearly always," he replied with ludicrous self-complacency. "Have I not proved to you over and over again that with a little reasonable common sense and a minimum of logic there is no such thing as an impenetrable mystery in criminology. Criminology is an exact science to which certain rules of reasoning invariably apply. The trouble is that so few are masters of logic and that fewer still know how to apply its rules. Now take the case of that poor girl, Janet Smith. We are likely to see some startling developments in it within the next two or three days. You'll see if we don't, and they will open the eyes of the police and public alike to what has been dear as daylight to me ever since the first day of the inquest."

I hastened to assure the whimsical creature that, though I was acquainted with the main circumstances of the tragedy, I was very vague as to detail, and that nothing would give me more pleasure than that he should enlighten my mind on the subject— which he immediately proceeded to do.

"You know Broxmouth, don't you?" he began after a while—"on the Wessex coast. It is a growing place, for the scenery is superb and the air acts on jaded spirits like sparkling wine. The only drawback— that is, from an artistic point of view— to the place, is that hideous barrack-like building on the West Cliff. It is a huge industrial school recently erected and endowed by the trustees of the Woodforde bequest for the benefit of sons of temporary officers killed in the War, and is under the presidency of no less a personage than General Sir Arkwright Jones who has a whole alphabet after his name.

"The building is certainly an eyesore, and, before it came into being, Broxmouth was a real beauty spot. If you have ever been there, you will remember that fine walk along the edge of the cliffs, at the end of which there is a wonderful view as far as the towers of Barchester cathedral. It is called the 'Lovers' Walk,' and is patronised by all the young people in the neighbourhood. They find it romantic as well as exhilarating: the objective is usually Kurtmoor,

where there are one or two fine hotels for plutocrats in search of rural surroundings, and where humble folk like you and I and the aforesaid lovers can get an excellent cup of tea at the Wheatsheaf in the main village street.

"But it is a daylight walk, for the path is narrow and in places the cliffs fall away, sheer and precipitous, to the water's edge, whilst loose bits of rock have an unpleasant way of giving way under one's feet. If you were to consult one of the Broxmouth gaffers on the advisability of taking a midnight walk to Kurtmoor, he would most certainly shake his head, and tell you to wait till the next day and take your walk in the morning. Accidents have happened there— more than one— though Broxmouth holds its tongue about that. Rash pedestrians have lost their footing and tumbled down the side of the cliff before now, almost always with fatal results. And so, at first when a couple of small boys, hunting for mussels at low tide in the early morning of May 5th last, saw the body of woman lying inanimate upon the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, and reported their discovery to the police, everyone began concluding that nothing but an accident had occurred, and went on to abuse the Town Council for not putting up along the more dangerous portions of the 'Lovers' Walk' some sort of barrier as a protection to unwary pedestrians.

"Later on, when the body was identified as that of Janet Smith, a well-known resident of Broxmouth, public indignation waxed high: the barrier along the edge of the Lovers' Walk became the burning question of the hour. But during the whole of that day the 'accident' theory was never disputed; it was only towards evening that whispers of 'suicide' began to circulate in and about Broxmouth, to be soon followed by the more ominous ones of 'murder.'

"And by the next morning Broxmouth had the thrill of its lift when it became known throughout the town that Captain Franklin Marston had been detained in connection with the finding of the body of Janet Smith, and that he would appear that day before the magistrate on a charge of murder.

"Properly to appreciate the significance of such an announcement, it would be necessary to be oneself a resident of Broxmouth where the Woodforde Institute, its affairs and its personnel are, as it were, the be-all and end-all of all the gossip in the neighbourhood. To begin with, the deceased was head matron of the Institute, and the man, now accused of the foul crime of having murdered her, was its secretary; moreover the secretary and the pretty young matron were known to be very much in love with one another, and, as a matter of fact, Broxmouth had of late been looking forward to a very interesting wedding. The idea of Captain Marston— who by the way was very good-looking, Very smart, and a splendid tennis player— being accused of murdering his sweetheart was in itself so preposterous, so impossible, that his numerous friends and many admirers were aghast and incredulous. 'There is some villainous plot here

somewhere,' the ladies averred, and wanted to know what Major Gubbins's attitude was going to be under these tragic circumstances.

"Major Gubbins, if you remember, was headmaster of the school, and what's more he, too, had been very much in love with Janet Smith, but it appeared that his friendship with Captain Marston had prompted him to stand aside as soon as he realised which way the girl's affections lay. Major Gubbins was not so popular as the Captain, he was inclined to be off-hand and disagreeable, so the ladies said, and moreover he did not play tennis, and, with the sublime inconsequence of your charming sex, they seemed to connect these defects with terrible accusation which was now weighing upon the Major's successful rival.

"The executive of the Institute consisted, in addition to the three persons I have named, of its president, General Sir Arkwright Jones, who, it seems, took little if any interest in the concern. It seems as if, by giving it the prestige of his name, he had done all that he intended for the furtherance of the Institute's welfare. Then there were the governors, a number of amiable local gentlemen and ladies who played tennis all day and attended innumerable tea-parties and knew as much about administering a big concern as a terrier does of rabbit-rearing. In the midst of this official supineness, the murder of the young matron, followed immediately by the arrest of the secretary, had come as a bombshell, and now wise heads began to wag and ominous murmurs became current that for some time past there had been something very wrong in the management of the Woodforde Institute. Whilst, at the call of various august personages, money was pouring in from the benevolent public, the commissariat was being conducted on parsimonious lines that were a positive scandal: the boys were shockingly underfed and the staff of servants was constantly being changed because girls would not remain on what they called a starvation regime.

"Then again, no proper accounts had been kept since the inception of the Institute five years ago; entries were spasmodic, irregular and unreliable; books were never audited; no one apparently had the slightest idea of profit and loss or of balances; no one knew from week to week where the salaries and wages were coming from, or from quarter to quarter if there would be funds enough to meet rates and taxes; no one, in fact, appeared to know anything about the affairs of the Institute, least of all the secretary himself who had often remarked quite jocularly that he had never in all his life known anything about book-keeping and that his appointment by the governors rested upon his agreeable personality rather than upon his financial and administrative ability.

"As you see, the Captain's position was, in consequence of this, a very serious one: it became still more so when presently two or three ominous facts came to light. To begin with, it seemed that he could give absolutely no account of himself during the greater part of the night of May 5th. He had left the Institute at about seven o'clock; he told the headmaster then that he was going

for a walk which seemed strange as it was pouring with rain. On the other hand the landlady at the room where he lodged told the police that when she herself went to bed at eleven o'clock the Captain had not come in: she hadn't seen him since morning, when he went to work and at what time he eventually came home she couldn't say. But there was worse to come: firstly, a stick was found on the beach some thirty yards or less from the spot where the body itself was discovered; and secondly, the police produced a few strands of wool which were, it seems, clinging to the poor girl's hat-pin, and which presumably were torn out of a muffler during the brief struggle which must have occurred when she was first attacked and before she lost her footing and fell down the side of the cliff.

"Now the stick was identified as the property of Captain Marston, and he had been seen on the road with it in his hand in the early part of the evening. He was then walking alone on the 'Lover's Walk'; two Broxmouth visitors met him on their way back from Kurtmoor. Knowing him by sight, they passed the time of day. These witnesses, however, were quite sure that Captain Marston was not then wearing a muffler, on the other hand they were equally sure that he carried the stick; they had noticed it as a very unusual one, of what is known as Javanese snake-wood with a round heavy knob and leather strap which the Captain carried slung upon his arm.

"Of course the matter interested me enormously; it is not often that a person of the social and intellectual calibre of Captain Marston stands accused of so foul a crime. If he was guilty, then indeed he was one of the vilest criminals that ever defaced God's earth, and in the annals of crime there were few crimes more hideous. The poor girl, it seems, had been in love with him right up to the end and, according to some well-informed gossips, the wedding day had actually been fixed.

"The unsuccessful rival, Major Gubbins, too, was an interesting personality, and it was difficult to suppose that he was entirely ignorant of the events which must of necessity have led up to the crime. Supposedly there had been a quarrel between the lovers; sundry rumours were current as to this and in a vague way those rumours connected this quarrel with the shaky financial situation of the Institute. But it was all mere surmise and very contradictory; no one could easily state what possible connection there could be between the affairs of the Institution and the murder of the chief matron.

"In the meanwhile the accused had been brought up before the magistrate, and formal evidence of the finding of the body and of the arrest was given, as well as of the subsequent discovery of the stick which was identified by the two witnesses and of the strands of wool. The accused was remanded until the following Monday, bail being refused. The inquest was held a day or two later and I went down to Broxmouth for it. I remember how hot it was in that

crowded court-room: excited and perspiring humanity filled the stuffy atmosphere with heat. While the crowd jabbered and fidgeted I had a good look at the chief personages who were about to enact a thrilling drama for my entertainment; you have seen portraits of them all in the illustrated papers, the British Army being well represented by a trio of as fine specimens of manhood as anyone would wish to see.

"The President, General Arkwright Jones, was there as a matter of course. He looked worried and annoyed that the even tenor of his pleasant existence should have been disturbed by this tiresome event; he is the regular type of British pre-war superior officer with ruddy face and white hair, something like a nice ripe tomato that has been packed in cotton wool. Then there was the headmaster. Major Gubbins, well-groomed, impassive, immaculate in dress and bearing; and finally the accused himself, in charge of two warders, fine-looking man, obviously more of a soldier and an athlete than a clerk immersed in figures.

"Two other persons in the crowded room arrested my attention: two women. One of them dressed in deep black, thin-lipped, with pale round eyes and pursed-up mouth was Miss Amelia Smith, the sister with whom deceased had been living, and the other was Louisa Rumble who held the position of housekeeper at the Woodforde Institute. The latter was one of the first witnesses called, and her evidence was intensely interesting because it gave one the first clue as to the motive which underlay the hideous crime. The woman's testimony, you must know, bore entirely on the question of housekeeping and of the extraordinary scarcity of money in the richly-endowed Institute.

"Often and often,' said the witness, a motherly old soul in a flamboyant bonnet, 'did I complain to Miss Smith when she give me my weekly allowance for the tradesmen's books: "'Tisn't enough, Miss Smith, I says to 'er, not to feed a family, I says, let alone thirty growin' boys and 'alf a dozen working girls." But Miss Smith she just shook 'er 'ead and says: "Committee's orders, Mrs. Rumble, I 'ave no power." "Why don't you speak to the Captain?" I says to 'er, "'e 'as the 'andling of the money; it is a scandal," I says. "Those boys can't live on boiled bacon an' beans and not English nor Irish bacon, it ain't, neither," I says. "Pore lambs. The money I 'ave won't pay for beef or mutton for them, Miss Smith," I says, "and you know it." But Miss Smith, she only shook 'er 'ead and says she would speak to the Captain about it.'

"Asked whether she knew if deceased had actually spoken to the secretary on the subject, Mrs. Rumble said most emphatically, 'Yes!'

"What's more, sir,' she went on, 'I can tell you that the very day before she died, the pore lamb 'ad a reg'lar tiff with the Captain about that there commissariat.'

"Mrs. Rumble had stumbled a little over the word, but strangely enough no one tittered; the importance of the old woman's testimony was impressed upon every mind and silenced every tongue. All eyes were turned in the direction of the accused. He had flushed to the roots of his hair, but otherwise stood quite still, with arms folded, and a dull expression of hopelessness upon his good-looking face.

"The coroner had asked the witness how she knew that Miss Smith had had words with the Captain Marston: 'Because I 'eard them two 'aving words, sir,' Mrs. Rumble replied. 'I'd been in the office to get my money and my orders from Miss Smith, and we 'ad the usual talk about American bacon and boiled beans with which I don't 'old, not for growing boys; then back I went to the kitchen, when I remembered I 'ad forgot to speak to Miss Smith about the scullery maid, who'd been saucy and given notice. So up I went again and I was just a goin' to open the office door when I 'eard Miss Smith say quite loud and distinck: "It is shameful," she says, "and I can't bear it," she says, "and if you won't speak to the General then I will. He is staying at the Queen's at Kurtmoor, I understand," she says, "and I am goin' this very night to speak with him," she says, "as I can't spend another night," she says, "with this on my mind." Then I give a genteel cough and...'

"The worthy lady had got thus far in her story when her volubility was suddenly checked by a violent expletive from the accused.

"'But this is damnable!' he cried, and no doubt would have said a lot more, but a touch on his shoulder from the warders behind him quickly recalled him to himself. He once more took up his outwardly calm attitude, and Mrs. Rumble concluded her evidence amidst silence more ominous than any riotous scene would have been.

"'I give a genteel cough,' she resumed, with unruffled dignity, 'and opened the door. Miss Smith, she was all flushed and I could see that she'd been crying; but the Captain 'e just walked out of the room, and didn't say not another word.'

"By this time," the Man in the Corner went on drily, "we must suppose that the amateur detectives and the large body of unintelligent public felt that they were being cheated. Never had there been so simple a case. Here, with the testimony of Mrs. Rumble, was the whole thing clear as daylight— motive, quarrel, means, everything was there already. No chance of exercising those powers of deduction so laboriously acquired by a systematic study of detective fiction. Had it not been for the position of the accused and his popularity in Broxmouth society, all interest in the case would have departed in the wake of Mrs. Rumble, and at first when Amelia Smith, sister of the deceased, was called, her appearance only roused languid curiosity. Miss Amelia looked, what in fact,

she was: a retired school marm, and wore the regular hall mark of impecunious and somewhat soured spinsterhood.

"Janet often told me,' she said in the course of her evidence,' that she was quite sure there was roguery going on in the affairs of the Institute, because she knew for a fact that subscriptions were constantly pouring in from the public, far in excess of what was being spent, for the welfare of the boys. I often used to urge her to go straight to the governors or even to the President himself about the whole matter, but she would always give the same disheartened reply. General Arkwright Jones, it seems, had made it a condition when he accepted the presidency that he was never to be worried about the administration of the place, and he refused to have anything to do with the handling of the subscriptions; as for the governors, my poor sister declared that they cared more for tennis parties than for the welfare of a lot of poor officers' children.'

"But a moment or two later we realised that Miss Amelia Smith was keeping her titbit of evidence until the end. It seems that she had not even spoken about it to the police, determined as she was, no doubt, to create a sensation for once in her monotonous and dreary life. So now she pursed up her lips tighter than before, and after a moment's dramatic silence, she said:

"The day before her death, my poor sister was very depressed. In the late afternoon, when she came in for tea, I could see that she had been crying. I guessed, of course, what was troubling her, but I didn't say much. Captain Franklin Marston was in the habit of calling for Janet in the evening and they would go for a walk together; at eight o'clock on that sad evening I asked her whether Captain Marston was coming as usual, whereupon she became quite excited and said: "No, no, I don't wish to see him!" and after a while she added in a voice choked with tears: "Never again!"

"About a quarter of an hour later,' Miss Amelia went on, 'Janet suddenly took up her hat and coat. I asked her where she was going and she said to me: "I don't know but I must put an end to all this. I must know one way or the other." I tried to question her further, but she was in an obstinate mood; when I remarked that it was raining hard she said; "That's all right, the rain will do me good." And when I asked her whether she wasn't going to meet Captain Marston after all, she just gave me a look, but she made no reply. And so my poor sister went out into the darkness and the rain, and I never again saw her alive.'

"She paused just long enough to give true dramatic value to her statement, and indeed there was nothing lukewarm now about the interest which she aroused; then she continued: 'As the clock was striking nine I was surprised to receive a visit from the headmaster, Major Gubbins. He came with a message from Captain Marston to my sister; I told him that Janet had gone out. He appeared vexed, and told me that the Captain would be terribly disappointed.'

"'What was this message?' the coroner asked, amidst breathless silence.

"'That Janet would please meet Captain Marston at the Dog's Tooth Cliff. He would wait for her there until nine o'clock.'

The Man in the Corner gave a short, sharp laugh, and with loving eyes contemplated his bit of string, in which he had just woven an elegant and complicated knot. Then he said:

"Now it was at the foot of the Dog's Tooth Cliff that the dead body of Janet Smith was found, and some thirty yards further on the stick which had last been seen in the hand of Captain Franklin Marston. Nervous women gave a gasp and scarcely dared to look at the accused for fear no doubt that they would see the hangman's rope around his neck, but I took a good look at him then. He had uttered a loud groan and buried his face in his hands, and I, with that unerring intuition of which I pride myself, knew that he was acting, Yes, deliberately acting a part— the part of shame and despair. You, no doubt, would ask me why he should have done this. Well, you shall understand presently. For the moment, and to all unthinking spectators, the attitude of despair on the part of the accused appeared fully justified.

"Later on we heard the evidence of Major Gubbins himself. He said that about seven o' clock he met Captain Marston in the hall of the Institute.

"'He appeared flushed and agitated,' the witness went on, very reluctantly it seemed, but in answer to pressing questions put to him by the coroner, 'and told me he was going for a walk. When I remarked that it was raining hard, he retorted that the rain would do him good. He didn't say where he was going, but presently he put his hand on my shoulder and said in a tone of pleading and affection which I shall never forget: "Old man," he said, "I want you to do something for me. Tell Janet that I must see her again tonight; beg her not to deny me. I will meet her at our usual place on the Dog's Tooth Cliff. Tell her I will wait for her there until nine o'clock, whatever the weather. But she must come. Tell her she must."

"'Unfortunately,' the Major continued, 'I was unable to deliver the message immediately as I had work to do in my office which kept me till close on nine o'clock. Then I hurried down to the Smiths' house and just missed Miss Janet who, it seems, had already gone out.'

"Asked why he had not spoken about this before, the Major replied that he did not intend to give evidence at all unless he was absolutely forced to do so as a matter of duty. Captain Marston was his friend and he did not think that any man was called upon to give what might prove damning evidence against his friend.

"All of which sounded very nice and very loyal until we learned that William Peryer, batman at the Institute, testified to having overheard violent words between the headmaster and the secretary at the very same hour when the

latter was supposed to have made so pathetic an appeal to his friend to deliver a message on his behalf. Peryer swore that the two men were quarrelling and quarrelling bitterly. The words he overheard were: 'You villain! You shall pay for this!' But he was so upset and so frightened that he could not state positively which of the two gentlemen had spoken them, but he was inclined to think that it was Major Gubbins.

"And so the tangle grew, a tangled web that was dexterously being woven around the secretary of the Institute. The two Broxmouth visitors were recalled, and they once more swore positively to having met Captain Marston on the 'Lover's Walk' at about eight o'clock of that fateful evening. They spoke to him and they noticed the stick which he was carrying. They were on their way home from Kurtmoor, and they met the Captain some two hundred yards or so before they came to the Dog's Tooth Cliff. Of this they were both quite positive. The lady remembered coming to the cliff a few minutes later: she was nervous in the dark and therefore the details of the incident impressed themselves upon her memory. Subsequently when they were nearing home they met a lady who might or might not have been the deceased; they did not know her by sight and the person they met had her hat pulled down over her eyes and the collar of her coat up to her ears. It was raining hard then, and they themselves were hurrying along and paid no attention to passers-by.'

"We also heard that at about nine o'clock James Hoggs and his wife, who live in a cottage not very far from the Dog's Tooth Cliff, heard a terrifying scream. They were just going to bed and closing up for the night. Hoggs had the front door open at the moment and was looking at the weather. It was raining, but nevertheless he picked up his cap and ran out toward the cliff. A moment or two later he came up against a man whom he hailed; it was very dark, but he noticed that the man was engaged in wrapping a muffler round his neck. He asked him whether he had heard a scream, but the man said: 'No, I've not!' then hurried quickly out of sight. As Hoggs heard nothing more, or saw anything, he thought that perhaps after all he and his missis had been mistaken, so he turned back home and went to bed.

"I think," the Man in the Corner continued thoughtfully, "that I have now put before you all the most salient points in the chain of evidence collected by the police against the accused. There were not many faulty links in the chain you will admit. The motive for the hideous crime was clear enough: for there was the fraudulent secretary and the unfortunate girl who had suspected the defalcations and was threatening to go and denounce her lover, either to the President of the Institute or to the governors.

"And the method was equally clear: the meeting in the dark and the rain on the lonely cliff, the muffler quickly thrown round the victim's mouth to smother her screams, the blow with the stick, the push over the edge of the cliff. The

stick stood up as an incontestable piece of evidence; the absence from home of the accused during the greater part of that night had been testified by his landlady, whilst his presence on the scene of the crime some time during the evening was not disputed. As a matter of fact the only point in the man's favour were the strands of wool found sticking to the girl's hat pin and Hoggs's story of the man whom he had seen in the dark, engaged in readjusting a muffler around his neck. Unfortunately Hoggs, when more closely questioned on that subject, became incoherent and confused as men of his class are apt to do when pinned down to a definite statement.

"Anyway, the accused was committed for trial on the coroner's warrant, and of course reserved his defence. You probably, like the rest of the public, kept up a certain amount of interest in the Cliff murder, as it was popularly called, for a time, and then allowed your mind to dwell on other matters and forgot poor Captain Franklin Marston who was languishing in gaol under such a horrible accusation. Subsequently, your interest in him revived when he was brought up for trial the other day at the Barchester Assizes. In the meanwhile he had secured the services of Messrs. Chamton and Inglewood, the noted solicitors, who had engaged Mr. Provost Boon, K.C., to defend their client.

"You know as well as I do what happened at the trial, and how Mr. Boon turned the witnesses for the Crown inside out and round about until they contradicted themselves and one another all along the line. The defence was conducted in a masterly fashion. To begin with the worthy housekeeper, Mrs. Rumble, after a stiff cross-examination which lasted nearly an hour, was forced to admit that she could not swear positively to the exact words which she overheard between the deceased and Captain Marston. All that she could swear to was that the Captain and his sweetheart had apparently had a tiff. Then, as to Miss Amelia Smith's evidence: it also merely went to prove that the lovers had had a quarrel; there was nothing whatever to say that it was on the subject of finance, or that deceased had any intention either of speaking to the President about it, or of handing in her resignation to the governors.

"Next came the question of Major Gubbins's story of the message which he had been asked by his friend to deliver to the deceased. Now accused flatly denied that story, and denied it on oath. The whole thing, he declared, was a fabrication on the part of the Major, who, far from being his friend, was his bitter enemy and unsuccessful rival. In support of his theory William Peryer's evidence was cited as conclusive. He had heard the two men quarrelling at the very moment when accused was alleged to have made a pathetic appeal to his friend. Peryer had heard one of them say to the other: 'You villain! You shall pay for this!' And, in very truth, the unfortunate Captain was paying for it, in humiliation and racking anxiety.

"Then there came the great, the vital question of the stick, and of the strands of wool so obviously torn out of a muffler. With regard to the stick, the accused had stated that in the course of his walk he had caught his foot against a stone and stumbled, and that the stick had fallen out of his hand and over the edge of the cliff. Now this statement was certainly borne out by the fact that, as eminent counsel reminded the jury, the stick was found more than thirty yards away from the body. As for the muffler, it was a graver point still; strands of wool were found sticking to the girl's hat pin and James Hoggs, after hearing a scream at nine o'clock that evening, ran out toward the cliff and came across a man who was engaged in readjusting a muffler round his throat.

"That was incontestable. Of course, Mr. Boon argued, it was easy enough to upset a witness of the type of James Hoggs, but an English jury's duty was not to fasten guilt on the first man who happens to be handy, but to see justice meted out to innocent and guilty alike. The evidence of the muffler, argued the eminent counsel, was proof positive of the innocence of the accused. The witnesses who saw him in the Lover's Walk on that fateful night had declared most emphatically that he was not wearing a muffler. Then where was the man with the muffler? Where was the man who was within a few yards of the scene of the crime five minutes after James Hoggs had heard the scream— the man who had denied hearing the scream, although both Hoggs and his wife heard it over a quarter of a mile away?

"Yes, gentlemen of the jury,' the eminent counsel concluded with a dramatic gesture, 'it is the man with the muffler who murdered the unfortunate girl. If he is innocent, why is he not here to give evidence? There are no side tracks that lead to the cliffs at this point, so the man with the muffler must have seen something or someone; he must know something that would be of invaluable assistance to the elucidation of this sad mystery. Then why does he not come forward? I say because he dare not. But let the police look for him, I say. The accused is innocent; he is the victim of tragic circumstances, but his whole life, his war record, his affection for the deceased, all proclaim him to be guiltless of such a dastardly crime, and above all there stands the incontestable proof of his innocence, the muffler, gentlemen of the jury— the muffler!

"He said a lot more than that, of course," the Man in the Corner went on, chuckling drily to himself, "and said it a lot better than ever I can repeat it, but I have given you the gist of what he said. You know the result of the trial. The accused was acquitted, the jury having deliberated less than a quarter of an hour. There was no getting away from that muffler, even though every other circumstance pointed to Marston as the murderer of Janet Smith. On the whole his acquittal was a popular one, although many who were present at the trial shook their heads and thought that if they had been on the jury Marston would not have got off so easily, but for the most part these sceptics were not

Broxmouth people. In Broxmouth the Captain was personally liked, and the proclamation of his innocence was hailed with enthusiasm; and, what's more, those same champions of the good-looking secretary— they were the women mostly— looked askance on the headmaster who, they averred, had woven a Machiavellian net for trapping and removing from his path for ever a hated and successful rival. The police have received a perfect deluge of anonymous communications suggesting that Major Gubbins was identical with the mysterious man with the muffler, but of course such a suggestion is perfectly absurd, since at the very hour when James Hoggs heard the scream and a very few minutes before he met the man with the muffler, Major Gubbins was paying his belated visit to Miss Amelia Smith and delivering the alleged message. Even those ladies who disliked the headmaster most cordially had to admit that he could not very well have been in two places at the same time. The Dog's Tooth Cliff is a good half-hour's walk from Miss Smith's house to the 'Lover's Walk' itself and is not accessible to cyclists or motors.

"And thus to all intents and purposes the Cliff murder has remained a mystery, but it won't be one for long. Have I not told you that you may expect important developments within the next few days? And I am seldom wrong. Already in this evening's paper you will have read that the entire executive of the Woodforde Institute has placed its resignation in the hands of the governors, that several august personages have withdrawn their names from the list of patrons, and that though the President has been implored not to withdraw his name, he has proved adamant on the subject, and even refused to recommend successors to the headmaster, the secretary or the matron; in fact, he has seemingly washed his hands of the whole concern."

"But surely," I now broke in, seeing that the Man in the Corner threatened to put away his piece of string and to leave me without the usual epilogue to his interesting narrative, "surely General Sir Arkwright Jones cannot be blamed for the scandal which undoubtedly has dimmed the fortunes of the Woodfordfe Institute!"

"Cannot be blamed?" the Man in the Corner retorted sarcastically. "Cannot be blamed for entering into a conspiracy with his secretary and his headmaster to defraud the Institute, and then to silence for ever the one voice that might have been raised in accusation against him."

"Sir Arkwright Jones?" I exclaimed incredulously, for indeed the idea appeared to me preposterous then, as the General's name was almost a household word before the catastrophe. "Impossible!"

"Impossible!" he reiterated. "Why? He murdered Janet Smith; of that you will be as convinced within the next few days as I am at this hour. That the three men were in collusion I have not the shadow of doubt. Marston only made love to Janet Smith in order to secure her silence, but in this he failed and the girl

boldly accused him of roguery as soon as she found him out. It would be inconceivable to suppose that being the bright, intelligent girl that she admittedly was, she could remain for ever in ignorance of the defalcations in the books; she must and did tax her lover of irregularities, she must have and indeed did threaten to put the whole thing before the governors. So much for the lover's quarrel overheard by Mrs. Rumble. I believe that the fate of the poor girl was decided on then and there by two of the scoundrels; it only remained to consult with their other accomplice as to the means for carrying their hideous project through. Janet had announced her determination to go to Kurtmoor that selfsame evening, the only question was which of those three miscreants would meet her in the darkness and solitude of the 'Lovers' Walk.'

"But in order at the outset to throw dust in the eyes of the public and the police and not appear to be in any way associated with one another, Marston and Gubbins made pretence of a violent quarrel which Peryer overheard; then Gubbins, in order to make sure that the poor girl would carry out her intention of going over to Kurtmoor that evening, went to her house with the supposed message from Marston, and incidentally secured thereby his own alibi. This made him safe. Marston in the meanwhile went to arrange matters with Arkwright Jones. His position was of course more difficult than that of Gubbins. If there was to be murder— and my belief is that the scoundrels had been resolved on murder for some time before— the first suspicion would inevitably fall on the secretary who had kept the books and who had had the handling of the money. The miscreants had some sort of vague plan in their heads: of this there can be no doubt; they were only procrastinating, hoping against hope that chance would continue to favour them. But now the hour had come, the danger was imminent; within the next four and twenty hours Janet Smith, being promised no redress on the part of the President, would place the whole matter before the governors. Unless she was effectually made to hold her tongue.

"We can easily suppose that Marston would be clever enough to arrange to meet Arkwright Jones, without arousing suspicion. We do know that soon after he finally quarrelled with Janet Smith he walked over to Kurtmoor; the two witnesses who spoke with him stated that they met him whilst they themselves were walking to Broxmouth. It was then past eight o'clock. Arkwright Jones had either dined at his hotel or not; we do not know, for it never struck the police to enquire at once how the popular General had spent his time on that fateful evening. You know what those sort of unconventional seaside places are: people spend most of their time out of doors, and there would be nothing strange, let alone suspicious, in any visitor going out for an hour after dinner, even if it rained.

"Then surely you can in your mind see those two scoundrels putting their villainous heads together, and, as suspicion of any foul play would of necessity

at once fall on Marston, Jones decided to take the hideous onus on himself. He went to the Dog's Tooth Cliff to meet Janet Smith himself and borrowed Marston's stick to aid him in his abominable deed. He was clever enough, however, to throw it over the edge of the cliff some distance away from the scene of his crime. We do not know, of course, whether the poor girl recognised him, or whether he just fell on her in the dark; she gave only one scream before she fell. They were clever scoundrels we must admit, but chance favoured them too, especially in one thing: she favoured them when she prompted Arkwright Jones to put a muffler round his throat. This one fact as you know saved Marston's neck from the gallows; but for the strands of wool in the girl's hat pin and Hoggs's brief view of a man manipulating a muffler nothing but Jones's own confession could have saved his accomplice. Whether he would have confessed remains a riddle which no one will ever solve. But as to the whole so-called mystery, I saw daylight through it the moment I realised that Marston's despair and humiliation during the inquest was a pretence. If he feigned despair it was because he desired temporarily to be the victim of circumstantial evidence. From that point to the unravelling of the tangled skein was but a step for a mind bent on logic.

"But," I argued, for indeed I was bewildered and really incredulous, "what will be the end of it all? Surely three scoundrels like that will not go scot free. There will be an inquiry into the affairs of the Institute: the governors—"

"The governors have talked of an inquiry," the funny creature broke in with a chuckle, "but if you had any experience of these private charities you would know that the thing their administrators wish to avoid is publicity. The President of the Woodforde Institute had sufficient influence on the committee, you may be sure, to stifle any suggestion of creating public scandal by any sort of inquiry."

"But the question of the finances of the Institute is anyhow public property now and—"

"And it will be allowed to sink into oblivion. The executive has resigned. Marston and Gubbins will leave the country, and everything will be conveniently hushed up."

"But Arkwright Jones—" I protested.

"You see the papers regularly," he rejoined drily, "watch them and you will see..."

I don't know when he went, but a moment or two later I found myself sitting alone at the table in the blameless tea shop. The matter interested me more than I cared to admit but, for once, I was not altogether prepared to accept the funny creature's deductions.

Twenty-four hours later, however, I had to own that he had been right, when the following piece of sensational news appeared in the *Evening Post*.

TRAGIC SEQUEL TO THE CLIFF MURDER.

An extraordinary sequel to the mysterious tragedy of the Dog's Tooth Cliff, near Broxmouth, occurred last night, when on the self-same spot where Miss Janet Smith met her death three months ago, General Sir Arkwright Jones lost his footing and fell a distance of two hundred feet on to the rocks below. It was a beautiful moonlight evening, and the tide being low, a number of visitors were down on the beach at the time, but those who immediately hurried to the General's assistance found life already extinct. The distinguished soldier, who will be deeply mourned, must have been killed on the spot.

Indeed now general public opinion as well as every inhabitant of Broxmouth will bring pressure to bear upon the Borough Council to see that a suitable barrier is erected along the dangerous portions of the beautiful 'Lover's Walk.' The double tragedy of this year's season renders such an erection imperative.

I was probably the only reader of that paragraph who guessed that the once distinguished soldier had not come accidentally by his death. No doubt the police had followed up the clue of the man with the muffler and were actually on the track of the miscreant, when the latter, guessing that exposure was imminent, preferred to put an end to his own miserable life.

I have since heard from friends at Broxmouth that Marston has gone to the Malay States, and that Gubbins is doing something in Germany. Curious creature Marston must have been! Imagine after Jones had returned from his infamous errand and told him that the hideous deed was done, imagine Marston walking back to Broxmouth along the 'Lover's Walk' in the rain and the darkness, past the Dog's Tooth Cliff, at the foot of which the body of the murdered girl lay! I wonder what would be the views of the Man in the Corner on the psychology of a man with nerve enough for such an ordeal.
