

Detective Stories

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Arthur Morrison

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THE CASE OF THE WARD LANE TABERNACLE

I

AMONG the few personal friendships that Martin Hewitt has allowed himself to make there is one for an eccentric but very excellent old lady named Mrs. Mallett. She must be more than seventy now, but she is of robust and active, not to say masculine, habits, and her relations with Hewitt are irregular and curious. He may not see her for many weeks, perhaps for months, until one day she will appear in the office, push Kerrett (who knows better than to attempt to stop her) into the inner room, and salute Hewitt with a shake of the hand and a savage glare of the eye which would appal a stranger, but which is quite amiably meant. As for myself, it was long ere I could find any resource but instant retreat before her gaze, though we are on terms of moderate toleration now.

After her first glare she sits in the chair by the window and directs her glance at Hewitt's small gas grill and kettle in the fireplace—a glance which Hewitt, with all expedition, translates into tea. Slightly mollified by the tea, Mrs. Mallett condescends to remark in tones of tragic truculence, on passing matters of conventional interest—the weather, the influenza, her own health, Hewitt's health, and so forth, any reply of Hewitt's being commonly received with either disregard or contempt. In half an hour's time or so she leaves the office with a stern command to Hewitt to attend at her house and drink tea on a day and at a time named—a command which Hewitt obediently fulfils, when he passes through a similarly exhilarating experience in Mrs. Mallett's back drawing-room at her little freehold house in Fulham. Altogether Mrs. Mallett, to a stranger, is a singularly uninviting personality, and indeed, except Hewitt, who has learnt to appreciate her hidden good qualities, I doubt if she has a friend in the world. Her studiously concealed charities are a matter of as much amusement as gratification to Hewitt, who naturally, in the course of his peculiar profession, comes across many sad examples of poverty and suffering, commonly among the decent sort, who hide their troubles from strangers' eyes and suffer in secret. When such a case is in his mind it is Hewitt's practice to inform Mrs. Mallett of it at one of the tea ceremonies. Mrs. Mallett receives the story with snorts of incredulity and scorn but takes care, while expressing the most callous disregard and contempt of the troubles of the sufferers, to ascertain casually their names and addresses; twenty-four hours after which Hewitt need only make a visit to find their difficulties in some mysterious way alleviated.

Mrs. Mallett never had any children, and was early left a widow. Her

appearance, for some reason or another, commonly leads strangers to believe her an old maid. She lives in her little detached house with its square piece of ground, attended by a housekeeper older than herself and one maid-servant. She lost her only sister by death soon after the events I am about to set down, and now has, I believe, no relations in the world. It was also soon after these events that her present housekeeper first came to her in place of an older and very deaf woman, quite useless, who had been with her before. I believe she is moderately rich, and that one or two charities will benefit considerably at her death; also I should be far from astonished to find Hewitt's own name in her will, though this is no more than idle conjecture. The one possession to which she clings with all her soul—her one pride and treasure—is her great-uncle Joseph's snuff-box, the lid of which she steadfastly believes to be made of a piece of Noah's original ark discovered on the top of Mount Ararat by some intrepid explorer of vague identity about a hundred years ago. This is her one weakness, and woe to the unhappy creature who dares hint a suggestion that possibly the wood of the ark rotted away to nothing a few thousand years before her great-uncle Joseph ever took snuff. I believe he would be bodily assaulted. The box is brought for Hewitt's admiration at every tea ceremony at Fulham, when Hewitt handles it reverently and expresses as much astonishment and interest as if he had never seen or heard of it before. It is on these occasions only that Mrs. Mallett's customary stiffness relaxes. The sides of the box are of cedar of Lebanon, she explains (which very possibly they are), and the gold mountings were worked up from spade guineas (which one can believe without undue strain on the reason). And it is usually these times, when the old lady softens under the combined influence of tea and uncle Joseph's snuff-box, that Hewitt seizes to lead up to his hint of some starving governess or distressed clerk, with the full confidence that the more savagely the story is received the better will the poor people be treated as soon as he turns his back.

It was her jealous care of uncle Joseph's snuff-box that first brought Mrs. Mallett into contact with Martin Hewitt, and the occasion, though not perhaps testing his acuteness to the extent that some did, was nevertheless one of the most curious and fantastic on which he has ever been engaged. She was then some ten or twelve years younger than she is now, but Hewitt assures me she looked exactly the same; that is to say, she was harsh, angular, and seemed little more than fifty years of age. It was before the time of Kerrett, and another youth occupied the outer office. Hewitt sat late one afternoon with his door ajar when he heard a stranger enter the outer office, and a voice, which he afterwards knew well as Mrs. Mallett's, ask "Is Mr. Martin Hewitt in?"

“Yes, ma’am, I think so. If you will write your name and—”

“Is he in there?” And with three strides Mrs. Mallett was at the inner door and stood before Hewitt himself, while the routed office-lad stared helplessly in the rear.

“Mr. Hewitt,” Mrs. Mallet said, “I have come to put an affair into your hands, which I shall require to be attended to at once.”

Hewitt was surprised, but he bowed politely, and said, with some suspicion of a hint in his tone, “Yes—I rather supposed you were in a hurry.”

She glanced quickly in Hewitt’s face and went on: “I am not accustomed to needless ceremony, Mr. Hewitt. My name is Mallett—Mrs. Mallett—and here is my card. I have come to consult you on a matter of great annoyance and some danger to myself. The fact is I am being watched and followed by a number of persons.”

Hewitt’s gaze was steadfast, but he reflected that possibly this curious woman was a lunatic, the delusion of being watched and followed by unknown people being perhaps the most common of all; also it was no unusual thing to have a lunatic visit the office with just such a complaint. So he only said soothingly, “Indeed? That must be very annoying.”

“Yes, yes, the annoyance is bad enough perhaps,” she answered shortly, “but I am chiefly concerned about my great-uncle Joseph’s snuff-box.”

This utterance sounded a trifle more insane than the other, so Hewitt answered, a little more soothingly still: “Ah, of course. A very important thing, the snuff-box, no doubt.”

“It is, Mr. Hewitt—it is important, as I think you will admit when you have seen it. Here it is,” and she produced from a small handbag the article that Hewitt was destined so often again to see and affect an interest in. “You may be incredulous, Mr. Hewitt, but it is nevertheless a fact that the lid of this snuff-box is made of the wood of the original ark that rested on Mount Ararat.”

She handed the box to Hewitt, who murmured, “Indeed! Very interesting—very wonderful, really,” and returned it to the lady immediately.

“That, Mr. Hewitt, was the property of my great-uncle, Joseph Simpson, who once had the honour of shaking hands with his late Majesty King George the Fourth. The box was presented to my uncle by —,” and then Mrs. Mallett plunged into the whole history and adventures of the box, in the formula wherewith Hewitt subsequently became so well acquainted, and which need not be here set out in detail. When the box had been properly honoured Mrs. Mallett proceeded with her business.

“I am convinced, Mr. Hewitt,” she said, “that systematic attempts are being made to rob me of this snuff-box. I am not a nervous or weak-minded woman, or perhaps I might have sought your assistance before. The watching and following of myself I might have disregarded, but when it comes to burglary I think it is time to do something.”

“Certainly,” Hewitt agreed.

“Well, I have been pestered with demands for the box for some time past. I have here some of the letters which I have received, and I am sure I know at whose instigation they were sent.” She placed on the table a handful of papers of various sizes, which Hewitt examined one after another. They were mostly in the same handwriting, and all were unsigned. Every one was couched in a fanatically toned imitation of scriptural diction, and all sorts of threats were expressed with many emphatic underlinings. The spelling was not of the best, the writing was mostly uncouth, and the grammar was in ill shape in many places, the “thous” and “thees” and their accompanying verbs falling over each other disastrously. The purport of the messages was rather vaguely expressed, but all seemed to make a demand for the restoration of some article held in extreme veneration. This was alluded to in many figurative ways as the “token of life,” the “seal of the woman,” and so forth, and sometimes Mrs. Mallett was requested to restore it to the “ark of the covenant.” One of the least vague of these singular documents ran thus:- “Thou of no faith put the bond of the woman clothed with the sun on the stoan sete in thy back garden this night or thy blood beest on your own hed. Give it back to us the five righteous only in this citty, give us that what saves the faithful when the erth is swallowed up.” Hewitt read over these fantastic missives one by one till he began to suspect that his client, mad or not, certainly corresponded with mad Quakers. Then he said, “Yes, Mrs. Mallett, these are most extraordinary letters. Are there any more of them?”

“Bless the man, yes, there were a lot that I burnt. All the same crack-brained sort

of thing.”

“They are mostly in one handwriting,” Hewitt said, “though some are in another. But I confess I don’t see any very direct reference to the snuff-box.”

“Oh, but it’s the only thing they can mean,” Mrs. Mallett replied with great positiveness. “Why, he wanted me to sell it him; and last night my house was broken into in my absence and everything ransacked and turned over, but not a thing was taken. Why? Because I had the box with me at my sister’s; and this is the only sacred relic in my possession. And what saved the faithful when the world was swallowed up? Why, the ark of course.” The old lady’s manner was odd, but notwithstanding the bizarre and disjointed character of her complaint Hewitt had now had time to observe that she had none of the unmistakable signs of the lunatic. Her eye was steady and clear, and she had none of the restless habits of the mentally deranged. Even at that time Hewitt had met with curious adventures enough to teach him not to be astonished at a new one, and now he set himself seriously to get at his client’s case in full order and completeness.

“Come, Mrs. Mallett,” he said, “I am a stranger, and I can never understand your case till I have it, not as it presents itself to your mind, in the order of importance of events, but in the exact order in which they happened. You had a great-uncle, I understand, living in the early part of the century, who left you at his death the snuff-box which you value so highly. Now you suspect that somebody is attempting to extort or steal it from you. Tell me as clearly and simply as you can whom you suspect and the whole story of the attempts.”

“That’s just what I’m coming to,” the old lady answered, rather pettishly. “My uncle Joseph had an old housekeeper, who of course knew all about the snuff-box, and it is her son Reuben Penner who is trying to get it from me. The old woman was half crazy with one extraordinary religious superstition and another, and her son seems to be just the same. My great-uncle was a man of strong common-sense and a churchman (though he did think he could write plays), and if it hadn’t been for his restraint I believe—that is I have been told—Mrs. Penner would have gone clean demented with religious mania. Well, she died in course of time, and my great-uncle died some time after, leaving me the most important thing in his possession (I allude to the snuff-box of course), a good bit of property, and a tin box full of his worthless manuscript. I became a widow at twenty-six, and since then I have lived very quietly in my present house in Fulham.

“A couple of years ago I received a visit from Reuben Penner. I didn’t recognise him, which wasn’t wonderful, since I hadn’t seen him for thirty years or more. He is well over fifty now, a large heavy-faced man with uncommonly wild eyes for a greengrocer—which is what he is, though he dresses very well, considering. He was quite respectful at first, and very awkward in his manner. He took a little time to get his courage, and then he began questioning me about my religious feelings. Well, Mr. Hewitt, I am not the sort of person to stand a lecture from a junior and an inferior, whatever my religious opinions may be, and I pretty soon made him realise it. But somehow he persevered. He wanted to know if I would go to some place of worship that he called his ‘Tabernacle.’ I asked him who was the pastor. He said himself. I asked him how many members of the congregation there were, and (the man was as solemn as an owl. I assure you, Mr. Hewitt) he actually said five! I kept my countenance and asked why such a small number couldn’t attend church, or at any rate attach itself to some decent Dissenting chapel. And then the man burst out; mad—mad as a hatter. He was as incoherent as such people usually are, but as far as I could make out he talked, among a lot of other things, of some imaginary woman—a woman standing on the moon and driven into a wilderness on the wings of an eagle. The man was so madly possessed of his fancies that I assure you for a while he almost ceased to look ridiculous. He was so earnest in his rant. But I soon cut him short. It’s best to be severe with these people—it’s the only chance of bringing them to their senses. ‘Reuben Penner,’ I said ‘shut up! Your mother was a very decent person in her way, I believe, but she was half a lunatic with her superstitious notions, and you’re a bigger fool than she was. Imagine a grown man, and of your age, coming and asking me, of all people in the world, to leave my church and make another fool in a congregation of five, with you to rave at me about women in the moon! Go away and look after your greengrocery, and go to church or chapel like a sensible man. Go away and don’t play the fool any longer; I won’t hear another word!’

“When I talk like this I am usually attended to, and in this case Penner went away with scarcely another word. I saw nothing of him for about a month or six weeks and then he came and spoke to me as I was cutting roses in my front garden. This time he talked—to begin with, at least—more sensibly. ‘Mrs. Mallett,’ he said, ‘you have in your keeping a very sacred relic.’

“‘I have,’ I said, ‘left me by my great-uncle Joseph. And what then?’

“‘Well’—he hummed and hawed a little—‘I wanted to ask if you might be

disposed to part with it.'

"‘What?’ I said, dropping my scissors—‘sell it?’

"‘Well, yes,’ he answered, putting on as bold a face as he could.

"The notion of selling my uncle Joseph’s snuff-box in any possible circumstances almost made me speechless. ‘What!’ I repeated. ‘Sell it?—sell it? It would be a sinful sacrilege!’

"His face quite brightened when I said this, and he replied, ‘Yes, of course it would; I think so myself, ma’am; but I fancied you thought otherwise. In that case, ma’am, not being a believer yourself, I’m sure you would consider it a graceful and a pious act to present it to my little Tabernacle, where it would be properly valued. And it having been my mother’s property—’

"He got no further. I am not a woman to be trifled with, Mr. Hewitt, and I believe I beat him out of the garden with my basket. I was so infuriated I can scarcely remember what I did. The suggestion that I should sell my uncle Joseph’s snuff-box to a greengrocer was bad enough; the request that I should actually give it to his ‘Tabernacle’ was infinitely worse. But to claim that it had belonged to his mother—well I don’t know how it strikes you, Mr. Hewitt, but to me it seemed the last insult possible."

"Shocking, shocking, of course," Hewitt said, since she seemed to expect a reply. "And he called you an unbeliever, too. But what happened after that?"

"After that he took care not to bother me personally again; but these wretched anonymous demands came in, with all sorts of darkly hinted threats as to the sin I was committing in keeping my own property. They didn’t trouble me much. I put ‘em in the fire as fast as they came, until I began to find I was being watched and followed, and then I kept them."

"Very sensible," Hewitt observed, "very sensible indeed to do that. But tell me as to these papers. Those you have here are nearly all in one handwriting, but some, as I have already said, are in another. Now before all this business, did you ever see Reuben Penner’s handwriting?"

"No, never."

“Then you are not by any means sure that he has written any of these things?”

“But then who else could?”

“That of course is a thing to be found out. At present, at any rate, we know this: that if Penner has anything to do with these letters he is not alone, because of the second handwriting. Also we must not bind ourselves past other conviction that he wrote any one of them. By the way, I am assuming that they all arrived by post?”

“Yes, they did.”

“But the envelopes are not here. Have you kept any of them?”

“I hardly know; there may be some at home. Is it important?”

“It may be; but those I can see at another time. Please go on.”

“These things continued to arrive, as I have said, and I continued to burn them till I began to find myself watched and followed, and then I kept them. That was two or three months ago. It is a most unpleasant sensation, that of feeling that some unknown person is dogging your footsteps from corner to corner and observing all your movements for a purpose you are doubtful of. Once or twice I turned suddenly back, but I never could catch the creatures, of whom I am sure Penner was one.”

“You saw these people, of course?”

“Well, yes, in a way—with the corner of my eye, you know. But it was mostly in the evening. It was a woman once, but several times I feel certain it was Penner. And once I saw a man come into my garden at the back in the night, and I feel quite sure that was Penner.”

“Was that after you had this request to put the article demanded on the stone seat in the garden?”

“The same night. I sat up and watched from the bathroom window, expecting someone would come. It was a dark night, and the trees made it darker, but I could plainly see someone come quietly over the wall and go up to the seat.”

“Could you distinguish his face?”

“No, it was too dark. But I feel sure it was Penner.”

“Has Penner any decided peculiarity of form or gait?”

“No, he’s just a big common sort of man. But I tell you I feel certain it was Penner.”

“For any particular reason?”

“No, perhaps not. But who else could it have been? No, I’m very sure it must have been Penner.”

Hewitt repressed a smile and went on. “Just so,” he said. “And what happened then?”

“He went up to the seat, as I said, and looked at it, passing his hand over the top. Then I called out to him. I said if I found him on my premises again by day or night I’d give him in charge of the police. I assure you he got over the wall the second time a good deal quicker than the first. And then I went to bed, though I got a shocking cold in the head sitting at that open bathroom window. Nobody came about the place after that till last night. A few days ago my only sister was taken ill. I saw her each day, and she got worse. Yesterday she was so bad that I wouldn’t leave her. I sent home for some things and stopped in her house for the night. To-day I got an urgent message to come home, and when I went I found that an entrance had been made by a kitchen window and the whole house had been ransacked, but not a thing was missing.”

“Were drawers and boxes opened?”

“Everywhere. Most seemed to have been opened with keys, but some were broken. The place was turned upside down, but, as I said before, not a thing was missing. A very old woman, very deaf, who used to be my housekeeper, but who does nothing now, was in the house, and so was my general servant. They slept in rooms at the top and were not disturbed. Of course the old woman is too deaf to have heard anything, and the maid is a very heavy sleeper. The girl was very frightened, but I pacified her before I came away. As it happened, I took the snuff-box with me. I had got very suspicious of late, of course, and something seemed to suggest that I had better so I took it. It’s pretty strong evidence that

they have been watching me closely, isn't it, that they should break in the very first night I left the place?"

"And are you quite sure that nothing has been taken?"

"Quite certain. I have spent a long time in a very careful search."

"And you want me, I presume, to find out definitely who these people are, and get such evidence as may ensure their being punished?"

"That is the case. Of course I know Reuben Penner is the moving spirit—I'm quite certain of that. But still I can see plainly enough that as yet there's no legal evidence of it. Mind, I'm not afraid of him—not a bit. That is not my character. I'm not afraid of all the madmen in England; but I'm not going to have them steal my property—this snuff-box especially."

"Precisely. I hope you have left the disturbance in your house exactly as you found it?"

"Oh, of course, and I have given strict orders that nothing is to be touched. Tomorrow morning I should like you to come and look at it."

"I must look at it, certainly," Hewitt said, "but I would rather go at once."

"Pooh—nonsense!" Mrs. Mallett answered, with the airy obstinacy that Hewitt afterwards knew so well. "I'm not going home again now to spend an hour or two more. My sister will want to know what has become of me, and she mustn't suspect that anything is wrong, or it may do all sorts of harm. The place will keep till the morning, and I have the snuff-box safe with me. You have my card, Mr. Hewitt, haven't you? Very well. Can you be at my house tomorrow morning at half-past ten? I will be there, and you can see all you want by daylight. We'll consider that settled. Good-day." Hewitt saw her to his office door and waited till she had half descended the stairs. Then he made for a staircase window which gave a view of the street. The evening was coming on murky and foggy, and the street lights were blotchy and vague. Outside a four-wheeled cab stood, and the driver eagerly watched the front door. When Mrs. Mallett emerged he instantly began to descend from the box with the quick invitation, "Cab, mum, cab?" He seemed very eager for his fare, and though Mrs. Mallett hesitated a second she eventually entered the cab. He drove off, and Hewitt tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the number of the cab behind. It was always a habit of his to note all

such identifying marks throughout a case, whether they seemed important at the time or not, and he has often had occasion to be pleased with the outcome. Now, however, the light was too bad. No sooner had the cab started than a man emerged from a narrow passage opposite, and followed. He was a large, rather awkward, heavy-faced man of middle age, and had the appearance of a respectable artisan or small tradesman in his best clothes. Hewitt hurried downstairs and followed the direction the cab and the man had taken, toward the Strand. But the cab by this time was swallowed up in the Strand traffic, and the heavy-faced man had also disappeared. Hewitt returned to his office a little disappointed, for the man seemed rather closely to answer Mrs. Mallett's description of Reuben Penner.

II.

Punctually at half-past ten the next morning Hewitt was at Mrs. Mallett's house at Fulham. It was a pretty little house, standing back from the road in a generous patch of garden, and had evidently stood there when Fulham was an outlying village. Hewitt entered the gate, and made his way to the front door, where two young females, evidently servants, stood. They were in a very disturbed state, and when he asked for Mrs. Mallett, assured him that nobody knew where she was, and that she had not been seen since the previous afternoon.

"But," said Hewitt, "she was to stay at her sister's last night, I believe."

"Yes, sir," answered the more distressed of the two girls—she in a cap—"but she hasn't been seen there. This is her sister's servant, and she's been sent over to know where she is, and why she hasn't been there." This the other girl—in bonnet and shawl—corroborated. Nothing had been seen of Mrs. Mallett at her sister's since she had received the message the day before to the effect that the house had been broken into.

"And I'm so frightened," the other girl said, whimperingly. "They've been in the place again last night."

"Who have?"

"The robbers. When I came in this morning—"

"But didn't you sleep here?"

“I—I ought to ha’ done sir, but—but after Mrs. Mallett went yesterday I got so frightened I went home at ten.” And the girl showed signs of tears, which she had apparently been already indulging in.

“And what about the old woman—the deaf woman; where was she?”

“She was in the house, sir. There was nowhere else for her to go, and she was deaf and didn’t know anything about what happened the night before, and confined to her room, and—and so I didn’t tell her.”

“I see,” Hewitt said with a slight smile. “You left her here. She didn’t see or hear anything, did she?”

“No sir; she can’t hear, and she didn’t see nothing.”

“And how do you know thieves have been in the house?”

“Everythink’s tumbled about worse than ever, sir, and all different from what it was yesterday; and there’s a box o’ papers in the attic broke open, and all sorts o’ things.”

“Have you spoken to the police?”

“No, sir; I’m that frightened I don’t know what to do. And missis was going to see a gentleman about it yesterday, and—”

“Very well, I am that gentleman—Mr. Martin Hewitt. I have come down now to meet her by appointment. Did she say she was going anywhere else as well as to my office and to her sister’s?”

“No, sir. And she—she’s got the snuff-box with her and all.” This latter circumstance seemed largely to augment the girl’s terrors for her mistress’s safety.

“Very well,” Hewitt said, “I think I’d better just look over the house now, and then consider what has become of Mrs. Mallett—if she isn’t heard of in the meantime.” The girl found a great relief in Hewitt’s presence in the house, the deaf old housekeeper, who seldom spoke and never heard, being, as she said, “worse than nobody.”

“Have you been in all the rooms?” Hewitt asked.

“No, sir; I was afraid. When I came in I went straight upstairs to my room, and as I was coming away I see the things upset in the other attic. I went into Mrs. Perks’ room, next to mine (she’s the deaf old woman), and she was there all right, but couldn’t hear anything. Then I came down and only just peeped into two of the rooms and saw the state they were in, and then I came out into the garden, and presently this young woman came with the message from Mrs. Rudd.”

“Very well, we’ll look at the rooms now,” Hewitt said, and they proceeded to do so. All were in a state of intense confusion. Drawers, taken from chests and bureaux, littered about the floor, with their contents scattered about them. Carpets and rugs had been turned up and flung into corners, even pictures on the walls had been disturbed, and while some hung awry others rested on the floor and on chairs. The things, however, appeared to have been fairly carefully handled, for nothing was damaged except one or two framed engravings, the brown paper on the backs of which had been cut round with a knife and the wooden slats shifted so as to leave the backs of the engravings bare. This, the girl told Hewitt, had not been done on the night of the first burglary; the other articles also had not on that occasion been so much disturbed as they now were.

Mrs. Mallett’s bedroom was the first floor front. Here the confusion was, if possible, greater than in the other rooms. The bed had been completely unmade and the clothes thrown separately on the floor, and everything else was displaced. It was here indeed that the most noticeable features of the disturbance were observed, for on the side of the looking-glass hung a very long old-fashioned gold chain untouched, and on the dressing-table lay a purse with the money still in it. And on the looking-glass, stuck into the crack of the frame, was a half sheet of notepaper with this inscription scrawled in pencil:- To Mr. Martin Hewitt.

Mrs. Mallett is alright and in frends hands. She will return soon alright, if you keep quiet. But if you folloe her or take any steps the conseqinses will be very serious.

This paper was not only curious in itself, and curious as being addressed to Hewitt, but it was plainly in the same handwriting as were the most of the anonymous letters which Mrs. Mallett had produced the day before in Hewitt’s

office. Hewitt studied it attentively for a few moments and then thrust it in his pocket and proceeded to inspect the rest of the rooms. All were the same—simply well-furnished rooms turned upside down. The top floor consisted of three comfortable attics, one used as a lumber-room and the others used respectively as bedrooms for the servant and the deaf old woman. None of these rooms appeared to have been entered, the girl said, on the first night, but now the lumber-room was almost as confused as the rooms downstairs. Two or three boxes were opened and their contents turned out. One of these was what is called a steel trunk—a small one—which had held old papers, the others were filled chiefly with old clothes.

The servant's room next this was quite undisturbed and untouched; and then Hewitt was admitted to the room of Mrs. Mallett's deaf old pensioner. The old woman sat propped up in her bed and looked with half-blind eyes at the peak in the bedclothes made by her bent knees. The servant screamed in her ear, but she neither moved nor spoke.

Hewitt laid his hand on her shoulder and said, in the slow and distinct tones he had found best for reaching the senses of deaf people, "I hope you are well. Did anything disturb you in the night?" But she only turned her head half toward him and mumbled peevishly, "I wish you'd bring my tea. You're late enough this morning." Nothing seemed likely to be got from her, and Hewitt asked the servant, "Is she altogether bedridden?"

"No," the girl answered; "leastways she needn't be. She stops in bed most of the time, but she can get up when she likes—I've seen her. But missis humours her and lets her do as she likes—and she gives plenty of trouble. I don't believe she's as deaf as she makes out."

"Indeed!" Hewitt answered. "Deafness is convenient sometimes, I know. Now I want you to stay here while I make some inquiries. Perhaps you'd better keep Mrs. Rudd's servant with you if you want company. I don't expect to be very long gone, and in any case it wouldn't do for her to go to her mistress and say that Mrs. Mallett is missing, or it might upset her seriously." Hewitt left the house and walked till he found a public-house where a post-office directory was kept. He took a glass of whisky and water, most of which he left on the counter, and borrowed the directory. He found "Greengrocers" in the "Trade" section and ran his finger down the column till he came on this address:- "Penner, Reuben, 8, Little Marsh Row, Hammersmith, W." Then he returned the directory and found

the best cab he could to take him to Hammersmith.

Little Marsh Row was not a vastly prosperous sort of place, and the only shops were three—all small. Two were chandlers', and the third was a sort of semi-shed of the greengrocery and coal persuasion, with the name "Penner" on a board over the door.

The shutters were all up, though the door was open, and the only person visible was a very smudgy boy who was in the act of wheeling out a sack of coals. To the smudgy boy Hewitt applied himself. "I don't see Mr. Penner about," he said; "will he be back soon?"

The boy stared hard at Hewitt. "No," he said, "he won't. 'E's guv' up the shop. 'E paid 'is next week's rent this mornin' and retired."

"Oh!" Hewitt answered sharply. "Retired, has he? And what's become of the stock, eh! Where are the cabbages and potatoes?"

"'E told me to give 'em to the pore, an' I did. There's lots o' pore lives round 'ere. My mother's one, an' these 'ere coals is for 'er, an' I'm goin' to 'ave the trolley for myself."

"Dear me!" Hewitt answered, regarding the boy with amused interest. "You're a very business-like almoner. And what will the Tabernacle do without Mr. Penner?"

"I dunno," the boy answered, closing the door behind him. "I dunno nothin' about the Tabernacle—only where it is."

"Ah, and where is it? I might find him there, perhaps."

"Ward Lane—fust on left, second on right. It's a shop wot's bin shut up; next door to a stable-yard." And the smudgy boy started off with his trolley.

The Tabernacle was soon found. At some very remote period it had been an unlucky small shop, but now it was permanently shuttered, and the interior was lighted by holes cut in the upper panels of the shutters. Hewitt took a good look at the shuttered window and the door beside it and then entered the stable-yard at the side. To the left of the passage giving entrance to the yard there was a door, which plainly was another entrance to the house, and a still damp mud-mark on

the step proved it to have been lately used. Hewitt rapped sharply at the door with his knuckles.

Presently a female voice from within could be heard speaking through the keyhole in a very loud whisper. "Who is it?" asked the voice.

Hewitt stooped to the keyhole and whispered back, "Is Mr. Penner here now?"

"No."

"Then I must come in and wait for him. Open the door." A bolt was pulled back and the door cautiously opened a few inches. Hewitt's foot was instantly in the jamb, and he forced the door back and entered. "Come," he said in a loud voice, "I've come to find out where Mr. Penner is, and to see whoever is in here."

Immediately there was an assault of fists on the inside of a door at the end of the passage, and a loud voice said, "Do you hear? Whoever you are I'll give you five pounds if you'll bring Mr. Martin Hewitt here. His office is 25 Portsmouth Street, Strand. Or the same if you'll bring the police." And the voice was that of Mrs. Mallett.

Hewitt turned to the woman who had opened the door, and who now stood, much frightened, in the corner beside him. "Come," he said, "your keys, quick, and don't offer to stir, or I'll have you brought back and taken to the station."

The woman gave him a bunch of keys without a word. Hewitt opened the door at the end of the passage, and once more Mrs. Mallett stood before him, prim and rigid as ever, except that her bonnet was sadly out of shape and her mantle was torn.

"Thank you, Mr. Hewitt," she said. "I thought you'd come, though where I am I know no more than Adam. Somebody shall smart severely for this. Why, and that woman—that woman," she pointed contemptuously at the woman in the corner, who was about two-thirds her height, "was going to search me—me! Why—" Mrs. Mallett, blazing with suddenly revived indignation, took a step forward and the woman vanished through the outer door.

"Come," Hewitt said, "no doubt you've been shamefully treated; but we must be quiet for a little. First I will make quite sure that nobody else is here, and then we'll get to your house." Nobody was there. The rooms were dreary and mostly empty. The front room, which was lighted by the holes in the shutters, had a rough reading-desk and a table, with half a dozen wooden chairs. "This," said

Hewitt, "is no doubt the Tabernacle proper, and there is very little to see in it. Come back now, Mrs. Mallett, to your house, and we'll see if some explanation of these things is not possible. I hope your snuff-box is quite safe?"

Mrs. Mallett drew it from her pocket and exhibited it triumphantly. "I told them they should never get it," she said, "and they saw I meant it, and left off trying." As they emerged in the street she said: "The first thing, of course, is to bring the police into this place."

"No, I think we won't do that yet," Hewitt said. "In the first place the case is one of assault and detention, and your remedy is by summons or action; and then there are other things to speak of. We shall get a cab in the High Street, and you shall tell me what has happened to you."

Mrs. Mallett's story was simple. The cab in which she left Hewitt's office had travelled west, and was apparently making for the locality of her sister's house; but the evening was dark, the fog increased greatly, and she shut the windows and took no particular notice of the streets through which she was passing. Indeed with such a fog that would have been impossible. She had a sort of undefined notion that some of the streets were rather narrow and dirty, but she thought nothing of it, since all cabmen are given to selecting unexpected routes. After a time, however, the cab slowed, made a sharp turn, and pulled up. The door was opened, and "Here you are mum," said the cabby. She did not understand the sharp turn, and had a general feeling that the place could not be her sister's, but as she alighted she found she had stepped directly upon the threshold of a narrow door into which she was immediately pulled by two persons inside. This, she was sure, must have been the side-door in the stable-yard, through which Hewitt himself had lately obtained entrance to the Tabernacle.

Before she had recovered from her surprise the door was shut behind her. She struggled stoutly and screamed, but the place she was in was absolutely dark; she was taken by surprise, and she found resistance useless. They were men who held her, and the voice of the only one who spoke she did not know. He demanded in firm and distinct tones that the "sacred thing" should be given up, and that Mrs. Mallett should sign a paper agreeing to prosecute nobody before she was allowed to go. She however, as she asserted with her customary emphasis, was not the sort of woman to give in to that. She resolutely declined to do anything of the sort, and promised her captors, whoever they were, a full and

legal return for their behaviour. Then she became conscious that a woman was somewhere present, and the man threatened that this woman should search her. This threat Mrs. Mallett met as boldly as the others. She should like to meet the woman who would dare attempt to search her, she said. She defied anybody to attempt it. As for her uncle Joseph's snuff-box, no matter where it was, it was where they would not be able to get it. That they should never have, but sooner or later they should have something very unpleasant for their attempts to steal it. This declaration had an immediate effect. They importuned her no more, and she was left in an inner room and the key was turned on her. There she sat, dozing occasionally, the whole night, her indomitable spirit remaining proof through all those doubtful hours of darkness. Once or twice she heard people enter and move about, and each time she called aloud to offer, as Hewitt had heard, a reward to anybody who should bring the police or communicate her situation to Hewitt. Day broke and still she waited, sleepless and unfed, till Hewitt at last arrived and released her.

On Mrs. Mallett's arrival at her house Mrs. Rudd's servant was at once despatched with reassuring news and Hewitt once more addressed himself to the question of the burglars. "First, Mrs. Mallett," he said, "did you ever conceal anything—anything at all mind—in the frame of an engraving?"

"No, never."

"Were any of your engravings framed before you had them?"

"Not one that I can remember. They were mostly uncle Joseph's, and he kept them with a lot of others in drawers. He was rather a collector, you know."

"Very well. Now come up to the attic. Something has been opened there that was not touched at the first attempt."

"See now," said Hewitt, when the attic was reached, "here is a box full of papers. Do you know everything that was in it?"

"No, I don't," Mrs. Mallett replied. "There were a lot of my uncle's manuscript plays. Here you see 'The Dead Bridegroom, or the Drum of Fortune,' and so on; and there were a lot of autographs. I took no interest in them, although some were rather valuable, I believe."

"Now bring your recollection to bear as strongly as you can," Hewitt said. "Do

you ever remember seeing in this box a paper bearing nothing whatever upon it but a wax seal?"

"Oh yes, I remember that well enough. I've noticed it each time I've turned the box over—which is very seldom. It was a plain slip of vellum paper with a red seal, cracked and rather worn—some celebrated person's seal, I suppose. What about it?" Hewitt was turning the papers over one at a time. "It doesn't seem to be here now," he said. "Do you see it?"

"No," Mrs. Mallett returned, examining the papers herself, "it isn't. It appears to be the only thing missing. But why should they take it?"

"I think we are at the bottom of all this mystery now," Hewitt answered quietly. "It is the Seal of the Woman."

"The what? I don't understand."

The fact is, Mrs. Mallett, that these people have never wanted your uncle Joseph's snuff-box at all, but that seal."

"Not wanted the snuff-box? Nonsense! Why, didn't I tell you Penner asked for it—wanted to buy it?"

"Yes, you did, but so far as I can remember you never spoke of a single instance of Penner mentioning the snuff-box by name. He spoke of a sacred relic, and you, of course, very naturally assumed he spoke of the box. None of the anonymous letters mentioned the box, you know, and once or twice they actually did mention a seal, though usually the thing was spoken of in a roundabout and figurative way. All along, these people—Reuben Penner and the others—have been after the seal, and you have been defending the snuff-box."

"But why the seal?"

"Did you never hear of Joanna Southcott?"

"Oh yes, of course; she was an ignorant visionary who set up as prophetess eighty or ninety years ago or more."

"Joanna Southcott gave herself out as a prophetess in 1790. She was to be the mother of the Messiah, she said, and she was the woman driven into the

wilderness, as foretold in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation. She died at the end of 1814, when her followers numbered more than 100,000, all fanatic believers. She had made rather a good thing in her lifetime by the sale of seals, each of which was to secure the eternal salvation of the holder. At her death, of course, many of the believers fell away, but others held on as faithfully as ever, asserting that 'the holy Joanna' would rise again and fulfil all the prophecies. These poor people dwindled in numbers gradually, and although they attempted to bring up their children in their own faith, the whole belief has been practically extinct for years now. You will remember that you told me of Penner's mother being a superstitious fanatic of some sort, and that your uncle Joseph possessed her extravagances. The thing seems pretty plain now. Your uncle Joseph possessed himself of Joanna Southcott's seal by way of removing from poor old Mrs. Penner an object of a sort of idolatry, and kept it as a curiosity. Reuben Penner grew up strong in his mother's delusions, and to him and the few believers he had gathered round him at his Tabernacle, the seal was an object worth risking anything to get.

"First he tried to convert you to his belief. Then he tried to buy it; after that, he and his friends tried anonymous letters, and at last, grown desperate, they resorted to watching you, burglary and kidnapping. Their first night's raid was unsuccessful, so last night they tried kidnapping you by the aid of a cabman. When they had got you, and you had at last given them to understand that it was your uncle Joseph's snuff-box you were defending, they tried the house again, and this time were successful. I guessed they had succeeded then, from a simple circumstance. They had begun to cut out the backs of framed engravings for purposes of search, but only some of the engravings were so treated. That meant either that the article wanted was found behind one of them, or that the intruders broke off in their picture-examination to search somewhere else, and were then successful, and so under no necessity of opening the other engravings. You assured me that nothing could have been concealed in any of the engravings, so I at once assumed that they had found what they were after in the only place wherein they had not searched the night before—the attic—and probably among the papers in the trunk."

"But then if they found it there why didn't they return and let me go?"

"Because you would have found where they had brought you. They probably intended to keep you there till the dark of the next evening, and then take you away in a cab again and leave you some distance off. To prevent my following

and possibly finding you they left here on your looking-glass this note” (Hewitt produced it) “threatening all sorts of vague consequences if you were not left to them. They knew you had come to me, of course, having followed you to my office. And now Penner feels himself anything but safe. He has relinquished his greengrocery and dispensed his stock in charity, and probably, having got the seal he has taken himself off. Not so much perhaps from fear of punishment as for fear the seal may be taken from him, and with it the salvation his odd belief teaches him it will confer.”

Mrs. Mallett sat silently for a little while and then said in a rather softened voice, “Mr. Hewitt, I am not what is called a woman of sentiment, as you may have observed, and I have been most shamefully treated over this wretched seal. But if all you tell me has been actually what has happened I have a sort of perverse inclination to forgive the man in spite of myself. The thing probably had been his mother’s—or at any rate he believed so—and his giving up his little all to attain the object of his ridiculous faith, and distributing his goods among the poor people and all that—really it’s worthy of an old martyr, if only it were done in the cause of a faith a little less stupid—though of course he thinks his is the only religion, as others do of theirs. But then”—Mrs. Mallett stiffened again—“there’s not much to prove your theories, is there?”

Hewitt smiled. “Perhaps not,” he said, “except that, to my mind at any rate, everything points to my explanation being the only possible one. The thing presented itself to you, from the beginning, as an attempt on the snuff-box you value so highly, and the possibility of the seal being the object aimed at never entered your mind. I saw it whole from the outside, and on thinking the thing over after our first interview I remembered Joanna Southcott. I think I am right.”

“Well, if you are, as I said, I half believe I shall forgive the man. We will advertise if you like, telling him he has nothing to fear if he can give an explanation of his conduct consistent with what he calls his religious belief, absurd as it may be.” That night fell darker and foggier than the last. The advertisement went into the daily papers, but Reuben Penner never saw it. Late the next day a bargeman passing Old Swan Pier struck some large object with his boat-hook and brought it to the surface. It was the body of a drowned man, and it was afterwards identified as that of Reuben Penner, late greengrocer, of Hammersmith. How he came into the water there was nothing to show. There was no money nor any valuables found on the body, and there was a story of a large, heavy-faced man who had given a poor woman—a perfect stranger—a

watch and chain and a handful of money down near Tower Hill on that foggy evening. But this again was only a story, not definitely authenticated. What was certain was that, tied securely round the dead man's neck with a cord, and gripped and crumpled tightly in his right hand, was a soddened piece of vellum paper, blank, but carrying an old red seal, of which the device was almost entirely rubbed and cracked away. Nobody at the inquest quite understood this.

THE IVY COTTAGE MYSTERY

I had been working double tides for a month: at night on my morning paper, as usual; and in the morning on an evening paper as locum tenens for another man who was taking a holiday. This was an exhausting plan of work, although it only actually involved some six hours' attendance a day, or less, at the two offices. I turned up at the headquarters of my own paper at ten in the evening, and by the time I had seen the editor, selected a subject, written my leader, corrected the slips, chatted, smoked, and so on, and cleared off, it was very usually one o'clock. This meant bed at two, or even three, after supper at the club.

This was all very well at ordinary periods, when any time in the morning would do for rising, but when I had to be up again soon after seven, and round at the evening paper office by eight, I naturally felt a little worn and disgusted with things by midday, after a sharp couple of hours' leaderette scribbling and paraphrasing, with attendant sundries.

But the strain was over, and on the first day of comparative comfort I indulged in a midday breakfast and the first undisgusted glance at a morning paper for a month. I felt rather interested in an inquest, begun the day before, on the body of a man whom I had known very slightly before I took to living in chambers.

His name was Gavin Kingscote, and he was an artist of a casual and desultory sort, having, I believe, some small private means of his own. As a matter of fact, he had boarded in the same house in which I had lodged myself for a while, but as I was at the time a late homer and a fairly early riser, taking no regular board in the house, we never became much acquainted. He had since, I understood, made some judicious Stock Exchange speculations, and had set up house in Finchley.

Now the news was that he had been found one morning murdered in his smoking—room, while the room itself, with others, was in a state of confusion. His pockets had been rifled, and his watch and chain were gone, with one or two other small articles of value. On the night of the tragedy a friend had sat smoking with him in the room where the murder took place, and he had been the last person to see Mr Kingscote alive. A jobbing gardener, who kept the garden in order by casual work from time to time, had been arrested in consequence of footprints, exactly corresponding with his boots, having been found on the

garden beds near the French window of the smoking—room.

I finished my breakfast and my paper, and Mrs Clayton, the housekeeper, came to clear my table. She was sister of my late landlady of the house where Kingscote had lodged, and it was by this connection that I had found my chambers. I had not seen the housekeeper since the crime was first reported, so I now said:

‘This is shocking news of Mr Kingscote, Mrs Clayton. Did you know him yourself?’

She had apparently only been waiting for some such remark to burst out with whatever information she possessed.

‘Yes, sir,’ she exclaimed: ‘shocking indeed. Pore young feller! I see him often when I was at my sister’s, and he was always a nice, quiet gentleman, so different from some. My sister, she’s awful cut up, sir, I assure you. And what d’you think ‘appened, sir, only last Tuesday? You remember Mr Kingscote’s room where he painted the woodwork so beautiful with gold flowers, and blue, and pink? He used to tell my sister she’d always have something to remember him by. Well, two young fellers, gentlemen I can’t call them, come and took that room (it being to let), and went and scratched off all the paint in mere wicked mischief, and then chopped up all the panels into sticks and bits! Nice sort o’ gentlemen them! And then they bolted in the morning, being afraid, I s’pose, of being made to pay after treating a pore widder’s property like that. That was only Tuesday, and the very next day the pore young gentleman himself’s dead, murdered in his own ‘ouse, and him goin’ to be married an’ all! Dear, dear! I remember once he said—’

Mrs Clayton was a good soul, but once she began to talk some one else had to stop her. I let her run on for a reasonable time, and then rose and prepared to go out. I remembered very well the panels that had been so mischievously destroyed. They made the room the showroom of the house, which was an old one. They were indeed less than half finished when I came away, and Mrs Lamb, the landlady, had shown them to me one day when Kingscote was out. All the walls of the room were panelled and painted white, and Kingscote had put upon them an eccentric but charming decoration, obviously suggested by some of the work of Mr Whistler. Tendrils, flowers, and butterflies in a quaint convention wandered thinly from panel to panel, giving the otherwise rather uninteresting

room an unwonted atmosphere of richness and elegance. The lamentable jackasses who had destroyed this had certainly selected the best feature of the room whereon to inflict their senseless mischief.

I strolled idly downstairs, with no particular plan for the afternoon in my mind, and looked in at Hewitt's offices. Hewitt was reading a note, and after a little chat he informed me that it had been left an hour ago, in his absence, by the brother of the man I had just been speaking of.

'He isn't quite satisfied,' Hewitt said, 'with the way the police are investigating the case, and asks me to run down to Finchley and look round. Yesterday I should have refused, because I have five cases in progress already, but today I find that circumstances have given me a day or two. Didn't you say you knew the man?'

'Scarcely more than by sight. He was a boarder in the house at Chelsea where I stayed before I started chambers.'

'Ah, well; I think I shall look into the thing. Do you feel particularly interested in the case? I mean, if you've nothing better to do, would you come with me?'

'I shall be very glad,' I said. 'I was in some doubt what to do with myself. Shall you start at once?'

'I think so. Kerrett, just call a cab. By the way, Brett, which paper has the fullest report of the inquest yesterday? I'll run over it as we go down.'

As I had only seen one paper that morning, I could not answer Hewitt's question. So we bought various papers as we went along in the cab, and I found the reports while Martin Hewitt studied them. Summarized, this was the evidence given:

Sarah Dodson, general servant, deposed that she had been in service at Ivy Cottage, the residence of the deceased, for five months, the only other regular servant being the housekeeper and cook. On the evening of the previous Tuesday both servants retired a little before eleven, leaving Mr Kingscote with a friend in the smoking or sitting room. She never saw her master again alive. On coming downstairs the following morning and going to open the smoking—room windows, she was horrified to discover the body of Mr Kingscote lying on the floor of the room with blood about the head. She at once raised an alarm, and, on the instructions of the housekeeper, fetched a doctor, and gave information to the

police. In answer to questions, witness stated she had heard no noise of any sort during the night, nor had anything suspicious occurred.

Hannah Carr, housekeeper and cook, deposed that she had been in the late Mr Kingscote's service since he had first taken Ivy Cottage—a period of rather more than a year. She had last seen the deceased alive on the evening of the previous Tuesday, at half—past ten, when she knocked at the door of the smoking—room, where Mr Kingscote was sitting with a friend, to ask if he would require anything more. Nothing was required, so witness shortly after went to bed. In the morning she was called by the previous witness, who had just gone downstairs, and found the body of deceased lying as described. Deceased's watch and chain were gone, as also was a ring he usually wore, and his pockets appeared to have been turned out. All the ground floor of the house was in confusion, and a bureau, a writing—table, and various drawers were open—a bunch of keys usually carried by deceased being left hanging at one keyhole. Deceased had drawn some money from the bank on the Tuesday, for current expenses; how much she did not know. She had not heard or seen anything suspicious during the night. Besides Dodson and herself, there were no regular servants; there was a charwoman, who came occasionally, and a jobbing gardener, living near, who was called in as required.

Mr James Vidler, surgeon, had been called by the first witness between seven and eight on Wednesday morning. He found the deceased lying on his face on the floor of the smoking—room, his feet being about eighteen inches from the window, and his head lying in the direction of the fireplace. He found three large contused wounds on the head, any one of which would probably have caused death. The wounds had all been inflicted, apparently, with the same blunt instrument—probably a club or life preserver, or other similar weapon. They could not have been done with the poker. Death was due to concussion of the brain, and deceased had probably been dead seven or eight hours when witness saw him. He had since examined the body more closely, but found no marks at all indicative of a struggle having taken place; indeed, from the position of the wounds and their severity, he should judge that the deceased had been attacked unawares from behind, and had died at once. The body appeared to be perfectly healthy.

Then there was police evidence, which showed that all the doors and windows were found shut and completely fastened, except the front door, which, although shut, was not bolted. There were shutters behind the French windows in the

smoking—room, and these were found fastened. No money was found in the bureau, nor in any of the opened drawers, so that if any had been there, it had been stolen. The pockets were entirely empty, except for a small pair of nail scissors, and there was no watch upon the body, nor a ring. Certain footprints were found on the garden beds, which had led the police to take certain steps. No footprints were to be seen on the garden path, which was hard gravel.

Mr Alexander Campbell, stockbroker, stated that he had known deceased for some few years, and had done business for him. He and Mr Kingscote frequently called on one another, and on Tuesday evening they dined together at Ivy Cottage. They sat smoking and chatting till nearly twelve o'clock, when Mr Kingscote himself let him out, the servants having gone to bed. Here the witness proceeded rather excitedly: 'That is all I know of this horrible business, and I can say nothing else. What the police mean by following and watching me—'

The Coroner: 'Pray be calm, Mr Campbell. The police must do what seems best to them in a case of this sort. I am sure you would not have them neglect any means of getting at the truth.'

Witness: 'Certainly not. But if they suspect me, why don't they say so? It is intolerable that I should be—'

The Coroner: 'Order, order, Mr Campbell. You are here to give evidence.'

The witness then, in answer to questions, stated that the French windows of the smoking—room had been left open during the evening, the weather being very warm. He could not recollect whether or not deceased closed them before he left, but he certainly did not close the shutters. Witness saw nobody near the house when he left.

Mr Douglas Kingscote, architect, said deceased was his brother. He had not seen him for some months, living as he did in another part of the country. He believed his brother was fairly well off, and he knew that he had made a good amount by speculation in the last year or two. Knew of no person who would be likely to owe his brother a grudge, and could suggest no motive for the crime except ordinary robbery. His brother was to have been married in a few weeks. Questioned further on this point, witness said that the marriage was to have taken place a year ago, and it was with that view that Ivy Cottage, deceased's residence, was taken. The lady, however, sustained a domestic bereavement, and

afterwards went abroad with her family: she was, witness believed, shortly expected back to England.

William Bates, jobbing gardener, who was brought up in custody, was cautioned, but elected to give evidence. Witness, who appeared to be much agitated, admitted having been in the garden of Ivy Cottage at four in the morning, but said that he had only gone to attend to certain plants, and knew absolutely nothing of the murder. He however admitted that he had no order for work beyond what he had done the day before. Being further pressed, witness made various contradictory statements, and finally said that he had gone to take certain plants away.

The inquest was then adjourned.

This was the cast as it stood—apparently not a case presenting any very striking feature, although there seemed to me to be doubtful peculiarities in many parts of it. I asked Hewitt what he thought.

‘Quite impossible to think anything, my boy, just yet; wait till we see the place. There are any number of possibilities. Kingscote’s friend, Campbell, may have come in again, you know, by way of the window—or he may not. Campbell may have owed him money or something—or he may not. The anticipated wedding may have something to do with it—or, again, that may not. There is no limit to the possibilities, as far as we see from this report—a mere dry husk of the affair. When we get closer we shall examine the possibilities by the light of more detailed information. One probability is that the wretched gardener is innocent. It seems to me that his was only a comparatively blameless manoeuvre not unheard of at other times in his trade. He came at four in the morning to steal away the flowers he had planted the day before, and felt rather bashful when questioned on the point. Why should he trample on the beds, else? I wonder if the police thought to examine the beds for traces of rooting up, or questioned the housekeeper as to any plants being missing? But we shall see.’

We chatted at random as the train drew near Finchley, and I mentioned *inter alia* the wanton piece of destruction perpetrated at Kingscote’s late lodgings. Hewitt was interested.

‘That was curious,’ he said, ‘very curious. Was anything else damaged? Furniture and so forth?’

‘I don’t know. Mrs Clayton said nothing of it, and I didn’t ask her. But it was quite bad enough as it was. The decoration was really good, and I can’t conceive a meaner piece of tomfoolery than such an attack on a decent woman’s property.’

Then Hewitt talked of other cases of similar stupid damage by creatures inspired by a defective sense of humour, or mere love of mischief. He had several curious and sometimes funny anecdotes of such affairs at museums and picture exhibitions, where the damage had been so great as to induce the authorities to call him in to discover the offender. The work was not always easy, chiefly from the mere absence of intelligible motive; not, indeed, always successful. One of the anecdotes related to a case of malicious damage to a picture—the outcome of blind artistic jealousy—a case which had been hushed up by a large expenditure in compensation. It would considerably startle most people, could it be printed here, with the actual names of the parties concerned.

Ivy Cottage, Finchley, was a compact little house, standing in a compact little square of garden, little more than a third of an acre, or perhaps no more at all. The front door was but a dozen yards or so back from the road, but the intervening space was well treed and shrubbed. Mr Douglas Kingscote had not yet returned from town, but the housekeeper, an intelligent, matronly woman, who knew of his intention to call in Martin Hewitt, was ready to show us the house.

‘First,’ Hewitt said, when we stood in the smoking—room, ‘I observe that somebody has shut the drawers and the bureau. That is unfortunate. Also, the floor has been washed and the carpet taken up, which is much worse. That, I suppose, was because the police had finished their examination, but it doesn’t help me to make one at all. Has anything—anything at all—been left as it was on Tuesday morning?’

‘Well, sir, you see everything was in such a muddle,’ the housekeeper began, ‘and when the police had done—’

Just so. I know. You “set it to rights”, eh? Oh, that setting to rights! It has lost me a fortune at one time and another. As to the other rooms, now, have they been set to rights?’

‘Such as was disturbed have been put right, sir, of course.’

‘Which were disturbed? Let me see them. But wait a moment.’ ,

He opened the French windows, and closely examined the catch and bolts. He knelt and inspected the holes whereinto the bolts fell, and then glanced casually at the folding shutters. He opened a drawer or two, and tried the working of the locks with the keys the housekeeper carried. They were, the housekeeper explained, Mr Kingscote's own keys. All through the lower floors Hewitt examined some things attentively and closely, and others with scarcely a glance, on a system unaccountable to me. Presently, he asked to be shown Mr Kingscote's bedroom, which had not been disturbed, 'set to rights', or slept in since the crime. Here, the housekeeper said, all drawers were kept unlocked but two—one in the wardrobe and one in the dressing—table, which Mr Kingscote had always been careful to keep locked. Hewitt immediately pulled both drawers open without difficulty. Within, in addition to a few odds and ends, were papers. All the contents of these drawers had been turned over confusedly, while those of the unlocked drawers were in perfect order.

'The police,' Hewitt remarked, 'may not have observed these matters. Any more than such an ordinary thing as this,' he added, picking up a bent nail lying at the edge of a rug.

The housekeeper doubtless took the remark as a reference to the entire unimportance of a bent nail, but I noticed that Hewitt dropped the article quietly into his pocket.

We came away. At the front gate we met Mr Douglas Kingscote, who had just returned from town. He introduced himself, and expressed surprise at our promptitude both of coming and going.

'You can't have got anything like a clue in this short time, Mr Hewitt?' he asked.

'Well, no,' Hewitt replied, with a certain dryness, 'perhaps not. But I doubt whether a month's visit would have helped me to get anything very striking out of a washed floor and a houseful of carefully cleaned—up and "set—to—rights" rooms. Candidly, I don't think you can reasonably expect much of me. The police have a much better chance—they had the scene of the crime to examine. I have seen just such a few rooms as anyone might see in the first well—furnished house he might enter. The trail of the housemaid has overlaid all the others.'

'I'm very sorry for that; the fact was, I expected rather more of the police; and, indeed, I wasn't here in time entirely to prevent the clearing up. But still, I

thought your well—known powers—’

‘My dear sir, my “well—known powers” are nothing but common sense assiduously applied and made quick by habit. That won’t enable me to see the invisible.’

‘But can’t we have the rooms put back into something of the state they were in? The cook will remember—’

‘No, no. That would be worse and worse: that would only be the housemaid’s trail in turn overlaid by the cook’s. You must leave things with me for a little, I think.’

‘Then you don’t give the case up?’ Mr Kingscote asked anxiously.

‘Oh, no! I don’t give it up just yet. Do you know anything of your brother’s private papers—as they were before his death?’

‘I never knew anything till after that. I have gone over them, but they are all very ordinary letters. Do you suspect a theft of papers?’

Martin Hewitt, with his hands on his stick behind him, looked sharply at the other, and shook his head. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I can’t quite say that.’

We bade Mr Douglas Kingscote good—day, and walked towards the station. ‘Great nuisance, that setting to rights,’ Hewitt observed, on the way. ‘If the place had been left alone, the job might have been settled one way or another by this time. As it is, we shall have to run over to your old lodgings.’

‘My old lodgings?’ I repeated, amazed. ‘Why my old lodgings?’

Hewitt turned to me with a chuckle and a wide smile. ‘Because we can’t see the broken panel—work anywhere else,’ he said. ‘Let’s see—Chelsea, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, Chelsea. But why—you don’t suppose the people who defaced the panels also murdered the man who painted them?’

‘Well,’ Hewitt replied, with another smile, ‘that would be carrying a practical joke rather far, wouldn’t it? Even for the ordinary picture damager.’

‘You mean you don’t think they did it, then? But what do you mean?’

‘My dear fellow, I don’t mean anything but what I say. Come now, this is rather an interesting case despite appearances, and it has interested me: so much, in fact, that I really think I forgot to offer Mr Douglas Kingscote my condolence on his bereavement. You see a problem is a problem, whether of theft, assassination, intrigue, or anything else, and I only think of it as one. The work very often makes me forget merely human sympathies. Now, you have often been good enough to express a very flattering interest in my work, and you shall have an opportunity of exercising your own common sense in the way I am always having to exercise mine. You shall see all my evidence (if I’m lucky enough to get any) as I collect it, and you shall make your own inferences. That will be a little exercise for you; the sort of exercise I should give a pupil if I had one. But I will give you what information I have, and you shall start fairly from this moment. You know the inquest evidence such as it was, and you saw everything I did in Ivy Cottage?’

‘Yes; I think so. But I’m not much the wiser.’

‘Very well. Now I will tell you. What does the whole case look like? How would you class the crime?’

‘I suppose as the police do. An ordinary case of murder with the object of robbery.’

‘It is not an ordinary case. If it were, I shouldn’t know as much as I do, little as that is; the ordinary cases are always difficult. The assailant did not come to commit a burglary, although he was a skilled burglar, or one of them was, if more than one were concerned. The affair has, I think, nothing to do with the expected wedding, nor had Mr Campbell anything to do in it—at any rate, personally—nor the gardener. The criminal (or one of them) was known personally to the dead man, and was well—dressed: he (or again one of them, and I think there were two) even had a chat with Mr Kingscote before the murder took place. He came to ask for something which Mr Kingscote was unwilling to part with,—perhaps hadn’t got. It was not a bulky thing. Now you have all my materials before you.’

‘But all this doesn’t look like the result of the blind spite that would ruin a man’s work first and attack him bodily afterwards.’

‘Spite isn’t always blind, and there are other blind things besides spite; people with good eyes in their heads are blind sometimes, even detectives.’

‘But where did you get all this information? What makes you suppose that this was a burglar who didn’t want to burgle, and a well—dressed man, and so on?’

Hewitt chuckled and smiled again.

‘I saw it—saw it, my boy, that’s all,’ he said ‘But here comes the train.’

On the way back to town, after I had rather minutely described Kingscote’s work on the boarding—house panels, Hewitt asked me for the names and professions of such fellow lodgers in that house as I might remember. ‘When did you leave yourself?’ he ended.

‘Three years ago, or rather more. I can remember Kingscote himself; Turner, a medical student—James Turner, I think; Harvey Challitt, diamond merchant’s articled pupil—he was a bad egg entirely, he’s doing five years for forgery now; by the bye he had the room we are going to see till he was marched off, and Kingscote took it—a year before I left; there was Norton—don’t know what he was “something in the City”, I think; and Carter Paget, in the Admiralty Office. I don’t remember any more at this moment; there were pretty frequent changes. But you can get it all from Mrs Lamb, of course.’

‘Of course; and Mrs Lamb’s exact address is—what?’

I gave him the address, and the conversation became disjointed. At Farringdon station, where we alighted, Hewitt called two hansoms. Preparing to enter one, he motioned me to the other, saying, ‘You get straight away to Mrs Lamb’s at once. She may be going to burn that splintered wood, or to set things to rights, after the manner of her kind, and you can stop her. I must make one or two small inquiries, but I shall be there half an hour after you.’

‘Shall I tell her our object?’

‘Only that I may be able to catch her mischievous lodgers—nothing else yet.’ He jumped into the hansom and was gone.

I found Mrs Lamb still in a state of indignant perturbation over the trick served her four days before. Fortunately, she had left everything in the panelled room

exactly as she had found it, with an idea of being better able to demand or enforce reparation should her lodgers return. ‘The room’s theirs, you see, sir,’ she said, ‘till the end of the week, since they paid in advance, and they may come back and offer to make amends, although I doubt it. As pleasant—spoken a young chap as you might wish, he seemed, him as come to take the rooms. “My cousin,” says he, “is rather an invalid, havin’ only just got over congestion of the lungs, and he won’t be in London till this evening late. He’s comin’ up from Birmingham,” he ses, “and I hope he won’t catch a fresh cold on the way, although of course we’ve got him muffled up plenty.” He took the rooms, sir, like a gentleman, and mentioned several gentlemen’s names I knew well, as had lodged here before; and then he put down on that there very table, sir’—Mrs Lamb indicated the exact spot with her hand, as though that made the whole thing much more wonderful—‘he put down on that very table a week’s rent in advance, and ses, “That’s always the best sort of reference, Mrs Lamb, I think,” as kind—mannered as anything—and never ‘aggled about the amount nor nothing. He only had a little black bag, but he said his cousin had all the luggage coming in the train, and as there was so much, p’r’aps they wouldn’t get it here till next day. Then he went out and came in with his cousin at eleven that night—Sarah let ‘em in her own self—and in the morning they was gone—and this!’ Poor Mrs Lamb, plaintively indignant, stretched her arm towards the wrecked panels.

‘If the gentleman as you say is comin’ on, sir,’ she pursued, ‘can do anything to find ‘em, I’ll prosecute ‘em, that I will, if it costs me ten pound. I spoke to the constable on the beat, but he only looked like a fool, and said if I knew where they were I might charge ‘em with wilful damage, or county court ‘em. Of course I know I can do that if I knew where they were, but how can I find ‘em? Mr Jones he said his name was; but how many Joneses is there in London, sir?’

I couldn’t imagine any answer to a question like this, but I condoled with Mrs Lamb as well as I could. She afterwards went on to express herself much as her sister had done with regard to Kingscote’s death, only as the destruction of her panels loomed larger in her mind, she dwelt primarily on that. ‘It might almost seem,’ she said, ‘that somebody had a deadly spite on the pore young gentleman, and went breakin’ up his paintin’ one night, and murderin’ him the next!’

I examined the broken panels with some care, having half a notion to attempt to deduce something from them myself, if possible. But I could deduce nothing. The beading had been taken out, and the panels, which were thick in the centre

but bevelled at the edges, had been removed and split up literally into thin firewood, which lay in a tumbled heap on the hearth and about the floor. Every panel in the room had been treated in the same way, and the result was a pretty large heap of sticks, with nothing whatever about them to distinguish them from other sticks, except the paint on one face, which I observed in many places had been scratched and scraped away. The rug was drawn half across the hearth, and had evidently been used to deaden the sound of chopping. But mischief—wanton and stupid mischief—was all I could deduce from it all.

Mr Jones's cousin, it seemed, only Sarah had seen, as she admitted him in the evening, and then he was so heavily muffled that she could not distinguish his features, and would never be able to identify him. But as for the other one, Mrs Lamb was ready to swear to him anywhere.

Hewitt was long in coming, and internal symptoms of the approach of dinner—time (we had had no lunch) had made themselves felt before a sharp ring at the door—bell foretold his arrival. 'I have had to wait for answers to a telegram,' he said in explanation, 'but at any rate I have the information I wanted. And these are the mysterious panels, are they?'

Mrs Lamb's true opinion of Martin Hewitt's behaviour as it proceeded would have been amusing to know. She watched in amazement the antics of a man who purposed finding out who had been splitting sticks by dint of picking up each separate stick and staring at it. In the end he collected a small handful of sticks by themselves and handed them to me, saying. 'Just put these together on the table, Brett, and see what you make of them.'

I turned the pieces painted side up, and fitted them together into a complete panel, joining up the painted design accurately. 'It is an entire panel,' I said.

'Good. Now look at the sticks a little more closely, and tell me if you notice anything peculiar about them—any particular in which they? differ from all the others.'

I looked. 'Two adjoining sticks,' I said, 'have each a small semi—circular cavity stuffed with what seems to be putty. Put together it would mean a small circular hole, perhaps a knot—hole, half an inch or so in diameter, in the panel, filled in with putty, or whatever it is.'

'A knot—hole?' Hewitt asked, with particular emphasis.

‘Well, no, not a knot—hole, of course, because that would go right through, and this doesn’t. It is probably less than half an inch deep from the front surface.’

‘Anything else? Look at the whole appearance of the wood itself. Colour, for instance.’

‘It is certainly darker than the rest.’

‘So it is,’ He took the two pieces carrying the puttied hole, threw the rest on the heap, and addressed the landlady. ‘The Mr Harvey Challitt who occupied this room before Mr Kingscote, and who got into trouble for forgery, was the Mr Harvey Challitt who was himself robbed of diamonds a few months before on a staircase, wasn’t he?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Mrs Lamb replied in some bewilderment. ‘He certainly was that, on his own office stairs, chloroformed.’

‘Just so, and when they marched him away because of the forgery, Mr Kingscote changed into his rooms?’

‘Yes, and very glad I was. It was bad enough to have the disgrace brought into the house, without the trouble of trying to get people to take his very rooms, and I thought—’

‘Yes, yes, very awkward, very awkward!’ Hewitt interrupted rather impatiently. ‘The man who took the rooms on Monday, now—you’d never seen him before, had you?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Then is that anything like him?’ Hewitt held a cabinet photograph before her.

‘Why—why—law, yes, that’s him!’

Hewitt dropped the photograph back into his breast pocket with a contented ‘Um,’ and picked up his hat. ‘I think we may soon be able to find that young gentleman for you, Mrs Lamb. He is not a very respectable young gentleman, and perhaps you are well rid of him, even as it is. Come, Brett,’ he added, ‘the day hasn’t been wasted, after all.’

We made towards the nearest telegraph office. On the way I said, 'That puttied—up hole in the piece of wood seems to have influenced you. Is it an important link?'

'Well—yes,' Hewitt answered, 'it is. But all those other pieces are important, too.'

'But why?'

'Because there are no holes in them.' He looked quizzically at my wondering face, and laughed aloud. 'Come,' he said, 'I won't puzzle you much longer. Here is the post—office. I'll send my wire, and then we'll go and dine at Luzatti's.'

He sent his telegram, and we cabbed it to Luzatti's. Among actors, journalists, and others who know town and like a good dinner, Luzatti's is well known. We went upstairs for the sake of quietness, and took a table standing alone in a recess just inside the door. We ordered our dinner, and then Hewitt began:

'Now tell me what your conclusion is in this matter of the Ivy Cottage murder.'

'Mine? I haven't one. I'm sorry I'm so very dull, but I really haven't.'

'Come, I'll give you a point. Here is the newspaper account (torn sacrilegiously from my scrap—book for your benefit) of the robbery perpetrated on Harvey Challitt a few months before his forgery. Read it.'

'Oh, but I remember the circumstances very well. He was carrying two packets of diamonds belonging to his firm downstairs to the office of another firm of diamond merchants on the ground—floor. It was a quiet time in the day, and halfway down he was seized on a dark landing, made insensible by chloroform, and robbed of the diamonds—five or six thousand pounds' worth altogether, of stones of various smallish individual values up to thirty pounds or so. He lay unconscious on the landing till one of the partners, noticing that he had been rather long gone, followed and found him. That's all, I think.'

'Yes, that's all. Well, what do you make of it?'

'I'm afraid I don't quite see the connection with this case.'

'Well, then, I'll give you another point. The telegram I've just sent releases

information to the police, in consequence of which they will probably apprehend Harvey Challitt and his confederate Henry Gillard, alias Jones, for the murder of Gavin Kingscote. Now, then.'

'Challitt! But he's in gaol already.'

'Tut, tut, consider. Five years' penal was his dose, although for the first offence, because the forgery was of an extremely dangerous sort. You left Chelsea over three years ago yourself, and you told me that his difficulty occurred a year before. That makes four years, at least. Good conduct in prison brings a man out of a five year's sentence in that time or a little less, and, as a matter of fact, Challitt was released rather more than a week ago.'

'Still, I'm afraid I don't see what you are driving at.'

'Whose story is this about the diamond robbery from Harvey Challitt?'

'His own.'

'Exactly. His own. Does his subsequent record make him look like a person whose stories are to be accepted without doubt or question?'

'Why, no. I think I see—no, I don't. You mean he stole them himself? I've a sort of dim perception of your drift now, but still I can't fix it. The whole thing's too complicated.'

'It is a little complicated for a first effort, I admit, so I will tell you. This is the story. Harvey Challitt is an artful young man, and decides on a theft of his firm's diamonds. He first prepares a hiding—place somewhere near the stairs of his office, and when the opportunity arrives he puts the stones away, spills his chloroform, and makes a smell—possibly sniffs some, and actually goes off on the stairs, and the whole thing's done. He is carried into the office—the diamonds are gone. He tells of the attack on the stairs, as we have heard, and he is believed. At a suitable opportunity he takes his plunder from the hiding—place, and goes home to his lodgings. What is he to do with those diamonds? He can't sell them yet, because the robbery is publicly notorious, and all the regular jewel buyers know him.

'Being a criminal novice, he doesn't know any regular receiver of stolen goods, and if he did would prefer to wait and get full value by an ordinary sale. There

will always be a danger of detection so long as the stones are not securely hidden, so he proceeds to hide them. He knows that if any suspicion were aroused his rooms would be searched in every likely place, so he looks for an unlikely place. Of course, he thinks of taking out a panel and hiding them behind that. But the idea is so obvious that it won't do; the police would certainly take those panels out to look behind them. Therefore he determines to hide them in the panels. See here'—he took the two pieces of wood with the filled hole from his tail pocket and opened his penknife—the putty near the surface is softer than that near the bottom of the hole; two different lots of putty, differently mixed, perhaps, have been used, therefore, presumably, at different times.

'But to return to Challitt. He makes holes with a centre—bit in different places on the panels, and in each hole he places a diamond, embedding it carefully in putty. He smooths the surface carefully flush with the wood, and then very carefully paints the place over, shading off the paint at the edges so as to leave no signs of a patch. He doesn't do the whole job at once, creating a noise and a smell of paint, but keeps on steadily, a few holes at a time, till in a little while the whole wainscoting is set with hidden diamonds, and every panel is apparently sound and whole.'

'But, then—there was only one such hole in the whole lot.'

Just so, and that very circumstance tells us the whole truth. Let me tell the story first—I'll explain the clue after. The diamonds lie hidden for a few months—he grows impatient. He wants the money, and he can't see a way of getting it. At last he determines to make a bolt and go abroad to sell his plunder. He knows he will want money for expenses, and that he may not be able to get rid of his diamonds at once. He also expects that his suddenly going abroad while the robbery is still in people's minds will bring suspicion on him in any case, so, in for a penny in for a pound, he commits a bold forgery, which, had it been successful, would have put him in funds and enabled him to leave the country with the stones. But the forgery is detected, and he is haled to prison, leaving the diamonds in their wainscot setting.

'Now we come to Gavin Kingscote. He must have been a shrewd fellow—the sort of man that good detectives are made of. Also he must have been pretty unscrupulous. He had his suspicions about the genuineness of the diamond robbery, and kept his eyes open. What indications he had to guide him we don't know, but living in the same house a sharp fellow on the look—out would

probably see enough. At any rate, they led him to the belief that the diamonds were in the thief's rooms, but not among his movables, or they would have been found after the arrest. Here was his chance. Challitt was out of the way for years, and there was plenty of time to take the house to pieces if it were necessary. So he changed into Challitt's rooms.

'How long it took him to find the stones we shall never know. He probably tried many other places first, and, I expect, found the diamonds at last by pricking over the panels with a needle. Then came the problem of getting them out without attracting attention. He decided not to trust to the needle, which might possibly leave a stone or two undiscovered, but to split up each panel carefully into splinters so as to leave no part unexamined. Therefore he took measurements, and had a number of panels made by a joiner of the exact size and pattern of those in the room, and announced to his landlady his intention of painting her panels with a pretty design. This to account for the wet paint, and even for the fact of a panel being out of the wall, should she chance to bounce into the room at an awkward moment. All very clever, eh?'

'Very.'

'Ah, he was a smart man, no doubt. Well, he went to work, taking out a panel, substituting a new one, painting it over, and chopping up the old one on the quiet, getting rid of the splinters out of doors when the booty had been extracted. The decoration progressed and the little heap of diamonds grew. Finally, he came to the last panel, but found that he had used all his new panels and hadn't one left for a substitute. It must have been at some time when it was difficult to get hold of the joiner—Bank Holiday, perhaps, or Sunday, and he was impatient. So he scraped the paint off, and went carefully over every part of the surface—experience had taught him by this that all the holes were of the same sort—and found one diamond. He took it out, refilled the hole with putty, painted the old panel and put it back. These are pieces of that old panel—the only old one of the lot.

'Nine men out of ten would have got out of the house as soon as possible after the thing was done, but he was a cool hand and stayed. That made the whole thing look a deal more genuine than if he had unaccountably cleared out as soon as he had got his room nicely decorated. I expect the original capital for those Stock Exchange operations we heard of came out of those diamonds. He stayed as long as suited him, and left when he set up housekeeping with a view to his

wedding. The rest of the story is pretty plain. You guess it, of course?’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I think I can guess the rest, in a general sort of way—except as to one or two points.’

‘It’s all plain—perfectly. See here! Challitt, in gaol, determines to get those diamonds when he comes out. To do that without being suspected it will be necessary to hire the room. But he knows that he won’t be able to do that himself, because the landlady, of course, knows him, and won’t have an ex—convict in the house. There is no help for it; he must have a confederate, and share the spoil. So he makes the acquaintance of another convict, who seems a likely man for the job, and whose sentence expires about the same time as his own. When they come out, he arranges the matter with this confederate, who is a well—mannered (and pretty well—known) housebreaker, and the latter calls at Mrs Lamb’s house to look for rooms. The very room itself happens to be to let, and of course it is taken, and Challitt (who is the invalid cousin) comes in at night muffled and unrecognizable.

‘The decoration on the panel does not alarm them, because, of course, they suppose it to have been done on the old panels and over the old paint. Challitt tries the spots where diamonds were left—there are none—there is no putty even. Perhaps, think they, the panels have been shifted and interchanged in the painting, so they set to work and split them all up as we have seen, getting more desperate as they go on. Finally they realize that they are done, and clear out, leaving Mrs Lamb to mourn over their mischief.

‘They know that Kingscote is the man who has forestalled them, because Gillard (or Jones), in his chat with the landlady, has heard all about him and his painting of the panels. So the next night they set off for Finchley. They get into Kingscote’s garden and watch him let Campbell out. While he is gone, Challitt quietly steps through the French window into the smoking—room, and waits for him, Gillard remaining outside.

‘Kingscote returns, and Challitt accuses him of taking the stones. Kingscote is contemptuous—doesn’t care for Challitt, because he knows he is powerless, being the original thief himself; besides, knows there is no evidence, since the diamonds are sold and dispersed long ago. Challitt offers to divide the plunder with him—Kingscote laughs and tells him to go; probably threatens to throw him out, Challitt being the smaller man. Gillard, at the open window, hears this,

steps in behind, and quietly knocks him on the head. The rest follows as a matter of course. They fasten the window and shutters, to exclude observation; turn over all the drawers, etc., in case the jewels are there; go to the best bedroom and try there, and so on. Failing (and possibly being disturbed after a few hours' search by the noise of the acquisitive gardener), Gillard, with the instinct of an old thief, determines they shan't go away with nothing, so empties Kingscote's pockets and takes his watch and chain and so on. They go out by the front door and shut it after them. Voila tout.'

I was filled with wonder at the prompt ingenuity of the man who in these few hours of hurried inquiry could piece together so accurately all the materials of an intricate and mysterious affair such as this; but more, I wondered where and how he had collected those materials.

'There is no doubt, Hewitt,' I said, 'that the accurate and minute application of what you are pleased to call your common sense has become something very like an instinct with you. What did you deduce from? You told me your conclusions from the examination of Ivy Cottage, but not how you arrived at them.'

'They didn't leave me much material downstairs, did they? But in the bedroom, the two drawers which the thieves found locked were ransacked—opened probably with keys taken from the dead man. On the floor I saw a bent French nail; here it is. You see, it is twice bent at right angles, near the head and near the point, and there is the faint mark of the pliers that were used to bend it. It is a very usual burglars' tool, and handy in experienced hands to open ordinary drawer locks. Therefore, I knew that a professional burglar had been at work. He had probably fiddled at the drawers with the nail first, and then had thrown it down to try the dead man's keys.

'But I knew this professional burglar didn't come for a burglary, from several indications. There was no attempt to take plate, the first thing a burglar looks for. Valuable clocks were left on mantelpieces, and other things that usually go in an ordinary burglary were not disturbed. Notably, it was to be observed that no doors or windows were broken, or had been forcibly opened; therefore, it was plain that the thieves had come in by the French window of the smoking-room, the only entrance left open at the last thing. Therefore, they came in, or one did, knowing that Mr Kingscote was up, and being quite willing—presumably anxious—to see him. Ordinary burglars would have waited till he had retired,

and then could have got through the closed French window as easily almost as if it were open, notwithstanding the thin wooden shutters, which would never stop a burglar for more than five minutes. Being anxious to see him, they—or again, one of them—presumably knew him. That they had come to get something was plain, from the ransacking. As, in the end, they did steal his money and watch, but did not take larger valuables, it was plain that they had no bag with them—which proves not only that they had not come to burgle, for every burglar takes his bag, but that the thing they came to get was not bulky. Still, they could easily have removed plate or clocks by rolling them up in a table—cover or other wrapper, but such a bundle, carried by well—dressed men, would attract attention—therefore it was probable that they were well dressed. Do I make it clear?’

‘Quite—nothing seems simpler now it is explained—that’s the way with difficult puzzles.’

‘There was nothing more to be got at the house. I had already in my mind the curious coincidence that the panels at Chelsea had been broken the very night before that of the murder, and determined to look at them in any case. I got from you the name of the man who had lived in the panelled room before Kingscote, and at once remembered it (although I said nothing about it) as that of the young man who had been chloroformed for his employer’s diamonds. I keep things of that sort in my mind, you see—and, indeed, in my scrap—book. You told me yourself about his imprisonment, and there I was with what seemed now a hopeful case getting into a promising shape.

‘You went on to prevent any setting to rights at Chelsea, and I made enquiries as to Challitt. I found he had been released only a few days before all this trouble arose, and I also found the name of another man who was released from the same establishment only a few days earlier. I knew this man (Gillard) well, and knew that nobody was a more likely rascal for such a crime as that at Finchley. On my way to Chelsea I called at my office, gave my clerk certain instructions, and looked up my scrap—book. I found the newspaper account of the chloroform business, and also a photograph of Gillard—I keep as many of these things as I can collect. What I did at Chelsea you know. I saw that one panel was of old wood and the rest new. I saw the hole in the old panel, and I asked one or two questions. The case was complete.’

We proceeded with our dinner. Presently I said: ‘It all rests with the police now,

of course?’

‘Of course. I should think it very probable that Challitt and Gillard will be caught. Gillard, at any rate, is pretty well known. It will be rather hard on the surviving Kingscote, after engaging me, to have his dead brother’s diamond transactions publicly exposed as a result, won’t it? But it can’t be helped. Fiat justitia, of course.’

‘How will the police feel over this?’ I asked. ‘You’ve rather cut them out, eh?’

‘Oh, the police are all right. They had not the information I had, you see; they knew nothing of the panel business. If Mrs Lamb had gone to Scotland Yard instead of to the policeman on the beat, perhaps I should never have been sent for.’

The same quality that caused Martin Hewitt to rank as mere ‘common—sense’ his extraordinary power of almost instinctive deduction, kept his respect for the abilities of the police at perhaps a higher level than some might have considered justified.

We sat some little while over our dessert, talking as we sat, when there occurred one of those curious conjunctions of circumstances that we notice again and again in ordinary life, and forget as often, unless the importance of the occasion fixes the matter in the memory. A young man had entered the dining—room, and had taken his seat at a corner table near the back window. He had been sitting there for some little time before I particularly observed him. At last he happened to turn his thin, pale face in my direction, and our eyes met. It was Challitt—the man we had been talking of!

I sprang to my feet in some excitement.

‘That’s the man!’ I cried. ‘Challitt!’

Hewitt rose at my words, and at first attempted to pull me back. Challitt, in guilty terror, saw that we were between him and the door, and turning, leaped upon the sill of the open window, and dropped out. There was a fearful crash of broken glass below, and everybody rushed to the window.

Hewitt drew me through the door, and we ran downstairs. ‘Pity you let out like that,’ he said, as he went. ‘If you’d kept quiet we could have sent out for the

police with no trouble. Never mind—can't help it.'

Below, Challitt was lying in a broken heap in the midst of a crowd of waiters. He had crashed through a thick glass skylight and fallen, back downward, across the back of a lounge. He was taken away on a stretcher unconscious, and, in fact, died in a week in hospital from injuries to the spine.

During his periods of consciousness he made a detailed statement, bearing out the conclusions of Martin Hewitt with the most surprising exactness, down to the smallest particulars. He and Gillard had parted immediately after the crime, judging it safer not to be seen together. He had, he affirmed, endured agonies of fear and remorse in the few days since the fatal night at Finchley, and had even once or twice thought of giving himself up. When I so excitedly pointed him out, he knew at once that the game was up, and took the one desperate chance of escape that offered. But to the end he persistently denied that he had himself committed the murder, or had even thought of it till he saw it accomplished. That had been wholly the work of Gillard, who, listening at the window and perceiving the drift of the conversation, suddenly beat down Kingscote from behind with a life—preserver.

And so Harvey Challitt ended his life at the age of twenty—six.

Gillard was never taken. He doubtless left the country, and has probably since that time become 'known to the police' under another name abroad. Perhaps he has even been hanged, and if he has been, there was no miscarriage of justice, no matter what the charge against him may have been.

THE NICOBAR BULLION CASE

The Angle—Malay Company's steamship Nicobar was returning home after a trading voyage in the Far East, and was due to land at Plymouth with a small general cargo, and gold bullion to the value of £200,000. The presence of this bullion was a source of much conspicuous worry to Mr Brayser, the second officer, who was in charge of the bullion—room. He soon came to suspect the motives of every member of the crew, including the captain. He suspected Captain Mackrie of being in league with the steward, as they were often talking together, and he suspected the carpenter of having duplicate keys to the bullion—room padlock.

It was January, and a fierce storm blew up in the Channel. Within sight of the Eddystone lighthouse, the Nicobar was in collision with a steamer, and the crew and the few passengers had to leave the sinking ship and reach shore by lifeboat. Brayser was anxious about leaving the bullion, but Captain Mackrie told him to leave it. But the captain did speak to the steward, who then went below deck, as if to execute some order. The Nicobar sank within fifteen minutes, only a mile from the shore.

Next day Lloyd's agent was steaming about in a launch from Plymouth, and soon a salvage company's tug came up and lay to by the emerging masts. There was every chance of raising the ship as far as could be seen, and a diver went down from the salvage tug to measure the breach made in the Nicobar's side, in order that the necessary oak planking or sheeting might be got ready for covering the hole, preparatory to pumping and raising. This was done in a very short time, and the necessary telegrams having been sent, the tug remained in its place through the night, and prepared for the sending down of several divers on the morrow to get out the bullion.

Just at this time Martin Hewitt happened to be engaged on a case of some importance and delicacy on behalf of Lloyd's Committee, and was staying for a few days at Plymouth. He heard the story of the wreck, of course, and speaking casually with Lloyd's agent as to the salvage work just beginning, he was told the name of the salvage company's representative on the tug, Mr Percy Merrick—a name he immediately recognized as that of an old acquaintance of his own. So that on the day when the divers were at work in the bullion—room of the sunken Nicobar, Hewitt gave himself a holiday, and went aboard the tug about

noon.

Here he found Merrick, a big, pleasant man of thirty—eight or so. He was very glad to see Hewitt, but was a great deal puzzled as to the results of the morning's work on the wreck. Two cases of gold bars were missing.

‘There was  200,000 worth of bullion on board,’ he said, ‘that’s plain and certain. It was packed in forty cases, each of  5,000 value. But now there are only thirty—eight cases! Two are gone, clearly. I wonder what’s happened?’

‘I suppose your men don’t know anything about it?’ asked Hewitt.

‘No, they’re all right. You see, it’s impossible for them to bring anything up without its being observed, especially as they have to be unscrewed from their diving—dresses here on deck. Besides, bless you, I was down with them.’

‘Oh! Do you dive yourself, then?’

‘Well, I put the dress on sometimes, you know, for any such special occasion as this. I went down this morning. There was no difficulty in getting about on the vessel below, and I found the keys of the bullion—room just where the captain said I would, in his cabin. But the locks were useless, of course, after being a couple of days in salt water. So we just burgled the door with crowbars, and then we saw that we might have done it a bit more easily from outside. For the coasting steamer cut clean into the bunker next the bullion—room, and ripped open the sheet of boiler—plate dividing them.’

‘The two missing cases couldn’t have dropped out that way?’

‘Oh, no. We looked, of course, but it would have been impossible. The vessel has a list the other way—to starboard—and the piled cases didn’t reach as high as the torn part.’

‘What have you done about the missing two—anything?’

‘Wired off to headquarters, of course, at once. And I’ve sent for Captain Mackrie—he’s still in the neighbourhood, I believe—and Brayser, the second officer, who had charge of the bullion—room. They may possibly know something. Anyway, one thing’s plain. There were forty cases at the beginning of the voyage, and now there are only thirty—eight.’

There was a pause; and then Merrick added, 'By the bye, Hewitt, this is rather your line, isn't it? You ought to look up these cases.'

'All right,' he said; 'I'll begin this minute if you'll commission me.'

There was a tap at the door and Captain Mackrie entered. 'Mr Merrick?' he said interrogatively, looking from one to another.

'That's myself, sir,' answered Merrick.

'I'm Captain Mackrie, of the Nicobar. You sent for me, I believe. Something wrong with the bullion I'm told, isn't it?'

Merrick explained matters fully. 'I thought perhaps you might be able to help us, Captain Mackrie. Perhaps I have been wrongly informed as to the number of cases that should have been there?'

'No; there were forty right enough. I think though—perhaps I might be able to give you a sort of hint.'—and Captain Mackrie looked hard at Hewitt.

'This is Mr Hewitt, Captain Mackrie,' Merrick interposed. 'You may speak as freely as you please before him.'

'Well,' Mackrie said, 'if that's so, speaking between ourselves, I should advise you to turn your attention to Brayser.'

'Do you mean,' Hewitt asked, 'that Mr Brayser might give us some useful information?'

Mackrie gave an ugly grin. 'Very likely he might,' he said, 'if he were fool enough. But I don't think you'd get much out of him direct.'

'What, do you suppose he was concerned in any way with the disappearance of this gold?'

'I should think—speaking, as I said before, in confidence and between ourselves—that it's very likely indeed.'

'Why?'

‘Well, he was so eternally cracking on about his responsibility, and pretending to suspect the stokers and the carpenter, and one person and another, of trying to get at the bullion cases—that that alone was almost enough to make one suspicious. He protested so much, you see. He was so conscientious and diligent himself, and all the rest of it, and everybody else was such a desperate thief, and he was so sure there would be some of that bullion missing some day that—that—well, I don’t know if I express his manner clearly, but I tell you I didn’t like it a bit. But there was something more than that. He was eternally smelling about the place, and peeping in at the steward’s pantry—which adjoins the bullion—room on one side, you know—and nosing about in the bunker on the other side. And once I actually caught him fitting keys to the padlocks—keys he’d borrowed from the carpenter’s stores. And every time his excuse was that he fancied he heard somebody or something. Whether or not I succeed in conveying my impressions to you, gentlemen, I can assure you that I regarded his whole manner and actions as very suspicious throughout the voyage, and I made up my mind I wouldn’t forget it if by chance anything did turn out wrong. Well, it has, and now I’ve told you what I’ve observed. It’s for you to see if it will lead you anywhere.’

‘Just so,’ Hewitt answered. ‘But let me fully understand, Captain Mackrie. You say that Mr Brayser had charge of the bullion—room, but that he was trying keys on it from the carpenter’s stores. Where were the legitimate keys then?’

‘In my cabin. They were only handed out when I knew what they were wanted for. There was a Chubb’s lock between the two padlocks, but a duplicate wouldn’t have been hard for Brayser to get.’

‘Well, and suppose he had taken these boxes, where do you think he would keep them?’

‘Impossible to say,’ he replied. ‘He might have hidden ‘em somewhere on board, though I don’t think that’s very likely. He’d be much more likely to have “dumped” it—dropped it overboard at some well—known spot in a foreign port, where he could go later and get it. So that you’ve a deal of scope for search, you see. Anywhere under water from here to Yokohama;’ and Captain Mackrie laughed.

Soon afterward he left, and as he was leaving a man knocked at the cabin door and looked in to say that Mr Brayser was on board. ‘You’ll be able to have a go

at him now,' said the captain. 'Good—day.'

'There's the steward of the Nicobar there too, sir,' said the man after the captain had gone, 'and the carpenter.'

Brayser made his appearance, overflowing with information. He required little assurance to encourage him to speak openly before Hewitt, and he said again all he had so often said before on board the Nicobar.

The men whose movements should be carefully watched, he said, were the captain and the steward. 'Nobody ever heard of a captain and a steward being so thick together. One day I met the captain coming out of the steward's pantry, and then he bullyragged me for being there and sent me on deck. But before that he bullyragged me because I had found out that there were other keys knocking about the place that fitted the padlocks on the bullion—room door. Why should he slang and threaten me for looking after these things and keeping my eye on the bullion—room, as was my duty? But that was the very thing that he didn't like. It was enough for him to see me anxious about the gold to make him furious. Of course his character for meanness and greed is known all through the company's service—he'll do anything to make a bit.'

'But have you any positive idea as to what has become of the gold?'

'Well,' Brayser replied, with a rather knowing air, 'I don't think they've dumped it.'

'Do you mean you think it's still in the vessel—hidden somewhere?'

'No, I don't. I believe the captain and the steward took it ashore, one case each, when we came off in the boats.'

"That would be difficult,' said Hewitt.

'It needn't be, on a black night like that. You see, the parcels are not so big—look at them, a foot by a foot and a half by six inches or so, roughly. Easily slipped under a big coat or covered up with anything. Of course they're a bit heavy—eighty or ninety pounds apiece altogether—but that's not much for a strong man to carry—especially in such a handy parcel, on a black night, with no end of confusion on. Now you just look here—I'll tell you something. The skipper went ashore last in a boat that was sent out by the coasting steamer that

ran into us. I suspected he might be up to something, so I got hold of one of the boat's crew that fetched the skipper ashore, and questioned him quietly—pumped him, you know—and he assures me that the skipper did have a small, heavy sort of parcel with him. I've made inquiries at the railway station and I find that two heavy parcels were sent off yesterday to London—deal boxes wrapped in brown paper, of just about the right size. And the paper got torn before things were sent off, and the clerk could see that the boxes inside were fastened with hoop—iron—like those!' and the second officer pointed triumphantly to the boxes piled at one side of the cabin.

'Well done!' said Hewitt. 'You're quite a smart detective. Did you find out who brought the parcels, and who they were addressed to?'

'No, I couldn't get quite as far as that. Of course the clerk didn't know the names of the senders, and now knowing me, wouldn't tell me exactly where the parcels were going. But I got quite chummy with him after a bit, and I'm going to meet him presently—he has the afternoon off, and we're going for a stroll. I'll find something more, I'll bet you! I'll let you know some more soon.'

Brayser went, and Norton, the steward of the old ship, was brought into the cabin. He was a sharp-eyed, rather cadaverous-looking man, and he spoke with sepulchral hollowness. He had heard, he said, that there was something wrong with the chests of bullion, and came on board to give any information he could. If he might speak strictly confidentially he would suggest that observations be kept on Wickens, the carpenter. He (Norton) didn't want to be uncharitable, but his pantry happened to be next the bullion—room, and he had heard Wickens at work for a very long time just below—on the under side of the floor of the bullion—room, it seemed to him, although, of course, he might have been mistaken. Still, it was very odd that the carpenter always seemed to have a job just at that spot. He also believed that Wickens had keys that fitted the bullion—room door.

'Thank you, Mr Norton,' said Merrick, with a twinkle in his eye; 'we won't forget what you say. Of course, if the stuff is found in consequence of any of your information, you won't lose by it.'

The steward said he hoped not, and he wouldn't fail to keep his eye on the carpenter. He had noticed Wickens was in the tug, and he trusted that if they were going to question him they would do it cautiously, so as not to put him on

his guard. Merrick promised they would.

‘By the bye, Mr Norton,’ asked Hewitt, ‘supposing your suspicions to be justified, what do you suppose the carpenter would do with the bullion?’

‘Well, sir,’ replied Martin, ‘I don’t think he’d keep it on the ship. He’d probably dump it somewhere.’

The steward left, and Merrick lay back in his chair and guffawed aloud. ‘This grows farcical,’ he said, ‘simply farcical. What a happy family they must have been aboard the Nicobar! And now here’s the captain watching the second officer, and the second officer watching the captain and the steward, and the steward watching the carpenter! It’s immense. And now we’re going to see the carpenter. Wonder whom he suspects?’

Hewitt said nothing, but his eyes twinkled with intense merriment, and presently the carpenter was brought into the cabin.

‘Good—day to you, gentlemen,’ said the carpenter in a soft and deferential voice, looking from one to the other. ‘Might I ‘ave the honour of adressin’ the salvage gentlemen?’

‘That’s right,’ Merrick answered, motioning him to a seat. ‘This is the salvage shop, Mr Wickens. What can we do for you?’

The carpenter coughed gently behind his hand. ‘I took the liberty of comin’, gentlemen, consekins o’ ‘earin’ as there was some bullion missin’. P’raps I’m wrong.’

‘Not at all. We haven’t found as much as we expected, and I suppose by this time nearly everybody knows it.’

The carpenter coughed again. ‘Well, gentlemen, my story ain’t a long one. All I’ve to say was what I ‘card on board, just before she went down. The passengers was off, and the crew was gettin’ into the other boats when the skipper turns to the steward an’ speaks to him quiet—like, not observin’, gentlemen, as I was agin ‘is elbow, so for to say. “Ere, Norton,” ‘e sez, or words to that effeck, “why shouldn’t we try getting them things ashore with us—you know, the cases—eh? I’ve a notion we’re pretty close inshore,” ‘e sez, “and there’s nothink of a sea now. You take one, anyway, and I’ll try the other,” ‘e

says, “but don’t make a flourish.” Then he sez, louder, ‘cos o’ the steward goin oft, “they’re the likeliest stuff, and at worst we can but drop ‘em. But look sharp,” ‘e says. Then I gets into the boat, and that’s all I ‘eard.’

‘That was all?’ asked Hewitt, watching the man’s face sharply.

‘All?’ the carpenter answered with some surprise. ‘Yes, that was all; but I think it’s pretty well enough, don’t you? It’s plain enough, what was meant—him and the steward was to take two cases, one apiece, on the quiet, and they was the likeliest stuff aboard, as he said himself. And now there’s two cases o’ bullion missin’.’ With this, he left.

‘Well,’ said Merrick, grinning across the table at Hewitt, ‘this is a queer go, isn’t it? What that man says makes the skipper’s case look pretty fishy, doesn’t it? What he says, and what Brayser says, taken together, makes a pretty strong case—I should say makes the thing a certainty. But what a business! It’s likely to be a bit serious for some one, but it’s a rare joke in a way. Wonder if Brayser will find out anything more? Pity the skipper and steward didn’t agree as to whom they should pretend to suspect. That’s a mistake on their part.’

‘Not at all,’ Hewitt replied. ‘If they are conspiring, and know what they’re about, they will avoid seeming to be both in a tale. The bullion is in bars, I understand?’

‘Yes, five bars in each case; weight, sixteen pounds to a bar.’

‘Let me see,’ Hewitt went on, as he looked at his watch; ‘it is now nearly two o’clock. I must think over these things if I am to do anything in the case. In the meantime, if it could be managed, I should like enormously to have a turn under water in a diving—dress. I have always had a curiosity to see under the sea. Could it be managed now? I might spot something,’ he said; ‘one never knows. And if I do anything in a case I always make it a rule to see and hear everything that can possibly be seen or heard, important or not. Clues lie where least expected. But beyond that, probably I may never have another chance of a little experience in a diving—dress. So if it can be managed I’d be glad.’

‘Very well, you shall go, if you say so. And since it’s your first venture, I’ll come down with you myself. The men are all ashore, I think, or most of them. Come along.’

Hewitt was put in woollens and then in india—rubbers. A leaden—soled boot of

twenty pounds' weight was strapped on each foot, and weights were hung on his back and chest.

'That's the dress that Gullen usually has,' Merrick remarked. 'He's a very smart fellow; we usually send him first, to make measurements and so on. An excellent man, but a bit too fond of the diver's lotion.'

'What's that?' asked Hewitt.

'Oh, you shall try some if you like, afterwards.'

Merrick went first over the ladder at the side, and Hewitt with much difficulty followed. As the water closed over his head, his sensations altered considerably. There was less weight to carry; his arms in particular felt light, though slow in motion. Down, down they went slowly, and all round about it was fairly light, but once on the sunken vessel and among the lower decks, the electric lamps were necessary enough. Once or twice Merrick spoke, laying his helmet against Hewitt's for the purpose of instructing him to keep his air—pipe, life—line, and lamp connection from fouling something at every step. Here and there shadowy swimming shapes came out of the gloom, attracted by their lamps, to dart into obscurity again with a twist of the tail. The fishes were exploring the Nicobar. The hatchway of the lower deck was open, and down this they passed to the orlop deck. A little way along this they came to a door standing open, with a broken lock hanging to it. It was the door of the bullion—room, which had been forced by the divers in the morning.

Merrick indicated by signs how the cases had been found piled on the floor. One of the sides of the room of thin steel was torn and thrust in the length of its whole upper half, and when they backed out of the room and passed the open door they stood in the great breach made by the bow of the strange coasting vessel. Steel, iron, wood, and everything stood in rents and splinters, and through the great gap they looked out into the immeasurable ocean.

They regained the upper deck, and Hewitt, placing his helmet against his companion's, told him that he meant to have a short walk on the ocean bed. He took to the ladder again, where it lay over the side, and Merrick followed him.

The bottom was of that tough, slimy sort of clay—rock that is found in many places about our coasts, and was dotted here and there with lumps of harder rock and clumps of curious weed. The two divers turned at the bottom of the ladder,

walked a few steps, and looked up at the great hole in the Nicobar's side.

Hewitt turned away, and began walking about. Once or twice he stood and looked thoughtfully at the ground he stood on, which was fairly flat. He turned over with his foot a whitish, clean—looking stone about as large as a loaf. Then he wandered on slowly, once or twice stopping to examine the rock beneath him, and presently stooped to look at another stone nearly as large as the other, weedy on one side only, standing on the edge of a cavity in the claystone. He pushed the stone into the hole, which it filled, and then he stood up.

Merrick put his helmet against Hewitt's, and shouted, 'Satisfied now? Seen enough of the bottom?'

'In a moment!' Hewitt shouted back; and he straightway began striding out in the direction of the ship. Arrived at the bows, he turned back to the point he started from, striding off again from there to the white stone he had kicked over, and from there to the vessel's side again. Merrick watched him in intense amazement, and hurried, as well as he might, after the light of Hewitt's lamp. Arrived for the second time at the bows of the ship, Hewitt turned and made his way along the side to the ladder, and forthwith ascended, followed by Merrick. There was no halt at the deck this time, and the two made their way up and up into the lighter water above, and the world of air.

On the tug, as the men were unscrewing them from their waterproof prisons, Merrick asked Hewitt, 'Will you try the "lotion" now?'

'No,' Hewitt replied, 'I won't go quite so far as that. But I will have a little whisky, if you've any in the cabin. And give me a pencil and a piece of paper.'

These things were brought, and on the paper Martin Hewitt immediately wrote a few figures and kept it in his hand.

'I might easily forget those figures,' he observed.

Merrick wondered, but said nothing.

Once more comfortably in the cabin, and clad in his usual garments, Hewitt asked if Merrick could produce a chart of the parts thereabout.

'Here you are,' was the reply, 'coast and all. Big enough, isn't it? I've already

marked the position of the wreck on it in pencil. She lies pointing north by east as nearly exact as anything.'

'As you've begun it,' said Hewitt, 'I shall take the liberty of making a few more pencil marks on this.' And with that he spread out the crumpled note of figures, and began much ciphering and measuring.

'There we are,' he said finally. 'And the nearest village to that is Lostella—indeed, the only coast village in that neighbourhood.' He rose. 'Bring me the sharpest-eyed person on board,' he said; 'that is, if he were here all day yesterday.'

'Well, really I believe the very sharpest chap is the boy. He's most annoyingly observant sometimes. I'll send for him.'

He came—a bright, snub-nosed, impudent-looking young ruffian.

'Yesterday,' said Hewitt, 'no doubt you saw various pieces of wreckage floating about. What were they?'

'Hatch—gratings mostly—nothin' much else.'

'I saw them. Now, remember. Did you see a hatch—grating floating yesterday that was different from the others? A painted one for instance—those out there now are not painted, you know.'

'Yessir, I see a little white 'un painted, bobbin' about away beyond the foremast of the Nicobar.'

'You're sure of that?'

'Certain sure, sir—it was the only painted thing floatin'. And today it's washed away somewheres.'

'So I noticed. You're a smart lad. Here's a shilling for you.'

The boy disappeared, and Hewitt turned to Merrick and said, 'I'm going to take a walk down to Lostella now—it's only two or three miles along the coast, but it will soon be getting dark.'

‘But what sort of a clue have you got? I didn’t—’

‘Never mind,’ replied Hewitt, with a chuckle. ‘Officially, you know, I’ve no right to a clue just yet—I’m not commissioned. When I am I’ll tell you everything.’

Hewitt was scarcely ashore when he was seized by the excited Brayser, who told him that the railway clerk had recognized Norton as being the sender of the packages, and he had found out that they being sent to Captain Mackrie’s London address. He was going to London himself to pursue the matter further. With this, the zealous second officer dashed off without waiting for a reply. Hewitt looked after him with an amused smile, and turned off towards Lostella.

It was about eleven the next morning when Merrick received the following note, brought by a boatman:

‘DEAR MERRICK,—Am I commissioned? If not, don’t trouble, but if I am, be just outside Lostella, at the turning before you come to the Smack Inn, at two o’clock. Bring with you a light cart, a policeman—or two perhaps will be better—and a man with a spade. There will probably be a little cabbage—digging. Are you fond of the sport?—Yours, MARTIN HEWITT.

‘P.S.—Keep all your men aboard; bring a spade artist from town.’

Merrick was off in a boat at once. His principals had replied to his telegram after Hewitt’s departure the day before, giving him a free hand to do whatever seemed best. With some little difficulty he got the policemen, and with none at all he got a light cart and a jobbing man with a spade. Together they drove off to the meeting—place.

It was before the time, but Martin Hewitt was there, waiting. ‘You’re quick,’ he said, ‘but the sooner the better.’

‘Have you got the stuff, then?’ Merrick asked anxiously.

‘No not yet,’ Hewitt replied, ‘but I think we’re about at the end of the job—it’s been a fairly lucky one. But I’ll explain after.’

Just beyond the Smack Inn, Hewitt halted the cart, and all got down. They looped the horse’s reins round a hedge—stake and proceeded the small remaining distance on foot, with the policeman behind, to avoid a premature

scare. They turned up a lane behind a few small and rather dirty cottages facing the sea, each with its patch of kitchen garden behind. Hewitt led the way to the second garden pushed open the wicket gate and walked boldly in, followed by the others.

Cabbages covered most of the patch, and seemed pretty healthy in their situation, with the exception of half a dozen—singularly enough, all together in a group. These were drooping, yellow and wilted, and towards these Hewitt straightway walked. ‘Dig up those wilted cabbages,’ he said to the jobbing man. ‘They’re really useless now. You’ll probably find something else six inches down or so.’

The man struck his spade into the soft earth, wherein it stopped suddenly with a thud. But at this moment a gaunt, slatternly woman, with a black eye, a handkerchief over her head, and her skirt pinned up in front, observing the invasion from the back door of the cottage, rushed out like a maniac and attacked the party valiantly with a broom. She upset the jobbing man over his spade, knocked off one policeman’s helmet, lunged into the other’s face with her broom, and was making her second attempt to hit Hewitt (who had dodged), when Merrick caught her firmly by the elbows from behind, pressed them together, and held her. She screamed, ‘Peter! Peter! Come ‘ee, come ‘ee here! Davey! They’re come!’

A grimy child came to the cottage door, and seeing the woman thus held, and strangers in the garden, set up a piteous howl. Meantime the digger had uncovered two wooden boxes, each eighteen inches long or so, bound with hoop—iron and sealed. One had been torn partly open at the top, and the broken wood roughly replaced. When this was lifted, bars of yellow metal were visible within.

The woman still screamed vehemently, and struggled. The grimy child retreated, and then there appeared at the door, staggering hazily and rubbing his eyes, a shaggy, unkempt man, in shirt and trousers. He looked stupidly at the scene before him, and his jaw dropped.

‘Take that man,’ cried Hewitt. ‘He’s one!’ And the policeman promptly took him, so that he had handcuffs on his wrists before he had collected his faculties sufficiently to begin swearing.

Hewitt and the other policeman entered the cottage, and found another man,

younger, and fast asleep. ‘He’s the other,’ said Hewitt. ‘Take him.’ And this one was handcuffed before he woke.

Then the recovered gold was put into the cart, and with the help of the village constable, who brought his own handcuffs for the benefit and adornment of the lady with the broom, such a procession marched out of Lostella as had never been dreamed of by the oldest inhabitant in his worst nightmare, nor recorded in the whole history of Cornwall.

‘Now,’ said Hewitt, turning to Merrick, ‘we must have that fellow of yours—what’s his name—Gullen, isn’t it? The one that went down to measure the hole in the ship. You’ve kept him aboard, of course?’

‘What, Gullen?’ exclaimed Merrick. ‘Gullen? Well, as a matter of fact he went ashore last night and hasn’t come back. But you don’t mean to say—’

‘I do,’ replied Hewitt. ‘And now you’ve lost him.’

Back on the tug Hewitt explained to Merrick how he had uncovered the plot. Gullen and his confederates had visited the scene the day before Gullen was due to inspect the breach in the Nicobar’s side. They had left a large white stone with a hook and a line attached on the sea bed, and joined the line to a float on the surface. As there was a lot of debris floating about on the surface they thought it would be safe to use a hatch—grating as a marker, but forgot that the Nicobar gratings were all plain wood, and theirs was painted white.

The next day Gullen dragged the boxes along the sea bed to the stone, and tied the line around them. That night the men returned. As the salvage tug was still there, they used a small rowing boat to come in and pick up the float, hoping not to be noticed. They took the float back to a larger fishing boat which had the weight to pull up the heavy boxes.

By making notes and marking them down on a chart he had been able to ascertain the direction the boat had gone in, and all indications pointed to Lostella.

‘I made off toward Lostella. The tide was low and it was getting dusk when I arrived. A number of boats and smacks were lying anchored on the beach, but there were few people to be seen. I began looking out for smacks with white—painted fittings in them. There are not so many of these among fishing vessels—

brown or red is more likely, or sheer colourless dirt over paint unrecognizable. There were only two that I saw last night. The first might have been the one I wanted, but there was nothing to show it. The second was the one. She was half—decked and had a small white—painted hatch. I shifted the hatch and found a long line, attached to the grating at one end and carrying a hook at the other! They had neglected to unfasten their apparatus—perhaps had an idea that there might be a chance of using it again in a few days, I went to the transom and read the inscriptions, “Rebecca, Peter and David Garthew, Lostella”. Then my business was to find the Garthews.

‘I wandered about the village for some little time, and presently got hold of a boy. I made a simple excuse for asking about the Garthews—wanted to go for a sail tomorrow. The boy, with many grins, confided to me that both of the Garthews were “on the booze”. I should find them at the Smack Inn, where they had been all day, drunk as fiddlers. This seemed a likely sort of thing after the haul they had made. I went to the Smack Inn, determined to claim old friendships with the Garthews, although I didn’t know Peter from David. There they were—one sleepy drunk, and the other loving and crying drunk. I got as friendly as possible with them under the circumstances, and at closing time stood another gallon of beer and carried it home for them, while they carried each other. I took care to have a good look round in the cottage. I even helped Peter’s “old woman”—the lady with the broom—to carry them up to bed. But nowhere could I see anything that looked like a bullion—case or a hiding—place for one.

‘This morning I was at Lostella before ten, and took a look at the Garthew’s cabbages. It seemed odd that half a dozen, all in a clump together, looked withered and limp, as though they had been dug up hastily, the roots broken, perhaps, and then replanted. And altogether these particular cabbages had a dissipated, leaning—different—ways look, as though they had been on the loose with the Garthews. As expected, there was a box below. The rest you saw for yourself. I think you and I may congratulate each other on having dodged that broom. It hit all the others.’

‘What I’m wild about,’ said Merrick, ‘is having let that scoundrel Gullen get off. He’s an artful chap, without a doubt. He saw us go over the side, you know, and after you had gone he came into the cabin for some instructions. Your pencil notes and the chart were on the table, and no doubt he put two and two together (which was more than I could do, not knowing what had happened), and concluded to make himself safe for a bit. He had no leave that night—he just

pulled away on the quiet. Why didn't you give me the tip to keep him?'

'That wouldn't have done. In the first place, there was no legal evidence to warrant his arrest, and ordering him to keep aboard would have aroused his suspicions. I didn't know at the time how many days, or weeks, it would take me to find the bullion, if I ever found it, and in that time Gullen might have communicated in some way with his accomplices, and so spoilt the whole thing. Yes, certainly he seems to have been fairly smart in his way. He knew he would probably be sent down first, as usual, alone to make measurements, and conceived his plan and made his arrangements forthwith.'

'But now what I want to know is what about all those Nicobar people watching and suspecting one another? More especially what about the cases the captain and the steward are said to have fetched ashore?'

Hewitt laughed. 'Well,' he said, 'as to that, the presence of the bullion seems to have bred all sorts of mutual suspicion on board the ship. Brayser was over—fussy, and his continual chatter started it probably, so that it spread like an infection. As to the captain and the steward, of course I don't know anything but that their rescued cases were not bullion cases. Probably they were doing a little private trading—it's generally the case when captain and steward seem unduly friendly for their relative positions—and perhaps the case contained something specially valuable: vases or bronzes from Japan, for instance; possibly the most valuable things of the size they had aboard. Then, if they had insured their things, Captain Mackrie (who has the reputation of a sharp and not very scrupulous man) might possibly think it rather a stroke of business to get the goods and the insurance money too, which would lead him to keep his parcels as quiet as possible. But that's as it may be.'

The case was much as Hewitt had surmised. The zealous Brayser, posting to London in hot haste after Mackrie, spent some days in watching him. At last the captain and the steward with their two boxes took a cab and went to Bond Street, with Brayser in another cab behind them. The two entered a shop, the window of which was set out with rare curiosities and much old silver and gold. Brayser could restrain himself no longer. He grabbed a passing policeman, and rushed with him into the shop. There they found the captain and the steward with two small packing cases opened before them, trying to sell a couple of very ancient—looking Japanese bronze figures, of that curious old workmanship and varied colour of metal that in genuine examples mean nowadays high money value.

Brayser vanished: there was too much chaff for him to live through in the British mercantile after this adventure. The fact was, the steward had come across the bargain, but had not sufficient spare cash to buy, so he called in the aid of the captain, and they speculated in the bronzes as partners. There was much anxious inspection of the prizes on the way home, and much discussion as to the proper price to ask. Finally, it was said, they got three hundred pounds for the pair.

Now and again Hewitt meets Merrick still. Sometimes Merrick says, ‘Now, I wonder after all whether or not some of those Nicobar men who were continually dodging suspiciously about that bullion—room did mean having a dash at the gold if there were a chance?’ And Hewitt replies, ‘I wonder.’

IV. THE FLITTERBAT LANCERS

It was late on a summer evening, two or three years back, that I drowsed in my armchair over a particularly solid and ponderous volume of essays on social economy. I was doing a good deal of reviewing at the time, and I remember that this particular volume had a property of such exceeding toughness that I had already made three successive attacks on it, on as many successive evenings, each attack having been defeated in the end by sleep. The weather was hot, my chair was very comfortable, and the book had somewhere about its strings of polysyllables an essence as of laudanum. Still something had been done on each evening, and now on the fourth I strenuously endeavoured to finish the book. I was just beginning to feel that the words before me were sliding about and losing their meanings, when a sudden crash and a jingle of broken glass behind me woke me with a start, and I threw the book down. A pane of glass in my window was smashed, and I hurried across and threw up the sash to see, if I could, whence the damage had come.

The building in which my chambers (and Martin Hewitt’s office) were situated was accessible—or rather visible, for there was no entrance—from the rear. There was, in fact, a small courtyard, reached by a passage from the street behind, and into this courtyard, my sitting-room window looked.

“Hullo, there!” I shouted. But there came no reply. Nor could I distinguish anybody in the courtyard. Some men had been at work during the day on a drainpipe, and I reflected that probably their litter had provided the stone with which my window had been smashed. As I looked, however, two men came hurrying from the passage into the court, and going straight into the deep shadow

of one corner, presently appeared again in a less obscure part, hauling forth a third man, who must have already been there in hiding. The third man struggled fiercely but without avail, and was dragged across toward the passage leading to the street beyond. But the most remarkable feature of the whole thing was the silence of all three men. No cry, no exclamation, escaped any of them. In perfect silence the two hauled the third across the courtyard, and in perfect silence he swung and struggled to resist and escape. The matter astonished me not a little, and the men were entering the passage before I found voice to shout at them. But they took no notice, and disappeared. Soon after I heard cab wheels in the street beyond, and had no doubt that the two men had carried off their prisoner.

I turned back into my room a little perplexed. It seemed probable that the man who had been borne off had broken my window. But why? I looked about on the floor, and presently found the missile. It was, as I had expected, a piece of broken concrete, but it was wrapped up in a worn piece of paper, which had partly opened out as it lay on my carpet, thus indicating that it had just been crumpled round the stone.

I disengaged the paper and spread it out. Then I saw it to be a rather hastily written piece of manuscript music, whereof I append a reduced facsimile:

[image]

This gave me no help. I turned the paper this way and that, but could make nothing of it. There was not a mark on it that I could discover, except the music and the scrawled title, Flitterbat Lancers, at the top. The paper was old, dirty, and cracked. What did it all mean? One might conceive of a person in certain circumstances sending a message—possibly an appeal for help—through a friend's window, wrapped round a stone, but this seemed to be nothing of that sort.

Once more I picked up the paper, and with an idea to hear what the Flitterbat Lancers sounded like, I turned to my little pianette and strummed over the notes, making my own time and changing it as seemed likely. But I could by no means extract from the notes anything resembling an air. I half thought of trying Martin Hewitt's office door, in case he might still be there and offer a guess at the meaning of my smashed window and the scrap of paper, when Hewitt himself came in. He had stayed late to examine a bundle of papers in connection with a case just placed in his hands, and now, having finished, came to find if I were

disposed for an evening stroll before turning in. I handed him the paper and the piece of concrete, observing, "There's a little job for you, Hewitt, instead of the stroll." And I told him the complete history of my smashed window.

Hewitt listened attentively, and examined both the paper and the fragment of paving. "You say these people made absolutely no sound whatever?" he asked.

"None but that of scuffling, and even that they seemed to do quietly."

"Could you see whether or not the two men gagged the other, or placed their hands over his mouth?"

"No, they certainly didn't do that. It was dark, of course, but not so dark as to prevent my seeing generally what they were doing."

Hewitt stood for half a minute in thought, and then said, "There's something in this, Brett—what, I can't guess at the moment, but something deep, I fancy. Are you sure you won't come out now?"

I told Hewitt that I was sure, and that I should stick to my work.

"Very well," he said; "then perhaps you will lend me these articles?" holding up the paper and the stone.

"Delighted," I said. "If you get no more melody out of the clinker than I did out of the paper, you won't have a musical evening. Goodnight!"

Hewitt went away with the puzzle in his hand, and I turned once more to my social economy, and, thanks to the gentleman who smashed my window, conquered.

*

At this time my only regular daily work was on an evening paper so that I left home at a quarter to eight on the morning following the adventure of my broken window, in order, as usual, to be at the office at eight; consequently it was not until lunchtime that I had an opportunity of seeing Hewitt. I went to my own rooms first, however, and on the landing by my door I found the housekeeper in conversation with a shortish, sun-browned man, whose accent at once convinced me that he hailed from across the Atlantic. He had called, it appeared, three or

four times during the morning to see me, getting more impatient each time. As he did not seem even to know my name, the housekeeper had not considered it expedient to give him any information about me, and he was growing irascible under the treatment. When I at last appeared, however, he left her and approached me eagerly.

“See here, sir,” he said, “I’ve been stumpin’ these here durn stairs o’ yours half through the mornin’. I’m anxious to apologize, and fix up some damage.”

He had followed me into my sitting-room, and was now standing with his back to the fireplace, a dripping umbrella in one hand, and the forefinger of the other held up boulder-high and pointing, in the manner of a pistol, to my window, which, by the way, had been mended during the morning, in accordance with my instructions to the housekeeper.

“Sir,” he continued, “last night I took the extreme liberty of smashin’ your winder.”

“Oh,” I said, “that was you, was it?”

“It was, sir—me. For that I hev come humbly to apologize. I trust the draft has not discommoded you, sir. I regret the accident, and I wish to pay for the fixin’ up and the general inconvenience.” He placed a sovereign on the table. “I ‘low you’ll call that square now, sir, and fix things friendly and comfortable as between gentlemen, an’ no ill will. Shake.”

And he formally extended his hand.

I took it at once. “Certainly,” I said. “As a matter of fact, you haven’t inconvenienced me at all; indeed, there were some circumstances about the affair that rather interested me.” And I pushed the sovereign toward him.

“Say now,” he said, looking a trifle disappointed at my unwillingness to accept his money, “didn’t I startle your nerves?”

“Not a bit,” I answered, laughing. “In fact, you did me a service by preventing me going to sleep just when I shouldn’t; so we’ll say no more of that.”

“Well—there was one other little thing,” he pursued, looking at me rather sharply as he pocketed the sovereign. “There was a bit o’ paper round that pebble

that came in here. Didn't happen to notice that, did you?"

"Yes, I did. It was an old piece of manuscript music."

"That was it—exactly. Might you happen to have it handy now?"

"Well," I said, "as a matter of fact a friend of mine has it now. I tried playing it over once or twice, as a matter of curiosity, but I couldn't make anything of it, and so I handed it to him."

"Ah!" said my visitor, watching me narrowly, "that's a puzzler, that Flitterbat Lancers—a real puzzler. It whips 'em all. Ha, ha'." He laughed suddenly—a laugh that seemed a little artificial. "There's music fellers as 'lows to set right down and play off anything right away that can't make anything of the Flitterbat Lancers. That was two of 'em that was monkeyin' with me last night. They never could make anythin' of it at all, and I was tantalizing them with it all along till they got real mad, and reckoned to get it out o' my pocket and learn it at home. Ha, ha! So I got away for a bit, and just rolled it round a stone and heaved it through your winder before they could come up, your winder being the nearest one with a light in it. Ha, ha! I'll be considerable obliged you'll get it from your friend right now. Is he stayin' hereabout?"

The story was so ridiculously lame that I determined to confront my visitor with Hewitt, and observe the result. If he had succeeded in making any sense of the Flitterbat Lancers, the scene might be amusing. So I answered at once, "Yes; his office is on the floor below; he will probably be in at about this time. Come down with me."

We went down, and found Hewitt in his outer office. "This gentleman," I told him with a solemn intonation, "has come to ask for his piece of manuscript music, the Flitterbat Lancers. He is particularly proud of it, because nobody who tries to play it can make any sort of tune out of it, and it was entirely because two dear friends of his were anxious to drag it out of his pocket and practice it over on the quiet that he flung it through my windowpane last night, wrapped round a piece of concrete."

The stranger glanced sharply at me, and I could see that my manner and tone rather disconcerted him. Burt Hewitt came forward at once. "Oh, yes," he said "just so—quite a natural sort of thing. As a matter of fact, I quite expected you. Your umbrella's wet—do you mind putting it in the stand? Thank you. Come

into my private office.”

We entered the inner room, and Hewitt, turning to the stranger, went on: “Yes, that is a very extraordinary piece of music, that Flitterbat Lancers. I have been having a little bit of practice with it myself, though I’m really nothing of a musician. I don’t wonder you are anxious to keep it to yourself. Sit down.”

The stranger, with a distrustful look at Hewitt, complied. At this moment, Hewitt’s clerk, Kerrett, entered from the outer office with a slip of paper. Hewitt glanced at it, and crumpled it in his hand. “I am engaged just now,” was his remark, and Kerrett vanished.

“And now,” Hewitt said, as he sat down and suddenly turned to the stranger with an intent gaze, “and now, Mr Hooker, we’ll talk of this music.”

The stranger started and frowned. “You’ve the advantage of me, sir,” he said; “you seem to know my name, but I don’t know yours.”

Hewitt smiled pleasantly. “My name,” he said, “is Hewitt, Martin Hewitt, and it is my business to know a great many things. For instance, I know that you are Mr Reuben B Hooker, of Robertsville, Ohio.”

The visitor pushed his chair back, and stared. “Well—that gits me,” he said. “You’re a pretty smart chap, Mr Hewitt. I’ve heard your name before, of course. And—and so you’ve been a-studyin’ the Flitterbat Lancers, have you?” This with a keen glance at Hewitt’s face. “Well, s’pose you have. What’s your idea?”

“Why,” answered Hewitt, still keeping his steadfast gaze on Hooker’s eyes, “I think it’s pretty late in the century to be fishing about for the Wedlake jewels.”

These words astonished me almost as much as they did Mr Hooker. The great Wedlake jewel robbery is, as many will remember, a traditional story of the ‘sixties. I remembered no more of it at the time than probably most men do who have at some time or another read the causes celebra of the century. Sir Francis Wedlake’s country house had been robbed, and the whole of Lady Wedlake’s magnificent collection of jewels stolen. A man named Shiels, a strolling musician, had been arrested and had been sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. Another man named Legg—one of the comparatively wealthy scoundrels who finance promising thefts or swindles and pocket the greater part of the proceeds—had also been punished, but only a very few of the trinkets, and

those quite unimportant items, had been recovered. The great bulk of the booty was never brought to light. So much I remembered, and Hewitt's sudden mention of the Wedlake jewels in connection with my broken window, Mr Reuben B. Hooker, and the Flitterbat Lancers, astonished me not a little.

As for Hooker, he did his best to hide his perturbation, but with little success. "Wedlake jewels, eh?" he said; "and—and what's that to do with it, anyway?"

"To do with it?" responded Hewitt, with an air of carelessness. "Well, well, I had my idea, nothing more. If the Wedlake jewels have nothing to do with it, we'll say no more about it, that's all. Here's your paper, Mr Hooker—only a little crumpled." He rose and placed the article in Mr Hooker's hand, with the manner of terminating the interview.

Hooker rose, with a bewildered look on his face, and turned toward the door. Then he stopped, looked at the floor, scratched his cheek, and finally sat down and put his hat on the ground. "Come," he said, "we'll play a square game. That paper has something to do with the Wedlake jewels, and, win or lose, I'll tell you all I know about it. You're a smart man and whatever I tell you, I guess it won't do me no harm; it ain't done me no good yet, anyway."

"Say what you please, of course," Hewitt answered, "but think first. You might tell me something you'd be sorry for afterward."

"Say, will you listen to what I say, and tell me if you think I've been swindled or not? My two hundred and fifty dollars is gone now, and I guess I won't go skirmishing after it anymore if you think it's no good. Will you do that much?"

"As I said before," Hewitt replied, "tell me what you please, and if I can help you I will. But remember, I don't ask for your secrets."

"That's all right, I guess, Mr Hewitt. Well, now, it was all like this." And Mr Reuben B. Hooker plunged into a detailed account of his adventures since his arrival in London.

Relieved of repetitions, and put as directly as possible, it was as follows: Mr Hooker was a wagon-builder, had made a good business from very humble beginnings, and intended to go on and make it still a better. Meantime, he had come over to Europe for a short holiday—a thing he had promised himself for years. He was wandering about the London streets on the second night after his

arrival in the city, when he managed to get into conversation with two men at a bar. They were not very prepossessing men, though flashily dressed. Very soon they suggested a game of cards. But Reuben B. Hooker was not to be had in that way, and after a while, they parted. The two were amusing enough fellows in their way, and when Hooker saw them again the next night in the same bar, he made no difficulty in talking with them freely. After a succession of drinks, they told him that they had a speculation on hand—a speculation that meant thousands if it succeeded—and to carry out which they were only waiting for a paltry sum of £50. There was a house, they said, in which was hidden a great number of jewels of immense value, which had been deposited there by a man who was now dead. Exactly in what part of the house the jewels were to be found they did not know. There was a paper, they said, which was supposed to contain some information, but as yet they hadn't been quite able to make it out. But that would really matter very little if once they could get possession of the house. Then they would simply set to work and search from the topmost chimney to the lowermost brick, if necessary. The only present difficulty was that the house was occupied, and that the landlord wanted a large deposit of rent down before he would consent to turn out his present tenants and give them possession at a higher rental. This deposit would come to £50, and they hadn't the money. However, if any friend of theirs who meant business would put the necessary sum at their disposal, and keep his mouth shut, they would make him an equal partner in the proceeds with themselves; and as the value of the whole haul would probably be something not very far off £20,000, the speculation would bring a tremendous return to the man who was smart enough to put down his £50.

Hooker, very distrustful, skeptically demanded more detailed particulars of the scheme. But these the two men (Luker and Birks were their names, he found, in course of talking) inflexibly refused to communicate.

“Is it likely,” said Luker, “that we should give the ‘ole thing away to anybody who might easily go with his fifty pounds and clear out the bloomin’ show? Not much. We’ve told you what the game is, and if you’d like to take a flutter with your fifty, all right; you’ll do as well as anybody, and we’ll treat you square. If you don’t—well, don’t, that’s all. We’ll get the oof from somewhere—there’s blokes as ‘ud jump at the chance. Anyway, we ain’t going to give the show away before you’ve done somethin’ to prove you’re on the job, straight. Put your money in, and you shall know as much as we do.”

Then there were more drinks, and more discussion. Hooker was still reluctant, though tempted by the prospect, and growing more venturesome with each drink.

“Don’t you see,” said Birks, “that if we was a-tryin’ to ‘ave you we should out with a tale as long as yer arm, all complete, with the address of the ‘ouse and all. Then I s’pose you’d lug out the pieces on the nail, without askin’ a bloomin’ question. As it is, the thing’s so perfectly genuine that we’d rather lose the chance and wait for some other bloke to find the money than run a chance of givin’ the thing away. It’s a matter o’ business, simple and plain, that’s all. It’s a question of either us trustin’ you with a chance of collarin’ twenty thousand pounds or you trustin’ us with a paltry fifty. We don’t lay out no ‘igh moral sentiments, we only say the weight o’ money is all on one side. Take it or leave it, that’s all. ‘Ave another Scotch?”

The talk went on and the drinks went on, and it all ended, at “chucking-out time,” in Reuben B. Hooker handing over five  10 notes, with smiling, though slightly incoherent, assurances of his eternal friendship for Luker and Birks.

In the morning he awoke to the realization of a bad head, a bad tongue, and a bad opinion of his proceedings of the previous night. In his sober senses it seemed plain that he had been swindled. All day he cursed his fuddled foolishness, and at night he made for the bar that had been the scene of the transaction, with little hope of seeing either Luker or Birks, who had agreed to be there to meet him. There they were, however, and, rather to his surprise, they made no demand for more money. They asked him if he understood music, and showed him the worn old piece of paper containing the Flitterbat Lancers. The exact spot, they said, where the jewels were hidden was supposed to be indicated somehow on that piece of paper. Hooker did not understand music, and could find nothing on the paper that looked in the least like a direction to a hiding-place for jewels or anything else.

Luker and Birks then went into full particulars of their project. First, as to its history. The jewels were the famous Wedlake jewels, which had been taken from Sir Francis Wedlake’s house in 1866 and never heard of again. A certain Jerry Shiels had been arrested in connection with the robbery, had been given a long sentence of penal servitude, and had died in jail. This Jerry Shiels was an extraordinarily clever criminal, and travelled about the country as a street musician. Although an expert burglar, he very rarely perpetrated robberies

himself, but acted as a sort of traveling fence, receiving stolen property and transmitting it to London or out of the country. He also acted as the agent of a man named Legg, who had money, and who financed any likely looking project of a criminal nature that Shiels might arrange.

Jerry Shiels traveled with a “pardner”—a man who played the harp and acted as his assistant and messenger in affairs wherein Jerry was reluctant to appear personally. When Shiels was arrested, he had in his possession a quantity of printed and manuscript music, and after his first remand his “pardner,” Jimmy Snape, applied for the music to be given up to him, in order, as he explained, that he might earn his living. No objection was raised to this, and Shiels was quite willing that Snape should have it, and so it was handed over. Now among the music was a small slip, headed Flitterbat Lancers, which Shiels had shown to Snape before the arrest. In case of Shiels being taken, Snape was to take this slip to Legg as fast as he could.

But as chance would have it, on that very day Legg himself was arrested, and soon after was sentenced also to a term of years. Snape hung about in London for a little while, and then emigrated. Before leaving, however, he gave the slip of music to Luker’s father, a rag-shop keeper, to whom he owed money. He explained its history, and Luker senior made all sorts of fruitless efforts to get at the information concealed in the paper. He had held it to the fire to bring out concealed writing, had washed it, had held it to the light till his eyes ached, had gone over it with a magnifying glass—all in vain. He had got musicians to strum out the notes on all sorts of instruments—backwards, forwards, alternately, and in every other way he could think of. If at any time he fancied a resemblance in the resulting sound to some familiar song-tune, he got that song and studied all its words with loving care, upside-down, right-side up—every way. He took the words Flitterbat Lancers and transposed the letters in all directions, and did everything else he could think of. In the end he gave it up, and died. Now, lately, Luker junior had been impelled with a desire to see into the matter. He had repeated all the parental experiments, and more, with the same lack of success. He had taken his “pal” Birks into his confidence, and together they had tried other experiments till at last they began to believe that the message had probably been written in some sort of invisible ink which the subsequent washings had erased altogether. But he had done one other thing: he had found the house which Shiels had rented at the time of his arrest, and in which a good quantity of stolen property—not connected with the Wedlake case—was discovered. Here, he argued, if anywhere, Jerry Shiels had hidden the jewels. There was no other

place where he could be found to have lived, or over which he had sufficient control to warrant his hiding valuables therein. Perhaps, once the house could be properly examined, something about it might give a clue as to what the message of the Flitterbat Lancers meant.

Hooker, of course, was anxious to know where the house in question stood, but this Luker and Birks would on no account inform him. "You've done your part," they said, "and now you leave us to do ours. There's a bit of a job about gettin' the tenants out. They won't go, and it'll take a bit of time before the landlord can make them. So you just hold your jaw and wait. When we're safe in the 'ouse, and there's no chance of anybody else pokin' in, then you can come and help find the stuff."

Hooker went home that night sober, but in much perplexity. The thing might be genuine, after all; indeed, there were many little things that made him think it was. But then, if it were, what guarantee had he that he would get his share, supposing the search turned out successful? None at all. But then it struck him for the first time that these jewels, though they may have lain untouched so long, were stolen property after all. The moral aspect of the affair began to trouble him a little, but the legal aspect troubled him more. That consideration however, he decided to leave over for the present. He had no more than the word of Luker and Birks that the jewels (if they existed) were those of Lady Wedlake, and Luker and Birks themselves only professed to know from hearsay. At any rate, he made up his mind to have some guarantee for his money. In accordance with this resolve, he suggested, when he met the two men the next day, that he should take charge of the slip of music and make an independent study of it. This proposal, however, met with an instant veto.

Hooker resolved to make up a piece of paper, folded as like the slip of music as possible, and substitute one for the other at their next meeting. Then he would put the Flitterbat Lancers in some safe place, and face his fellow conspirators with a hand of cards equal to their own. He carried out his plan the next evening with perfect success, thanks to the contemptuous indifference with which Luker and Birks had begun to regard him. He got the slip in his pocket, and left the bar. He had not gone far, however, before Luker discovered the loss, and soon he became conscious of being followed. He looked for a cab, but he was in a dark street, and no cab was near. Luker and Birks turned the corner and began to run. He saw they must catch him. Everything now depended on his putting the Flitterbat Lancers out of their reach, but where he could himself recover it. He

ran till he saw a narrow passageway on his right, and into this he darted. It led into a yard where stones were lying about, and in a large building before him he saw the window of a lighted room a couple of floors up. It was a desperate expedient, but there was no time for consideration. He wrapped a stone in the paper and flung it with all his force through the lighted window. Even as he did it he heard the feet of Luker and Birks as they hurried down the street. The rest of the adventure in the court I myself saw.

Luker and Birks kept Hooker in their lodgings all that night. They searched him unsuccessfully for the paper; they bullied, they swore, they cajoled, they entreated, they begged him to play the game square with his pals. Hooker merely replied that he had put the Flitterbat Lancers where they couldn't easily find it, and that he intended playing the game square as long as they did the same. In the end they released him, apparently with more respect than they had before entertained, advising him to get the paper into his possession as soon as he could.

“And now,” said Mr Hooker, in conclusion of his narrative, “perhaps you'll give me a bit of advice. Am I playin' a fool-game running after these toughs, or ain't I?”

Hewitt shrugged his shoulders. “It all depends,” he said, “on your friends Luker and Birks. They may want to swindle you, or they may not. I'm afraid they'd like to, at any rate. But perhaps you've got some little security in this piece of paper. One thing is plain: they certainly believe in the deposit of the jewels themselves, else they wouldn't have taken so much trouble to get the paper back.”

“Then I guess I'll go on with the thing, if that's it.”

“That depends, of course, on whether you care to take trouble to get possession of what, after all, is somebody else's lawful property.”

Hooker looked a little uneasy. “Well,” he said, “there's that, of course. I didn't know nothin' of that at first, and when I did I'd parted with my money and felt entitled to get something back for it. Anyway, the stuff ain't found yet. When it is, why then, you know, I might make a deal with the owner. But, say, how did you find out my name, and about this here affair being jined up with the Wedlake jewels?”

Hewitt smiled. “As to the name and address, you just think it over a little when you’ve gone away, and if you don’t see how I did it. You’re not so cute as I think you are. In regard to the jewels—well, I just read the message of the Flitterbat Lancers, that’s all.”

“You read it? Whew! And what does it say? How did you do it?” Hooker turned the paper over eagerly in his hands as he spoke.

“See, now,” said Hewitt, “I won’t tell you all that, but I’ll tell you something, and it may help you to test the real knowledge of Luker and Birks. Part of the message is in these words, which you had better write down: Over the coals the fifth dancer slides, says Jerry Shield the homey.

“What?” Hooker exclaimed, “fifth dancer slides over the coals? That’s mighty odd. What’s it all about?”

“About the Wedlake jewels, as I said. Now you can go and make a bargain with Luker and Birks. The only other part of the message is an address, and that they already know, if they have been telling the truth about the house they intend taking. You can offer to tell them what I have told you of the message, after they have told you where the house is, and proved to you that they are taking the steps they talked of. If they won’t agree to that, I think you had best treat them as common rogues and charge them with obtaining your money under false pretenses.”

Nothing more would Hewitt say than that, despite Hooker’s many questions; and when at last Hooker had gone, almost as troubled and perplexed as ever, my friend turned to me and said, “Now, Brett, if you haven’t lunched and would like to see the end of this business, hurry!”

“The end of it?” I said. “Is it to end so soon? How?”

“Simply by a police raid on Jerry Shiels’s old house with a search warrant. I communicated with the police this morning before I came here.”

“Poor Hooker!” I said.

“Oh, I had told the police before I saw Hooker, or heard of him, of course. I just conveyed the message on the music slip—that was enough. But I’ll tell you all about it when there’s more time; I must be off now. With the information I have

given him, Hooker and his friends may make an extra push and get into the house soon, but I couldn't resist the temptation to give the unfortunate Hooker some sort of sporting chance—though it's a poor one, I fear. Get your lunch as quickly as you can, and go at once to Colt Row, Bankside—Southwark way, you know. Probably we shall be there before you. If not, wait.”

Colt Row was not difficult to find. It was one of those places that decay with an excess of respectability, like Drury Lane and Clare Market. Once, when Jacob's Island was still an island, a little farther down the river, Colt Row had evidently been an unsafe place for a person with valuables about him, and then it probably prospered, in its own way. Now it was quite respectable, but very dilapidated and dirty. Perhaps it was sixty yards long—perhaps a little more. It was certainly a very few yards wide, and the houses at each side had a patient and forlorn look of waiting for a metropolitan improvement to come along and carry them away to their rest.

I could see no sign of Hewitt, nor of the police, so I walked up and down the narrow pavement for a little while. As I did so, I became conscious of a face at the window of the least ruinous house in the row, a face that I fancied expressed particular interest in my movements. The house was an old gabled structure, faced with plaster. What had apparently once been a shopwindow on the ground floor was now shuttered up, and the face that watched me—an old woman's—looked out from the window above. I had noted these particulars with some curiosity, when, arriving again at the street corner, I observed Hewitt approaching, in company with a police inspector, and followed by two unmistakable plainclothesmen.

“Well,” Hewitt said, “you're first here after all. Have you seen any more of our friend Hooker?”

“No, nothing.”

“Very well—probably he'll be here before long, though.”

The party turned into Colt Row, and the inspector, walking up to the door of the house with the shuttered bottom window, knocked sharply. There was no response, so he knocked again, equally in vain.

“All out,” said the inspector.

“No,” I said; “I saw a woman watching me from the window above not three minutes ago.”

“Ho, ho!” the inspector replied. “That’s so, eh? One of you—you, Johnson—step round to the back, will you?”

One of the plainclothesmen started off, and after waiting another minute or two the inspector began a thundering cannonade of knocks that brought every available head out of the window of every inhabited room in the Row. At this the woman opened the window, and began abusing the inspector with a shrillness and fluency that added a street-corner audience to that already congregated at the windows.

“Go away, you blaggards!” the lady said, “you ought to be ‘orse-w’ipped, every one of ye! A-comin’ ‘ere a-tryin’ to turn decent people out o’ ‘ouse and ‘ome! Wait till my ‘usband comes ‘ome—‘e’ll show yer, ye mutton-cadgin’ scoundrels! Payin’ our rent reg’lar, and good tenants as is always been—and I’m a respectable married woman, that’s what I am, ye dirty great cow-ards!”—this last word with a low, tragic emphasis.

Hewitt remembered what Hooker had said about the present tenants refusing to quit the house on the landlord’s notice. “She thinks we’ve come from the landlord to turn her out,” he said to the inspector. “We’re not here from the landlord, you old fool!” the inspector said. “We don’t want to turn you out. We’re the police, with a search warrant, and you’d better let us in or you’ll get into trouble.”

““Ark at ‘im!” the woman screamed, pointing at the inspector. ““Ark at ‘im! Thinks I was born yesterday, that feller! Go ‘ome, ye dirty pie-stealer, go ‘ome!”

The audience showed signs of becoming a small crowd, and the inspector’s patience gave out. “Here, Bradley,” he said, addressing the remaining plainclothesman, “give a hand with these shutters,” and the two—both powerful men—seized the iron bar which held the shutters and began to pull. But the garrison was undaunted, and, seizing a broom, the woman began to belabour the invaders about the shoulders and head from above. But just at this moment, the woman, emitting a terrific shriek, was suddenly lifted from behind and vanished. Then the head of the plainclothesman who had gone round to the back appeared, with the calm announcement, “There’s a winder open behind, sir. But I’ll open

the front door if you like.”

In a minute the bolts were shot, and the front door swung back. The placid Johnson stood in the passage, and as we passed in he said, “I’ve locked ‘er in the back room upstairs.”

“It’s the bottom staircase, of course,” the inspector said; and we tramped down into the basement. A little way from the stairfoot Hewitt opened a cupboard door, which enclosed a receptacle for coals. “They still keep the coals here, you see,” he said, striking a match and passing it to and fro near the sloping roof of the cupboard. It was of plaster, and covered the underside of the stairs.

“And now for the fifth dancer,” he said, throwing the match away and making for the staircase again. “One, two, three, four, five,” and he tapped the fifth stair from the bottom.

The stairs were uncarpeted, and Hewitt and the inspector began a careful examination of the one he had indicated. They tapped it in different places, and Hewitt passed his hands over the surfaces of both tread and riser. Presently, with his hand at the outer edge of the riser, Hewitt spoke. “Here it is, I think,” he said; “it is the riser that slides.”

He took out his pocketknife and scraped away the grease and paint from the edge of the old stair. Then a joint was plainly visible. For a long time the plank, grimed and set with age, refused to shift; but at last, by dint of patience and firm fingers, it moved, and was drawn clean out from the end.

Within, nothing was visible but grime, fluff, and small rubbish. The inspector passed his hand along the bottom angle. “Here’s something,” he said. It was the gold hook of an old-fashioned earring, broken off short.

Hewitt slapped his thigh. “Somebody’s been here before us,” he said “and a good time back too, judging from the dust. That hook’s a plain indication that jewellery was here once. There’s plainly nothing more, except—except this piece of paper.” Hewitt’s eyes had detected—black with loose grime as it was—a small piece of paper lying at the bottom of the recess. He drew it out and shook off the dust. “Why, what’s this?” he exclaimed. “More music!”

We went to the window, and there saw in Hewitt’s hand a piece of written musical notation, thus:

[image]

Hewitt pulled out from his pocket a few pieces of paper. "Here is a copy I made this morning of the Flitterbat Lancers, and a note or two of my own as well," he said. He took a pencil, and, constantly referring to his own papers, marked a letter under each note on the last-found slip of music. When he had done this, the letters read:

You are a clever cove whoever you are but there was a cleverer says Jim Snape the horney's mate.

"You see." Hewitt said handing the inspector the paper. "Snape, the unconsidered messenger, finding Legg in prison, set to work and got the jewels for himself. The thing was a cryptogram, of course, of a very simple sort, though uncommon in design. Snape was a humorous soul, too, to leave this message here in the same cipher, on the chance of somebody else reading the Flitterbat Lancers."

"But," I asked, "why did he give that slip of music to Laker's father?"

"Well, he owed him money, and got out of it that way. Also, he avoided the appearance of 'flushness' that paying the debt might have given him, and got quietly out of the country with his spoils."

The shrieks upstairs had grown hoarser, but the broom continued vigorously. "Let that woman out," said the inspector, "and we'll go and report. Not much good looking for Snape now, I fancy. But there's some satisfaction in clearing up that old quarter-century mystery."

We left the place pursued by the execrations of the broom wielder, who bolted the door behind us, and from the window defied us to come back, and vowed she would have us all searched before a magistrate for what we had probably stolen. In the very next street we were in sight of Reuben B. Hooker in the company of two swell-mob-looking fellows, who sheered off down a side turning in sight of our group. Hooker, too, looked rather shy at the sight of the inspector.

"The meaning of the thing was so very plain," Hewitt said to me afterwards, "that the duffers who had the Flitterbat Lancers in hand for so long never saw it at all. If Shiels had made an ordinary clumsy cryptogram, all letters and figures, they would have seen what it was at once, and at least would have tried to read

it; but because it was put in the form of music, they tried everything else but the right way. It was a clever dodge of Shiels's, without a doubt. Very few people, police officers or not, turning over a heap of old music, would notice or feel suspicious of that little slip among the rest. But once one sees it is a cryptogram (and the absence of bar lines and of notes beyond the stave would suggest that) the reading is as easy as possible. For my part I tried it as a cryptogram at once. You know the plan—it has been described a hundred times. See here—look at this copy of the Flitterbat Lancers. Its only difficulty—and that is a small one—is that the words are not divided. Since there are positions for less than a dozen notes on the stave, and there are twenty-six letters to be indicated, it follows that crotchets, quavers, and semiquavers on the same line or space must mean different letters. The first step is obvious. We count the notes to ascertain which sign occurs most frequently, and we find that the crotchet in the top space is the sign required—it occurs no less than eleven times. Now the letter most frequently occurring in an ordinary sentence of English is e. Let us then suppose that this represents e. At once a coincidence strikes us. In ordinary musical notation in the treble clef the note occupying the top space would be E. Let us remember that presently.

“Now the most common word in the English language is the. We know the sign for e, the last letter of this word, so let us see if in more than one place that sign is preceded by two others identical in each case. If so, the probability is that the other two signs will represent t and h, and the whole word will be the. Now it happens in no less than four places the sign e is preceded by the same two other signs—once in the first line, twice in the second, and once in the fourth. No word of three letters ending in e would be in the least likely to occur four times in a short sentence except the. Then we will call it the, and note the signs preceding the e. They are a quaver under the bottom line for the t, and a crotchet on the first space for the h. We travel along the stave, and wherever these signs occur we mark them with t or h, as the case may be.

“But now we remember that e, the crotchet in the top space, is in its right place as a musical note, while the crotchet in the bottom space means h, which is no musical note at all. Considering this for a minute, we remember that among the notes which are expressed in ordinary music on the treble stave, without the use of ledger lines, d, e and f are repeated at the lower and at the upper part of the stave. Therefore, anybody making a cryptogram of musical notes would probably use one set of these duplicate positions to indicate other letters, and as A is in the lower part of the stave, that is where the variation comes in. Let us

experiment by assuming that all the crotchets above f in ordinary musical notation have their usual values, and let us set the letters over their respective notes. Now things begin to shape. Look toward the end of the second line: there is the word the and the letters f f t h, with another note between the two f's. Now that word can only possibly be fifth, so that now we have the sign for i. It is the crotchet on the bottom line. Let us go through and mark the I's.

“And now observe. The first sign of the lot is i, and there is one other sign before the word the. The only words possible here beginning with i, and of two letters, are it, if, is and in. Now we have the signs for t and f, so we know that it isn't it or if. Is would be unlikely here, because there is a tendency, as you see, to regularity in these signs, and t, the next Idler alphabetically to s, is at the bottom of the stave. Let us try n. At once we get the word dance at the beginning of line three. And now we have got enough to see the system of the thing. Make a stave and put G A B C and the higher D E F in their proper musical places. Then fill in the blank places with the next letters of the alphabet downward, h i j, and we find that h and i fall in the places we have already discovered for them as crotchets. Now take quavers, and go on with k l m n o, and so on as before, beginning on the A space. When you have filled the quavers, do the same with semiquavers—there are only six alphabetical letters left for this—u v w x y z. Now you will find that this exactly agrees with all we have ascertained already, and if you will use the other letters to fill up over the signs still unmarked you will get the whole message:

“In the Colt Row ken over the coals the fifth dancer slides says Jerry Shiels the homey.

“‘Dancer,’ as perhaps you didn't know, is thieves' slang for a stair, and ‘homey’ is the strolling musician's name for cornet player. Of course the thing took a little time to work out, chiefly because the sentence was short, and gave one few opportunities. But anybody with the key, using the cipher as a means of communication, would read it easily.

“As soon as I had read it, of course I guessed the purport of the Flitterbat Lancers. Jerry Shiels's name is well-known to anybody with half my knowledge of the criminal records of the century, and his connection with the missing Wedlake jewels, and his death in prison, came to my mind at once. Certainly here was something hidden, and as the Wedlake jewels seemed most likely, I made the shot in talking to Hooker.”

“But you terribly astonished him by telling him his name and address. How was that?” I asked curiously.

Hewitt laughed aloud. “That,” he said; “why, that was the thinnest trick of all. Why, the man had it engraved on the silver band of his umbrella handle. When he left his umbrella outside, Kerrett (I had indicated the umbrella to him by a sign) just copied the lettering on one of the ordinary visitors’ forms, and brought it in. You will remember I treated it as an ordinary visitor’s announcement.” And Hewitt laughed again.

THE NARRATIVE OF MR. JAMES RIGBY

I shall here set down in language as simple and straightforward as I can command, the events which followed my recent return to England; and I shall leave it to others to judge whether or not my conduct has been characterised by foolish fear and ill-considered credulity. At the same time I have my own opinion as to what would have been the behaviour of any other man of average intelligence and courage in the same circumstances; more especially a man of my exceptional upbringing and retired habits.

I was born in Australia, and I have lived there all my life till quite recently, save for a single trip to Europe as a boy, in company with my father and mother. It was then that I lost my father. I was less than nine years old at the time, but my memory of the events of that European trip is singularly vivid.

My father had emigrated to Australia at the time of his marriage, and had become a rich man by singularly fortunate speculations in land in and about Sydney. As a family we were most uncommonly self-centred and isolated. From my parents I never heard a word as to their relatives in England; indeed to this day I do not as much as know what was the Christian name of my grandfather. I have often supposed that some serious family quarrel or great misfortune must have preceded or accompanied my father’s marriage. Be that as it may, I was never able to learn anything of my relatives, either on my mother’s or my father’s side. Both parents, however, were educated people, and indeed I fancy that their habit of seclusion must first have arisen from this circumstance, since the colonists about them in the early days, excellent people as they were, were not as a class distinguished for extreme intellectual culture. My father had his library stocked from England, and added to by fresh arrivals from time to time; and among his books he would pass most of his days, taking, however, now and

again an excursion with a gun in search of some new specimen to add to his museum of natural history, which occupied three long rooms in our house by the Lane Cove river.

I was, as I have said, eight years of age when I started with my parents on a European tour, and it was in the year 1873. We stayed but a short while in England at first arrival, intending to make a longer stay on our return from the Continent. We made our tour, taking Italy last, and it was here that my father encountered a dangerous adventure.

We were at Naples, and my father had taken an odd fancy for a picturesque-looking ruffian who had attracted his attention by a complexion unusually fair for an Italian, and in whom he professed to recognise a likeness to Tasso the poet. This man became his guide in excursions about the neighbourhood of Naples, though he was not one of the regular corps of guides, and indeed seemed to have no regular occupation of a definite sort. “Tasso,” as my father always called him, seemed a civil fellow enough, and was fairly intelligent: but my mother disliked him extremely from the first, without being able to offer any very distinct reason for her aversion. In the event her instinct was proved true.

“Tasso”—his correct name, by the way, was Tommaso Marino—persuaded my father that something interesting was to be seen at the Astroni crater, four miles west of the city, or thereabout: persuaded him, moreover, to make the journey on foot: and the two accordingly set out. All went well enough till the crater was reached, and then, in a lonely and broken part of the hill, the guide suddenly turned and attacked my father with a knife, his intention, without a doubt, being murder and the acquisition of the Englishman’s valuables. Fortunately my father had a hip-pocket with a revolver in it, for he had been warned of the danger a stranger might at that time run wandering in the country about Naples. He received a wound in the flesh of his left arm in an attempt to ward off a stab, and fired, at wrestling distance, with the result that his assailant fell dead on the spot. He left the place with all speed, tying up his arm as he went, sought the British consul at Naples, and informed him of the whole circumstances. From the authorities there was no great difficulty. An examination or two, a few signatures, some particular exertions on the part of the consul, and my father was free so far as the officers of the law were concerned. But while these formalities were in progress no less than three attempts were made on his life—two by the knife and one by shooting—and in each his escape was little short of miraculous. For the dead ruffian, Marino, had been a member of the dreaded Camorra and

the Camorristi were eager to avenge his death. To anybody acquainted with the internal history of Italy—more particularly the history of the old kingdom of Naples—the name of the Camorra will be familiar enough. It was one of the worst and most powerful of the many powerful and evil secret societies of Italy, and had none of the excuses for existence which have been from time to time put forward on behalf of the other. It was a gigantic club for the commission of crime and the extortion of money. So powerful was it that it actually imposed a regular tax on all food material entering Naples—a tax collected and paid with far more regularity than were any of the taxes due to the lawful Government of the country. The carrying of smuggled goods was a monopoly of the Camorra, a perfect organisation existing for the purpose throughout the kingdom. The whole population was terrorised by this detestable society, which had no less than twelve centres in the city of Naples alone. It contracted for the commission of crime just as systematically and calmly as a railway company contracts for the carriage of merchandise. A murder was so much, according to circumstances, with extras for disposing of the body; arson was dealt in profitably; maimings and kidnappings were carried out with promptitude and despatch; and any diabolical outrage imaginable was a mere matter of price. One of the staple vocations of the concern was of course brigandage. After the coming of Victor Emmanuel and the fusion of Italy into one kingdom the Camorra lost some of the power, but for a long time gave considerable trouble. I have heard that in the year after the matters I am describing two hundred Camorristi were banished from Italy.

As soon as the legal forms were complied with, my father received the broadest possible official hint that the sooner and the more secretly he left the country the better it would be for himself and his family. The British consul, too, impressed it upon him that the law would be entirely unable to protect him against the machinations of the Camorra; and indeed it needed but little persuasion to induce us to leave, for my poor mother was in a state of constant terror lest we were murdered together in our hotel; so that we lost no time in returning to England and bringing our European trip to a close.

In London we stayed at a well-known private hotel near Bond Street. We had been but three days here when my father came in one evening with a firm conviction that he had been followed for something like two hours, and followed very skilfully too. More than once he had doubled suddenly with a view to confront the pursuers, who he felt were at his heels, but he had met nobody of a suspicious appearance. The next afternoon I heard my mother telling my

governess (who was travelling with us) of an unpleasant looking man, who had been hanging about opposite the hotel door, and who, she felt sure, had afterwards been following her and my father as they were walking. My mother grew nervous and communicated her fears to my father. He, however, pooh-poohed the thing, and took little thought of its meaning. Nevertheless the dogging continued, and my father, who was never able to fix upon the persons who caused the annoyance—indeed he rather felt their presence by instinct, as one does in such cases, than otherwise—grew extremely angry, and had some idea of consulting the police. Then one morning my mother discovered a little paper label stuck on the outside of the door of the bedroom occupied by herself and my father. It was a small thing, circular, and about the size of a six-penny-piece, or even smaller, but my mother was quite certain that it had not been there when she last entered the door the night before, and she was much terrified. For the label carried a tiny device, drawn awkwardly in ink—a pair of knives of curious shape, crossed; the sign of the Camorra.

Nobody knew anything of this label, or how it came where it had been found. My mother urged my father to place himself under the protection of the police at once, but he delayed. Indeed I fancy he had a suspicion that the label might be the production of some practical joker staying at the hotel, who had heard of his Neapolitan adventure (it was reported in many newspapers) and designed to give him a fright. But that very evening my poor father was found dead, stabbed in a dozen places, in a short, quiet street not forty yards from the hotel. He had merely gone out to buy a few cigars of a particular brand which he fancied, at a shop two streets away, and in less than half an hour of his departure the police were at the hotel door with the news of his death, having got his address from letters in his pockets.

It is no part of my present design to enlarge on my mother's grief, or to describe in detail the incidents that followed my father's death, for I am going back to this early period of my life merely to make more clear the bearings of what has recently happened to myself. It will be sufficient therefore to say that at the inquest the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown; that it was several times reported that the police had obtained a most important clue, and that being so, very naturally there was never any arrest. We returned to Sydney, and then I grew up.

I should perhaps have mentioned ere this that my profession—or I should rather say my hobby—is that of an artist. Fortunately or unfortunately, as you may

please to consider it, I have no need to follow any profession as a means of livelihood, but since I was sixteen years of age my whole time has been engrossed in drawing and painting. Were it not for my mother's invincible objection to parting with me, even for the shortest space of time, I should long ago have come to Europe to work and to study in the regular schools. As it was I made shift to do my best in Australia, and wandered about pretty freely, struggling with the difficulties of moulding into artistic form the curious Australian landscape. There is an odd, desolate, uncanny note in characteristic Australian scenery, which most people are apt to regard as of little value for the purposes of the landscape painter, but with which I have always been convinced that an able painter could do great things. So I did my feeble best.

Two years ago my mother died. My age was then twenty-eight, and I was left without a friend in the world, and, so far as I know, without a relative. I soon found it impossible any longer to inhabit the large house by the Lane Cove river. It was beyond my simple needs, and the whole thing was an embarrassment, to say nothing of the associations of the house with my dead mother, which exercised a painful and depressing effect on me. So I sold the house, and cut myself adrift. For a year or more I pursued the life of a lonely vagabond in New South Wales, painting as well as I could its scattered forests of magnificent trees, with their curious upturned foliage. Then, miserably dissatisfied with my performance, and altogether filled with a restless spirit, I determined to quit the colony and live in England, or at any rate somewhere in Europe. I would paint at the Paris schools, I promised myself, and acquire that technical mastery of my material that I now felt the lack of.

The thing was no sooner resolved on than begun. I instructed my solicitors in Sydney to wind up my affairs and to communicate with their London correspondents in order that, on my arrival in England, I might deal with business matters through them. I had more than half resolved to transfer all my property to England, and to make the old country my permanent headquarters; and in three weeks from the date of my resolve I had started. I carried with me the necessary letters of introduction to the London solicitors, and the deeds appertaining to certain land in South Australia, which my father had bought just before his departure on the fatal European trip. There was workable copper in this land, it had since been ascertained, and I believed I might profitably dispose of the property to a company in London.

I found myself to some extent out of my element on board a great passenger

steamer. It seemed no longer possible for me in the constant association of shipboard to maintain that reserve which had become with me a second nature. But so much had it become my nature that I shrank ridiculously from breaking it, for, grown man as I was, it must be confessed that I was absurdly shy, and indeed I fear little better than an overgrown schoolboy in my manner. But somehow I was scarce a day at sea before falling into a most pleasant acquaintanceship with another passenger, a man of thirty-eight or forty, whose name was Dorrington. He was a tall, well-built fellow, rather handsome, perhaps, except for a certain extreme roundness of face and fulness of feature; he had a dark military moustache, and carried himself erect, with a swing as of a cavalryman, and his eyes had, I think, the most penetrating quality I ever saw. His manners were extremely engaging, and he was the only good talker I had ever met. He knew everybody, and had been everywhere. His fund of illustration and anecdote was inexhaustible, and during all my acquaintance with him I never heard him tell the same story twice. Nothing could happen—not a bird could fly by the ship, not a dish could be put on the table, but Dorrington was ready with a pungent remark and the appropriate anecdote. And he never bored nor wearied one. With all his ready talk he never appeared unduly obtrusive nor in the least egotistic. Mr. Horace Dorrington was altogether the most charming person I have ever met. Moreover we discovered a community of taste in cigars.

“By the way,” said Dorrington to me one magnificent evening as we leaned on the rail and smoked, “Rigby isn’t a very common name in Australia, is it? I seem to remember a case, twenty years ago or more, of an Australian gentleman of that name being very badly treated in London—indeed, now I think of it, I’m not sure that he wasn’t murdered. Ever hear anything of it?”

“Yes,” I said, “I heard a great deal, unfortunately. He was my father, and he was murdered.”

“Your father? There—I’m awfully sorry. Perhaps I shouldn’t have mentioned it; but of course I didn’t know.”

“Oh,” I replied, “that’s all right. It’s so far back now that I don’t mind speaking about it. It was a very extraordinary thing altogether.” And then, feeling that I owed Dorrington a story of some sort, after listening to the many he had been telling me, I described to him the whole circumstances of my father’s death.

“Ah,” said Dorrington when I had finished, “I have heard of the Camorra before

this—I know a thing or two about it, indeed. As a matter of fact it still exists; not quite the widespread and open thing it once was, of course, and much smaller; but pretty active in a quiet way, and pretty mischievous. They were a mighty bad lot, those Camorristi. Personally I’m rather surprised that you heard no more of them. They were the sort of people who would rather any day murder three people than one, and their usual idea of revenge went a good way beyond the mere murder of the offending party; they had a way of including his wife and family, and as many relatives as possible. But at any rate you seem to have got off all right, though I’m inclined to call it rather a piece of luck than otherwise.” Then, as was his invariable habit, he launched into anecdote. He told me of the crimes of the Maffia, that Italian secret society, larger even and more powerful than the Camorra, and almost as criminal; tales of implacable revenge visited on father, son and grandson in succession, till the race was extirpated. Then he talked of the methods; of the large funds at the disposal of the Camorra and the Maffia, and of the cunning patience with which their schemes were carried into execution; of the victims who had discovered too late that their most trusted servants were sworn to their destruction, and of those who had fled to remote parts of the earth and hoped to be lost and forgotten, but who had been shadowed and slain with barbarous ferocity in their most trusted hiding-places. Wherever Italians were, there was apt to be a branch of one of the societies, and one could never tell where they might or might not turn up. The two Italian fore-castle hands on board at that moment might be members, and might or might not have some business in hand not included in their signed articles.

I asked if he had ever come into personal contact with either of these societies or their doings.

“With the Camorra, no, though I know things about them that would probably surprise some of them not a little. But I have had professional dealings with the Maffia—and that without coming off second-best, too. But it was not so serious a case as your father’s; one of a robbery of documents and blackmail.”

“Professional dealings?” I queried.

Dorrington laughed. “Yes,” he answered. “I find I’ve come very near to letting the cat out of the bag. I don’t generally tell people who I am when I travel about, and indeed I don’t always use my own name, as I am doing now. Surely you’ve heard the name at some time or another?” I had to confess that I did not remember it. But I excused myself by citing my secluded life, and the fact that I

had never left Australia since I was a child.

“Ah,” he said, “of course we should be less heard of in Australia. But in England we’re really pretty well known, my partner and I. But, come now, look me all over and consider, and I’ll give you a dozen guesses and bet you a sovereign you can’t tell me my trade. And it’s not such an uncommon or unheard-of trade, neither.” Guessing would have been hopeless, and I said so. He did not seem the sort of man who would trouble himself about a trade at all. I gave it up.

“Well,” he said, “I’ve no particular desire to have it known all over the ship, but I don’t mind telling you—you’d find it out probably before long if you settle in the old country—that we are what is called private inquiry agents—detectives—secret service men—whatever you like to call it.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, indeed. And I think I may claim that we stand as high as any—if not a trifle higher. Of course I can’t tell you, but you’d be rather astonished if you heard the names of some of our clients. We have had dealings with certain royalties, European and Asiatic, that would startle you a bit if I could tell them. Dorrington & Hicks is the name of the firm, and we are both pretty busy men, though we keep going a regiment of assistants and correspondents. I have been in Australia three months over a rather awkward and complicated matter, but I fancy I pulled it through pretty well, and I mean to reward myself with a little holiday when I get back. There—now you know the worst of me. And D. & H. present their respectful compliments, and trust that by unfailing punctuality and a strict attention to business they may hope to receive your esteemed commands whenever you may be so unfortunate as to require their services. Family secrets extracted, cleaned, scaled, or stopped with gold. Special attention given to wholesale orders.” He laughed and pulled out his cigar-case. “You haven’t another cigar in your pocket,” he said, “or you wouldn’t smoke that stump so low. Try one of these.” I took the cigar and lit it at my remainder. “Ah, then,” I said, “I take it that it is the practice of your profession that has given you such a command of curious and out-of-the-way information and anecdote. Plainly you must have been in the midst of many curious affairs.”

“Yes, I believe you,” Dorrington replied. “But, as it happens, the most curious of my experiences I am unable to relate, since they are matters of professional confidence. Such as I can tell I usually tell with altered names, dates and places.

One learns discretion in such a trade as mine.”

“As to your adventure with the Maffia, now. Is there any secrecy about that?” Dorrington shrugged his shoulders. “No,” he said, “none in particular. But the case was not particularly interesting. It was in Florence. The documents were the property of a wealthy American, and some of the Maffia rascals managed to steal them. It doesn’t matter what the documents were—that’s a private matter—but their owner would have parted with a great deal to get them back, and the Maffia held them for ransom. But they had such a fearful notion of the American’s wealth, and of what he ought to pay, that, badly as he wanted the papers back, he couldn’t stand their demands, and employed us to negotiate and to do our best for him. I think I might have managed to get the things stolen back again—indeed I spent some time thinking a plan over—but I decided in the end that it wouldn’t pay. If the Maffia were tricked in that way they might consider it appropriate to stick somebody with a knife, and that was not an easy thing to provide against. So I took a little time and went another way to work. The details don’t matter—they’re quite uninteresting, and to tell you them would be to talk mere professional ‘shop’; there’s a deal of dull and patient work to be done in my business. Anyhow, I contrived to find out exactly in whose hands the documents lay. He wasn’t altogether a blameless creature, and there were two or three little things that, properly handled, might have brought him into awkward complications with the law. So I delayed the negotiations while I got my net effectually round this gentleman, who was the president of that particular branch of the Maffia, and when all was ready I had a friendly interview with him, and just showed him my hand of cards. They served as no other argument would have done, and in the end we concluded quite an amicable arrangement on easy terms for both parties, and my client got his property back, including all expenses, at about a fifth of the price he expected to have to pay. That’s all. I learnt a deal about the Maffia while the business lasted, and at that and other times I learnt a good deal about the Camorra too.” Dorrington and I grew more intimate every day of the voyage, till he knew every detail of my uneventful little history, and I knew many of his own most curious experiences. In truth he was a man with an irresistible fascination for a dull home-bird like myself. With all his gaiety he never forgot business, and at most of our stopping places he sent off messages by cable to his partner. As the voyage drew near its end he grew anxious and impatient lest he should not arrive in time to enable him to get to Scotland for grouse-shooting on the twelfth of August. His one amusement, it seemed, was shooting, and the holiday he had promised himself was to be spent on a grouse-moor which he rented in Perthshire. It would be a great nuisance to

miss the twelfth, he said, but it would apparently be a near shave. He thought, however, that in any case it might be done by leaving the ship at Plymouth, and rushing up to London by the first train.

“Yes,” he said, “I think I shall be able to do it that way, even if we are a couple of days late. By the way,” he added suddenly, “why not come along to Scotland with me? You haven’t any particular business in hand, and I can promise you a week or two of good fun.”

The invitation pleased me. “It’s very good of you,” I said, “and as a matter of fact I haven’t any very urgent business in London. I must see those solicitors I told you of, but that’s not a matter of hurry; indeed an hour or two on my way through London would be enough. But as I don’t know any of your party and —”

“Pooh, pooh, my dear fellow,” answered Dorrington, with a snap of his fingers, “that’s all right. I shan’t have a party. There won’t be time to get it together. One or two might come down a little later, but if they do they’ll be capital fellows, delighted to make your acquaintance, I’m sure. Indeed you’ll do me a great favour if you’ll come, else I shall be all alone, without a soul to say a word to. Anyway I won’t miss the twelfth, if it’s to be done by any possibility. You’ll really have to come you know—you’ve no excuse. I can lend you guns and anything you want, though I believe you’ve such things with you. Who is your London solicitor, by the way?”

“Mowbray, of Lincoln’s Inn Fields.”

“Oh, Mowbray? We know him well; his partner died last year. When I say we know him well, I mean as a firm. I have never met him personally, though my partner (who does the office work) has regular dealings with him. He’s an excellent man, but his managing clerk’s frightful; I wonder Mowbray keeps him. Don’t you let him do anything for you on his own hook: he makes the most disastrous messes, and I rather fancy he drinks. Deal with Mowbray himself; there’s nobody better in London. And by the way, now I think of it, it’s lucky you’ve nothing urgent for him, for he’s sure to be off out of town for the twelfth; he’s a rare old gunner, and never misses a season. So that now you haven’t a shade of an excuse for leaving me in the lurch, and we’ll consider the thing settled.” Settled accordingly it was, and the voyage ended uneventfully. But the steamer was late, and we left it at Plymouth and rushed up to town on the tenth.

We had three or four hours to prepare before leaving Euston by the night train. Dorrington's moor was a long drive from Crieff station, and he calculated that at best we could not arrive there before the early evening of the following day, which would however give us comfortable time for a good long night's rest before the morning's sport opened. Fortunately I had plenty of loose cash with me, so that there was nothing to delay us in that regard. We made ready in Dorrington's rooms (he was a bachelor) in Conduit Street, and got off comfortably by the ten o'clock train from Euston.

Then followed a most delightful eight days. The weather was fine, the birds were plentiful, and my first taste of grouse-shooting was a complete success. I resolved for the future to come out of my shell and mix in the world that contained such charming fellows as Dorrington, and such delightful sports as that I was then enjoying. But on the eighth day Dorrington received a telegram calling him instantly to London.

"It's a shocking nuisance," he said; "here's my holiday either knocked on the head altogether or cut in two, and I fear it's the first rather than the second. It's just the way in such an uncertain profession as mine. There's no possible help for it, however; I must go, as you'd understand at once if you knew the case. But what chiefly annoys me is leaving you all alone." I reassured him on this point, and pointed out that I had for a long time been used to a good deal of my own company. Though indeed, with Dorrington away, life at the shooting lodge threatened to be less pleasant than it had been.

"But you'll be bored to death here," Dorrington said, his thoughts jumping with my own. "But on the other hand it won't be much good going up to town yet. Everybody's out of town, and Mowbray among them. There's a little business of ours that's waiting for him at the moment—my partner mentioned it in his letter yesterday. Why not put in the time with a little tour round? Or you might work up to London by irregular stages, and look about you. As an artist you'd like to see a few of the old towns—probably, Edinburgh, Chester, Warwick, and so on. It isn't a great programme, perhaps, but I hardly know what else to suggest. As for myself I must be off as I am by the first train I can get." I begged him not to trouble about me, but to attend to his business. As a matter of fact, I was disposed to get to London and take chambers, at any rate for a little while. But Chester was a place I much wanted to see—a real old town, with walls round it—and I was not indisposed to take a day at Warwick. So in the end I resolved to pack up and make for Chester the following day, and from there to take train for

Warwick. And in half an hour Dorrington was gone.

Chester was all delight to me. My recollections of the trip to Europe in my childhood were vivid enough as to the misfortunes that followed my father, but of the ancient buildings we visited I remembered little. Now in Chester I found the mediaeval town I had so often read of. I wandered for hours together in the quaint old "Rows," and walked on the city wall. The evening after my arrival was fine and moonlight, and I was tempted from my hotel. I took a stroll about the town and finished by a walk along the wall from the Watergate toward the cathedral. The moon, flecked over now and again by scraps of cloud, and at times obscured for half a minute together, lighted up all the city in the intervals, and touched with silver the river beyond. But as I walked I presently grew aware of a quiet shuffling footstep some little way behind me. I took little heed of it at first, though I could see nobody near me from whom the sound might come. But soon I perceived that when I stopped, as I did from time to time to gaze over the parapet, the mysterious footsteps stopped also, and when I resumed my walk the quiet shuffling tread began again. At first I thought it might be an echo; but a moment's reflection dispelled that idea. Mine was an even, distinct walk, and this which followed was a soft, quick, shuffling step—a mere scuffle. Moreover, when, by way of test, I took a few silent steps on tip-toe, the shuffle still persisted. I was being followed.

Now I do not know whether or not it may sound like a childish fancy, but I confess I thought of my father. When last I had been in England, as a child, my father's violent death had been preceded by just such followings. And now after all these years, on my return, on the very first night I walked abroad alone, there were strange footsteps in my track. The walk was narrow, and nobody could possibly pass me unseen. I turned suddenly, therefore, and hastened back. At once I saw a dark figure rise from the shadow of the parapet and run. I ran too, but I could not gain on the figure, which receded farther and more indistinctly before me. One reason was that I felt doubtful of my footing on the unfamiliar track. I ceased my chase, and continued my stroll. It might easily have been some vagrant thief, I thought, who had a notion to rush, at a convenient opportunity, and snatch my watch. But ere I was far past the spot where I had turned there was the shuffling footstep behind me again. For a little while I feigned not to notice it; then, swinging round as swiftly as I could, I made a quick rush. Useless again, for there in the distance scuttled that same indistinct figure, more rapidly than I could run. What did it mean? I liked the affair so little that I left the walls and walked toward my hotel.

The streets were quiet. I had traversed two, and was about emerging into one of the two main streets, where the Rows are, when, from the farther part of the dark street behind me, there came once more the sound of the now unmistakable footstep. I stopped; the footsteps stopped also. I turned and walked back a few steps, and as I did it the sounds went scuffling away at the far end of the street.

It could not be fancy. It could not be chance. For a single incident perhaps such an explanation might serve, but not for this persistent recurrence. I hurried away to my hotel, resolved, since I could not come at my pursuer, to turn back no more. But before I reached the hotel there were the shuffling footsteps again, and not far behind.

It would not be true to say that I was alarmed at this stage of the adventure, but I was troubled to know what it all might mean, and altogether puzzled to account for it. I thought a great deal, but I went to bed and rose in the morning no wiser than ever.

Whether or not it was a mere fancy induced by the last night's experience I cannot say, but I went about that day with a haunting feeling that I was watched, and to me the impression was very real indeed. I listened often, but in the bustle of the day, even in quiet old Chester, the individual characters of different footsteps were not easily recognisable. Once however, as I descended a flight of steps from the Rows, I fancied I heard the quick shuffle in the curious old gallery I had just quitted. I turned up the steps again and looked. There was a shabby sort of man looking in one of the windows, and leaning so far as to hide his head behind the heavy oaken pilaster that supported the building above. It might have been his footstep, or it might have been my fancy. At any rate I would have a look at him. I mounted the top stair, but as I turned in his direction the man ran off, with his face averted and his head ducked, and vanished down another stair. I made all speed after him, but when I reached the street he was nowhere to be seen.

What could it all mean? The man was rather above the middle height, and he wore one of those soft felt hats familiar on the head of the London organ-grinder. Also his hair was black and bushy, and protruded over the back of his coat-collar. Surely this was no delusion; surely I was not imagining an Italian aspect for this man simply because of the recollection of my father's fate?

Perhaps I was foolish, but I took no more pleasure in Chester. The

embarrassment was a novel one for me, and I could not forget it. I went back to my hotel, paid my bill, sent my bag to the railway station, and took train for Warwick by way of Crewe.

It was dark when I arrived, but the night was near as fine as last night had been at Chester. I took a very little late dinner at my hotel, and fell into a doubt what to do with myself. One rather fat and sleepy commercial traveller was the only other customer visible, and the billiard room was empty. There seemed to be nothing to do but to light a cigar and take a walk.

I could just see enough of the old town to give me good hopes of tomorrow's sight-seeing. There was nothing visible of quite such an interesting character as one might meet in Chester, but there were a good few fine old sixteenth century houses, and there were the two gates with the chapels above them. But of course the castle was the great show-place, and that I should visit on the morrow, if there were no difficulties as to permission. There were some very fine pictures there, if I remembered aright what I had read. I was walking down the incline from one of the gates, trying to remember who the painters of these pictures were, besides Van Dyck and Holbein, when—that shuffling step was behind me again!

I admit that it cost me an effort, this time, to turn on my pursuer. There was something uncanny in that persistent, elusive footstep, and indeed there was something alarming in my circumstances, dogged thus from place to place, and unable to shake off my enemy, or to understand his movements or his motive. Turn I did, however, and straightway the shuffling step went off at a hastened pace in the shadow of the gate. This time I made no more than half-a-dozen steps back. I turned again, and pushed my way to the hotel. And as I went the shuffling step came after.

The thing was serious. There must be some object in this unceasing watching, and the object could bode no good to me. Plainly some unseen eye had been on me the whole of that day, had noted my goings and comings and my journey from Chester. Again, and irresistibly, the watchings that preceded my father's death came to mind, and I could not forget them. I could have no doubt now that I had been closely watched from the moment I had set foot at Plymouth. But who could have been waiting to watch me at Plymouth, when indeed I had only decided to land at the last moment? Then I thought of the two Italian fore-castle hands on the steamer—the very men whom Dorrington had used to illustrate in

what unexpected quarters members of the terrible Italian secret societies might be found. And the Camorra was not satisfied with single revenge; it destroyed the son after the father, and it waited for many years, with infinite patience and cunning.

Dogged by the steps, I reached the hotel and went to bed. I slept but fitfully at first, though better rest came as the night wore on. In the early morning I woke with a sudden shock, and with an indefinite sense of being disturbed by somebody about me. The window was directly opposite the foot of the bed, and there, as I looked, was the face of a man, dark, evil, and grinning, with a bush of black hair about his uncovered head, and small rings in his ears.

It was but a flash, and the face vanished. I was struck by the terror that one so often feels on a sudden and violent awakening from sleep, and it was some seconds ere I could leave my bed and get to the window. My room was on the first floor, and the window looked down on a stable-yard. I had a momentary glimpse of a human figure leaving the gate of the yard, and it was the figure that had fled before me in the Rows, at Chester. A ladder belonging to the yard stood under the window, and that was all.

I rose and dressed; I could stand this sort of thing no longer. If it were only something tangible, if there were only somebody I could take hold of, and fight with if necessary, it would not have been so bad. But I was surrounded by some mysterious machination, persistent, unexplainable, that it was altogether impossible to tackle or to face. To complain to the police would have been absurd—they would take me for a lunatic. They are indeed just such complaints that lunatics so often make to the police—complaints of being followed by indefinite enemies, and of being besieged by faces that look in at windows. Even if they did not set me down a lunatic, what could the police of a provincial town do for me in a case like this? No, I must go and consult Dorrington.

I had my breakfast, and then decided that I would at any rate try the castle before leaving. Try it I did accordingly, and was allowed to go over it. But through the whole morning I was oppressed by the horrible sense of being watched by malignant eyes. Clearly there was no comfort for me while this lasted: so after lunch I caught a train which brought me to Euston soon after half-past six.

I took a cab straight to Dorrington's rooms, but he was out, and was not expected home till late. So I drove to a large hotel near Charing Cross—I avoid

mentioning its name for reasons which will presently be understood—sent in my bag, and dined.

I had not the smallest doubt but that I was still under the observation of the man or the men who had so far pursued me; I had, indeed, no hope of eluding them, except by the contrivance of Dorrington's expert brain. So as I had no desire to hear that shuffling footstep again—indeed it had seemed, at Warwick, to have a physically painful effect on my nerves—I stayed within and got to bed early.

I had no fear of waking face to face with a grinning Italian here. My window was four floors up, out of reach of anything but a fire-escape. And, in fact, I woke comfortably and naturally, and saw nothing from my window but the bright sky, the buildings opposite, and the traffic below. But as I turned to close my door behind me as I emerged into the corridor, there, on the mounting of the frame, just below the bedroom number, was a little round paper label, perhaps a trifle smaller than a sixpence, and on the label, drawn awkwardly in ink, was a device of two crossed knives of curious, crooked shape. The sign of the Camorra!

I will not attempt to describe the effect of this sign upon me. It may best be imagined, in view of what I have said of the incidents preceding the murder of my father. It was the sign of an inexorable fate, creeping nearer step by step, implacable, inevitable, and mysterious. In little more than twelve hours after seeing that sign my father had been a mangled corpse. One of the hotel servants passed as I stood by the door, and I made shift to ask him if he knew anything of the label. He looked at the paper, and then, more curiously, at me, but he could offer no explanation. I spent little time over breakfast, and then went by cab to Conduit Street. I paid my bill and took my bag with me.

Dorrington had gone to his office, but he had left a message that if I called I was to follow him; and the office was in Bedford Street, Covent Garden. I turned the cab in that direction forthwith.

“Why,” said Dorrington as we shook hands, “I believe you look a bit out of sorts! Doesn't England agree with you?”

“Well,” I answered, “it has proved rather trying so far.” And then I described, in exact detail, my adventures as I have set them down here.

Dorrington looked grave. “It's really extraordinary,” he said, “most

extraordinary: and it isn't often that I call a thing extraordinary neither, with my experience. But it's plain something must be done—something to gain time at any rate. We're in the dark at present, of course, and I expect I shall have to fish about a little before I get at anything to go on. In the meantime I think you must disappear as artfully as we can manage it." He sat silent for a little while, thoughtfully tapping his forehead with his finger-tips. "I wonder," he said presently, "whether or not those Italian fellows on the steamer are in it or not. I suppose you haven't made yourself known anywhere, have you?"

"Nowhere. As you know, you've been with me all the time till you left the moor, and since then I have been with nobody and called on nobody."

"Now there's no doubt it's the Camorra," Dorrington said—"that's pretty plain. I think I told you on the steamer that it was rather wonderful that you had heard nothing of them after your father's death. What has caused them all this delay there's no telling—they know best themselves: it's been lucky for you, anyway, so far. What I'd like to find out now is how they have identified you, and got on your track so promptly. There's no guessing where these fellows get their information—it's just wonderful; but if we can find out then perhaps we can stop the supply, or turn on something that will lead them into a pit. If you had called anywhere on business and declared yourself—as you might have done, for instance, at Mowbray's—I might be inclined to suspect that they got the tip in some crooked way from there. But you haven't. Of course, if those Italian chaps on the steamer are in it, you're probably identified pretty certainly; but if they're not, they may only have made a guess. We two landed together, and kept together, till a day or two ago; as far as any outsider would know, I might be Rigby and you might be Dorrington. Come, we'll work on those lines. I think I smell a plan. Are you staying anywhere?"

"No. I paid my bill at the hotel and came along here with my bag."

"Very well. Now there's a house at Highgate kept by a very trustworthy man, whom I know very well, where a man might be pretty comfortable for a few days, or even for a week, if he doesn't mind staying indoors, and keeping himself out of sight. I expect your friends of the Camorra are watching in the street outside at this moment; but I think it will be fairly easy to get you away to Highgate without letting them into the secret, if you don't mind secluding yourself for a bit. In the circumstances, I take it you won't object at all?"

“Object? I should think not.”

“Very well, that’s settled. You can call yourself Dorrington or not, as you please, though perhaps it will be safest not to shout ‘Rigby’ too loud. But as for myself, for a day or two at least I’m going to be Mr. James Rigby. Have you your card-case handy?”

“Yes, here it is. But then, as to taking my name, won’t you run serious risk?” Dorrington winked merrily. “I’ve run a risk or two before now,” he said, “in course of my business. And if I don’t mind the risk, you needn’t grumble, for I warn you I shall charge for risk when I send you my bill. And I think I can take care of myself fairly well, even with the Camorra about. I shall take you to this place at Highgate, and then you won’t see me for a few days. It won’t do for me, in the character of Mr. James Rigby, to go dragging a trail up and down between this place and your retreat. You’ve got some other identifying papers, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I have.” I produced the letter from my Sydney lawyers to Mowbray, and the deeds of the South Australian property, from my bag.

“Ah,” said Dorrington, “I’ll just give you a formal receipt for these, since they’re valuable; it’s a matter of business, and we’ll do it in a business-like way. I may want something solid like this to support any bluff I may have to make. A mere case of cards won’t always act, you know. It’s a pity old Mowbray’s out of town, for there’s a way in which he might give a little help, I fancy. But never mind—leave it all to me. There’s your receipt. Keep it snug away somewhere, where inquisitive people can’t read it.” He handed me the receipt, and then took me to his partner’s room and introduced me. Mr. Hicks was a small, wrinkled man, older than Dorrington, I should think, by fifteen or twenty years, and with all the aspect and manner of a quiet old professional man.

Dorrington left the room, and presently returned with his hat in his hand. “Yes,” he said, “there’s a charming dark gentleman with a head like a mop, and rings in his ears, skulking about at the next corner. If it was he who looked in at your window, I don’t wonder you were startled. His dress suggests the organ-grinding interest, but he looks as though cutting a throat would be more in his line than grinding a tune; and no doubt he has friends as engaging as himself close at call. If you’ll come with me now I think we shall give him the slip. I have a growler ready for you—a hansom’s a bit too glassy and public. Pull down the blinds and

sit back when you get inside.” He led me to a yard at the back of the building wherein the office stood, from which a short flight of steps led to a basement. We followed a passage in this basement till we reached another flight, and ascending these, we emerged into the corridor of another building. Out at the door at the end of this, and we passed a large block of model dwellings, and were in Bedfordbury. Here a four-wheeler was waiting, and I shut myself in it without delay.

I was to proceed as far as King’s Cross in this cab, Dorrington had arranged, and there he would overtake me in a swift hansom. It fell out as he had settled, and, dismissing the hansom, he came the rest of the journey with me in the four-wheeler.

We stopped at length before one of a row of houses, apparently recently built—houses of the over-ornamented, gabled and tiled sort that abound in the suburbs.

“Crofting is the man’s name,” Dorrington said as we alighted. “He’s rather an odd sort of customer, but quite decent in the main, and his wife makes coffee such as money won’t buy in most places.” A woman answered Dorrington’s ring—a woman of most extreme thinness. Dorrington greeted her as Mrs. Crofting, and we entered.

“We’ve just lost our servant again, Mr. Dorrington,” the woman said in a shrill voice, “and Mr. Crofting ain’t at home. But I’m expecting him before long.”

“I don’t think I need wait to see him, Mrs. Crofting,” Dorrington answered. “I’m sure I can’t leave my friend in better hands than yours. I hope you’ve a vacant room?”

“Well, for a friend of yours, Mr. Dorrington, no doubt we can find room.”

“That’s right. My friend Mr.”—Dorrington gave me a meaning look—“Mr. Phelps, would like to stay here for a few days. He wants to be quite quiet for a little—do you understand?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Dorrington, I understand.”

“Very well, then, make him as comfortable as you can, and give him some of your very best coffee. Have you got any cigars?” Dorrington added, turning to me.

“Yes; there are some in my bag.”

“Then I think you’ll be pretty comfortable now. Good-bye. I expect you’ll see me in a few days—or at any rate you’ll get a message. Meantime be as happy as you can.” Dorrington left, and the woman showed me to a room upstairs, where I placed my bag. The furniture of the place was of the sort one expects to find in an ordinary lodging house—horsehair sofas, loo tables, lustres, and so forth.

At two o’clock the dinner came, and I was agreeably surprised to find it a very good one, much above what the appointments of the house had led me to expect. Plainly Mrs. Crofting was a capital cook. There was no soup, but there was a very excellent sole, and some well-done cutlets with peas, and an omelet. I had heard a heavy, blundering tread on the floor below, and judged from this that Mr. Crofting had returned.

After dinner I lit a cigar, and Mrs. Crofting brought her coffee. Truly it was excellent coffee, and brewed as I like it—strong and black, and plenty of it. It had a flavour of its own too, novel, but not unpleasing. I had not read six lines of my book before I was asleep.

I woke with a sensation of numbing cold in my right side, a terrible stiffness in my limbs, and a sound of loud splashing in my ears. All was pitch dark, and—what was this? Water! Water all about me. I was lying in six inches of cold water, and more was pouring down upon me from above. My head was afflicted with a splitting ache. But where was I? Why was it dark? And whence all the water? I staggered to my feet, and instantly struck my head against a hard roof above me. I raised my hand; there was the roof of whatever place it was, hard, smooth and cold, and little more than five feet from the floor, so that I bent as I stood. I spread my hand to the side; that was hard, smooth and cold too. And then the conviction struck me like a blow—I was in a covered iron tank, and the water was pouring in to drown me!

I dashed my hands frantically against the lid, and strove to raise it. It would not move. I shouted at the top of my voice, and turned about to feel the extent of my prison. One way I could touch the opposite sides at once easily with my hands, the other way it was wider—perhaps a little more than six feet altogether. What was this? Was this to be my fearful end, cooped in this tank while the water rose by inches to choke me? Already the water was a foot deep. I flung myself at the sides, I beat the pitiless iron with fists, face and head, I screamed and implored.

Then it struck me that I might at least stop the inlet of water. I put out my hand and felt the falling stream, then found the inlet and stopped it with my fingers. But water still poured in with a resounding splash; there was another opening at the opposite end, which I could not reach without releasing the one I now held! Oh, the devilish cunning that had devised those two inlets, so far apart! Again I beat the sides, broke my nails with tearing at the corners, screamed and entreated in my agony.

In the height of my frenzy I held my breath, for I heard a sound from outside. I shouted again—implored some quicker death. Then there was a scraping on the lid above me, and it was raised at one edge, and let in the light of a candle. I sprang from my knees and forced the lid back, and the candle flame danced before me. The candle was held by a dusty man, a workman apparently, who stared at me with scared eyes, and said nothing but, “Goo’ lor’!” Overhead were the rafters of a gabled roof, and tilted against them was the thick beam which, jammed across from one sloping rafter to another, had held the tank-lid fast. “Help me!” I gasped, “help me out!” The man took me by the armpits and hauled me, dripping and half dead, over the edge of the tank, into which the water still poured, making a noise in the hollow iron that half drowned our voices. The man had been at work on the cistern of a neighbouring house, and hearing an uncommon noise, he had climbed through the spaces left in the party walls to give passage along under the roofs to the builders’ men. Among the joists at our feet was the trap-door through which, drugged and insensible, I had been carried, to be flung into that horrible cistern.

With the help of my friend the workman I made shift to climb through by the way he had come. We got back to the house where he had been at work, and there the people gave me brandy and lent me dry clothes. I made haste to send for the police, but when they arrived Mrs. Crofting and her respectable spouse had gone. Some unusual noise in the roof must have warned them. And when the police, following my directions further, got to the offices of Dorrington and Hicks, those acute professional men had gone too, but in such haste that the contents of the office, papers and everything else, had been left just as they stood.

The plot was clear now. The followings, the footsteps, the face at the window, the label on the door—all were a mere humbug arranged by Dorrington for his own purpose, which was to drive me into his power and get my papers from me. Armed with these, and with his consummate address and knowledge of affairs,

he could go to Mr. Mowbray in the character of Mr. James Rigby, sell my land in South Australia, and have the whole of my property transferred to himself from Sydney. The rest of my baggage was at his rooms; if any further proof were required it might be found there. He had taken good care that I should not meet Mr. Mowbray—who, by the way, I afterwards found had not left his office, and had never fired a gun in his life. At first I wondered that Dorrington had not made some murderous attempt on me at the shooting place in Scotland. But a little thought convinced me that that would have been bad policy for him. The disposal of the body would be difficult, and he would have to account somehow for my sudden disappearance. Whereas, by the use of his Italian assistant and his murder apparatus at Highgate I was made to efface my own trail, and could be got rid of in the end with little trouble; for my body, stripped of everything that might identify me, would be simply that of a drowned man unknown, whom nobody could identify. The whole plot was contrived upon the information I myself had afforded Dorrington during the voyage home. And it all sprang from his remembering the report of my father's death.

When the papers in the office came to be examined, there each step in the operations was plainly revealed. There was a code telegram from Suez directing Hicks to hire a grouse moor. There were telegrams and letters from Scotland giving directions as to the later movements; indeed the thing was displayed completely. The business of Dorrington & Hicks had really been that of private inquiry agents, and they had done much bona fide business; but many of their operations had been of a more than questionable sort. And among their papers were found complete sets, neatly arranged in dockets, each containing in skeleton a complete history of a case. Many of these cases were of a most interesting character, and I have been enabled to piece together, out of the material thus supplied, the narratives which follow this. As to my own case, it only remains to say that as yet neither Dorrington, Hicks, nor the Croftings have been caught. They played in the end for a high stake (they might have made six figures of me if they had killed me, and the first figure would not have been a one) and they lost by a mere accident. But I have often wondered how many of the bodies which the coroners' juries of London have returned to be "Found Drowned" were drowned, not where they were picked up, but in that horrible tank at Highgate. What the drug was that gave Mrs. Crofting's coffee its value in Dorrington's eyes I do not know, but plainly it had not been sufficient in my case to keep me unconscious against the shock of cold water till I could be drowned altogether. Months have passed since my adventure, but even now I sweat at the sight of an iron tank.

THE CASE OF JANISSARY

IN the year 1897 a short report of an ordinary sort of inquest appeared in the London newspapers, and I here transcribe it.

“Dr. McCulloch held an inquest yesterday on the body of Mr. Henry Lawrence, whose body was found on Tuesday morning last in the river near Vauxhall Bridge. The deceased was well known in certain sporting circles. Sophia Lawrence, the widow, said that deceased had left home on Monday afternoon at about five, in his usual health, saying that he was to dine at a friend’s and she saw nothing more of him till called upon to identify the body. He had no reason for suicide, and so far as witness knew, was free from pecuniary embarrassments. He had, indeed, been very successful in betting recently. He habitually carried a large pocket-book, with papers in it.

Mr. Robert Naylor, commission agent, said that deceased dined with him that evening at his house in Gold Street, Chelsea, and left for home at about half-past eleven. He had at the time a sum of nearly four hundred pounds upon him, chiefly in notes, which had been paid him by witness in settlement of a bet. It was a fine night, and deceased walked in the direction of Chelsea Embankment. That was the last witness saw of him. He might not have been perfectly sober, but he was not drunk, and was capable of taking care of himself. The evidence of the Thames police went to show that no money was on the body when found, except a few coppers, and no pocket-book. Dr. William Hodgetts said that death was due to drowning. There were some bruises on the arms and head which might have been caused before death. The body was a very healthy one. The coroner said that there seemed to be a strong suspicion of foul play, unless the pocket-book of the deceased had got out of his pocket in the water; but the evidence was very meagre, although the police appeared to have made every possible inquiry. The jury returned a verdict of ‘Found Drowned, though how the deceased came into the water there was no evidence to show’.” I know no more of the unfortunate man Lawrence than this, and I have only printed the cutting here because it probably induced Dorrington to take certain steps in the case I am dealing with. With that case the fate of the man Lawrence has nothing whatever to do. He passes out of the story entirely.

Mr. Warren Telfer was a gentleman of means, and the owner of a few—very few—racehorses. But he had a great knack of buying hidden prizes in yearlings, and

what his stable lacked in quantity it often more than made up for in quality. Thus he had once bought a St. Leger winner for as little as a hundred and fifty pounds. Many will remember his bitter disappointment of ten or a dozen years back, when his horse, Matfelon, starting an odds-on favourite for the Two Thousand, never even got among the crowd, and ambled in streets behind everything. It was freely rumoured (and no doubt with cause) that Matfelon had been “got at” and in some way “nobbled”. There were hints of a certain bucket of water administered just before the race—a bucket of water observed in the hands, some said of one, some said of another person connected with Ritter’s training establishment. There was no suspicion of pulling for plainly the jockey was doing his best with the animal all the way along, and never had a tight rein. So a nobbling it must have been, said the knowing ones, and Mr. Warren Telfer said so too, with much bitterness. More, he immediately removed his horses from Ritter’s stables, and started a small training place of his own for his own horses merely; putting an old steeplechase jockey in charge, who had come out of a bad accident permanently lame, and had fallen on evil days.

The owner was an impulsive and violent-tempered man, who, once a notion was in his head, held to it through everything, and in spite of everything. His misfortune with Matfelon made him the most insanely distrustful man alive. In everything he fancied he saw a trick, and to him every man seemed a scoundrel. He could scarce bear to let the very stable-boys touch his horses, and although for years all went as well as could be expected in his stables, his suspicious distrust lost nothing of its virulence. He was perpetually fussing about the stables, making surprise visits, and laying futile traps that convicted nobody. The sole tangible result of this behaviour was a violent quarrel between Mr. Warren Telfer and his nephew Richard, who had been making a lengthened stay with his uncle. Young Telfer, to tell the truth, was neither so discreet nor so exemplary in behaviour as he might have been, but his temper was that characteristic of the family, and when he conceived that his uncle had an idea that he was communicating stable secrets to friends outside, there was an animated row, and the nephew betook himself and his luggage somewhere else. Young Telfer always insisted, however, that his uncle was not a bad fellow on the whole, though he had habits of thought and conduct that made him altogether intolerable at times. But the uncle had no good word for his graceless nephew; and indeed Richard Telfer betted more than he could afford, and was not so particular in his choice of sporting acquaintances as a gentleman should have been.

Mr. Warren Telfer's house, Blackhall, and his stables were little more than two miles from Redbury, in Hampshire; and after the quarrel Mr Richard Telfer was not seen near the place for many months—not, indeed, till excitement was high over the forthcoming race for the Redbury Stakes, for which there was an entry from the stable—Janissary, for long ranked second favourite; and then the owner's nephew did not enter the premises, and, in fact, made his visit as secret as possible.

I have said that Janissary was long ranked second favourite for the Redbury Stakes, but a little more than a week before the race he became first favourite, owing to a training mishap to the horse fancied first, which made its chances so poor that it might have been scratched at any moment. And so far was Janissary above the class of the field (though it was a two-year-old race, and there might be a surprise) that it at once went to far shorter odds than the previous favourite, which, indeed, had it run fit and well, would have found Janissary no easy colt to beat.

Mr. Telfer's nephew was seen near the stables but two or three days before the race, and that day the owner despatched a telegram to the firm of Dorrington & Hicks. In response to the telegram, Dorrington caught the first available train for Redbury, and was with Mr Warren Telfer in his library by five in the afternoon.

“It is about my horse Janissary that I want to consult you, Mr. Dorrington,” said Mr. Telfer. “It's right enough now—or at least was right at exercise this morning—but I feel certain that there's some diabolical plot on hand somewhere to interfere with the horse before the Redbury Stakes day, and I'm sorry to have to say that I suspect my own nephew to be mixed up in it in some way. In the first place I may tell you that there is no doubt whatever that the colt, if let alone, and bar accident, can win in a canter. He could have won even if Herald, the late favourite, had kept well, for I can tell you that Janissary is a far greater horse than anybody is aware of outside my establishment—or at any rate, than anybody ought to be aware of, if the stable secrets are properly kept. His pedigree is nothing very great, and he never showed his quality till quite lately, in private trials. Of course it has leaked out somehow that the colt is exceptionally good—I don't believe I can trust a soul in the place. How should the price have gone up to five to four unless somebody had been telling what he's paid not to tell? But that isn't all, as I have said. I've a conviction that something's on foot—somebody wants to interfere with the horse. Of course we get a tout about now and again, but the downs are pretty big, and we generally

manage to dodge them if we want to. On the last three or four mornings, however, whenever Janissary might be taking his gallop, there was a big, hulking fellow, with a red beard and spectacles—not so much watching the horse as trying to get hold of the lad. I am always up at five, for I’ve found to my cost—you remember about Matfelon—that if a man doesn’t want to be ramped he must never take his eye off things. Well, I have scarcely seen the lad ease the colt once on the last three or four mornings without that red-bearded fellow bobbing up from a knoll, or a clump of bushes, or something, close by—especially if Janissary was a bit away from the other horses, and not under my nose, or the head lad’s, for a moment. I rode at the fellow, of course, when I saw what he was after, but he was artful as a cartload of monkeys, and vanished somehow before I could get near him.

‘The head lad believes he has seen him about just after dark, too; but I am keeping the stable lads in when they’re not riding, and I suppose he finds he has no chance of getting at them except when they’re out with the horses. This morning, not only did I see this fellow about, as usual, but, I am ashamed to say, I observed my own nephew acting the part of a common tout. He certainly had the decency to avoid me and clear out, but that was not all, as you shall see. This morning, happening to approach the stables from the back, I suddenly came upon the red-bearded man—giving money to a groom of mine! He ran off at once, as you may guess, and I discharged the groom where he stood, and would not allow him into the stables again. He offered no explanation or excuse, but took himself off, and half an hour afterwards I almost sent away my head boy too. For when I told him of the dismissal, he admitted that he had seen that same groom taking money off my nephew at the back of the of stables, an hour before, and had not informed me! He said that he thought that as it was ‘only Mr. Richard’ it didn’t matter. Fool! Anyway, the groom has gone, and, so far as I can tell as yet, the colt is all right. I examined him at once, of course; and I also turned over a box that Weeks, the groom, used to keep brushes and odd things in. There I found this paper full of powder. I don’t yet know what it is, but it’s certainly nothing he had any business with in the stable. Will you take it?

“And now,” Mr Telfer went on, “I’m in such an uneasy state that I want your advice and assistance. Quite apart from the suspicious—more than suspicious—circumstances I have informed you of, I am certain—I know it without being able to give precise reasons—I am certain that some attempt is being made at disabling Janissary before Thursday’s race. I feel it in my bones, so to speak. I had the same suspicion just before that Two Thousand, when Matfelon was got

at. The thing was in the air, as it is now. Perhaps it's a sort of instinct; but I rather think it is the result of an unconscious absorption of a number of little indications about me. Be it as it may, I am resolved to leave no opening to the enemy if I can help it, and I want to see if you can suggest any further precautions beyond those I am taking. Come and look at the stables." Dorrington could see no opening for any piece of rascality by which he might make more of the case than by serving his client loyally, so he resolved to do the latter. He followed Mr. Telfer through the training stables, where eight or nine thoroughbreds stood, and could suggest no improvement upon the exceptional precautions that already existed.

"No," said Dorrington, "I don't think you can do any better than this—at least on this, the inner line of defence. But it is best to make the outer lines secure first. By the way, this isn't Janissary, is it? We saw him farther up the row, didn't we?"

"Oh no, that's a very different sort of colt, though he does look like, doesn't he? People who've been up and down the stables once or twice often confuse them. They're both bays, much of a build, and about the same height, and both have a bit of stocking on the same leg, though Janissary's is bigger, and this animal has a white star. But you never saw two creatures look so like and run so differently. This is a dead loss—not worth his feed. If I can manage to wind him up to something like a gallop I shall try to work him off in a selling plate somewhere; but as far as I can see he isn't good enough even for that. He's a disappointment. And his stock's far better than Janissary's too, and he cost half as much again! Yearlings are a lottery. Still, I've drawn a prize or two among them, at one time or another."

"Ah yes, so I've heard. But now as to the outer defences I was speaking of. Let us find out who is trying to interfere with your horse. Do you mind letting me into the secrets of the stable commissions?"

"Oh no. We're talking in confidence, of course. I've backed the colt pretty heavily all round, but not too much anywhere. There's a good slice with Barker—you know Barker, of course; Mullins has a thousand down for him, and that was at five to one, before Herald went amiss. Then there's Ford and Lascelles—both good men, and Naylor—he's the smallest man of them all, and there's only a hundred or two with him, though he's been laying the horse pretty freely everywhere, at least until Herald went wrong. And there's Pedder. But there must have been a deal of money laid to outside backers, and there's no telling

who may contemplate a ramp.”

“Just so. Now as to your nephew. What of your suspicions in that direction?”

“Perhaps I’m a little hasty as to that,” Mr. Telfer answered, a little ashamed of what he had previously said. “But I’m worried and mystified, as you see, and hardly know what to think. My nephew Richard is a little erratic, and he has a foolish habit of betting more than he can afford. He and I quarrelled some time back, while he was staying here, because I had an idea that he had been talking too freely outside. He had, in fact; and I regarded it as a breach of confidence. So there was a quarrel and he went away.”

“Very well. I wonder if I can get a bed at the ‘Crown’ at Redbury: I’m afraid it’ll be crowded, but I’ll try.”

“But why trouble? Why not stay with me, and be near the stables?”

“Because then I should be of no more use to you than one of your lads. People who come out here every morning are probably staying at Redbury, and I must go there after them.”

THE “Crown” at Redbury was full in anticipation of the races, but Dorrington managed to get a room ordinarily occupied by one of the landlord’s family, who undertook to sleep at a friend’s for a night or two. This settled, he strolled into the yard, and soon fell into animated talk with the hostler on the subject of the forthcoming races. All the town was backing Janissary for the Stakes, the hostler said, and he advised Dorrington to do the same.

During this conversation two men stopped in the street, just outside the yard gate, talking. One was a big, heavy, vulgar-looking fellow in a box-cloth coat, and with a shaven face and hoarse voice; the other was a slighter, slimmer, younger and more gentlemanlike man, though there was a certain patchy colour about his face that seemed to hint of anything but teetotalism.

“There,” said the hostler, indicating the younger of these two men, “that’s young Mr. Telfer, him as whose uncle’s owner o’ Janissary. He’s a young plunger, he is, and he’s on Janissary too. He give me the tip, straight, this mornin’. ‘You put your little bit on my uncle’s colt,’ he said. ‘It’s all right. I ain’t such pals with the old man as I was, but I’ve got the tip that his money’s down on it. So don’t neglect your opportunities, Thomas,’ he says; and I haven’t. He’s stoppin’ in our

house, is young Mr. Richard.”

“And who is that he is talking to? A bookmaker?”

“Yes, sir, that’s Naylor—Bob Naylor. He’s got Mr. Richard’s bets. P’raps he’s puttin’ on a bit more now.” The men at the gate separated, and the bookmaker walked off down the street in the fast gathering dusk. Richard Telfer, however, entered the house, and Dorrington followed him. Telfer mounted the stairs and went into his room. Dorrington lingered a moment on the stairs and then went and knocked at Telfer’s door.

“Hullo!” cried Telfer, coming to the door and peering out into the gloomy corridor.

“I beg pardon,” Dorrington replied courteously. “I thought this was Naylor’s room.”

“No—it’s No. 23, by the end. But I believe he’s just gone down the street.” Dorrington expressed his thanks and went to his own room. He took one or two small instruments from his bag and hurried stealthily to the door of No. 23.

All was quiet, and the door opened at once to Dorrington’s picklock, for there was nothing but the common tumbler rim-lock to secure it. Dorrington, being altogether an unscrupulous scoundrel, would have thought nothing of entering a man’s room thus for purposes of mere robbery. Much less scruple had he in doing so in the present circumstances. He lit the candle in a little pocket lantern, and, having secured the door, looked quickly about the room. There was nothing unusual to attract his attention, and he turned to two bags lying near the dressing-table. One was the usual bookmaker’s satchel, and the other was a leather travelling-bag; both were locked. Dorrington unbuckled the straps of the large bag and produced a slender picklock of steel wire, with a sliding joint, which, with a little skilful “humouring”, turned the lock in the course of a minute or two. One glance inside was enough. There on the top lay a large false beard of strong red, and upon the shirts below was a pair of spectacles. But Dorrington went farther, and felt carefully below the linen till his hand met a small, flat, mahogany box. This he withdrew and opened. Within, on a velvet lining, lay a small silver instrument resembling a syringe. He shut and replaced the box, and, having rearranged the contents of the bag, shut, locked and strapped it, and blew out his light. He had found what he came to look for. In another minute Mr. Bob

Naylor's door was locked behind him, and Dorrington took his picklocks to his own room.

It was a noisy evening in the Commercial Room at the "Crown". Chaff and laughter flew thick, and Richard Telfer threatened Naylor with a terrible settling day. More was drunk than thirst strictly justified, and everybody grew friendly with everybody else. Dorrington, sober and keenly alert, affected the reverse, and exhibited especial and extreme affection for Mr. Bob Naylor. His advances were unsuccessful at first, but Dorrington's manner and the 'Crown' whisky overcame the bookmaker's reserve, and at about eleven o'clock the two left the house arm in arm for a cooling stroll in the High Street. Dorrington blabbed and chattered with great success, and soon began about Janissary.

"So you've pretty well done all you want with Janissary, eh? Book full? Ah! nothing like keeping a book even all round—it's the safest way—'specially with such a colt as Janissary about. Eh, my boy?" He nudged Naylor genially. "Ah! no doubt it's a good colt, but old Telfer has rum notions about preparation, hasn't he?"

"I dunno," replied Naylor. "How do you mean?"

"Why, what does he have the horse led up and down behind the stable for, half an hour every afternoon?"

"Didn't know he did."

"Ah! but he does. I came across it only this afternoon. I was coming over the downs, and just as I got round behind Telfer's stables there I saw a fine bay colt, with a white stocking on the off hind leg, well covered up in a suit of clothes, being led up and down by a lad, like a sentry—up and down, up and down—about twenty yards each way, and nobody else about. 'Hullo!' says I to the lad, 'hullo! what horse is this?' 'Janissary,' says the boy—pretty free for a stable-lad. 'Ah!' says I. 'And what are you walking him like that for?' 'Dunno,' says the boy, 'but it's gov'nor's orders. Every afternoon, at two to the minute, I have to bring him out here and walk him like this for half an hour exactly, neither more or less, and then he goes in and has a handful of malt. But I dunno why.' 'Well,' says I, 'I never heard of that being done before. But he's a fine colt,' and I put my hand under the cloth and felt him—hard as nails and smooth as silk."

"And the boy let you touch him?"

“Yes; he struck me as a bit easy for a stable-boy. But it’s an odd trick, isn’t it, that of the half-hour’s walk and the handful of malt? Never hear of anybody else doing it, did you?”

“No, I never did.” They talked and strolled for another quarter of an hour and then finished up with one more drink.

THE next was the day before the race, and in the morning Dorrington, making a circuit, came to Mr. Warren Telfer’s from the farther side. As soon as they were assured of privacy: “Have you seen the man with the red beard this morning?” asked Dorrington.

“No; I looked out pretty sharply, too.”

“That’s right. If you like to fall in with my suggestions, however, you shall see him at about two o’clock, and take a handsome rise out of him.”

“Very well,” Mr. Telfer replied. “What’s your suggestion?”

“I’ll tell you. In the first place, what’s the value of that other horse that looks so like Janissary?”

“Hamid is his name. He’s worth—well, what he will fetch. I’ll sell him for fifty and be glad of the chance.”

“Very good. Then you’ll no doubt be glad to risk his health temporarily to make sure of the Redbury Stakes, and to get longer prices for anything you may like to put on between now and tomorrow afternoon. Come to the stables and I’ll tell you. But first, is there a place where we may command a view of the ground behind the stables without being seen?”

“Yes, there’s a ventilation grating at the back of each stall.”

“Good! Then we’ll watch from Hamid’s stall, which will be empty. Select your most wooden-faced and most careful boy, and send him out behind the stable with Hamid at two o’clock to the moment. Put the horse in a full suit of clothes—it is necessary to cover up that white star—and tell the lad he must lead it up and down slowly for twenty yards or so. I rather expect the red-bearded man will be coming along between two o’clock and half-past two. You will understand that Hamid is to be Janissary for the occasion. You must drill your boy to appear

a bit of a fool, and to overcome his stable education sufficiently to chatter freely—so long as it is the proper chatter. The man may ask the horse's name, or he may not. Anyway, the boy mustn't forget it is Janissary he is leading. You have an odd fad, you must know (and the boy must know it too) in the matter of training. This ridiculous fad is to have your colt walked up and down for half an hour exactly at two o'clock every afternoon, and then given a handful of malt as he comes in. The boy can talk as freely about this as he pleases, and also about the colt's chances, and anything else he likes; and he is to let the stranger come up, talk to the horse, pat him in short, to do as he pleases. Is that plain?"

"Perfectly. You have found out something about this red-bearded chap then?"

"Oh, yes—it's Naylor the bookmaker, as a matter of fact, with a false beard."

"What! Naylor?"

"Yes. You see the idea, of course. Once Naylor thinks he has nobbled the favourite he will lay it to any extent, and the odds will get longer. Then you can make him pay for his little games."

"Well, yes, of course. Though I wouldn't put too much with Naylor in any case. He's not a big man, and he might break and lose me the lot. But I can get it out of the others."

"Just so. You'd better see about schooling your boy now, I think. I'll tell you more presently." A minute or two before two o'clock Dorrington and Telfer, mounted on a pair of steps, were gazing through the ventilation grating of Hamid's stall, while the colt, clothed completely, was led around. Then Dorrington described his operations of the previous evening.

"No matter what he may think of my tale," he said "Naylor will be pretty sure to come. He has tried to bribe your stablemen, and has been baffled. Every attempt to get hold of the boy in charge of Janissary has failed, and he will be glad to clutch at any shadow of a chance to save his money now. Once he is here, and the favourite apparently at his mercy, the thing is done. By the way, I expect your nephew's little present to the man you sacked was a fairly innocent one. No doubt he merely asked the man whether Janissary was keeping well, and was thought good enough to win, for I find he is backing it pretty heavily. Naylor came afterwards, with much less innocent intentions, but fortunately you were down on him in time. Several considerations induced me to go to Naylor's room.

In the first place, I have heard rather shady tales of his doings on one or two occasions, and he did not seem a sufficiently big man to stand to lose a great deal over your horse. Then, when I saw him, I observed that his figure bore a considerable resemblance to that of the man you had described, except as regards the red beard and the spectacles—articles easily enough assumed, and, indeed, often enough used by the scum of the ring whose trade is welshing. And, apart from these considerations, here, at any rate, was one man who had an interest in keeping your colt from winning, and here was his room waiting for me to explore. So I explored it, and the card turned up trumps.” As he was speaking, the stable-boy, a stolid-looking youngster, was leading Hamid back and forth on the turf before their eyes.

“There’s somebody,” said Dorrington suddenly, “over in that clump of trees. Yes—our man, sure enough. I felt pretty sure of him after you had told me that he hadn’t thought it worth while to turn up this morning. Here he comes.” Naylor, with his red beard sticking out over the collar of his big coat, came slouching along with an awkwardly assumed air of carelessness and absence of mind.

“Hullo!” he said suddenly, as he came abreast of the horse, turning as though but now aware of its presence, “that’s a valuable sort of horse, ain’t it, my lad?”

“Yes,” said the boy, “it is. He’s goin’ to win the Redbury Stakes tomorrow. It’s Janissary.”

“Oh! Janey Sairey, is it?” Naylor answered, with a quaint affectation of gaping ignorance. “Janey Sairey, eh? Well, she do look a fine ‘orse, what I can see of ‘er. What a suit o’ clo’es! An’ so she’s one o’ the ‘orses that runs in races, is she? Well, I never! Pretty much like other ‘orses, too, to look at, ain’t she? Only a bit thin in the legs.” The boy stood carelessly by the colt’s side, and the man approached. His hand came quickly from an inner pocket, and then he passed it under Hamid’s cloths, near the shoulder. “Ah, it do feel a lovely skin, to be sure!” he said. “An’ so there’s goin’ to be races at Redbury tomorrow, is there? I dunno anythin’ about races myself, an’—Oo my!” Naylor sprang back as the horse, flinging back its ears, started suddenly, swung round, and reared. “Lor,” he said, “what a vicious brute! Jist because I stroked her! I’ll be careful about touching racehorses again.” His hand passed stealthily to the pocket again, and he hurried on his way, while the stable-boy steadied and soothed Hamid.

Telfer and Dorrington sniggered quietly in their concealment. “He’s taken a deal

of trouble, hasn't he?" Dorrington remarked. "It's a sad case of the biter bit for Mr. Naylor, I'm afraid. That was a prick the colt felt—hypodermic injection with the syringe I saw in the bag, no doubt. The boy won't be such a fool as to come in again at once, will he? If Naylor's taking a look back from anywhere, that may make him suspicious."

"No fear. I've told him to keep out for the half-hour, and he'll do it. Dear, dear, what an innocent person Mr. Bob Naylor is! 'Well, I never! Pretty much like other horses!' He didn't know there were to be races at Redbury! 'Janey Sairey,' too—it's really very funny!" Ere the half-hour was quite over, Hamid came stumbling and dragging into the stable yard, plainly all amiss, and collapsed on his litter as soon as he gained his stall. There he lay, shivering and drowsy.

"I expect he'll get over it in a day or two," Dorrington remarked. "I don't suppose a vet could do much for him just now, except, perhaps, give him a drench and let him take a rest. Certainly, the effect will last over tomorrow. That's what it is calculated for."

THE Redbury Stakes were run at three in the afternoon, after two or three minor events had been disposed of. The betting had undergone considerable fluctuations during the morning, but in general it ruled heavily against Janissary. The story had got about, too, that Mr. Warren Telfer's colt would not start. So that when the numbers went up, and it was seen that Janissary was starting after all, there was much astonishment, and a good deal of uneasiness in the ring.

"It's a pity we can't see our friend Naylor's face just now, isn't it?" Dorrington remarked to his client, as they looked on from Mr. Telfer's drag.

"Yes; it would be interesting," Telfer replied. "He was quite confident last night, you say."

"Quite. I tested him by an offer of a small bet on your colt, asking some points over the odds, and he took it at once. Indeed, I believe he has been going about gathering up all the wagers he could about Janissary, and the market has felt it. Your nephew has risked some more with him, I believe, and altogether it looks as though the town would spoil the 'bookies' badly." As the horses came from the weighing enclosure, Janissary was seen conspicuous among them, bright, clean, and firm, and a good many faces lengthened at the sight. The start was not so good as it might have been, but the favourite (the starting-price had gone to

evens) was not left, and got away well in the crowd of ten starters. There he lay till rounding the bend, when the Telfer blue and chocolate was seen among the foremost, and near the rails. Mr. Telfer almost trembled as he watched through his glasses.

“Hang that Willett!” he said, almost to himself. “He’s too clever against those rails before getting clear. All right, though, all right! He’s coming!” Janissary, indeed, was showing in front, and as the horses came along the straight it was plain that Mr. Telfer’s colt was holding the field comfortably. There were changes in the crowd; some dropped away, some came out and attempted to challenge for the lead, but the favourite, striding easily, was never seriously threatened, and in the end, being a little let out, came in a three-lengths winner, never once having been made to show his best.

“I congratulate you, Mr. Telfer,” said Dorrington, “and you may congratulate me.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Mr. Telfer hastily, hurrying off to lead in the winner.

It was a bad race for the ring, and in the open parts of the course many a humble fielder grabbed his satchel ere the shouting was over, and made his best pace for the horizon; and more than one pair of false whiskers, as red as Naylor’s, came off suddenly while the owner betook himself to a fresh stand. Unless a good many outsiders sailed home before the end of the week there would be a bad Monday for layers. But all sporting Redbury was jubilant. They had all been “on” the local favourite for the local race, and it had won.

MR. Bob Naylor “got a bit back”, in his own phrase, on other races by the end of the week, but all the same he saw a black settling day ahead. He had been done—done for a certainty. He had realized this as soon as he saw the numbers go up for the Redbury Stakes. Janissary had not been drugged after all. That meant that another horse had been substituted for him, and that the whole thing was an elaborate plant. He thought he knew Janissary pretty well by sight, too, and rather prided himself on having an eye for a horse. But clearly it was a plant—a complete do. Telfer was in it, and so of course was that gentlemanly stranger who had strolled along Redbury High Street with him that night, telling that cock-and-bull story about the afternoon walks and the handful of malt. There was a nice schoolboy tale to take in a man who thought himself broad as Cheapside! He cursed himself high and low. To be done, and to know it, was a

galling thing, but this would be worse. The tale would get about. They would boast of a clever stroke like that, and that would injure him with everybody; with honest men, because his reputation, as it was, would bear no worsening, and with knaves like himself, because they would laugh at him, and leave him out when any little co-operative swindle was in contemplation. But though the chagrin of the defeat was bitter bad enough, his losses were worse. He had taken everything offered on Janissary after he had nobbled the wrong horse, and had given almost any odds demanded. Do as he might, he could see nothing but a balance against him on Monday, which, though he might pay out his last cent, he could not cover by several hundred pounds.

But on the day he met his customers at his club, as usual, and paid out freely. Young Richard Telfer, however, with whom he was heavily “in”, he put off till the evening. “I’ve been a bit disappointed this morning over some ready that was to be paid over,” he said, “and I’ve used the last cheque-form in my book. You might come and have a bit of dinner with me tonight, Mr. Telfer, and take it then.” Telfer assented without difficulty.

“All right, then, that’s settled. You know the place—Gold Street. Seven sharp. The missis’ll be pleased to see you, I’m sure, Mr. Telfer. Let’s see—it’s fifteen hundred and thirty altogether, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s it. I’ll come.” Young Telfer left the club, and at the corner of the street ran against Dorrington. Telfer, of course, knew him as his late fellow-guest at the “Crown” at Redbury, and this was their first meeting in London after their return from the races.

“Ah!” said Telfer. “Going to draw a bit of Janissary money, eh?”

“Oh, I haven’t much to draw,” Dorrington answered. “But I expect your pockets are pretty heavy, if you’ve just come from Naylor.”

“Yes, I’ve just come from Naylor, but I haven’t touched the merry sovs just yet,” replied Telfer cheerfully. “There’s been a run on Naylor, and I’m going to dine with him and his respectable missis this evening, and draw the plunder then. I feel rather curious to see what sort of establishment a man like Naylor keeps going. His place is in Gold Street, Chelsea.”

“Yes, I believe so. Anyhow, I congratulate you on your haul, and wish you a merry evening.” And the two men parted.

Dorrington had, indeed, a few pounds to draw as a result of his “fishing” bet with Naylor, but now he resolved to ask for the money at his own time. This invitation to Telfer took his attention, and it reminded him oddly of the circumstances detailed in the report of the inquest on Lawrence, transcribed at the beginning of this paper. He had cut out this report at the time it appeared, because he saw certain singularities about the case, and he had filed it, as he had done hundred of other such cuttings. And now certain things led him to fancy that he might be much interested to observe the proceedings at Naylor’s house on the evening after a bad settling-day. He resolved to gratify himself with a strict professional watch in Gold Street that evening, on chance of something coming of it. For it was an important thing in Dornington’s rascally trade to get hold of as much of other people’s private business as possible, and to know exactly in what cupboard to find every man’s skeleton. For there was no knowing but it might be turned into money sooner or later. So he found the number of Naylor’s house from the handiest directory, and at six o’clock, a little disguised by a humbler style of dress than usual, he began his watch.

Naylor’s house was at the corner of a turning, with the flank wall blank of windows, except for one at the top; and a public-house stood at the opposite corner. Dornington, skilled in watching without attracting attention to himself, now lounged in the public-house bar, now stood at the street corner, and now sauntered along the street, a picture of vacancy of mind, and looking, apparently, at everything in turn, except the house at the corner. The first thing he noted was the issuing forth from the area steps of a healthy-looking girl in much gaily beribboned finery. Plainly a servant taking an evening out. This was an odd thing, that a servant should be allowed out on an evening when a guest was expected to dinner; and the house looked like one where it was more likely that one servant would be kept than two. Dornington hurried after the girl, and, changing his manner of address, to that of a civil labourer, said—“Beg pardon, Miss, but is Mary Walker still in service at your ‘ouse?”

“Mary Walker?” said the girl. “Why, no. I never ‘eard the name. And there ain’t nobody in service there but me.”

“Beg pardon—it must be the wrong ‘ouse. It’s my cousin, Miss, that’s all.” Dornington left the girl and returned to the public-house. As he reached it he perceived a second noticeable thing. Although it was broad daylight, there was now a light behind the solitary window at the top of the side-wall of Naylor’s house. Dornington slipped through the swing-doors of the public-house and

watched through the glass.

It was a bare room behind the high window—it might have been a bathroom—and its interior was made but dimly visible from outside by the light. A tall, thin woman was setting up an ordinary pair of house-steps in the middle of the room. This done, she turned to the window and pulled down the blind, and as she did so Dorrington noted her very extreme thinness, both of face and body. When the blind was down the light still remained within. Again there seemed some significance in this. It appeared that the thin woman had waited until her servant had gone before doing whatever she had to do in that room. Presently the watcher came again into Gold Street, and from there caught a passing glimpse of the thin woman as she moved busily about the front room over the breakfast parlour.

Clearly, then, the light above had been left for future use. Dorrington thought for a minute, and then suddenly stopped, with a snap of the fingers. He saw it all now. Here was something altogether in his way. He would take a daring course.

He withdrew once more to the public-house, and ordering another drink, took up a position in a compartment from which he could command a view both of Gold Street and the side turning. The time now, he saw by his watch, was ten minutes to seven. He had to wait rather more than a quarter of an hour before seeing Richard Telfer come walking jauntily down Gold Street, mount the steps, and knock at Naylor's door. There was a momentary glimpse of the thin woman's face at the door, and then Telfer entered.

It now began to grow dusk, and in about twenty minutes more Dorrington took to the street again. The room over the breakfast-parlour was clearly the dining-room. It was lighted brightly, and by intent listening the watcher could distinguish, now and again, a sudden burst of laughter from Telfer, followed by the deeper grunts of Naylor's voice, and once by sharp tones that it seemed natural to suppose were the thin woman's.

Dorrington waited no longer, but slipped a pair of thick sock-feet over his shoes, and, after a quick look along the two streets, to make sure nobody was near, he descended the area steps. There was no light in the breakfast-parlour. With his knife he opened the window-catch, raised the sash quietly and stepped over the sill, and stood in the dark room within.

All was quiet, except for the talking in the room above. He had done but what many thieves—"parlour-jumpers" do every day; but there was more ahead. He made his way silently to the basement passage, and passed into the kitchen. The room was lighted, and cookery utensils were scattered about, but nobody was there. He waited till he heard a request in Naylor's gruff voice for "another slice" of something, and noiselessly mounted the stairs. He noticed that the dining-room door was ajar, but passed quickly on to the second flight, and rested on the landing above. Mrs. Naylor would probably have to go downstairs once or twice again, but he did not expect anybody in the upper part of the house just yet. There was a small flight of stairs above the landing whereon he stood, leading to the servant's bedroom and the bathroom. He took a glance at the bathroom with its feeble lamp, its steps, and its open ceiling-trap, and returned again to the bedroom landing. There he stood waiting watchfully.

Twice the thin woman emerged from the dining-room, went downstairs and came up again, each time with food and plates. Then she went down once more, and was longer gone. Meantime Naylor and Telfer were talking and joking loudly at the table.

When once again Dorrington saw the crown of the thin woman's head rising over the bottom stair, he perceived that she bore a tray set with cups already filled with coffee. These she carried into the dining-room, whence presently came the sound of striking matches. After this the conversation seemed to flag, and Telfer's part in it grew less and less, till it ceased altogether, and the house was silent except for a sound of heavy breathing. Soon this became almost a snore, and then there was a sudden noisy tumble as of a drunken man; but still the snoring went on, and the Naylor's were talking in whispers.

There was a shuffling and heaving sound, and a chair was knocked over. Then at the dining-room door appeared Naylor, walking backward, and carrying the inert form of Telfer by the shoulders, while the thin woman followed supporting the feet. Dorrington retreated up the small stair-flight, cocking a pocket revolver as he went.

Up the stairs they came, Naylor puffing and grunting with exertion, and Telfer still snoring soundly on, till at last, having mounted the top flight, they came in at the bathroom door, where Dorrington stood to receive them, smiling and bowing pleasantly, with his hat in one hand and his revolver in the other.

The woman, from her position, saw him first, and dropped Telfer's legs with a scream. Naylor turned his head and then also dropped his end. The drugged man fell in a heap, snoring still.

Naylor, astounded and choking, made as if to rush at the interloper, but Dorrington thrust the revolver into his face, and exclaimed, still smiling courteously, "Mind, mind! It's a dangerous thing, is a revolver, and apt to go off if you run against it!" He stood thus for a second, and then stepped forward and took the woman—who seemed like to swoon—by the arm, and pulled her into the room. "Come, Mrs. Naylor," he said, "you're not one of the fainting sort, and I think I'd better keep two such clever people as you under my eye, or one of you may get into mischief. Come now, Naylor, we'll talk business." Naylor, now white as a ghost, sat on the edge of the bath, and stared at Dorrington as though in a fascination of terror. His hands rested on the bath at each side, and an odd sound of gurgling came from his thick throat.

"We will talk business," Dorrington resumed. "Come, you've met me before now you know—at Redbury. You can't have forgotten Janissary, and the walking exercise and the handful of malt. I'm afraid you're a clumsy sort of rascal, Naylor, though you do your best. I'm a rascal myself (though I don't often confess it), and I assure you that your conceptions are crude as yet. Still, that isn't a bad notion in its way, that of drugging a man and drowning him in your cistern up there in the roof, when you prefer not to pay him his winnings. It has the very considerable merit that, after the body has been fished out of any river you may choose to fling it into, the stupid coroner's jury will never suspect that it was drowned in any other water but that. Just as happened in the Lawrence case, for instance. You remember that, eh? So do I, very well, and it was because I remembered that that I paid you this visit tonight. But you do the thing much too clumsily, really. When I saw a light up here in broad daylight I knew at once it must be left for some purpose to be executed later in the evening; and when I saw the steps carefully placed at the same time, after the servant had been sent out, why the thing was plain, remembering, as I did, the curious coincidence that Mr. Lawrence was drowned the very evening he had been here to take away his winnings. The steps must be intended to give access to the roof, where there was probably a tank to feed the bath, and what more secret place to drown a man than there? And what easier place, so long as the man was well drugged, and there was a strong lid to the tank? As I say, Naylor, your notion was meritorious, but your execution was wretched—perhaps because you had no notion that I was watching you." He paused, and then went on. "Come," he said, "collect your

scattered faculties, both of you. I shan't hand you over to the police for this little invention of yours; it's too useful an invention to give away to the police. I shan't hand you over, that is to say, as long as you do as I tell you. If you get mutinous, you shall hang, both of you, for the Lawrence business. I may as well tell you that I'm a bit of a scoundrel myself, by way of profession. I don't boast about it, but it's well to be frank in making arrangements of this sort. I'm going to take you into my service. I employ a few agents, and you and your tank may come in very handy from time to time. But we must set it up, with a few improvements, in another house—a house which hasn't quite such an awkward window. And we mustn't execute our little suppressions so regularly on settling-day; it looks suspicious. So as soon as you can get your faculties together we'll talk over this thing." The man and the woman had exchanged glances during this speech, and now Naylor asked, huskily, jerking his thumb toward the man on the floor, "An'—an' what about 'im?"

"What about him? Why, get rid of him as soon as you like. Not that way, though." (He pointed toward the ceiling trap.) "It doesn't pay me, and I'm master now. Besides, what will people say when you tell the same tale at his inquest that you told at Lawrence's? No, my friend, bookmaking and murder don't assort together, profitable as the combination may seem. Settling-days are too regular. And I'm not going to be your accomplice, mind. You are going to be mine. Do what you please with Telfer. Leave him on somebody's doorstep if you like."

"But I owe him fifteen hundred, and I ain't got more than half of it! I'll be ruined!"

"Very likely," Dorrington returned placidly. "Be ruined as soon as possible, then, and devote all your time to my business. You're not to ornament the ring any longer, remember—you're to assist a private inquiry agent, you and your wife and your charming tank. Repudiate the debt if you like—it's a mere gaming transaction, and there is no legal claim—or leave him in the street and tell him he's been robbed. Please yourself as to this little roguery—you may as well, for it's the last you will do on your own account. For the future your respectable talents will be devoted to the service of Dorrington & Hicks, private inquiry agents; and if you don't give satisfaction, that eminent firm will hang you, with the assistance of the judge at the Old Bailey. So settle your business yourselves, and quickly, for I've a good many things to arrange with you." And, Dorrington watching them continually, they took Telfer out by the side gate in the garden

wall and left him in a dark corner.

THE AFFAIR OF THE AVALANCHE BICYCLE & TYRE CO., LTD

CYCLE companies were in the market everywhere. Immense fortunes were being made in a few days and sometimes little fortunes were being lost to build them up.

Mining shares were dull for a season, and any company with the word “cycle” or “tyre” in its title was certain to attract capital, no matter what its prospects were like in the eyes of the expert. All the old private cycle companies suddenly were offered to the public, and their proprietors, already rich men, built themselves houses on the Riviera, bought yachts, ran racehorses, and left business for ever. Sometimes the shareholders got their money’s-worth, sometimes more, sometimes less—sometimes they got nothing but total loss; but still the game went on. One could never open a newspaper without finding, displayed at large, the prospectus of yet another cycle company with capital expressed in six figures at least, often in seven. Solemn old dailies, into whose editorial heads no new thing ever found its way till years after it had been forgotten elsewhere, suddenly exhibited the scandalous phenomenon of “broken columns” in their advertising sections, and the universal prospectuses stretched outrageously across half or even all the page—a thing to cause apoplexy in the bodily system of any self-respecting manager of the old school.

In the midst of this excitement it chanced that the firm of Dorrington & Hicks were engaged upon an investigation for the famous and long-established “Indestructible Bicycle & Tricycle Manufacturing Company,” of London and Coventry. The matter was not one of sufficient intricacy or difficulty to engage Dorrington’s personal attention, and it was given to an assistant. There was some doubt as to the validity of a certain patent having reference to a particular method of tightening the spokes and truing the wheels of a tricycle, and Dorrington’s assistant had to make inquiries (without attracting attention to the matter) as to whether or not there existed any evidence, either documentary or in the memory of veterans, of the use of this method, or anything like it, before the year 1885. The assistant completed his inquiries and made his report to Dorrington. Now I think I have said that, from every evidence I have seen, the chief matter of Dorrington’s solicitude was his own interest, and just at this time he had heard, as had others, much of the money being made in cycle companies. Also, like others, he had conceived a great desire to get the confidential advice

of somebody “in the know”—advice which might lead him into the “good thing” desired by all the greedy who flutter about at the outside edge of the stock and share market. For this reason Dorrington determined to make this small matter of the wheel patent an affair of personal report. He was a man of infinite resource, plausibility and good-companionship, and there was money going in the cycle trade. Why then should he lose an opportunity of making himself pleasant, in the inner groves of that trade, and catch whatever might come his way—information, syndicate shares, directorships, anything? So that Dorrington made himself master of his assistant’s information, and proceeded to the head office of the “Indestructible” company on Holborn Viaduct, resolved to become the entertaining acquaintance of the managing director.

On his way his attention was attracted by a very elaborately fitted cycle shop which his recollection told him was new. “The Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company” was the legend gilt above the great plate-glass window, and in the window itself stood many brilliantly enamelled and plated bicycles, each labelled on the frame with the flaming red and gold transfer of the firm; and in the midst of all was another bicycle covered with dried mud, of which, however, sufficient had been carefully cleared away to expose a similar glaring transfer to those that decorated the rest—with a placard announcing that on this particular machine somebody had ridden some incredible distance on bad roads in very little more than no time at all. A crowd stood about the window; and gaped respectfully at the placard, the bicycles, the transfers and the mud, though they paid little attention to certain piles of folded white papers, endorsed in bold letters with the name of the company, with the suffix “limited” and the word “prospectus” in bloated black letter below. These, however, Dorrington observed at once, for he had himself that morning, in common with several thousand other people, received one by post. Also half a page of his morning paper had been filled with a copy of that same prospectus, and the afternoon had brought another copy in the evening paper. In the list of directors there was a titled name or two, together with a few unknown names—doubtless the “practical men.” And below this list there were such positive promises of tremendous dividends, backed up and proved beyond dispute by such ingenious piles of business-like figures, every line of figures referring to some other line for testimonials to its perfect genuineness and accuracy, that any reasonable man, it would seem, must instantly sell the hat off his head and the boots off his feet to buy one share at least, and so make his fortune for ever. True, the business was but lately established, but that was just it. It had rushed ahead with such amazing rapidity (as was natural with an avalanche) that it had got altogether out of hand, and

orders couldn't be executed at all; wherefore the proprietors were reluctantly compelled to let the public have some of the luck. This was Thursday. The share list was to be opened on Monday morning and closed inexorably at four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, with a merciful extension to Wednesday morning for the candidates for wealth who were so unfortunate as to live in the country. So that it behoved everybody to waste no time lest he be numbered among the unlucky whose subscription-money should be returned in full, failing allotment. The prospectus did not absolutely say it in so many words, but no rational person could fail to feel that the directors were fervently hoping that nobody would get injured in the rush.

Dorrington passed on and reached the well-known establishment of the "Indestructible Bicycle Company." This was already a limited company of a private sort, and had been so for ten years or more. And before that the concern had had eight or nine years of prosperous experience. The founder of the firm, Sir Paul Mallows, was now the managing director, and a great pillar of the cycling industry. Dorrington gave a clerk his card, and asked to see Mr. Mallows.

Mr. Mallows was out, it seemed, but Mr. Stedman, the secretary, was in, and him Dorrington saw. Mr. Stedman was a pleasant, youngish man, who had been a famous amateur bicyclist in his time, and was still an enthusiast. In ten minutes business was settled and dismissed, and Dorrington's tact had brought the secretary into a pleasant discursive chat, with much exchange of anecdote.

Dorrington expressed much interest in the subject of bicycling, and, seeing that Stedman had been a racing man, particularly as to bicycling races.

"There'll be a rare good race on Saturday, I expect," Stedman said. "Or rather," he went on, "I expect the fifty miles record will go. I fancy our man Gillett is pretty safe to win, but he'll have to move, and I quite expect to see a good set of new records on our advertisements next week. The next best man is Lant—the new fellow, you know—who rides for the 'Avalanche' people."

"Let's see, they're going to the public as a limited company, aren't they?" Dorrington asked, casually.

Stedman nodded, with a little grimace.

"You don't think it's a good thing, perhaps," Dorrington said, noticing the

grimace. "Is that so?"

"Well," Stedman answered, "of course I can't say. I don't know much about the firm—nobody does, as far as I can tell—but they seem to have got a business together in almost no time; that is, if the business is as genuine as it looks at first sight. But they want a rare lot of capital, and then the prospectus—well I've seen more satisfactory ones, you know. I don't say it isn't all right, of course, but still I shan't go out of my way to recommend any friends of mine to plunge on it."

"You won't?"

"No, I won't. Though no doubt they'll get their capital, or most of it. Almost any cycle or tyre company can get subscribed just now. And this 'Avalanche' affair is both, and it is so well advertised, you know. Lant has been winning on their mounts just lately, and they've been booming it for all they're worth. By Jove, if they could only screw him up to win the fifty miles on Saturday, and beat our man Gillett, that would give them a push! Just at the correct moment too. Gillett's never been beaten yet at the distance, you know. But Lant can't do it—though, as I have said, he'll make some fast riding—it'd be a race, I tell you!"

"I should like to see it."

"Why not come? See about it, will you? And perhaps you'd like to run down to the track after dinner this evening and see our man training—awfully interesting, I can tell you, with all the pacing machinery and that. Will you come?"
Dorrington expressed himself delighted, and suggested that Stedman should dine with him before going to the track. Stedman, for his part, charmed with his new acquaintance—as everybody was at a first meeting with Dorrington—assented gladly.

At that moment the door of Stedman's room was pushed open and a well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a shaven, flabby face, appeared. "I beg pardon," he said, "I thought you were alone. I've just ripped my finger against the handle of my brougham door as I came in—the screw sticks out. Have you a piece of sticking plaster?" He extended a bleeding finger as he spoke. Stedman looked doubtfully at his desk.

"Here is some court plaster," Dorrington exclaimed, producing his pocket-book. "I always carry it—it's handier than ordinary sticking plaster. How much do you want?"

“Thanks—an inch or so.”

“This is Mr. Dorrington, of Messrs. Dorrington & Hicks, Mr. Mallows,” Stedman said. “Our managing director, Mr. Paul Mallows, Mr. Dorrington.” Dorrington was delighted to make Mr. Mallows’s acquaintance, and he busied himself with a careful strapping of the damaged finger. Mr. Mallows had the large frame of a man of strong build who has had much hard bodily work, but there hung about it the heavier, softer flesh that told of a later period of ease and sloth. “Ah, Mr. Mallows,” Stedman said, “the bicycle’s the safest thing, after all! Dangerous things these broughams!”

“Ah, you younger men,” Mr. Mallows replied, with a slow and rounded enunciation, “you younger men can afford to be active! We elders —”

“Can afford a brougham,” Dorrington added, before the managing director began the next word. “Just so—and the bicycle does it all; wonderful thing the bicycle!” Dorrington had not misjudged his man, and the oblique reference to his wealth flattered Mr. Mallows. Dorrington went once more through his report as to the spoke patent and then Mr. Mallows bade him good-bye.

“Good day, Mr. Dorrington, good day,” he said. “I am extremely obliged by your careful personal attention to this matter of the patent. We may leave it with Mr. Stedman now, I think. Good day. I hope soon to have the pleasure of meeting you again.” And with clumsy stateliness Mr. Mallows vanished.

II.

“So you don’t think the ‘Avalanche’ good business as an investment?” Dorrington said once more as he and Stedman, after an excellent dinner, were cabbage it to the track.

“No, no,” Stedman answered, “don’t touch it! There’s better things than that coming along presently. Perhaps I shall be able to put you in for something you know a bit later; but don’t be in a hurry. As to the ‘Avalanche,’ even if everything else were satisfactory, there’s too much ‘booming’ being done just now to please me. All sorts of rumours, you know, of their having something ‘up their sleeve,’ and so on; mysterious hints in the papers, and all that; as to something revolutionary being in hand with the ‘Avalanche’ people. Perhaps there is. But why they don’t fetch it out in view of the public subscription for shares is more than I can understand, unless they don’t want too much of a rush.

And as to that well they don't look like modestly shrinking from anything of that sort up to the present."

They were at the track soon after seven but Gillett was not yet riding. Dorrington remarked that Gillett appeared to begin late.

"Well," Stedman explained, "he's one of those fellows that afternoon training doesn't seem to suit, unless it is a bit of walking exercise. He just does a few miles in the morning and a spurt or two, and then he comes on just before sunset for a fast ten or fifteen miles—that is when he is getting fit for such a race as Saturday's. Tonight will be his last spin of that length before Saturday, because tomorrow will be the day before the race. Tomorrow he'll only go a spurt or two, and rest most of the day." They strolled about inside the track, the two highly "banked" ends whereof seemed to a near-sighted person in the centre to be solid erect walls, along the face of which the training riders skimmed, fly-fashion. Only three or four persons beside themselves were in the enclosure when they first came, but in ten minutes' time Mr. Paul Mallows came across the track.

"Why," said Stedman to Dorrington, "here's the governor! It isn't often he comes down here. But I expect he's anxious to see how Gillett's going, in view of Saturday."

"Good evening Mr. Mallows," said Dorrington. "I hope the finger's all right? Want any more plaster?"

"Good evening, good evening," responded Mr. Mallows heavily. "Thank you, the finger's not troubling me a bit." He held it up, still decorated by the black plaster. "Your plaster remains, you see—I was a little careful not to fray it too much in washing, that was all." And Mr. Mallows sat down on a light iron garden-chair (of which several stood here and there in the enclosure) and began to watch the riding.

The track was clear, and dusk was approaching when at last the great Gillett made his appearance on the track. He answered a friendly question or two put to him by Mallows and Stedman, and then, giving his coat to his trainer, swung off along the track on his bicycle, led in front by a tandem and closely attended by a triplet. In fifty yards his pace quickened, and he settled down into a swift even pace, regular as clockwork. Sometimes the tandem and sometimes the triplet went to the front, but Gillett neither checked nor heeded as, nursed by his pacers,

who were directed by the trainer from the centre, he swept along mile after mile, each mile in but a few seconds over the two minutes.

“Look at the action!” exclaimed Stedman with enthusiasm. “Just watch him. Not an ounce of power wasted there! Did you ever see more regular ankle work? And did anybody ever sit a machine quite so well as that? Show me a movement anywhere above the hips!”

“Ah,” said Mr. Hallows, “Gillett has a wonderful style—a wonderful style, really!” The men in the enclosure wandered about here and there on the grass, watching Gillett’s riding as one watches the performance of a great piece of art—which, indeed, was what Gillett’s riding was. There were, besides Mallows, Stedman, Dorrington and the trainer, two officials of the Cyclists’ Union, an amateur racing man named Sparks, the track superintendent and another man. The sky grew darker, and gloom fell about the track. The machines became invisible, and little could be seen of the riders across the ground but the row of rhythmically working, legs and the white cap that Gillett wore. The trainer had just told Stedman that there would be three fast laps and then his man would come off the track.

“Well, Mr. Stedman,” said Mr. Mallows, “I think we shall be all right for Saturday.”

“Rather!” answered Stedman confidently. “Gillett’s going great guns, and steady as a watch!” The pace now suddenly increased. The tandem shot once more to the front, the triplet hung on the rider’s flank, and the group of swishing wheels flew round the track at a “one-fifty” gait. The spectators turned about, following the riders round the track with their eyes. And then swinging into the straight from the top bend, the tandem checked suddenly and gave a little jump. Gillett crashed into it from behind, and the triplet, failing to clear, wavered and swung, and crashed over and along the track too. All three machines and six men were involved in one complicated smash.

Everybody rushed across the grass, the trainer first. Then the cause of the disaster was seen. Lying on its side on the track, with men and bicycles piled over and against it, was one of the green painted light iron garden-chairs that had been standing in the enclosure. The triplet men were struggling to their feet, and though much cut and shaken, seemed the least hurt of the lot. One of the men of the tandem was insensible, and Gillett, who from his position had got all the

worst of it, lay senseless too, badly cut and bruised, and his left arm was broken.

The trainer was cursing and tearing his hair. "If I knew; who'd done this," Stedman cried, "I'd pulp him with that chair!"

"Oh, that betting, that betting!" wailed Mr. Mallows, hopping about distractedly; "see what it leads people into doing! It can't have been an accident, can it?"

"Accident? Skittles! A man doesn't put a chair on a track in the dark and leave it there by accident. Is anybody getting away there from the outside of the track?"

"No, there's nobody. He wouldn't wait till this, he's clear off a minute ago and more. Here, Fielders! Shut the outer gate, and we'll see who's about." But there seemed to be no suspicious character. Indeed, except for the ground-man, his boy, Gillett's trainer, and a racing man, who had just finished dressing in the pavilion, there seemed to be nobody about beyond those whom everybody had seen standing in the enclosure. But there had been ample time for anybody, standing unnoticed at the outer rails, to get across the track in the dark, just after the riders had passed, place the obstruction, and escape before the completion of the lap.

The damaged men were helped or carried into the pavilion, and the damaged machines were dragged after them. "I will give fifty pounds gladly—more, a hundred," said Mr. Mallows, excitedly, "to anybody who will find out who put that chair on the track. It might have ended in murder. Some wretched bookmaker, I suppose, who has taken too many bets on Gillett. As I've said a thousand times, betting is the curse of all sport nowadays."

"The governor excites himself a great deal about betting and bookmakers," Stedman said to Dorrington, as they walked toward the pavilion, "but, between you and me, I believe some of the 'Avalanche' people are in this. The betting bee is always in Mallows's bonnet, but as a matter of fact there's very little betting at all on cycle races, and what there is is little more than a matter of half-crowns or at most half-sovereigns on the day of the race. No bookmaker ever makes a heavy book first. Still there may be something in it this time, of course. But look at the 'Avalanche' people. With Gillett away their man can certainly win on Saturday, and if only the weather keeps fair he can almost as certainly beat the record; just at present the fifty miles is fairly easy, and it's bound to go soon. Indeed our intention was that Gillett should pull it down on Saturday. He was a

safe winner, bar accidents, and it was good odds on his altering the record, if the weather were and good at all.

“With Gillett out of it Lant is just about as certain a winner as our man would be if all were well. And there would be a boom for the ‘Avalanche’ company, on the very eve of the share subscription! Lant, you must know, was very second-rate till this season, but he has improved wonderfully in the last month or two, since he has been with the ‘Avalanche’ people. Let him win, and they can point to the machine as responsible for it all. ‘Here,’ they will say in effect, ‘is a man who could rarely get in front, even in second-class company, till he rode an ‘Avalanche.’ Now he beats the world’s record for fifty miles on it, and makes rings round the topmost professionals!’ Why, it will be worth thousands of capital to them. Of course the subscription of capital won’t hurt us, but the loss of the record may, and to have Gillett knocked out like this in the middle of the season is serious.”

“Yes, I suppose with you it is more than a matter of this one race.”

“Of course. And so it mill be with the ‘Avalanche’ company. Don’t you see, with Gillett probably useless for the rest of the season, Lant will have it all his own way at anything over ten miles. That’ll help to boom up the shares and there’ll be big profit made on trading in them. Oh, I tell you this thing seems pretty suspicious to me.”

“Look here,” said Dorrington, “can you borrow a light for me, and let me run over with it to the spot where the smash took place? The people have cleared into the pavilion, and I could go alone.”

“Certainly. Will you have a try for the governor’s hundred?”

“Well, perhaps. But any way there’s no harm in doing you a good turn if I can, while I’m here. Some day perhaps you’ll do me one.”

“Right you are—I’ll ask Fielders, the ground-man.” A lantern was brought, and Dorrington betook himself to the spot where the iron chair still lay, while Stedman joined the rest of the crowd in the pavilion.

Dorrington minutely examined the grass within two yards of the place where the chair lay, and then, crossing the track and getting over the rails, did the same with the damp gravel that paved the outer ring. The track itself was of cement,

and unimpressible by footmarks, but nevertheless he scrutinized that with equal care, as well as the rails. Then he turned his attention to the chair. It was, as I have said, a light chair made of flat iron strip, bent to shape and riveted. It had seen good service, and its present coat of green paint was evidently far from being its original one. Also it was rusty in places, and parts had been repaired and strengthened with cross pieces secured by bolts and square nuts, some rusty and loose. It was from one of these square nuts, holding a cross-piece that stayed the back at the top, that Dorrington secured some object—it might have been a hair—which he carefully transferred to his pocket-book. This done, with one more glance round, he betook himself to the pavilion.

A surgeon had arrived, and he reported well of the chief patient. It was a simple fracture, and a healthy patient. When Dorrington entered, preparations were beginning for setting the limb. There was a sofa in the pavilion and the surgeon saw no reason for removing the patient till all was made secure.

“Found anything?” asked Stedman in a low tone of Dorrington.

Dorrington shook his head. “Not much,” he answered at a whisper. “I’ll think over it later.” Dorrington asked one of the Cyclists’ Union officials for the loan of a pencil, and, having made a note with it, immediately, in another part of the room, asked Sparks, the amateur, to lend him another.

Stedman had told Mr. Mallows of Dorrington’s late employment with the lantern, and the managing director now said quietly, “You remember what I said about rewarding anybody who discovered the perpetrator of this outrage, Mr. Dorrington? Well, I was excited at the time, but I quite hold to it. It is a shameful thing. You have been looking about the grounds, I hear. I hope you have come across something that will enable you to find something out! Nothing will please me more than to have to pay you, I’m sure.”

“Well,” Dorrington confessed, “I’m afraid I haven’t seen anything very big in the way of a clue, Mr. Mallows; but I’ll think a bit. The worst of it is, you never know who these betting men are, do you, once they get away? There are so many, and it may be anybody. Not only that, but they may bribe anybody.”

“Yes, of course—there’s no end to their wickedness, I’m afraid. Stedman suggests that trade rivalry may have had something to do with it. But that seems an uncharitable view, don’t you think? Of course we stand very high, and there

are jealousies and all that, but this is a thing I'm sure no firm would think of stooping to, for a moment. No, it's betting that is at the bottom of this, I fear. And I hope, Mr. Dorrington that you will make some attempt to find the guilty parties." Presently Stedman spoke to Dorrington again. "Here's something that may help you," he said. "To begin with, it must have been done by someone from the outside of the track."

"Why?"

"Well, at least every probability's that way. Everybody inside was directly interested in Gillett's success, excepting the Union Officials and Sparks, who's a gentleman and quite above suspicion, as much so, indeed, as the Union officials. Of course, there was the ground-man, but he's all right, I'm sure."

"And the trainer?"

"Oh, that's altogether improbable—altogether. I was going to say —"

"And there's that other man who was standing about; I haven't heard who he was."

"Right you are. I don't know him, either. Where is he now?" But the man had gone.

"Look here, I'll make some quiet inquiries about that man," Stedman pursued. "I forgot all about him in the excitement of the moment. I was going to say that although whoever did it could easily have got away by the gate before the smash came, he might not have liked to go that way in case of observation in passing the pavilion. In that case he could have got away (and indeed he could have got into the grounds to begin with) by way of one of those garden walls that bound the ground just by where the smash occurred. If that were so he must either live in one of the houses, or he must know somebody that does. Perhaps you might put a man to smell about along that road—it's only a short one; Chisnall Road's the name."

"Yes, yes," Dorrington responded patiently. "There might be something in that." By this time Gillett's arm was in a starched bandage and secured by splints, and a cab was ready to take him home. Mr. Mallows took Stedman away with him, expressing a desire to talk business, and Dorrington went home by himself. He did not turn down Chisnall Road. But he walked jauntily along toward the

nearest cab-stand, and once or twice he chuckled, for he saw his way to a delightfully lucrative financial operation in cycle companies, without risk of capital.

The cab gained, he called at the lodgings of two of his men assistants and gave them instant instructions. Then he packed a small bag at his rooms in Conduit Street, and at midnight was in the late fast train for Birmingham.

III.

THE prospectus of the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company” stated that the works were at Exeter and Birmingham. Exeter is a delightful old town, but it can scarcely be regarded as the centre of the cycle trade; neither is it in especially easy and short communication with Birmingham. It was the sort of thing that any critic anxious to pick holes in the prospectus might wonder at, and so one of Dorrington’s assistants had gone by the night mail to inspect the works. It was from this man that Dorrington, in Birmingham, about noon on the day after Gillett’s disaster, received this telegram—Works here old disused cloth-mills just out of town. Closed and empty but with big new signboard and notice that works now running are at Birmingham. Agent says only deposit paid—tenancy agreement not signed.—Farrish.

The telegram increased Dorrington’s satisfaction, for he had just taken a look at the Birmingham works. They were not empty, though nearly so, nor were they large; and a man there had told him that the chief premises, where most of the work was done, were at Exeter. And the hollower the business the better prize he saw in store for himself. He had already, early in the morning, indulged in a telegram on his own account, though he had not signed it. This was how it ran—Mallows, 58 Upper Sandown Place, London, W.

Fear all not safe here. Run down by 10.10 train without fail.

Thus it happened that at a little later than half-past eight Dorrington’s other assistant, watching the door of No. 58 Upper Sandown Place, saw a telegram delivered, and immediately afterward Mr. Paul Mallows in much haste dashed away in a cab which was called from the end of the street. The assistant followed in another. Mr. Mallows dismissed his cab at a theatrical wig-makers in Bow Street and entered. When he emerged in little more than forty minutes’ time, none but a practiced watcher, who had guessed the reason of the visit, would

have recognized him. He had not assumed the clumsy disguise of a false beard. He was “made up” deftly. His colour was heightened, and his face seemed thinner. There was no heavy accession of false hair, but a slight crepe-hair whisker at each side made a better and less pronounced disguise. He seemed a younger, healthier man. The watcher saw him safely off to Birmingham by the ten minutes past ten train, and then gave Dorrington note by telegraph of the guise in which Mr. Mallows was travelling.

Now this train was timed to arrive at Birmingham at one, which was the reason that Dorrington had named it in the anonymous telegram. The entrance to the “Avalanche” works was by a large gate, which was closed, but which was provided with a small door to pass a man. Within was a yard, and at a little before one o’clock Dorrington pushed open the small door, peeped and entered. Nobody was about in the yard, and what little noise could be heard came from a particular part of the building on the right. A pile of solid “export” crates stood to the left, and these Dorrington had noted at his previous visit that morning as making a suitable hiding-place for temporary use. Now he slipped behind them and awaited the stroke of one. Prompt at the hour a door on the opposite side of the yard swung open, and two men and a boy emerged and climbed one after another through the little door in the big gate. Then presently another man, not a workman, but apparently a sort of overseer, came from the opposite door, which he carelessly let fall-to behind him, and he also disappeared through the little door, which he then locked.

Dorrington was now alone in the sole active works of the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company, Limited.” He tried the door opposite and found it was free to open. Within he saw in a dark corner a candle which had been left burning, and opposite him a large iron enamelling oven, like an immense safe, and round about, on benches, were strewn heaps of the glaring red and gold transfer which Dorrington had observed the day before on the machines exhibited in the Holborn Viaduct window. Some of the frames had the label newly applied, and others were still plain. It would seem that the chief business of the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company, Limited,” was the attaching of labels to previously nondescript machines. But there was little time to examine further, and indeed Dorrington presently heard the noise of a key in the outer gate. So he stood and waited by the enamelling oven to welcome Mr. Mallows. As the door was pushed open Dorrington advanced and bowed politely.

Mallows started guiltily, but, remembering his disguise, steadied himself and

asked gruffly, "Well sir, and who are you?"

"I," answered Dorrington with perfect composure, "I am Mr. Paul Mallows—you may have heard of me in connection with the 'Indestructible Bicycle Company.'"

Mallows was altogether taken aback. But then it struck him that perhaps the detective, anxious to win the reward he had offered in the matter of the Gillett outrage, was here making inquiries in the assumed character of the man who stood, impenetrably disguised, before him. So after a pause he asked again, a little less gruffly, "And what may be your business?"

"Well," said Dorrington, "I did think of taking shares in this company. I suppose there would be no objection to the managing director of another company taking shares in this?"

"No," answered Mallows, wondering what all this was to lead to.

"Of course not; I'm sure you don't think so, eh?" Dorrington, as he spoke, looked in the other's face with a sly leer, and Mallows began to feel altogether uncomfortable. "But there's one other thing," Dorrington pursued, taking out his pocket-book, though still maintaining his leer in Mallows's face—"one other thing. And by the way, will you have another piece of court plaster now I've got it out? Don't say no. It's a pleasure to oblige you, really." And Dorrington, his leer growing positively fiendish, tapped the side of his nose with the case of court plaster.

Mallows paled under the paint, gasped, and felt for support. Dorrington laughed pleasantly. "Come, come," he said, encouragingly, "don't be frightened. I admire your cleverness, Mr. Mallows, and I shall arrange everything pleasantly, as you will see. And as to the court plaster, if you'd rather not have it you needn't. You have another piece on now, I see. Why didn't you get them to paint it over at Clarkson's? They really did the face very well, though! And there again you were quite right. Such a man as yourself was likely to be recognized in such a place as Birmingham, and that would have been unfortunate for both of us—both of us, I assure you.... Man alive, don't look as though I was going to cut your throat! I'm not, I assure you. You're a smart man of business, and I happen to have spotted a little operation of yours, that's all. I shall arrange easy terms for you.... Pull yourself together and talk business before the men come back. Here,

sit on this bench.” Mallows, staring amazedly in Dorrington’s face, suffered himself to be led to a bench, and sat on it.

“Now,” said Dorrington, “the first thing is a little matter of a hundred pounds. That was the reward you promised if I should discover who broke Gillett’s arm last night. Well I have. Do you happen to have any notes with you? If not, make it a cheque.”

“But—but—how—I mean who—who —”

“Tut, tut! Don’t waste time, Mr. Mallows. Who? Why, yourself, of course. I knew all about it before I left you last night, though it wasn’t quite convenient to claim the reward then, for reasons you’ll understand presently. Come, that little hundred.”

“But what—what proof have you? I’m not to be bounced like this, you know,” Mr. Mallows was gathering his faculties again.

“Proof? Why, man alive, be reasonable! Suppose I have none—none at all? What difference does that make? Am I to walk out and tell your fellow directors where I have met you—here—or am I to have that hundred? More, am I to publish abroad that Mr. Paul Mallows is the moving spirit in the rotten ‘Avalanche Bicycle Company’?”

“Well,” Mallows answered reluctantly, “if you put it like that —”

“But I only put it like that to make you see things reasonably. As a matter of fact your connection with this new company is enough to bring your little performance with the iron chair pretty near proof. But I got at it from the other side. See here—you’re much too clumsy with your fingers, Mr. Mallows. First you go and tear the tip of your middle finger opening your brougham door, and have to get court plaster from me. Then you let that court plaster get frayed at the edge, and you still keep it on. After that you execute your very successful chair operation. When the eyes of the others are following the bicycles you take the chair in the hand with the plaster on it, catching hold of it at the place where a rough, loose, square nut protrudes, and you pitch it on to the track so clumsily and nervously that the nut carries away the frayed thread of the court plaster with it. Here it is, you see, still in my pocket-book, where I put it last night by the light of the lantern; just a sticky black silk thread, that’s all. I’ve only brought it to show you I’m playing a fair game with you. Of course, I might easily have got

a witness before I took the thread off the nut, if I had thought you were likely to fight the matter. But I knew you were not. You can't fight, you know, with this bogus company business known to me. So that I am only showing you this thread as an act of grace, to prove that I have stumped you with perfect fairness. And now the hundred. Here's a fountain pen, if you want one."

"Well," said Mallows glumly, "I suppose I must, then." He took the pen and wrote the cheque. Dorrington blotted it on the pad of his pocket-book and folded it away.

"So much for that!" he said. "That's just a little preliminary, you understand. We've done these little things just as a guarantee of good faith—not necessarily for publication, though you must remember that as yet there's nothing to prevent it. I've done you a turn by finding out who upset those bicycles, as you so ardently wished me to do last night, and you've loyally fulfilled your part of the contract by paying the promised reward—though I must say that you haven't paid with all the delight and pleasure you spoke of at the time. But I'll forgive you that, and now that the little hors d'œuvre is disposed of, we'll proceed to serious business." Mallows looked uncomfortably glum.

"But you mustn't look so ashamed of yourself, you know," Dorrington said, purposely misinterpreting his glumness. "It's all business. You were disposed for a little side flutter, so to speak—a little speculation outside your regular business. Well, you mustn't be ashamed of that."

"No," Mallows observed, assuming something of his ordinarily ponderous manner; "no, of course not. It's a little speculative deal. Everybody does it, and there's a deal of money going."

"Precisely. And since everybody does it, and there is so much money going, you are only making your share."

"Of course." Mr. Mallows was almost pompous by now.

"Of course." Dorrington coughed slightly. "Well now, do you know, I am exactly the same sort of man as yourself—if you don't mind the comparison. I am disposed for a little side butter, so to speak—a little speculation outside my regular business. I also am not ashamed of it. And since everybody does it, and there is so much money going—why, I am thinking of making my share. So that we are evidently a pair, and naturally intended for each other!" Mr. Paul

Mallows here looked a little doubtful.

“See here, now,” Dorrington proceeded. “I have lately taken it into my head to operate a little on the cycle share market. That was why I came round myself about that little spoke affair, instead of sending an assistant. I wanted to know somebody who understood the cycle trade, from whom I might get tips. Yon see I’m perfectly frank with you. Well, I have succeeded uncommonly well. And I want you to understand that I have gone every step of the way by fair work. I took nothing for granted, and I played the game fairly. When you asked me (as you had anxious reason to ask) if I had found anything, I told you there was nothing very big—and see what a little thing the thread was! Before I came away from the pavilion I made sure that you were really the only man there with black court plaster on his fingers. I had noticed the hands of every man but two, and I made all excuse of borrowing something, to see those. I saw your thin presence of suspecting the betting men, and I played up to it. I have had a telegraphic report on your Exeter works this morning—a deserted cloth mills with nothing on it of yours but a signboard, and only a deposit of rent paid.

There they referred to the works here. Here they referred to the works there. It was very clever, really! Also I have had a telegraphic report of your make-up adventure this morning. Clarkson does it marvellously, doesn’t he? And, by the way, that telegram bringing you down to Birmingham was not from your confederate here, as perhaps you fancied. It was from me. Thanks for coming so promptly. I managed to get a quiet look round here just before you arrived, and on the whole the conclusion I come to as to the ‘Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company, Limited,’ is this: A clever man, whom it gives me great pleasure to know,” with a bow to Mallows, “conceives the notion of offering the public the very rottenest cycle company ever planned, and all without appearing in it himself. He finds what little capital is required, his two or three confederates help to make up a board of directors, with one or two titled guinea-pigs, who know nothing of the company and care nothing, and the rest’s easy. A professional racing man is employed to win races and make records, on machines which have been specially made by another firm (perhaps it was the ‘Indestructible,’ who knows?) to a private order and afterwards decorated with the name and style of the bogus company on a transfer. For ordinary sale, bicycles of the ‘trade’ description are bought—so much a hundred from the factors, and put your own name on ‘em. They come cheap, and they sell at a good price—the profit pays all expenses and perhaps a bit over; and by the time they all break down the company will be successfully floated, the money—the

capital—will be divided, the moving spirit and his confederates will have disappeared, and the guinea-pigs will be left to stand the racket—if there is a racket. And the moving spirit will remain unsuspected, a man of account in the trade all the time! Admirable! All the work to be done at the ‘works’ is the sticking on of labels and a bit of enamelling. Excellent, all round! Isn’t that about the size of your operations?”

“Well, yes,” Mallows answered, a little reluctantly, but with something of modest pride in his manner, “that was the notion since you speak so plainly.”

“And it shall be the notion. All—everything—shall be as you have planned it, with one exception, which is this. The moving spirit shall divide his plunder with me.”

“You? But—but—why, I gave you a hundred just now!”

“Dear, dear! Why will you harp so much on that vulgar little hundred? That’s settled and done with. That’s our little personal bargain in the matter of the lamentable accident with the chair. We are now talking of bigger business—not hundreds but thousands, and not one of them, but a lot. Come now, a mind like yours should be wide enough to admit of a broad and large view of things. If I refrain from exposing this charming scheme of yours I shall be promoting a piece of scandalous robbery. Very well then, I want my promotion money, in the regular way. Can I shut my eyes and allow a piece of iniquity like this to go on unchecked, without getting anything by way of damages for myself? Perish the thought! When all expenses are paid, and the confederates are sent off with as little as they will take, you and I will divide fairly, Mr. Mallows, respectable brothers in rascality. Mind, I might say we’d divide to begin with; and leave you to pay expenses, but I am always fair to a partner in anything of this sort. I shall just want a little guarantee, you know—it’s safest in such matters as these; say a bill at six months for ten thousand pounds—which is very low. When a satisfactory division is made you shall have the bill back. Come—I have a bill-stamp ready, being so much convinced of your reasonableness as to buy it this morning, though it cost five pounds.”

“But that’s nonsense—you’re trying to impose. I’ll give you anything reasonable—half is out of the question. What, after all the trouble and worry and risk that I’ve had —”

“Which would suffice for no more than to put you in gaol if I held up my finger!”

“But, hang it, be reasonable! You’re a mighty clever man, and you’ve got me on the hip, as I admit. Say ten per cent.”

“You’re wasting time, and presently the men will be back. Your choice is between making half, or making none, and going to gaol into the bargain. Choose!”

“But just consider —”

“Choose!”

Mallows looked despairingly about him. “But really,” he said, “I want the money more than you think. I —”

“For the last time—choose!”

Mallows’s despairing gaze stopped at the enamelling oven. “Well, well,” he said, “if I must, I must, I suppose. But I warn you, you may regret it.”

“Oh dear no, I’m not so pessimistic. Come, you wrote a cheque—now I’ll write the bill. ‘Six months after date, pay to me or my order the sum of ten thousand pounds for value received’—excellent value too, I think. There you are!” When the bill was written and signed Mallows scribbled his acceptance with more readiness than might have been expected. Then he rose, and said with something of brisk cheerfulness in his tone, “We, that’s done, and the least said the soonest mended. You’ve won it, and I won’t grumble any more. I think I’ve done this thing pretty neatly, eh? Come and see the ‘works.’”

Every other part of the place was empty of machinery. There were a good many finished frames and wheels, bought separately, and now in course of being fitted together for sale, and there were many more complete bicycles of cheap but showy make to which nothing needed to be done but to fix the red and gold “transfer” of the “Avalanche” company. Then Mallows opened the tall iron door of the enamelling oven.

“See this,” he said, “this is the enamelling oven. Get in and look round. The frames and other different parts hang on the racks after the enamel is laid on, and

all those gas jets are lighted to harden it by heat. Do you see that deeper part there by the back?—go closer.” Dorrington felt a push at his back and the door was swung to with a bang, and the latch dropped. He was in the dark, trapped in a great iron chamber. And instantly Dorrington’s nostrils were filled with the smell of escaping gas. He realized his peril on the instant. Mallows had given him the bill with the idea of silencing him by murder and recovering it. He had pushed him into the oven and had turned on the gas. It was dark, but to light a match would mean death instantly, and without the match it must be death by suffocation and poison of gas in a very few minutes. To appeal to Mallows was useless—Dorrington knew too much. It would seem that at last a horribly-fitting retribution had overtaken Dorrington in death by a mode parallel to that which he and his creatures had prepared for others. Dorrington’s victims had drowned in water—or at least Crofton’s had, for I never ascertained definitely whether anybody had met his death by the tank after the Croftons had taken service with Dorrington—and now Dorrington himself was to drown in gas.

The oven was of sheet iron, fastened by a latch in the centre. Dorrington flung himself desperately against the door, and it gave outwardly at the extreme bottom. He snatched a loose angle-iron with which his hand came in contact, dashed against the door once more, and thrust the iron through where it strained open. Then, with another tremendous plunge, he drove the door a little more outward and raised the angle-iron in the crack; then once more, and raised it again. He was near to losing his senses, when, with one more plunge the catch of the latch, not designed for such treatment, suddenly gave way, the door flew open, and Dorrington, blue in the face, staring, stumbling and gasping, came staggering out into the fresher air, followed by a gush of gas.

Mallows had retreated to the rooms behind, and thither Dorrington followed him, gaining vigour and fury at every step. At sight of him the wretched Mallows sank in a corner, sighing and shivering with terror. Dorrington hauled the struggling wretch across the room, tearing off the crepe whiskers as he came, while Mallows supplicated and whined, fearing that it might be the other’s design to imprison him in the enamelling oven. But at the door of the room against that containing the oven their progress came to an end, for the escaped gas had reached the lighted candle, and with one loud report the partition wall fell in, half burying Mallows where he lay, and knocking Dorrington over.

Windows fell out of the building, and men broke through the front gate, climbed into the ruined rooms and stopped the still escaping gas. When the two men and

the boy returned, with the conspirator who had been in charge of the works, they found a crowd from the hardware and cycle factories thereabout, surveying with great interest the spectacle of the extrication of Mr. Paul Mallows, managing director of the “Indestructible Bicycle Company,” from the broken bricks, mortar, bicycles and transfers of the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company, Limited,” and the preparations for carrying him to a surgeon’s where his broken leg might be set. And in a couple of hours it was all over Birmingham, and spreading to other places, that the business of the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company” consisted of sticking brilliant labels on factors’ bicycles, bought in batches. So that when, next day, Lant won the fifty miles race in London, he was greeted with ironical shouts of “Gum on yer transfer!”

“Hi! mind yer label!”

“Where did you steal that bicycle?”

“Sold yer shares?” and so forth.

Somehow the “Avalanche Bicycle & Tyre Company, Limited,” never went to allotment. It was found politic, also, that Mr. Paul Mallows should retire from the directorate of the “Indestructible Bicycle Company.” As for Dorrington, he had his hundred pounds reward. But the bill for £10,000 he never presented. Why, I do not altogether know, unless he found that Mr. Mallows’s financial position, as he had hinted, was not altogether so good as was supposed.

THE END