

had a list in his pocket-book, which he referred to as he made his selection from my stock. The stones which he selected were rather unusual—the sort of stones that appeal to collectors and connoisseurs, rather than ordinary wearers of jewels. And some of them were very valuable; one ruby alone that he took was worth fifteen hundred pounds. The total value of the parcel that he carried away with him was four thousand two hundred pounds.”

“I understand that he did not pay you for them?”

“No; he was not proposing to keep them all. They were a selection to show to the customer. I made out a full list, and he signed a receipt at the foot of it. I had known deceased for many years, and had often had similar dealings with him.”

“And did he never return these stones, or any part of the collection?”

“No. From the time that he left my office with the stones in his pocket I never saw him or heard from him again.”

This was the sum of Mr. Hyams' evidence; and when he had retired the name of Judith Samuels was called. The new witness took her place at the table, and, after the usual preliminaries, proceeded to give her evidence.

“I am the wife of David Samuels who trades under the name of Donald Campbell. He is a dealer in works of art, principally goldsmiths work and jewellery. He is a practical jeweller himself, but most of the alterations and repairs are put out. The new work that he sells, or which is commissioned by customers, is executed for him by independent goldsmiths, not by workmen employed by him.”

“You visited the deceased on the night preceding his death, I understand, is that so?”

“Yes. I came to his chambers about half-past six, and left about seven o'clock.”

“Did you notice anything unusual in his manner or appearance?”

“He was not looking very well, and he seemed rather depressed but he brightened up as we talked. He was very much interested in the business which I had come to discuss.”

“What was the nature of that business?”

“It was connected with a collection of stones that he

had got on approval from Mr. Hyams to carry out a commission that he expected to get from a very wealthy American gentleman, to whom he had an introduction. He did not disclose the name of the gentleman, but it was understood that if he secured the commission, my husband should conduct the negotiations, and get the work executed."

"Did you gather that he had the stones in his possession?"

"Yes; he showed them to me. They were in a small wooden box, the different kinds of stones wrapped up separately in little paper packets. He took the box from a deed-box on the table by his bed-side, and put it back there when he had shown me the stones."

"Did you make any arrangements as to the disposal of these stones?"

"No final arrangements. He advised that we should get some of our artist goldsmiths to submit designs for the customer to see; and he suggested that my husband should ask Mrs. Otway to design and execute a pendant to take some of the finest stones."

"Mrs. Otway!" exclaimed the coroner. "What Mrs. Otway do you refer to?"

"I mean Helen Otway, the wife of the deceased."

"Are we to understand that Mrs. Otway is a designer of jewellery?"

"She is not only a designer; she is a practical goldsmith, and a very clever one too. My husband admires her work exceedingly and has paid her some very high prices. He paid her, for instance, twenty-five guineas for a set of silver tea-spoons."

The looks of astonishment that the coroner, the jury, and the press-men bestowed on me might, in other circumstances, have flattered my vanity. Now, I could see that Mrs. Campbell, without (so far as I knew) departing one single jot from the truth, was enveloping me in the most hideous entanglements.

After a pause—filled in with strenuous note-taking—the coroner again addressed the witness. "It has been given in evidence that the deceased had received a number of anonymous letters. Do you know anything about these letters?"

"I know nothing beyond what I heard when the evidence was given."

"Have you any means of judging who wrote these letters?"

"I have heard the evidence, and I can make a pretty good guess who wrote them."

"That is not quite what I mean. Have you any information about them other than what you gathered from the evidence?"

"No; I never heard of them until then."

This concluded Mrs. Campbell's evidence. When she had retired Mrs. Gregg was recalled and questioned concerning the missing stones.

"Did you know that deceased had these stones in his possession?"

"Yes. He showed them to me on one occasion, and I often saw him looking at them. He was very fond of precious stones. He used to set them out on a small square of black velvet, and try them in different lights, and look at them through a magnifying glass."

"When did you last see these stones?"

"After Mrs. Campbell—that is the last witness—had left, and just before Mrs. Otway arrived. Deceased was then sitting up in bed looking at a large green stone. I reminded him that Mrs. Otway was due at eight, and he then put the stones back in their box, and put the box away in the deed-box that was on the table."

"When did you first learn that the stones were missing?"

"The day after the discovery that the deceased had committed suicide, when Mrs. Otway came to the chambers with Mr. Hyams and the coroner's officer. She came to search for the anonymous letters, and she went straight to the deed-box, and there they were. But the stones were not there. I saw her take all the things out of the deed-box for Mr. Hyams to see and there were no stones there."

"Thank you," said the coroner. "That will do. We must now, gentlemen, see if Mrs. Otway can give us any further information."

I once more took my place at the table and was again sensible of a generally heightened curiosity on the part of the jury and the spectators."

"We may as well dispose of the question of the missing

stones," said the coroner; "for though it does not affect our enquiry directly but is rather the business of the police, it seems to have an important, indirect bearing. You have heard, Mrs. Otway, the evidence of Judith Samuels, and Rachel Goldstein—or Gregg. Can you throw any light on the disappearance of these stones?"

"No, I cannot."

"Did you know that deceased had these valuable stones in his possession?"

"No; I never heard of the stones until Mr. Hyams called on me on the evening of the day on which Mr. Otway's death was discovered."

"Do you know, or have you any idea, where those stones are now?"

"I do not know, and I have no idea where they are."

"Did you know that deceased was a dealer in precious stones?"

"No; my father told me that deceased collected gem-stones, and that he sometimes had dealings in them. But I supposed that he was merely a collector, not a professional dealer."

"How long had you known deceased when you married him?"

"I had known of his existence about a year, but I had hardly ever spoken to him. He was virtually a stranger to me."

"Had you never heard of the suicidal tendency in his family?"

"Never until the night preceding his death, when he told me."

"It has been stated that you are a practical goldsmith, and that you have executed work for Mr. Samuels, or Campbell. Is that true?"

"I work as a goldsmith and I have sold some of my productions to Mr. Campbell; but I have never been employed by him. I work as an independent artist."

"Has he ever supplied you with precious stones?"

"No. I purchase my own materials."

"Have you ever done any alterations or resettings for him?"

"No. I have done no work of any kind for him, or anyone else. I work on my own account, and sell what I make."

The coroner nodded, and glanced over his notes. After a pause he asked: "At what time on the night of your visit to deceased did you leave his chambers?"

"A little before ten o'clock."

"What was the condition of deceased when you left? Did he seem particularly depressed or worried?"

"He was asleep when I left."

"Asleep!" exclaimed the coroner, "How long had he been asleep?"

"Not very long; perhaps a quarter of an hour. When he took his usual dose of veronal he asked me to stay with him until he went to sleep, and I did so."

"I see that the housekeeper states that when she entered the living-room in the morning, the bedroom door was wide open, and the gas full on. What was the condition of affairs when you left?"

"The gas was full on, and I did not shut the bedroom door. I was not aware that the housekeeper had gone to bed and assumed that she would look in on deceased and make what arrangements were usual for the night."

"But if you had turned down the gas, and shut the bedroom door, that would have prevented the housekeeper from going to deceased."

"No. It did not appear to matter either way."

"When you went away, did you leave your hand-bag behind?"

"Yes, I had hung it on the back of my chair, and when I got up to go, I forgot about it."

"When did you discover that you had left it behind?"

"I first remembered it when I hailed a cab at the corner of Holywell Street to take me home."

"Why did you not then go back for it?"

"I did not like to disturb Mrs. Gregg and deceased, as it was so late."

"Was your purse in the bag?"

"Yes; but that was of no consequence. I knew there would be someone sitting up who could pay the cabman."

"The housekeeper has told us that you came to fetch the bag on the following day."

"Yes, in the afternoon, about three. It was then that I first heard of Mr. Otway's death."

"The housekeeper states that, when she told you what

had happened, you fell down in a dead faint. Is that so?"

"Yes. It gave me a great shock, especially as Mrs. Gregg told me the bad news so very abruptly."

"Were you expecting to hear that the deceased had committed suicide?"

"No; the subject was not in my mind."

"Is that not rather remarkable, having regard to your conversation with deceased on the previous night?"

"I don't think so. That conversation had certainly given me the impression that there was a danger that deceased might be driven to suicide if this persecution were continued. But I had not supposed that the danger was immediate."

"And that pitiful letter that you received from deceased? Did that convey no note of warning?"

"At the time when I received it I was not aware of any predisposition to suicide on the part of deceased. What he told me caused me some alarm, but he became so much calmer after our talk that I thought the danger was past, so far as the immediate future was concerned."

"And when you went to his chambers on the following day, you felt no uneasiness as to what might have happened?"

"No, the possibility that anything unusual might have happened was not in my mind at all."

"Well," said the coroner, "it seems to me rather remarkable that the possibility did not even occur to you. However, we are dealing with the facts, and if those are the facts, there is no more to be said. We will now pass on to the consideration of the will. When did you first learn that deceased had made a fresh will?"

"Four days ago, when I received a letter from Mr. Isaacs informing me of the fact that I was one of the beneficiaries."

"Had deceased never mentioned to you that he had made a will in your favour?"

"No."

"Was there no stipulation on your part at the time of the marriage that he should make such a will?"

"No. Nothing ever passed between us on the subject."

"And had you no knowledge or belief that a will affecting you had been executed?"

"I had no knowledge or belief that such a will had been executed nor any expectation that it would be. I did not consider myself as having any pecuniary claim on deceased."

"Did you not receive an allowance from deceased?"

"No. He wished to make me an allowance, but I declined to accept it."

"But you were entitled to an allowance for maintenance. Why did you refuse to accept it?"

"I did not consider that I had any claim on deceased so long as I insisted on living apart."

"Then do we understand that you subsist entirely on your own means or earnings?"

"Yes, entirely."

"Would you kindly tell us what those means and earnings respectively amount to? And what are their sources?"

"I have a small private income—about sixty pounds a year—derived from the realisation of my father's estate. I cannot estimate my earnings very exactly, as I have been working only a few months. Probably I shall be able to earn from a hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds a year, when I am established. Up to the present I have sold all my work to Mr. Campbell."

"How did you first become acquainted with Mr. Campbell—or Samuels, to give him his correct name?"

"Deceased recommended him to me when I first came to London. He stated that he had known him for many years."

"Did you know that Mr. Campbell was related to deceased?"

"Not until I heard it here to-day."

The coroner considered awhile, turning over his notes reflectively. At length he said, "Before you sit down, Mrs. Otway, I should like to ask you again about those anonymous letters. You have stated that you have no idea who wrote them."

"That is so," I replied.

"When you discussed them with deceased, did neither of you arrive at any conclusion as to who might have written them?"

"Deceased assured me that he could make no guess as

to who had sent them. Naturally, I could not, since all his acquaintances, whether friends or enemies, were unknown to me."

"And you adhere to your statement that you know nothing about these letters?"

"I know nothing about them whatever, excepting that deceased received them; and that I have only known by his telling me."

"And with regard to your father's stick? You have stated that you have no knowledge as to what became of it, or where it is now. Do you adhere to that statement too?"

"That statement was correct when I made it; but the stick has since come to light."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the coroner. "When and how did that happen?"

"It occurred three days ago, when I went to look over the chambers in Lyon's Inn. I chanced to open a large cupboard in the living room, and there, on the single shelf at the top, I saw the stick lying at the back, and hardly visible in the deep shadow."

"In-deed!" said the coroner, with a strong emphasis on the second syllable. It was perfectly evident that he did not believe me, and he made no secret of it. Nor were the jury any better impressed. In the silence that followed my statement they whispered together eagerly, and disbelief was writ large on the faces of them all.

"Had you any particular occasion to look over the chambers?" the coroner asked after an interval.

"Yes; I had received a letter from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he wished to make a survey of the premises and asking me to give him permission, and the necessary facilities to do so. I accordingly went, on the following day, and fetched the keys from Mr. Isaacs to leave them at Dr. Thorndyke's chambers. On the way, I called in at Lyon's Inn to see what condition the chambers were in."

"And to plant the stick for Dr. Thorndyke to find, eh?" said one of the jurors, with a truculent leer.

Mr. Cawley rose instantly to protest, but he was anticipated by the coroner, who said severely: "That, sir, is quite out of order. Members of the jury must not suggest motives or actions on the part of witnesses which

are not given in evidence. They may have their opinions, but those opinions must not be expressed until all the evidence has been heard and the verdict has to be considered." Having administered this reproof, he again turned to me.

"When you looked over the chambers, did you examine the other furniture and receptacles. Did you, for instance, look in the other cupboards and drawers?"

"No."

"Only this one cupboard? Now what made you look into this cupboard in particular?"

I saw the awkwardness of the question; but I also saw that a complete explanation of my motives would land me on much more dangerous ground. My immediate motive had been to ascertain what the inside of the cupboard was like, and this was as much as I dared tell.

"I wished to see what kind of a cupboard it was—whether it had shelves, drawers, or simply an open space."

"Did you take the stick out of the cupboard?"

"Yes, I took it out to examine it and see if the statement in the letter as to the bruise, the blood-smear, and the hairs was correct."

"And was the statement correct?"

"Yes; there was a bruise on the silver knob, and a thick smear of what looked like dried blood, to which two hairs had stuck."

"Did those hairs look to you like hairs from your father's head?"

"I could not say. They might have been. They were short and looked as if they had come from the head of a grey-haired man. My father's hair was grey."

"What did you do with the stick?"

"I put it back in the cupboard."

"Why did you not bring it here?"

"I thought it best to leave it where I found it."

"Are the keys of the chambers in your possession now?"

"No; I left them at Dr. Thorndyke's chambers, and he has not yet returned them. I left a note informing him that the stick was in the cupboard."

"May I ask why you did that?"

"Dr. Thorndyke mentioned in his letter that he was investigating the case on instructions from the Home Office, and I wished to give him any assistance that I could."

"But," the coroner exclaimed irritably, "don't you understand that this court is investigating the case? That a coroner's court is the proper authority to carry out such investigations? I don't know why this medical specialist has been brought into the case at all. I have not asked for his assistance. It is quite irregular and most unnecessary. And how did this gentleman come to write to you?"

"He wanted to survey the premises, and someone—I don't know who—had told him that I was the present lessee."

The coroner grunted in evident displeasure. The importation of Dr. Thorndyke into the case was clearly a sore point, for he rejoined: "The whole affair is highly unsatisfactory. I am not clear that you had any right to give permission to any unofficial person to survey these premises without obtaining my consent; or that he had any right to ask you. The jury have surveyed the premises, and that ought to be enough. However, we shall see what comes of these mysterious investigations. Meanwhile, I think that is all we have to ask you, Mrs. Otway, unless the jury have any questions to put."

The jury, warned, perhaps, by the result of the last question put by a juryman, had no question to ask; and I returned to my seat by Mr. Cawley, in time to hear Mr. Isaacs recalled.

"You have heard," said the coroner, "the very remarkable evidence given by the last witness concerning the finding of a stick in a large cupboard in the living-room of the chambers in Lyon's Inn?"

"I have."

"In your previous evidence you stated that you had made a minute search of those chambers, and drawn up an inventory of their contents. Do you remember whether, when you made that search, you examined that particular cupboard?"

"Yes, I remember quite clearly that I examined it, and

found it empty. I have marked it 'empty' in the inventory."

"Are you sure that it was really empty? Is it not possible that this stick lying in the shade on the shelf, might have been overlooked?"

"It is quite impossible. I made a most exhaustive search, and I used an electric torch for examining dark interiors. Moreover, the object that I was looking for—a little parcel of precious stones—was much smaller, and less conspicuous than a walking stick. I could not have missed a large object like that. And I have quite a clear recollection of looking on that shelf—it was the only shelf in the cupboard—and throwing the light of the torch along it. I had to stand on tip-toe to see in distinctly, and so, I suppose, had Mrs. Otway."

"Do you swear that the cupboard was empty when you examined it?"

"I swear that it was absolutely empty."

The coroner entered the reply in his notes, and then asked: "Did you receive any communication from Dr. Thorndyke respecting his proposed survey of the chambers at Lyon's Inn?"

"He called to enquire in whom the tenancy of the chambers was vested, but did not state why he wanted to know. I told him that the widow was the lessee. I don't know how he got her address. I didn't give it to him. I may say that when I had finished the inventory I locked up the chambers, and kept the keys until I delivered them up to Mrs. Otway."

"Thank you," said the coroner. "That is all I wanted you to tell us. And that, gentlemen," he continued, turning to the jury, "appears to be the whole of the evidence, with the exception of Dr. Thorndyke's; and the question now arises, what are we to do? Let me explain the position, and then you can decide on our procedure."

"This enquiry was adjourned to enable the police to make some investigations in connection with it. On their application, Dr. John Thorndyke, who, I may inform you, is an eminent medico-legal expert, was instructed by the Home Office to proceed to Maidstone to conduct an exhumation of the body of the late John Vardon, the

father of Mrs. Otway. He was to make an examination of the body, and ascertain if possible, whether the cause of the said John Vardon's death was as stated at the inquest, or whether, as is hinted in these anonymous letters, he died from the effects of violence. The question is an important one, but it is more important to the police than to us. Then, it seems that the Home Office further instructed this gentleman to carry out an independent investigation into the facts of this case which we, in our humble and inefficient way, are trying to investigate. It is an extraordinary proceeding, and one that I do not in the least understand; but then I am not a medico-legal specialist. I am only a mere coroner, and you are only a mere coroner's jury. It is just as well that we should know our place.

"Well, I understand that Dr. Thorndyke has made an examination of the body of Lewis Otway, and, as you have heard, he has made a survey of the deceased man's chambers. We, also, have surveyed these chambers, but apparently our survey doesn't count; and Dr. Shelburn, whose evidence you have heard, examined the body within a few hours of death. It would seem as if medical evidence were the last thing we want. Meanwhile I have had a telegram from Dr. Thorndyke saying that he has been detained at Maidstone, and has missed his train. I don't know when he will arrive here. He may be here in a few minutes, or he may arrive in an hour or two. It is for you to decide what is to be done. We have a great deal of evidence to consider. We do not seem to need any more medical evidence, and the question of Mr. Vardon's death is not of vital importance to this enquiry.

"The question is shall we wait to hear Dr. Thorndyke's evidence or shall we proceed to consider the great mass of evidence that we already have? It is for you to decide, gentlemen."

The jury conferred for a couple of minutes, and then the foreman announced their decision. "The jury say, sir, that we are enquiring into the death of Lewis Otway, not John Vardon. They would like to proceed with the consideration of the evidence without waiting for Dr. Thorndyke."

"I am entirely with you, gentlemen," said the coroner.

"I think that the evidence that we have heard will prove amply sufficient to guide us to our verdict; and we can still revise our opinions if the expert witness should have something fresh to tell us."

Chapter XXVII

The Indictment

DURING the short interval, in which the coroner took a final glance over his notes, there was a general stirring among the occupants and a suggestion of preparation for the next act. Jurymen re-settled themselves in their seats, reporters straightened their backs, and looked about them, the police officers and the spectators conversed in low undertones. At length the coroner laid on the table before him a single sheet of paper—probably an abstract of the evidence—sat back in his chair, and looked towards the jury; whereupon a deep silence fell upon the court, and he began his address:

"It is hardly necessary to remind you, gentlemen, that we are assembled for the purpose of ascertaining how, when, and by what means Lewis Otway came by his death; but it may be necessary to remark that our enquiry is not entirely concerned with the immediate causes of that death, but is also—and in fact, principally—concerned with the more remote contributory circumstances. For in this case, the 'How, when, and by what means' are simple enough. We have the testimony of an eye-witness who saw the deceased hanging dead, from a peg on the wall, under conditions strongly suggestive—in fact characteristic—of suicide; and we have the testimony of the deputy-police surgeon that all the appearances were those of suicide, and we have his expert opinion that the cause of death was undoubtedly suicidal hanging. Indeed, we may say that the immediate cause of death is self-evident, and that the whole of our enquiry is concerned with the remote causes. We are not asking 'Did this man commit suicide?' for the evidence of the first two witnesses settled that question. We are asking ourselves, Why did he commit suicide? The questions that we have to answer are, Was that suicide the spontaneous act of the deceased, for which he alone is

responsible? Or was deceased driven to suicide by the deliberate, purposive, and malicious acts of some other person, or persons? And if the latter appears to be the case, Who is, or are, that person or persons, and what degree of criminal responsibility attaches to such acts?

"Now we have at our disposal a considerable mass of rather miscellaneous evidence, and, I think the best way to deal with it will be to sketch out lightly the general course of events, and fill in the details later. The deceased, Lewis Otway, is the central figure of our picture, and the history that we have to trace, is his history. As to what we may call his past, that does not much concern us. Among the Ancient Egyptians the deceased was conceived as being brought before the tribunal of Osiris to answer for his conduct during his earthly life. We are not a tribunal of that kind. We are not trying Lewis Otway. If, as the police suspect, he had feathered his nest with a certain amount of illicit plumage, that is not our concern. Our interest in him is mainly confined to his connection with a particular series of events which began with his marriage and ended with his death. Let us now trace that succession of events, at first in outline, and then in more detail.

"Lewis Otway first comes into our view on the occasion of his marriage. As presented in the evidence of his widow, Helen Otway, that marriage offers us the spectacle of an act of the most amazing folly. We see an elderly man—and an unattractive one at that, as you must have observed—marrying by compulsion, under threats, and greatly against her wishes, a young woman, of very unusual physical attractions, of great talent, and of exceptional mental gifts, and strength of character. You have seen this lady, and have heard her give her evidence, and you can confirm my description of her.

"It was, I repeat, an act of amazing folly. For she must, in any case, have detested him. His conduct towards her was cruel and unscrupulous to the last degree, and in marrying her he could not fail to introduce a bitter enemy into his household. But there were added causes for that repugnance to him which she has freely admitted. In the first place, she believed that her consent had been secured by actual fraud. And in the second place, Otway's action was the undoubted cause—whether directly or

indirectly, we need not enquire at this stage—of John Vardon's death. So that our history opens with the tableau of an elderly man who has married a young, beautiful, and clever wife, who loathes him, and has abundant reason for loathing him.

“ And now we pass on to the second scene—a scene almost more amazing than the first. Within an hour or two of the marriage ceremony, the young wife has repudiated the marriage, and demanded a separation for an indefinite period—practically a permanent separation. But it is not the demand that is so astonishing. The really astounding thing is that the husband seems to have agreed to this demand without demur. Consider the extraordinary inconsistency of his conduct. On the one hand we see this man, in his eagerness to possess this beautiful girl, trampling without scruple on her happiness, and her father's, oblivious of everything but his own desires; on the other, we see him meekly submitting to a demand which—natural as it may have been—the law would not have supported.

“ Whence this sudden compliance? Why did he consent? He need not have consented. The marriage was quite regular. No suit for nullity could have been sustained, whereas he could have sued at once for restitution. Why did he agree in this incomprehensible manner to surrender his unquestionable rights?

“ But this is not the only inconsistency. The conduct of the wife is even more inexplicable. When Otway gave evidence at the inquest on Mr. Vardon he omitted all reference to the loaded stick; which is not unnatural, seeing that it was a highly incriminating circumstance. But that suppression of a material fact made his evidence, in effect, false evidence. For the truth is, according to the terms of the witnesses oath, the whole truth. Yet Helen Otway, when she gave evidence, confirmed this virtually false testimony; and she also suppressed—or, at least, omitted—the facts relating to the loaded stick. Her explanation is that, feeling convinced that her father died from a heart attack, she did not consider the stick incident of any importance. In estimating the credibility of that explanation you will bear in mind that the verdict was “Death from natural causes,” but that the jury were not in possession of the facts. You will also bear in mind that

this woman had seen her father lying dead, with a wound on his head, and this man, whom she loathed, and detested, standing over the body, grasping a formidable weapon. But whatever view you take of the explanation, the fact remains that at the inquest she not only refrained from accusing him, but she withheld a material fact which, if it had been disclosed, might have put Otway in the dock on a charge of murder.

“Here, then, are two cases of incomprehensible inconsistency of conduct. But they are only incomprehensible so long as they are considered separately. Consider them together and a perfectly intelligible suggestion emerges. The husband had the power to compel his wife to live with him—and he did not exercise it. The wife had the power to expose the husband to a suspicion of having committed a capital crime—and she did not exercise it. The appearance is that of a surrender by each of the power to injure the other; in short, of a bargain or agreement, involving collusion to suppress evidence.

“But this suggestion of collusion raises another question, which we shall consider later, but which we may note in passing. What was really the cause of Mr. Vardon’s death? Did he die from natural causes as the coroner’s jury believed and affirmed? Or was his death due to violence inflicted by Otway? It is by no means clear that Otway did not kill him, either inadvertently or with malice. And supposing Otway to have killed Mr. Vardon, was the fact known to Helen Otway? If it was, Otway’s easy compliance is the more readily understood; for he would be absolutely in his wife’s power. But we shall consider these points at more length presently, and perhaps we may get further light on them from the evidence of Dr. Thorndyke—if he should arrive before the verdict is agreed on.

“The next phase of this drama opens about two months after the marriage. On the 21st of June, the deceased received an anonymous letter, the first of a series of seven, which were sent thereafter at fairly regular intervals of about a fortnight. Now, let us consider those letters from various points of view in relation to their probable authorship. You have heard them read, and know their general purport. They all contain veiled threats to make

certain exposures. Some are vague and some are more explicit, but there is a general crescendo note, culminating in the last letter, which pretty openly makes an accusation of murder and threatens criminal proceedings.

"First, what is the purpose of these letters? It is clearly not to levy blackmail. They hold out menaces, but there is no suggestion of an attempt to extort money. Those menaces are incomprehensible until we supply an explanatory fact. The man to whom these letters were sent suffered from a strong inherited predisposition to suicide. The very obvious inference to which we are forced, in the absence of any other explanation, is that the purpose of these letters was to convert that latent tendency into action—to produce a state of mind in which the deceased would be likely to take his own life.

"But that purpose implies knowledge on the part of the writer that this inherited tendency existed, and consequently limits the possible authorship to persons possessing such knowledge. The only persons known by us to possess such knowledge are deceased's own family. His widow has sworn that she had no knowledge of this tendency, and if you believe her statement to be true, you will tend to exclude her from the possible authorship of these letters.

"Next we have to consider the characters of the letters themselves. They all bear the East-London postmark, but there is not much in that. Anonymous letter-writers commonly post their letters in districts remote from their own residences. Still, we must take it into consideration. The two persons known to us who occupy premises in East London are Morris Goldstein and Helen Otway.

"Then as to the style of the letters. They are rather markedly uneducated in manner. The composition is ungrammatical and the phraseology vulgar. But that does not help us much; for, on the one hand, none of the persons known to us is grossly uneducated, and on the other it is usual for anonymous letter-writers to disguise their personality. Obviously, it is easy enough for an educated person to write an apparently illiterate letter.

"The next point is a much more important one. We have decided that the purpose of these letters was to produce in the deceased a state of mind which would render his suicide probable. Now, what was the motive behind

that purpose? Who could have wished deceased to commit suicide, and why should that person have wished it?

“The possible motives in this case are, in effect, the usual motives of murder, with full premeditation, viz:—Revenge, or hatred; direct profit; and indirect profit by the elimination of an undesired person. Let us consider each of these motives in relation to the known facts of this case.

“First as to hatred or revenge. The only persons known to us are the family of deceased and his wife. His family certainly had a grievance against him, for the children were illegitimate, and the mother was unmarried. But it was an old grievance, and the family appeared to be on quite amicable terms. The children were quite well provided for, and their mother continued to live with deceased. There was, indeed, a new factor of possible discord. The deceased had married, and that marriage was manifestly to the disadvantage of his family; a fact of which it is necessary to take due account.

“When, however, we turn to the consideration of the wife, the facts are much more striking. She had suffered grievous injuries from deceased. He had ruined her life. He had virtually condemned her to perpetual spinsterhood, since she would not live with him and she could not marry anyone else. He had caused the death of her father; and she has admitted that she had an unconquerable repugnance to him. That is actually known to us; and there is a further possibility that he was actually her father’s murderer, though we must leave that out of consideration in the absence of positive evidence. But on the evidence which is before us, you will see that the motive of personal animosity is much more evident in the case of the wife than in that of the family.

“We now come to the motive of direct profit, and the question that we ask ourselves is, Who stood to benefit by the death of Lewis Otway? And as soon as we ask that question, a very striking fact comes into view. The first letter is dated by the postmark, the 21st of June. But on the 10th of that month—only eleven days previously—deceased had made a new will. By the provisions of that will Helen Otway stood to gain from eight to twelve thousand pounds by the death of her husband.

“ But did anyone else stand to gain by Lewis Otway's death? Observe that we are still dealing with the same group of persons—the only persons known to us in connection with the case. Well, the family of deceased stood to gain by his death, though to a much smaller extent. But the fact that must instantly impress us is the opposite effects of the new will on the family, and the wife respectively. The execution of the new will involved the revocation of a previous will, which had left the bulk of the estate to the family. The position of affairs is consequently this: up to the 10th of June, the family, jointly, stood to benefit by Lewis Otway's death to the extent of the bulk of his estate and the wife did not stand to benefit at all; after the 10th of June the wife stood to benefit by Otway's death to the extent of the bulk of his estate, and the family to a relatively small extent.”

“ But the first of the anonymous letters was sent almost immediately after the 10th of June. That is to say, it was sent almost immediately after the family had ceased to be and the wife had become the principal beneficiary.

“ From the motive of direct profit we turn to that of indirect profit, by the elimination of a person whose existence was a hindrance, a danger, or an inconvenience. Is there anyone known to us who could have regarded deceased in that light? We cannot attribute any such view to his family, for, as I have said, they appear to have been on quite amicable terms, and deceased seems to have maintained an interest in his children's welfare to the last. But what are we to say with regard to the wife? She was married, against her wishes, to a man, unsuitable in age, uncomely in appearance; a man whom she loathed—and had good reason to loathe; who, while she repudiated him as a husband, yet held her chained to him for life; who stood inexorably between her, and any marriage which she might wish to contract; whose existence condemned her for life to the dubious position of a married woman who is not living with her husband. Think, gentlemen, of this woman—young, handsome, clever, accomplished, capable; think of what life might have been to her, and what it was with this millstone hung round her neck! And then ask yourselves whether—apart from all pecuniary considerations—she did not stand to gain incalculably by his death;

whether his elimination from her life would not have opened to her the gates of a world of happiness, and freedom.

“And it is here that the importance of that further evidence, which we unfortunately have not yet heard, appears. For if it should now transpire that Otway did actually kill John Vardon and that Helen Otway was privy to the homicide, then there would be yet another powerful reason why she should desire to be rid of him. But this evidence is not in our possession and we must, therefore, leave this aspect of the case out of our consideration. Nor is it essential. The facts within our knowledge are amply sufficient to enable us to answer the question whether Helen Otway's position would or would not have been improved by the death of her husband.

“And now we come to something much more definite. Hitherto we have been dealing with the question: ‘Who *might* have written these letters?’ We shall now consider the more specific question, ‘Who *could* have written them?’

“There seems to be only one possible answer. The writer of those letters had knowledge that was possessed by only two persons—the deceased and his wife. One letter refers to something that was held back at the inquest. But who knew that anything had been held back at the inquest? No one, according to the evidence, but these two persons. Of course, it is possible that there may have been some watcher secreted in that house at Maidstone who knew that Lewis Otway had stood over the body of John Vardon with a loaded stick in his hand. But the evidence before us is to the effect that there was no one in the house but John Vardon, Lewis Otway, and Helen Otway. Consequently, unless Lewis Otway wrote these letters to himself, there is nobody, so far as we know, who could have written them but Helen Otway.

“The last letter refers explicitly to the loaded stick, and even describes its condition minutely and, as it appears, correctly. The writer had, therefore, presumably seen the stick and very probably had possession of it. But where was that stick? Deceased certainly did not know where it was; the housekeeper states that she had never seen it since that fatal morning, and Helen Otway has denied all

knowledge of its whereabouts. No one knew what had become of it.

"But if its disappearance was a mystery, its reappearance is a greater mystery still. The account given by Helen Otway is obviously unsatisfactory. She went to the chambers, for no very apparent reason. When there she did not examine the various cupboards, drawers, and other receptacles; but she went direct to this particular cupboard, unlocked it, stood on tiptoe and looked on the shelf. And behold! there was the missing stick. She took it out, examined it, and put it back. And she not only put it back, but she went out of her way to inform a person who is to give evidence on this enquiry that the stick was to be found in that cupboard.

"Now, how did that stick get into that cupboard, and when was it put there? You have heard Mr. Isaacs swear that it was not there when he made out the inventory, and you will probably agree that he could hardly be mistaken. A stick is a fairly large and conspicuous object, whereas he was searching for a small and inconspicuous one. Clearly the stick was put into the cupboard after his search was made. But when he had finished, the chambers were locked up, and the keys remained in his possession until he delivered them up to Helen Otway. Bearing these facts in mind, you have to consider whether you can accept Mrs. Otway's statement, or whether it is more probable that she took the stick to the chambers, and put it into the cupboard herself.

"We now come to the incidents of that terrible night. What really happened in those chambers on that occasion will probably never be known. But the accounts that we have are full of sinister suggestions. We cannot, for instance, but note the fact that after this, the first and only visit from his wife, Lewis Otway made away with himself. Why he did the dreadful deed on this particular occasion, and at this particular time, is not clear. According to his wife's account he was much calmer, and more cheerful after their talk, and she left him peacefully asleep. That is what she has told us. But what are the facts? Within an hour or two hours after she had left, his dead body was hanging from that peg. Nay! There is even a more dreadful possibility. The medical witness has told

us that death took place about eleven, 'But it might have been an hour later or earlier.' So that it is physically possible—since Mrs. Otway left the chambers about ten—that the suicide may have actually taken place before she left. It is a horrible suggestion, and I should not have made it but for the fact that there are certain appearances which seem to support it.

"You must have been struck by the singular circumstance that when Mrs. Otway took her departure she left the gas full on, and the bedroom door open. You have heard her explanation, but we are not concerned with that for the moment. The remarkable thing is that in the morning, the gas was still full on, and the bedroom door still open. Now how could that have been? If deceased was asleep when his wife left, then he must have arisen, made his preparations, and finally hanged himself, not only with the gas full on—which might easily have been the case—but with the door open, which is improbable in the extreme. Men do not usually commit suicide *coram publico*. Commonly suicides lock themselves in their rooms or otherwise seek security from interruption. Yet this man, whose bedroom opened directly into the living-room and whose housekeeper might still have been about, cuts down the bell-rope, arranges the chair and hangs himself, all in a brightly-lighted room with the door open. It is certainly against common probabilities.

"But there are other suggestions of a similar tendency. If the fully-lighted gas and the open door suggest a hurried and agitated departure, so does the forgotten hand-bag containing the purse. And you will have noted that Mrs. Otway remembered that she had left her purse behind when she hailed a cab at the corner of Holywell Street. Now why did she not go back for it? She was quite near Lyon's Inn. She could have left the cab waiting, or brought it to the gate. She says she did not like to disturb Mrs. Gregg. But she has also said that she thought that Mrs. Gregg was still up and about. The explanation is not convincing, but on the other hand there is a strong suggestion of dislike to the idea of going back—a dislike which we can understand well enough if we believe that the tragedy had already been enacted, and that the body was even then hanging on the wall.

“ Then, too, the disappearance of the precious stones points in the same direction. They might have been taken when the deceased was asleep ; but the theft would have been far easier if he was dead. But, of course, we cannot say with certainty that Helen Otway took the stones. We can only consider the evidence. That evidence, however, is almost overwhelmingly strong. It goes to show that the stones were in the deed-box within half-an-hour of Helen Otway's arrival. There is no reason to suppose they were then removed. It is practically certain that they were there when she arrived, and they were never seen there or anywhere else after she left. And there is a further corroborative circumstance. To ordinary persons unmounted precious stones illicitly obtained are difficult to dispose of. But this woman is not an ordinary person ; she is a working goldsmith and jeweller who buys her own materials and sells the finished works to individual buyers. She could easily dispose of stolen gems in a manner that would render them untraceable.

“ The theft of these stones is not directly our business. It is that of the police. But indirectly it is of great importance. For it furnishes strong support to the suggestion that deceased was already dead when Helen Otway took her hurried departure. But what is the importance of that suggestion ? The answer to that question will be found in the consideration of certain further facts and certain points of criminal law.

“ First, we must notice that if deceased committed suicide while Helen Otway was in the chambers, he must have done so with her consent and connivance. But was it only a matter of consent ? Is there not a suggestion that some direct means may have been employed to induce or compel him to commit suicide ? On this point we have very little information. But we have the evidence of Rachel Goldstein or Gregg that she overheard the conversation between Helen Otway and deceased on two separate occasions ; and that on both occasions they seemed to be talking about suicide. There seems to be a strong suggestion that some active, direct, means were employed : persuasion, threats, or perhaps the mysterious agency of suggestion. We cannot say that it was so ; but it would be in close agreement with the known circumstances and

quite consistent with the course of action exhibited by the anonymous letters.

“Supposing such active, direct means to have been employed, what degree of criminal responsibility would their employment entail? With regard to the letters, though the moral responsibility for their effect is beyond question, I should hesitate to give an opinion as to the exact legal position. But in the case of direct means there is no doubt at all. The law on the subject is quite clear. Let us consider it for a moment.

“First as to the legal nature of suicide. In law, suicide is murder. It has been expressly laid down that a person cannot commit manslaughter on himself. But since suicide is necessarily murder, it follows that any person who is accessory to suicide is accessory to murder. If such person aids or abets any other person in so killing himself, that person is an accessory before the fact, or a principal in the second degree in the murder so committed; an accessory before the fact being defined as one who directly or indirectly counsels, procures, or commands any person to commit any felony or piracy which is committed in consequence of such counselling, procuring, or commandment.

“Here, then, is the importance of the matter. The criminal responsibility attaching to the anonymous letters may be involved in some obscurity; but if it can be proved that any person counselled, procured, or commanded the deceased to kill himself, that person can be dealt with as a principal in the second degree in the murder of deceased. It is for you to say whether, in your judgment, such action can be proved in the case of any person, and if so, who that person is.

“There is only one more item of evidence that I shall refer to, and that I shall touch upon only lightly. You have heard the witness Rachel Goldstein state that when she informed Helen Otway that deceased had hanged himself, Mrs. Otway fell down in a dead faint. You have heard the explanation that Mrs. Otway gave, and you must decide what weight you attach to it; whether you can regard this fainting as due to the shock of an unexpected tragedy, or as the culminating effect of prolonged and extreme nervous tension. In any case, its evidential value is but small.

“ And now, as our expert witness has still not arrived, let us take a last look over the evidence to see what material we have for our verdict.” Here the coroner paused, and laying a number of sheets of paper in a row before him, glanced rapidly through them.

I watched him with a dreadful fascination, even as a bird might watch the stealthy approach of a snake, terrified, but despairing of any hope of escape. So I had listened to this terrible summing-up—all false and erroneous in detail, but so horribly true in regard to the central fact. Through that dense fog of error and false appearances the coroner had seen the essential truth ; that Lewis Otway had gone to his death at my bidding. Like some great spider he had wound around me a network of horrid entanglements ; and now he was about to wind up the final turns.

At length he looked up, and laid his hand on one of the papers. Then he turned once more towards the jury and began his summary of the evidence. And at that moment, unnoticed, apparently, by anyone save myself, Dr. Thorndyke entered silently by a side door, and seated himself on a vacant chair.

Chapter XXVIII

The Verdict

THE arrival of Dr. Thorndyke seemed to me to close the last avenue of escape. The coroner had guessed at my guilty secret, but he only offered his guess as a speculative possibility on which no decisive opinion could be founded. But Dr. Thorndyke was not a guesser. If he had penetrated to that secret he would offer no speculative probabilities, but definite evidence, which would reduce the matter to certainty.

It was a terrible thought. Self-accusation—the denunciations of a guilty conscience—had been dreadful enough. But there is a world of difference between self-accusation in secret and a public criminal indictment ; between calling oneself a murderess, and standing in the dock to answer the charge.

During the coroner's address I furtively watched Dr. Thorndyke. But I could gather nothing from his face.

As he sat motionless, with his eyes steadily bent on the coroner, his expression denoted nothing but a grave and concentrated attention. After the first quick glance round the court, he never looked at me. What was in his mind I could not guess, though I felt that he held my fate in the hollow of his hand.

“There is no need, gentlemen,” the coroner began, “for us to go through the mass of evidence again. We have looked over it as a whole, and we have seen that certain striking suggestions emerge from it. In our last glance we have to bring those suggestions to a definite focus. Our inquiry deals with a man who committed suicide, but the appearances suggest that that suicide was not a voluntary, spontaneous act, but was the effect of a compelling force exerted by some other person.

“Who was that other person? The compelling force seems to have been exerted by means of certain menacing letters. The person who procured the suicide of deceased was therefore the writer of those letters. Now who was the writer of those letters? The question is best answered by asking certain other questions.

“First: Had deceased any enemies? Well, we know of one, and one only. His wife, Helen Otway, has confessed to a deep repugnance to him. She had suffered grievous injuries at his hands, and she resented those injuries profoundly.

“Second: Who gained most, financially, by his death? Again, the answer is his wife, Helen Otway.

“Third: Did anyone stand to gain in any other way by his death? The answer again is yes; and the person who stood to gain—by liberation from an intolerable bondage—was Helen Otway.

“Fourth: Who could have written those letters? who possessed the secret knowledge that those letters exhibit? Only one such person is known to us besides deceased himself. That person is Helen Otway.

“Fifth: Who was the last person who was with him before his death? Again the answer is, Helen Otway.

“Sixth: Is there any evidence of the use of more direct means to procure or compel this act of suicide? And if so, by whom do those means appear to have been employed? The answer is that there is such evidence, and that the

person who appears to have used those means is Helen Otway. There is evidence suggesting that she was actually present when the suicide took place; there is evidence of a hurried flight and unwillingness to return for the purse that she had left behind; there is the open door, the lighted gas, and the missing jewels, which were in the chambers when she arrived, and which were never seen after she left. And then there is the mysterious stick which had vanished, and which reappeared so strangely after her unexplained visit to the chambers.

"That, gentlemen, is in brief the whole of the evidence with the exception of that relating to John Vardon's death. That evidence is important to this enquiry; for if it should be proved that John Vardon was killed by Lewis Otway, and that Helen Otway was privy to the homicide, that would furnish a further motive for procuring the suicide of deceased—the motive of the removal of the sole accomplice in a serious crime. But that evidence is not vitally important, and it is for you to decide whether you will still await the arrival of Dr. Thorndyke, or whether you will proceed to consider your verdict on the evidence that you have heard."

As the coroner concluded, Dr. Thorndyke rose and advanced to the table, placing on an empty chair a small green-covered suit-case. The coroner looked up at him sharply and with somewhat definitely unfriendly recognition.

"How long have you been here, sir?" the former demanded.

"About seven minutes," Dr. Thorndyke replied, glancing at his watch. "You were just beginning your summary when I entered."

"You should have announced your arrival immediately," said the coroner. "However, as you are here, you had better take the oath, and give your evidence without further delay."

The coroner's brusque, and even rude manner, did not appear to disturb Dr. Thorndyke in the smallest degree. With the same impassive expression and quiet, composed demeanour, he took the oath and disposed of the usual preliminaries.

"We understand," said the coroner, "that you have

made an examination of the body of the late John Vardon."

"Yes, I proceeded to Maidstone on instructions from the Home Office and conducted an exhumation of the body of John Vardon, of which I then made an examination. The object of the proceeding was to ascertain whether the cause of death had been correctly stated at the inquest."

"And what was the result of your examination—I don't think we want minute details."

"I found that the cause of death was, as stated at the inquest by the medical witnesses, failure of an extremely dilated heart. There was a small wound on the right side of the forehead adjoining the temple, which I examined very thoroughly. It was a glancing wound caused by a very oblique impact, and was such a wound as might have been produced in the manner described—by striking the corner of the mantelpiece in falling. There was no injury to the bone nor to the brain or its membranes. It was quite a trivial wound, and was not either wholly or partially the cause of death."

"Could that wound have been caused by a blow with a loaded stick?"

"I should say not. It was an oblique tear in the scalp and was apparently produced by some object more angular than the knob of a stick."

"Well," said the coroner, "that seems to dispose of the question of Mr. Vardon's death. It is a thousand pities that it was not cleared up more completely at the time. However, it is cleared up now; and that, really, is all, I think, that we want you to tell us, unless you have some other information. I understand that you had a sort of roving commission to investigate the matter of this enquiry?"

"I received instructions to make certain investigations with a view to my giving evidence at this inquest, and I have made such investigations as seemed to me to be necessary."

"Yes, you have, in fact, held a sort of one-man inquest on your own account. Well, the question is, do you suppose that you are in a position to tell us anything that we do not know already?"

"I am quite sure that I am. If you will allow me to present a summary of the facts in my possession——"

"I shall allow nothing of the kind. You will be good enough to answer questions like any other witness."

Dr. Thorndyke bowed with the same immovable serenity, and the coroner proceeded with his examination.

"Have you had much experience of cases of suicide?"

"I have."

"Have you had personal experience of any cases in which the suicidal act was procured, or brought about, by acts of persons other than the suicide, performed by them with deliberate intent?"

"Yes, I have had experience of several such cases."

"In those cases, what methods were used to procure the other person to commit suicide?"

"The majority were cases in which two persons agreed mutually to commit suicide together. In the less common cases in which the procurer did not propose to commit suicide, the method employed was usually some form of suggestion."

"Can you give us an instance of the employment of suggestion?"

"A very typical case occurred in my practice some years ago. A young man, who had a strong inherited predisposition to suicide, was caused by certain persons, who stood to benefit very considerably by his death, to make away with himself. The method adopted was this: The victim was made to believe that a certain Chinese jewel in his possession carried a curse; that all previous owners of it had hanged themselves, and that the appointed time for the suicide was made known by the apparition of a dead mandarin. When by frequent repetitions of this story the suitable state of mind had been produced, one of these persons dressed himself in a mandarin's costume and presented himself to the victim, with the result that, within an hour or two, the latter hanged himself."

"In that case," observed the coroner, "the suggestion seems to have been in two stages. Is that usual?"

"One could hardly call it usual, as the cases are so rare. But it is the most obvious and effective method—to produce a suicidal state of mind by preparatory suggestion, and

then, as it were, to explode the mine by a definite determining suggestion."

"Are you acquainted with the evidence which has been given in this inquiry?"

"I have read a verbatim report of the first proceedings, and I have heard your summary of the whole case."

"You have, then, read the evidence relating to the anonymous letters. What opinion did you form as to the purpose of those letters?"

"I formed the opinion that their purpose was to impel deceased to commit suicide."

"Do you consider that, in the case of a person predisposed to suicide, they would be likely to produce that effect?"

"I should say that they would have a tendency to induce a suicidal state of mind."

"And suppose such a person, having received a series of such letters, and being greatly depressed by them, should be engaged—in his bedroom, the last thing at night—in a conversation on suicide, his own suicide, and that of relatives who had killed themselves, what would you expect to be the effect of such conversation?"

"It would not be possible to predict the effect, but the tendency would be to reinforce the influence of the letters."

"And what would be the condition of such a person in regard to his susceptibility to further suggestion?"

"His susceptibility to further suggestion would probably be increased."

"Looking at this case as a whole, by the light of your experience of suicide, do you regard the death of deceased as the result of his own spontaneous act or as due in part to the acts of some other person or persons?"

"I regard his death as due entirely to the acts of some other person or persons."

At these terrible words my heart seemed to stand still. There was a fearful certainty and confidence in Dr. Thorndyke's tone that chilled my very blood. He did not guess. He knew. In the short pause that followed, I set my teeth and waited for my condemnation.

"You consider that the suggestion conveyed in the letters and in that conversation and by other possible means

operated so as to convert deceased into an automaton? Is that what you mean?"

"No. I do not consider that the letters or the conversation had any effect in causing his death."

The coroner frowned, perplexedly. "I don't think I quite understand," said he. "There seems to be—if you will pardon me—some self-contradiction. You state that the letters and the conversation would tend to produce a suicidal state of mind; but yet, though the letters were actually received and the conversation occurred, neither had any effect in causing the death which followed them. Do I state the case correctly?"

"Yes; quite correctly."

"Then I do not understand you in the least. You appear to be flatly contradicting yourself. I think you will agree that we are not making much progress."

"We are not making any progress at all. The examination has not elicited a single, relevant fact."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed the coroner. "And, pray, whose fault is that?"

"I suggest," Dr. Thorndyke replied, suavely, "that it is due to the method of examination."

The coroner turned purple. "This is insufferable!" he exclaimed; "that a witness should presume to instruct an experienced officer of justice in the duties of his office! But I suppose we must be humble in the presence of an expert. May I ask, sir, what you object to in my method of examination?"

"The lack of result," Dr. Thorndyke replied, "is due to the fact that your examination has been conducted to support a particular theory; and that theory happens to be the wrong theory."

"Again, I don't understand you," the coroner said, angrily. "No theory has been advanced by me. Will you be good enough to explain what theory you are alluding to?"

"I allude to the theory, which you seem to have adopted, that the deceased Lewis Otway committed suicide by hanging himself from a peg on the bedroom wall. That theory is erroneous. It is practically certain that Lewis Otway did not commit suicide; and it is quite certain that he never hung from that peg on the bedroom wall."

"But," exclaimed the coroner, "we have the evidence of a witness who saw deceased hanging from that peg; and not only saw him, but cut him down and found him to be dead."

"As a witness," said Dr. Thorndyke, "I am not concerned with the testimony of other witnesses, but only with the facts as ascertained by me."

"No doubt," retorted the coroner. "But we are concerned with the testimony of all the witnesses; and the statement of this witness that she saw the body hanging from the peg, and that she cut it down from the peg, is a clear statement on a question of fact. If that statement is true, deceased hung from that peg. If he did not hang from that peg the statement is false. You say that he never hung from that peg. On what facts do you base that statement?"

"On the strength of the peg and the weight of the body of deceased. The strength of the peg—that is, the maximum weight it was capable of supporting—was under 175 pounds. But the body of deceased weighed 231 pounds—more than half a hundredweight in excess of the greatest weight that the peg was capable of supporting."

"What method did you employ to measure the strength of the peg?"

"I used simple weights, which I thought preferable to a dynamometer for purposes of evidence. These weights I had conveyed to the chambers, and I carried out the experiment in the presence of Mr. Anstey, K.C., and my assistant, Francis Polton. I hung from the peg a wooden tray, slung by a chain, the total weight of which was ten pounds. On this tray I placed—with great care to avoid shocks—two half-hundredweights. I then added weights, five pounds at a time, until the total weight, including that of the tray and chain, reached 170 pounds. This was evidently very near the limit of what the peg would bear, for it was bending noticeably under the weight; and when I added another five pounds the peg doubled under, breaking half-way through. I have brought it with me for your inspection." He opened the green suit-case and produced the peg, which he handed to the coroner.

"You see," he said, "that, in spite of its massive

appearance, it had very little strength. It is merely a piece of thinnish, brass tube."

The coroner was impressed, but puzzled. "You consider," said he, as he handed the peg to the foreman of the jury, "that the test is conclusive?"

"Quite," replied Dr. Thorndyke. "Clearly, a peg which breaks under a weight of 175 pounds could not have supported a body weighing 231 pounds."

"Yes," agreed the coroner, "that appears to be undeniable." He again reflected for a few moments, and then said:

"I notice that you went to the chambers provided with this apparatus. The suggestion is that you had already a definite suspicion in your mind. Is that the case?"

"Yes; I had already come to the conclusion that deceased had never hung from that peg."

"Will you tell us what led you to that conclusion?"

"When I received instructions to investigate the case, I proceeded to make an inspection of the body, and it struck me, at once, that the appearances were not quite in agreement with the alleged facts, which I had learned from a verbatim report of the evidence. The amount of injury to the structures of the neck was much less than I should have expected in the case of so heavy a man, and the characteristic signs of death by hanging were absent. It is my invariable rule, in all cases of suspicious death, no matter what the apparent cause of the death may be, to examine the contents of the stomach and the secretions. In this case the procedure appeared to be necessary, and I made a careful examination of the contents of the stomach. The examination disclosed the presence of small quantities of veronal and alcohol, but when I tested for alkaloids, I obtained from the stomach and its contents no less than twenty-three minims of nicotine, the alkaloid of tobacco. Now nicotine—which differs from all other alkaloids but conein, the alkaloid of hemlock, in being a liquid—is an intensely poisonous substance. The fatal dose has not been exactly ascertained, but it may be stated at not more than five minims; that is, roughly, five drops. So that the quantity of this virulent poison actually obtained from the stomach of deceased was about four times the fatal dose. But this was only a part of the quantity that had been

swallowed, for the examination was made ten days after death, by which time an appreciable amount of the poison would have been lost by post-mortem diffusion. I also examined the liver and other organs and the secretions, and in these I detected minute quantities of nicotine. The evidence afforded by these minute quantities is very important. Nicotine is a poison that acts with great rapidity—in fact, with the exception of hydrocyanic acid (prussic acid) it is probably the most rapidly-acting poison known. The importance, therefore, of these minute traces of the poison in remote organs is this: their existence proves that the poison entered the stomach during life—while the blood was still circulating; and the minuteness of the quantity absorbed proves that death occurred very rapidly—practically instantaneously.

“But the very large quantity of the poison and the evidence of its almost instantaneous effect created this dilemma: a witness had stated that she saw deceased hanging from the peg; but since death was practically instantaneous, he could not have hanged himself after taking the poison; and obviously he could not have taken the poison after he had hanged himself. This discrepancy, coupled with the absence of appreciable injury to the neck, raised a doubt as to whether deceased had ever hung from the peg at all. That doubt was increased by certain other circumstances. There were, for instance, post-mortem lacerations of the hamstring muscles and other muscles of the thighs, which could not be accounted for in the case of a body which had hung vertically, fully extended. There were faint impressions below the knees of some coarse-textured fabric, not part of his clothing, and there was the condition of a length of red, worsted rope by which deceased was said to have been suspended. Both ends of this rope—which had formed part of a loop—had been cut through with a very sharp instrument; and both ends were cut cleanly right through. But this could not possibly have happened in the alleged circumstances. If a body of this great weight had been suspended by two thicknesses of a flimsy, woollen rope, and an attempt had been made to cut that rope, the cutting instrument would not have passed right through, but would have divided the rope until the remaining portion was too weak to sustain the

weight, and then that portion would have broken, leaving a ragged end. Having regard to the great evidential importance of the question, I decided to clear up the doubt, if possible, by examining the peg itself. There are not many pegs which could carry this great weight without either bending, breaking or pulling out of the woodwork, and I thought it probable that an actual test with weights would settle the question. I accordingly obtained the keys from Mrs. Otway, went to the chambers and applied the tests as I have stated."

"If the deceased was not suspended at all," the coroner objected, "how do you account for the marks of the rope on his neck?"

"He *was* suspended—or rather partially suspended. I looked about the chambers for the probable means of suspension, and decided that this was the knob of the bedpost at the right-hand side of the head of the bed. On this side of the bed was a hard jute matting, the texture of which corresponded exactly with the impressions on the knees, the faintness of which is accounted for by the partial protection furnished by the pyjamas. The procedure seems to have been this: the rope was secured to the neck of deceased immediately after death, while he was lying on the bed. It was then hitched over the knob of the bedpost and the body drawn off the bed so that it was supported against the bedpost in a kneeling position. This would account for the shallowness of the marks on the neck, the impressions of the matting on the knees, and the post-mortem lacerations of the muscles. With regard to these latter, it is evident that the body was left suspended in an approximately kneeling position for a good many hours—probably for the purpose of producing as deep an indentation as possible on the neck—and that during that time cadaveric rigidity became well established; so that when the rope was cut and the body allowed to fall to the floor, the legs were found to have stiffened and to be firmly set in the kneeling posture. As deceased was to be represented as having hanged himself from the peg, it would be necessary to straighten out the legs by force; but as the muscles were already rigid, the forcible extension would tend to produce such lacerations as were found. These lacerations were, of course, under the skin and

would not be noticeable excepting on close examination."

"Is that the whole of your evidence?" the coroner asked, as Dr. Thorndyke paused.

"It is the whole of my evidence concerning the immediate circumstances of the death of Lewis Otway. I have certain other information, but you will probably not consider it of much importance to the enquiry. I have examined the two hairs that were found adhering to Mr. Vardon's stick. They were not his hairs. As a matter of fact, the wound on his head was on a part in which there was no hair; but in any case, these were not his hairs. One of these was apparently a hair of Lewis Otway's—probably taken from his hair brush. His hair was white, but was dyed with a stain containing sulphide of lead. This hair was of a similar character and stained with the same material. The other was white and appeared to be a woman's hair. It was cut at both ends, and was evidently part of a much longer hair. I have also made some enquiries concerning the anonymous letters. Mrs. Otway consulted me about them a month or two back, and I promised her to look into the matter, and did so. I collected very few facts, but if I may look at the letters, I can tell you at once whether those facts throw any light on the authorship of these letters."

"It really is not of much importance to us," said the coroner, "though it may be important evidence in another place. Still, you may as well look at the letters." He handed the bundle of letters to Dr. Thorndyke, who examined each of them closely, holding them up to the light to inspect the watermark and comparing them with some other letters which he produced from his pocket.

"I think," said he, as he returned the letters to the coroner, "there is no doubt that all these letters were written by Morris Goldstein. I have several letters which were received from and signed by him, which are identically similar in character. All are typed on the same foreign paper—made in Sweden—with an old Calligraph machine which had three type-bars slightly bent—the lower-case 'g' and 's' and the capital 'O.' I have further evidence on the subject, if you care to hear it."

The foreman of the jury interposed at this point. "We

don't want to hear any more about those letters. If deceased did not commit suicide, the letters don't matter."

"They will matter a good deal in another court," said the coroner, "but I agree with you that they do not affect our probable verdict; but there is one question to which we may as well have a definite answer, and then we need not detain Dr. Thorndyke any longer. You have told us, sir, that the immediate cause of Lewis Otway's death was nicotine poisoning. Can you say whether the poison was taken by deceased himself, or whether it was administered by some other person?"

"The medical evidence proper furnishes no answer to that question, but from the attendant circumstances I infer that the poison was administered by some other person—probably while deceased was asleep. But that is only an opinion, based on the circumstantial evidence."

"Exactly. It is really a question for the jury. And now I don't think we need trouble you any further." The coroner bowed, a little stiffly, and as Dr. Thorndyke walked back to his chair, he once more faced the jury.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "you have heard Dr. Thorndyke's very remarkable evidence, and you will see that it compels us completely to revise our views of the case. The suicide by hanging, which we have been considering at such length, is seen to be an illusion, carefully, elaborately and ingeniously prepared. The question now is, was there a suicide at all? The cause of death was poisoning by nicotine, and death was almost instantaneous. Is this, then, a case of suicidal poisoning or of homicide?"

"It is unnecessary for me to dwell on the suggested probabilities. You have heard a witness swear, in the most circumstantial manner, that she saw deceased hanging from a peg, and that she cut the body down. You now know that deceased could never have hung from that peg. That statement was false. But what was the object of that false statement? Its object must be considered in conjunction with the illusory appearances produced by an elaborate set of preparations—the cord-marks on the neck, the overturned chair, the end of the rope fastened to the peg—a set of preparations, the only intelligible object of which seems to be the concealment of the real cause of death. And then there is a further series of preparations revealed by the

anonymous letters. These we now have reason to believe were written and sent by Morris Goldstein. Our reason for connecting Mrs. Otway with those letters was based on Rachel Goldstein's statement that no one was in the house at Maidstone but Mrs. Otway, and her husband and father. But we can no longer accept that statement. The suggested probability is that she was in the house, and that she either saw, or heard enough to gather what had taken place. In that case we seem to detect a carefully-laid plan to procure the suicide of the deceased, and throw suspicion on his wife; and when the suicide failed to occur, the alternative of poison would seem to have been adopted.

"I must draw your attention to the circumstances existing at the time of the tragedy. In deceased's chambers were precious stones to the value of over four thousand pounds. Possibly there were stolen gems of a somewhat greater aggregate value. It is highly probable that Rachel Goldstein knew of the deceased's letter to his wife, for as he was bed-ridden at the time, the letter would have been posted by her, and could easily have been opened and read. The time of the interview was arranged by her so that Mrs. Otway should be the last visitor.

"Here then is a group of circumstances furnishing a perfect opportunity for the carrying out of the plan. The gems were within reach, and a visitor was expected on whom could be thrown the suspicion of the theft, and the responsibility of the apparent suicide.

"As to the motive, apart from the theft of the gems, we must remember that here was an illegitimate Jewish family into which had been introduced a legitimate Gentile wife. Her arrival had affected the interests of the family injuriously, and if a reconciliation between husband and wife should have occurred, those interests would have been still more unfavourably affected.

"But we are not called on to go deeply into the question of motive. This is a coroner's inquest, and our business is to decide how and by what means deceased met with his death. That decision is with you, gentlemen. You have heard the evidence, and I shall now leave you to consider your verdict."

As the coroner ceased speaking, and silence fell upon the court I allowed myself, for the first time, to think of my

own position. Previously I had not dared ; for when Dr. Thorndyke had made his dramatic statement, the revulsion of feeling had been so great that I had much ado to restrain myself from bursting into hysterical tears or laughter. But now I was more calm, and could think upon the change that a few magic words had wrought in my condition. I was free—free in body and soul. My imagined guilt had been a delusion ; the silent willing and suggestion, a myth. I had never had any conscious intention to procure Lewis Otway's suicide ; and no suicide had been procured. The death of that wretched man—my evil genius—had been brought about by no act of mine, conscious or unconscious. I was guiltless, I was free.

The jury took but a short time to consider their verdict. In a few minutes the foreman intimated that they had come to a unanimous decision. The coroner then formally put the question.

"Have you considered the evidence, gentlemen, and are you agreed upon your verdict ?"

"We are," replied the foreman. "Our verdict is that the deceased, Lewis Otway, met his death as the result of a poisonous dose of nicotine administered to him by Rachel Goldstein."

"Do you say that the poison was administered inadvertently or with malice ?"

The foreman consulted his colleagues, and then replied, "With malice."

"That," said the coroner, "amounts to a verdict of wilful murder against Rachel Goldstein ; and I may say that I am entirely in agreement with you."

As the coroner concluded, I looked at Mrs. Gregg. Her face was set, and had turned a horrible, livid grey. Presently she rose slowly from her chair, and looked furtively over her shoulder ; and as she did so she looked into the face of Superintendent Miller.

Epilogue

THE history that I have set forth in the foregoing pages is the history of an episode. That episode opened with instantaneous abruptness ; and in an instant it came to an abrupt end. The fatal words that I had overheard in my father's house had been as an incantation that had cast over me a malign spell. In the moment in which they were spoken the sinister shadow of Lewis Otway had fallen upon my life ; and in the long months that followed it had never lifted. Even the death of the unhappy wizard had left the spell still working, the shadow deepening from hour to hour, until Dr. Thorndyke, like a benevolent magician, had spoken the counter-charm. Then, in an instant, the spell was broken ; the shadow lifted and lifted for ever.

And with the breaking of the spell and the lifting of the shadow, the episode is at an end, and my tale is told. Yet I am loth to lay down my pen until the reader who has followed my pilgrimage through the valley of the shadow, has been given at least one glimpse of me straying in the sunshine, "along the meads of asphodel." I would crave his attendance at the sombre, old church of St. Clement Danes, where, on a bright May morning, was spoken another incantation that opened to four faithful hearts the gates of a Paradise of life-long happiness and love. I would bid him admire sweet Peggy, tripping forth, all smiles and blushes, beside her stalwart husband to foregather with Jasper and me and our friends from Wellclose Square and the Temple in the ancient rooms in Clifford's Inn.

But my tale is told. The curtain is rung down ; and I may not linger before it, babbling over the extinguished footlights on an empty stage—perchance to an empty house.

THE END





