

tive that he should be stopped before it was too late. This was my view, but I meant to have Thorndyke's opinion, and act under his direction, but

"The best laid plans of mice and men
Gang aft agley."

When I came downstairs and took a preliminary glance at the rough memorandum-book, kept by the bottle-boy, or, in his absence, by the housemaid, I stood aghast. The morning's entries looked already like a sample page of the Post Office directory. The new calls alone were more than equal to an ordinary day's work, and the routine visits remained to be added. Gloomily wondering whether the Black Death had made a sudden reappearance in England, I hurried to the dining-room and made a hasty breakfast, interrupted at intervals by the apparition of the bottle-boy to announce new messages.

The first two or three visits solved the mystery. An epidemic of influenza had descended on the neighbourhood, and I was getting not only our own normal work but a certain amount of overflow from other practices. Further, it appeared that a strike in the building trade had been followed immediately by a widespread failure of health among the bricklayers who were members of a certain benefit club; which accounted for the remarkable suddenness of the outbreak.

Of course, my contemplated visit to Thorndyke was out of the question. I should have to act on my own responsibility. But in the hurry and rush and anxiety of the work—for some of the cases were

severe and even critical—I had no opportunity to consider any course of action, nor time to carry it out. Even with the aid of a hansom which I chartered, as Stillbury kept no carriage, I had not finished my last visit until near on midnight, and was then so spent with fatigue that I fell asleep over my postponed supper.

As the next day opened with a further increase of work, I sent a telegram to Dr. Stillbury at Hastings, whither he had gone, like a wise man, to recruit after a slight illness. I asked for authority to engage an assistant, but the reply informed me that Stillbury himself was on his way to town; and to my relief, when I dropped in at the surgery for a cup of tea, I found him rubbing his hands over the open day-book.

“It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good,” he remarked cheerfully as we shook hands. “This will pay the expenses of my holiday, including you. By the way, you are not anxious to be off, I suppose?”

As a matter of fact, I was; for I had decided to accept Thorndyke’s offer, and was now eager to take up my duties with him. But it would have been shabby to leave Stillbury to battle alone with this rush of work or to seek the services of a strange assistant.

“I should like to get off as soon as you can spare me,” I replied, “but I’m not going to leave you in the lurch.”

“That’s a good fellow,” said Stillbury. “I knew you wouldn’t. Let us have some tea and divide up the work. Anything of interest going?”

There were one or two unusual cases on the list, and, as we marked off our respective patients, I gave him the histories in brief synopsis. And then I opened the subject of my mysterious experiences at the house of Mr. Weiss.

“There’s another affair that I want to tell you about; rather an unpleasant business.”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Stillbury. He put down his cup and regarded me with quite painful anxiety.

“It looks to me like an undoubted case of criminal poisoning,” I continued.

Stillbury’s face cleared instantly. “Oh, I’m glad it’s nothing more than that,” he said with an air of relief. “I was afraid, it was some confounded woman. There’s always that danger, you know, when a locum is young and happens—if I may say so, Jervis—to be a good-looking fellow. Let us hear about this case.”

I gave him a condensed narrative of my connection with the mysterious patient, omitting any reference to Thorndyke, and passing lightly over my efforts to fix the position of the house, and wound up with the remark that the facts ought certainly to be communicated to the police.

“Yes,” he admitted reluctantly, “I suppose you’re right. Deuced unpleasant though. Police cases don’t do a practice any good. They waste a lot of time, too; keep you hanging about to give evidence. Still, you are quite right. We can’t stand by and see the poor devil poisoned without making some effort. But I don’t believe the police will do anything in the matter.”

“ Don't you really ? ”

“ No, I don't. They like to have things pretty well cut and dried before they act. A prosecution is an expensive affair, so they don't care to prosecute unless they are fairly sure of a conviction. If they fail they get hauled over the coals.”

“ But don't you think they would get a conviction in this case ? ”

“ Not on your evidence, Jervis. They might pick up something fresh, but, if they didn't they would fail. You haven't got enough hard-baked facts to upset a capable defence. Still, that isn't our affair. You want to put the responsibility on the police and I entirely agree with you.”

“ There ought not to be any delay,” said I.

“ There needn't be. I shall look in on Mrs. Wackford and you have to see the Rummel children ; we shall pass the station on our way. Why shouldn't we drop in and see the inspector or superintendent ? ”

The suggestion met my views exactly. As soon as we had finished tea, we set forth, and in about ten minutes found ourselves in the bare and forbidding office attached to the station.

The presiding officer descended from a high stool, and, carefully laying down his pen, shook hands cordially.

“ And what can I do for you gentlemen ? ” he asked, with an affable smile.

Stillbury proceeded to open our business.

“ My friend here, Dr. Jervis, who has very kindly been looking after my work for a week or two, has

had a most remarkable experience, and he wants to tell you about it."

"Something in my line of business?" the officer inquired.

"That," said I, "is for you to judge. I think it is, but you may think otherwise"; and hereupon, without further preamble, I plunged into the history of the case, giving him a condensed statement similar to that which I had already made to Stillbury.

He listened with close attention, jotting down from time to time a brief note on a sheet of paper; and, when I had finished, he wrote out in a black-covered notebook a short *précis* of my statement.

"I have written down here," he said, "the substance of what you have told me. I will read the deposition over to you, and, if it is correct, I will ask you to sign it."

He did so, and, when I had signed the document, I asked him what was likely to be done in the matter.

"I am afraid," he replied, "that we can't take any active measures. You have put us on our guard and we shall keep our eyes open. But I think that is all we can do, unless we hear something further."

"But," I exclaimed, "don't you think that it is a very suspicious affair?"

"I do," he replied. "A very fishy business indeed, and you were quite right to come and tell us about it."

"It seems a pity not to take some measures," I said. "While you are waiting to hear something further, they may give the poor wretch a fresh dose and kill him."

"In which case we should hear something further, unless some fool of a doctor were to give a death certificate."

"But that is very unsatisfactory. The man ought not to be allowed to die."

"I quite agree with you, sir. But we've no evidence that he is going to die. His friends sent for you, and you treated him skilfully and left him in a fair way to recovery. That's all that we really know about it. Yes, I know," the officer continued as I made signs of disagreement, "you think that a crime is possibly going to be committed and that we ought to prevent it. But you overrate our powers. We can only act on evidence that a crime has actually been committed or is actually being attempted. Now we have no such evidence. Look at your statement, and tell me what you can swear to."

"I think I could swear that Mr. Graves had taken a poisonous dose of morphine."

"And who gave him that poisonous dose?"

"I very strongly suspect——"

"That's no good, sir," interrupted the officer. "Suspicion isn't evidence. We should want you to swear an information and give us enough facts to make out a *primâ facie* case against some definite person. And you couldn't do it. Your information amounts to this: that a certain person has taken a poisonous dose of morphine and apparently recovered. That's all. You can't swear that the names given to you are real names, and you can't give us any address or even any locality."

“ I took some compass bearings in the carriage,” I said. “ You could locate the house, I think, without much difficulty.”

The officer smiled faintly and fixed an abstracted gaze on the clock.

“ *You* could, sir,” he replied. “ I have no doubt whatever that *you* could. *I* couldn't. But, in any case, we haven't enough to go upon. If you learn anything fresh, I hope you will let me know ; and I am very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble in the matter. Good evening sir. Good evening, Dr. Stillbury.”

He shook hands with us both genially, and, accepting perforce this very polite but unmistakable dismissal, we took our departure.

Outside the station, Stillbury heaved a comfortable sigh. He was evidently relieved to find that no upheavals were to take place in his domain.

“ I thought that would be their attitude,” he said, “ and they are quite right, you know. The function of law is to prevent crime, it is true ; but prophylaxis in the sense in which we understand it is not possible in legal practice.”

I assented without enthusiasm. It was disappointing to find that no precautionary measures were to be taken. However, I had done all that I could in the matter. No further responsibility lay upon me, and, as it was practically certain that I had seen and heard the last of Mr. Graves and his mysterious household, I dismissed the case from my mind. At the next corner Stillbury and I parted to go our respective ways ; and my attention was soon trans-

ferred from the romance of crime to the realities of epidemic influenza.

The plethora of work in Dr. Stillbury's practice continued longer than I had bargained for. Day after day went by and still found me tramping the dingy streets of Kennington or scrambling up and down narrow stairways; turning in at night dead tired, or turning out half awake to the hideous jangle of the night bell.

It was very provoking. For months I had resisted Thorndyke's persuasion to give up general practice and join him. Not from lack of inclination, but from a deep suspicion that he was thinking of my wants rather than his own; that his was a charitable rather than a business proposal. Now that I knew this not to be the case, I was impatient to join him; and, as I trudged through the dreary thoroughfares of this superannuated suburb, with its once rustic villas and its faded gardens, my thoughts would turn enviously to the quiet dignity of the Temple and my friend's chambers in King's Bench Walk.

The closed carriage appeared no more; nor did any whisper either of good or evil reach me in connection with the mysterious house from which it had come. Mr. Graves had apparently gone out of my life for ever.

But if he had gone out of my life, he had not gone out of my memory. Often, as I walked my rounds, would the picture of that dimly-lit room rise unbidden. Often would I find myself looking once more into that ghastly face, so worn, so wasted

and haggard, and yet so far from repellent. All the incidents of that last night would reconstitute themselves with a vividness that showed the intensity of the impression that they had made at the time. I would have gladly forgotten the whole affair, for every incident of it was fraught with discomfort. But it clung to my memory; it haunted me; and ever as it returned it bore with it the disquieting questions: Was Mr. Graves still alive? And, if he was not, was there really nothing which could have been done to save him?

Nearly a month passed before the practice began to show signs of returning to its normal condition. Then the daily lists became more and more contracted and the day's work proportionately shorter. And thus the term of my servitude came to an end. One evening, as we were writing up the day-book, Stillbury remarked:

"I almost think, Jervis, I could manage by myself now. I know you are only staying on for my sake."

"I am staying on to finish my engagement, but I shan't be sorry to clear out if you can do without me."

"I think I can. When would you like to be off?"

"As soon as possible. Say to-morrow morning, after I have made a few visits and transferred the patients to you."

"Very well," said Stillbury. "Then I will give you your cheque and settle up everything to-night, so that you shall be free to go off when you like to-morrow morning."

Thus ended my connection with Kennington Lane.

On the following day at about noon, I found myself strolling across Waterloo Bridge with the sensations of a newly liberated convict and a cheque for twenty-five guineas in my pocket. My luggage was to follow when I sent for it. Now, unhampered even by a hand-bag, I joyfully descended the steps at the north end of the bridge and headed for King's Bench Walk by way of the Embankment and Middle Temple Lane.

*Chapter V**Jeffrey Blackmore's Will*

MY arrival at Thorndyke's chambers was not unexpected, having been heralded by a premonitory post-card. The "oak" was open and an application of the little brass knocker of the inner door immediately produced my colleague himself and a very hearty welcome.

"At last," said Thorndyke, "you have come forth from the house of bondage. I began to think that you had taken up your abode in Kennington for good."

"I was beginning, myself, to wonder when I should escape. But here I am; and I may say at once that I am ready to shake the dust of general practice off my feet for ever—that is, if you are still willing to have me as your assistant."

"Willing!" exclaimed Thorndyke, "Barkis himself was not more willing than I. You will be invaluable to me. Let us settle the terms of our comradeship forthwith, and to-morrow we will take measures

to enter you as a student of the Inner Temple. Shall we have our talk in the open air and the spring sunshine? ”

I agreed readily to this proposal, for it was a bright, sunny day and warm for the time of year—the beginning of April. We descended to the Walk and thence slowly made our way to the quiet court behind the church, where poor old Oliver Goldsmith lies, as he would surely have wished to lie, in the midst of all that had been dear to him in his chequered life. I need not record the matter of our conversation. To Thorndyke's proposals I had no objections to offer but my own unworthiness and his excessive liberality. A few minutes saw our covenants fully agreed upon, and when Thorndyke had noted the points on a slip of paper, signed and dated it and handed it to me, the business was at an end.

“ There,” my colleague said with a smile as he put away his pocket-book, “ if people would only settle their affairs in that way, a good part of the occupation of lawyers would be gone. Brevity is the soul of wit ; and the fear of simplicity is the beginning of litigation.”

“ And now,” I said, “ I propose that we go and feed. I will invite you to lunch to celebrate our contract.”

“ My learned junior is premature,” he replied. “ I had already arranged a little festivity—or rather had modified one that was already arranged. You remember Mr. Marchmont, the solicitor? ”

“ Yes.”

“ He called this morning to ask me to lunch with him and a new client at the ‘ Cheshire Cheese.’ I accepted and notified him that I should bring you.”

“ Why the ‘ Cheshire Cheese ’ ? ” I asked.

“ Why not ? Marchmont’s reasons for the selection were, first, that his client has never seen an old-fashioned London tavern, and second, that this is Wednesday and he, Marchmont, has a gluttonous affection for a really fine beef-steak pudding. You don’t object, I hope ? ”

“ Oh, not at all. In fact, now that you mention it, my own sensations incline me to sympathize with Marchmont. I breakfasted rather early.”

“ Then come,” said Thorndyke. “ The assignation is for one o’clock, and, if we walk slowly, we shall just hit it off.”

We sauntered up Inner Temple Lane, and, crossing Fleet Street, headed sedately for the tavern. As we entered the quaint old-world dining-room, Thorndyke looked round and a gentleman, who was seated with a companion at a table in one of the little boxes or compartments, rose and saluted us.

“ Let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Stephen Blackmore,” he said as we approached. Then, turning to his companion, he introduced us by our respective names.

“ I engaged this box,” he continued, “ so that we might be private if we wished to have a little preliminary chat ; not that beef-steak pudding is a great help to conversation. But when people

have a certain business in view, their talk is sure to drift towards it, sooner or later."

Thorndyke and I sat down opposite the lawyer and his client, and we mutually inspected one another. Marchmont I already knew; an elderly, professional-looking man, a typical solicitor of the old school; fresh-faced, precise, rather irascible, and conveying a not unpleasant impression of taking a reasonable interest in his diet. The other man was quite young, not more than five-and-twenty, and was a fine athletic-looking fellow with a healthy, out-of-door complexion and an intelligent and highly prepossessing face. I took a liking to him at the first glance, and so, I saw, did Thorndyke.

"You two gentlemen," said Blackmore, addressing us, "seem to be quite old acquaintances. I have heard so much about you from my friend, Reuben Hornby."

"Ah!" exclaimed Marchmont, "that was a queer case—'The Case of the Red Thumb Mark,' as the papers called it. It was an eye-opener to old-fashioned lawyers like myself. We've had scientific witnesses before—and bullied 'em properly, by Jove! when they wouldn't give the evidence that we wanted. But the scientific lawyer is something new. His appearance in court made us all sit up, I can assure you."

"I hope we shall make you sit up again," said Thorndyke.

"You won't this time," said Marchmont. "The issues in this case of my friend Blackmore's are

purely legal; or rather, there are no issues at all. There is nothing in dispute. I tried to prevent Blackmore from consulting you, but he wouldn't listen to reason. Here! Waiter! How much longer are we to be waiters? We shall die of old age before we get our victuals!"

The waiter smiled apologetically. "Yessir!" said he. "Coming now, sir." And at this very moment there was borne into the room a Gargantuan pudding in a great bucket of a basin, which being placed on a three-legged stool was forthwith attacked ferociously by the white-clothed, white-capped carver. We watched the process—as did every one present—with an interest not entirely gluttonous, for it added a pleasant touch to the picturesque old room, with its sanded floor, its homely, pew-like boxes, its high-backed settles and the friendly portrait of the "great lexicographer" that beamed down on us from the wall.

"This is a very different affair from your great, glittering modern restaurant," Mr. Marchmont remarked.

"It is indeed," said Blackmore, "and if this is the way in which our ancestors lived, it would seem that they had a better idea of comfort than we have."

There was a short pause, during which Mr. Marchmont glared hungrily at the pudding; then Thorndyke said:

"So you refused to listen to reason, Mr. Blackmore?"

"Yes. You see, Mr. Marchmont and his partner

had gone into the matter and decided that there was nothing to be done. Then I happened to mention the affair to Reuben Hornby, and he urged me to ask your advice on the case."

"Like his impudence," growled Marchmont, "to meddle with my client."

"On which," continued Blackmore, "I spoke to Mr. Marchmont and he agreed that it was worth while to take your opinion on the case, though he warned me to cherish no hopes, as the affair was not really within your specialty."

"So you understand," said Marchmont, "that we expect nothing. This is quite a forlorn hope. We are taking your opinion as a mere formality, to be able to say that we have left nothing untried."

"That is an encouraging start," Thorndyke remarked. "It leaves me unembarrassed by the possibility of failure. But meanwhile you are arousing in me a devouring curiosity as to the nature of the case. Is it highly confidential? Because if not, I would mention that Jervis has now joined me as my permanent colleague."

"It isn't confidential at all," said Marchmont. "The public are in full possession of the facts, and we should be only too happy to put them in still fuller possession, through the medium of the Probate Court, if we could find a reasonable pretext. But we can't."

Here the waiter charged our table with the fussy rapidity of the overdue.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, sir. Rather early, sir. Wouldn't like it underdone, sir."

Marchmont inspected his plate critically and remarked :

“ I sometimes suspect these oysters of being mussels ; and I'll swear the larks are sparrows.”

“ Let us hope so,” said Thorndyke. “ The lark is better employed ‘ at Heaven's gate singing ’ than garnishing a beef-steak pudding. But you were telling us about your case.”

“ So I was. Well it's just a matter of—ale or claret ? Oh, claret, I know. You despise the good old British John Barleycorn.”

“ He that drinks beer thinks beer,” retorted Thorndyke. “ But you were saying that it is just a matter of—— ? ”

“ A matter of a perverse testator and an ill-drawn will. A peculiarly irritating case, too, because the defective will replaces a perfectly sound one, and the intentions of the testator were—er—were—excellent ale, this. A little heady, perhaps, but sound. Better than your sour French wine, Thorndyke—were—er—were quite obvious. What he evidently desired was—mustard ? Better have some mustard. No ? Well, well ! Even a Frenchman would take mustard. You can have no appreciation of flavour, Thorndyke, if you take your victuals in that crude, unseasoned state. And, talking of flavour, do you suppose that there is really any difference between that of a lark and that of a sparrow ? ”

Thorndyke smiled grimly. “ I should suppose,” said he, “ that they were indistinguishable ; but the question could easily be put to the test of experiment.”

“That is true,” agreed Marchmont, “and it would really be worth trying, for, as you say, sparrows are more easily obtainable than larks. But, about this will. I was saying—er—now, what was I saying?”

“I understood you to say,” replied Thorndyke, “that the intentions of the testator were in some way connected with mustard. Isn’t that so, Jervis?”

“That was what I gathered,” said I.

Marchmont gazed at us for a moment with a surprised expression and then, laughing good-humouredly, fortified himself with a draught of ale.

“The moral of which is,” Thorndyke added, “that testamentary dispositions should not be mixed up with beef-steak pudding.”

“I believe you’re right, Thorndyke,” said the unabashed solicitor. “Business is business and eating is eating. We had better talk over our case in my office or your chambers after lunch.”

“Yes,” said Thorndyke, “come over to the Temple with me and I will give you a cup of coffee to clear your brain. Are there any documents?”

“I have all the papers here in my bag,” replied Marchmont; and the conversation—such conversation as is possible “when beards wag all” over the festive board—drifted into other channels.

As soon as the meal was finished and the reckoning paid, we trooped out of Wine Office Court, and, insinuating ourselves through the line of empty hansoms that, in those days, crawled in a con-

tinuous procession on either side of Fleet Street, betook ourselves by way of Mitre Court to King's Bench Walk. There, when the coffee had been requisitioned and our chairs drawn up around the fire, Mr. Marchmont unloaded from his bag a portentous bundle of papers, and we addressed ourselves to the business in hand.

"Now," said Marchmont, "let me repeat what I said before. Legally speaking, we have no case—not the ghost of one. But my client wished to take your opinion, and I agreed on the bare chance that you might detect some point that we had overlooked. I don't think you will, for we have gone into the case very thoroughly, but still, there is the infinitesimal chance and we may as well take it. Would you like to read the two wills, or shall I first explain the circumstances?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "a narrative of the events in the order of their occurrence would be most helpful. I should like to know as much as possible about the testator before I examine the documents."

"Very well," said Marchmont. "Then I will begin with a recital of the circumstances, which, briefly stated, are these: My client, Stephen Blackmore, is the son of Mr. Edward Blackmore, deceased. Edward Blackmore had two brothers who survived him, John, the elder, and Jeffrey, the younger. Jeffrey is the testator in this case.

"Some two years ago, Jeffrey Blackmore executed a will by which he made his nephew Stephen his executor and sole legatee; and a few months later

he added a codicil giving two hundred and fifty pounds to his brother John."

"What was the value of the estate?" Thorndyke asked.

"About three thousand five hundred pounds, all invested in Consols. The testator had a pension from the Foreign Office, on which he lived, leaving his capital untouched. Soon after having made his will, he left the rooms in Jermyn Street, where he had lived for some years, stored his furniture and went to Florence. From thence he moved on to Rome and then to Venice and other places in Italy, and so continued to travel about until the end of last September, when it appears that he returned to England, for at the beginning of October he took a set of chambers in New Inn, which he furnished with some of the things from his old rooms. As far as we can make out, he never communicated with any of his friends, excepting his brother, and the fact of his being in residence at New Inn or of his being in England at all became known to them only when he died."

"Was this quite in accordance with his ordinary habits?" Thorndyke asked.

"I should say not quite," Blackmore answered. "My uncle was a studious, solitary man, but he was not formerly a recluse. He was not much of a correspondent but he kept up some sort of communication with his friends. He used, for instance, to write to me sometimes, and, when I came down from Cambridge for the vacations, he had me to stay with him at his rooms."

“Is there anything known that accounts for the change in his habits?”

“Yes, there is,” replied Marchmont. “We shall come to that presently. To proceed with the narrative: On the fifteenth of last March he was found dead in his chambers, and a more recent will was then discovered, dated the twelfth of November of last year. Now no change had taken place in the circumstances of the testator to account for the new will, nor was there any appreciable alteration in the disposition of the property. As far as we can make out, the new will was drawn with the idea of stating the intentions of the testator with greater exactness and for the sake of doing away with the codicil. The entire property, with the exception of two hundred and fifty pounds, was, as before, bequeathed to Stephen, but the separate items were specified, and the testator’s brother, John Blackmore, was named as the executor and residuary legatee.”

“I see,” said Thorndyke. “So that your client’s interest in the will would appear to be practically unaffected by the change.”

“Yes. There it is,” exclaimed the lawyer, slapping the table to add emphasis to his words. “That is the pity of it! If people who have no knowledge of law would only refrain from tinkering at their wills, what a world of trouble would be saved!”

“Oh, come!” said Thorndyke. “It is not for a lawyer to say that.”

“No, I suppose not,” Marchmont agreed. “Only,

you see, we like the muddle to be made by the other side. But, in this case, the muddle is on our side. The change, as you say, seems to leave our friend Stephen's interests unaffected. That is, of course, what poor Jeffrey Blackmore thought. But he was mistaken. The effect of the change is absolutely disastrous."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. As I have said, no alteration in the testator's circumstances had taken place at the time the new will was executed. *But* only two days before his death, his sister, Mrs. Edmund Wilson, died; and on her will being proved it appeared that she had bequeathed to him her entire personalty, estimated at about thirty thousand pounds."

"Heigho!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "What an unfortunate affair!"

"You are right," said Mr. Marchmont; "it was a disaster. By the original will this great sum would have accrued to our friend Mr. Stephen, whereas now, of course, it goes to the residuary legatee, Mr. John Blackmore. And what makes it even more exasperating is the fact that this is obviously not in accordance with the wishes and intentions of Mr. Jeffrey, who clearly desired his nephew to inherit his property."

"Yes," said Thorndyke; "I think you are justified in assuming that. But do you know whether Mr. Jeffrey was aware of his sister's intentions?"

"We think not. Her will was executed as recently as the third of September last, and it seems

that there had been no communication between her and Mr. Jeffrey since that date. Besides, if you consider Mr. Jeffrey's actions, you will see that they suggest no knowledge or expectation of this very important bequest. A man does not make elaborate dispositions in regard to three thousand pounds and then leave a sum of thirty thousand to be disposed of casually as the residue of the estate."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "And, as you have said, the manifest intention of the testator was to leave the bulk of his property to Mr. Stephen. So we may take it as virtually certain that Mr. Jeffrey had no knowledge of the fact that he was a beneficiary under his sister's will."

"Yes," said Mr. Marchmont, "I think we may take that as nearly certain."

"With reference to the second will," said Thorndyke, "I suppose there is no need to ask whether the document itself has been examined; I mean as to its being a genuine document and perfectly regular?"

Mr. Marchmont shook his head sadly.

"No," he said, "I am sorry to say that there can be no possible doubt as to the authenticity and regularity of the document. The circumstances under which it was executed establish its genuineness beyond any question."

"What were those circumstances?" Thorndyke asked.

"They were these: On the morning of the twelfth of November last, Mr. Jeffrey came to the

porter's lodge with a document in his hand. 'This,' he said, 'is my will. I want you to witness my signature. Would you mind doing so, and can you find another respectable person to act as the second witness?' Now it happened that a nephew of the porter's, a painter by trade, was at work in the Inn. The porter went out and fetched him into the lodge and the two men agreed to witness the signature. 'You had better read the will,' said Mr. Jeffrey. 'It is not actually necessary, but it is an additional safeguard and there is nothing of a private nature in the document.' The two men accordingly read the document, and, when Mr. Jeffrey had signed it in their presence, they affixed their signatures; and I may add that the painter left the recognizable impressions of three greasy fingers."

"And these witnesses have been examined?"

"Yes. They have both sworn to the document and to their own signatures, and the painter recognized his finger-marks."

"That," said Thorndyke, "seems to dispose pretty effectually of any question as to the genuineness of the will; and if, as I gather, Mr. Jeffrey came to the lodge alone, the question of undue influence is disposed of too."

"Yes," said Mr. Marchmont. "I think we must pass the will as absolutely flawless."

"It strikes me as rather odd," said Thorndyke, "that Jeffrey should have known so little about his sister's intentions. Can you explain it, Mr. Blackmore?"

"I don't think that it is very remarkable,"

Stephen replied. "I knew very little of my aunt's affairs and I don't think my uncle Jeffrey knew much more, for he was under the impression that she had only a life interest in her husband's property. And he may have been right. It is not clear what money this was that she left to my uncle. She was a very taciturn woman and made few confidences to anyone."

"So that it is possible," said Thorndyke, "that she, herself, may have acquired this money recently by some bequest?"

"It is quite possible," Stephen answered.

"She died, I understand," said Thorndyke, glancing at the notes that he had jotted down, "two days before Mr. Jeffrey. What date would that be?"

"Jeffrey died on the fourteenth of March," said Marchmont.

"So that Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March?"

"That is so," Marchmont replied; and Thorndyke then asked:

"Did she die suddenly?"

"No," replied Stephen; "she died of cancer. I understand that it was cancer of the stomach."

"Do you happen to know," Thorndyke asked, "what sort of relations existed between Jeffrey and his brother John?"

"At one time," said Stephen, "I know they were not very cordial; but the breach may have been made up later, though I don't know that it actually was."

“ I ask the question,” said Thorndyke, “ because, as I dare say you have noticed, there is, in the first will, some hint of improved relations. As it was originally drawn that will makes Mr. Stephen the sole legatee. Then, a little later, a codicil is added in favour of John, showing that Jeffrey had felt the necessity of making some recognition of his brother. This seems to point to some change in the relations, and the question arises: if such a change did actually occur, was it the beginning of a new and further improving state of feeling between the two brothers? Have you any facts bearing on that question? ”

Marchmont pursed up his lips with the air of a man considering an unwelcome suggestion, and, after a few moments of reflection, answered:

“ I think we must say ‘ yes ’ to that. There is the undeniable fact that, of all Jeffrey’s friends, John Blackmore was the only one who knew that he was living in New Inn.”

“ Oh, John knew that, did he? ”

“ Yes, he certainly did; for it came out in the evidence that he had called on Jeffrey at his chambers more than once. There is no denying that. But, mark you! ” Mr. Marchmont added emphatically, “ that does not cover the inconsistency of the will. There is nothing in the second will to suggest that Jeffrey intended materially to increase the bequest to his brother.”

“ I quite agree with you, Marchmont. I think that is a perfectly sound position. You have, I suppose, fully considered the question as to whether

it would be possible to set aside the second will on the ground that it fails to carry out the evident wishes and intentions of the testator? ”

“ Yes. My partner, Winwood, and I went into that question very carefully, and we also took counsel’s opinion—Sir Horace Barnaby—and he was of the same opinion as ourselves ; that the court would certainly uphold the will.”

“ I think that would be my own view,” said Thorndyke, “ especially after what you have told me. Do I understand that John Blackmore was the only person who knew that Jeffrey was in residence at New Inn? ”

“ The only one of his private friends. His bankers knew and so did the officials from whom he drew his pension.”

“ Of course he would have to notify his bankers of his change of address.”

“ Yes, of course. And à propos of the bank, I may mention that the manager tells me that, of late, they had noticed a slight change in the character of Jeffrey’s signature—I think you will see the reason of the change when you hear the rest of his story. It was very trifling ; not more than commonly occurs when a man begins to grow old, especially if there is some failure of eyesight.”

“ Was Mr. Jeffrey’s eyesight failing? ” asked Thorndyke.

“ Yes, it was, undoubtedly,” said Stephen. “ He was practically blind in one eye and, in the very last letter that I ever had from him, he mentioned that there were signs of commencing cataract in the other.”

“ You spoke of his pension. He continued to draw that regularly ? ”

“ Yes ; he drew his allowance every month, or rather, his bankers drew it for him. They had been accustomed to do so when he was abroad, and the authorities seem to have allowed the practice to continue.”

Thorndyke reflected a while, running his eye over the notes on the slips of paper in his hand, and Marchmont surveyed him with a malicious smile. Presently the latter remarked :

“ Methinks the learned counsel is floored.”

Thorndyke laughed. “ It seems to me,” he retorted, “ that your proceedings are rather like those of the amiable individual who offered the bear a flint pebble, that he might crack it and extract the kernel. Your confounded will seems to offer no soft spot on which one could commence an attack. But we won't give up. We seem to have sucked the will dry. Let us now have a few facts respecting the parties concerned in it ; and, as Jeffrey is the central figure, let us begin with him and the tragedy at New Inn that formed the starting-point of all this trouble.”

Chapter VI

Jeffrey Blackmore, Deceased

HAVING made the above proposition, Thorndyke placed a fresh slip of paper on the blotting pad on his knee and looked inquiringly at Mr. Marchmont ; who, in his turn, sighed and looked at the bundle of documents on the table.

“What do you want to know?” he asked a little wearily.

“Everything,” replied Thorndyke. “You have hinted at circumstances that would account for a change in Jeffrey’s habits and that would explain an alteration in the character of his signature. Let us have those circumstances. And, if I might venture on a suggestion, it would be that we take the events in the order in which they occurred or in which they became known.”

“That’s the worst of you, Thorndyke,” Marchmont grumbled. “When a case has been squeezed out to the last drop, in a legal sense, you want to begin all over again with the family history of every one concerned and a list of his effects and household furniture. But I suppose you will have to be humoured; and I imagine that the best way in which to give you the information you want will be to recite the circumstances surrounding the death of Jeffrey Blackmore. Will that suit you?”

“Perfectly,” replied Thorndyke; and thereupon Marchmont began:

“The death of Jeffrey Blackmore was discovered at about eleven o’clock in the morning of the fifteenth of March. It seems that a builder’s man was ascending a ladder to examine a gutter on number 31, New Inn, when, on passing a second-floor window that was open at the top, he looked in and perceived a gentleman lying on a bed. The gentleman was fully clothed and had apparently lain down on the bed to rest; at least so the builder thought at the time, for he was merely passing the

window on his way up, and, very properly, did not make a minute examination. But when, some ten minutes later, he came down and saw that the gentleman was still in the same position, he looked at him more attentively; and this is what he noticed—but perhaps we had better have it in his own words as he told the story at the inquest.

“ ‘ When I came to look at the gentleman a bit more closely, it struck me that he looked rather queer. His face looked very white, or rather pale yellow, like parchment, and his mouth was open. He did not seem to be breathing. On the bed by his side was a brass object of some kind—I could not make out what it was—and he seemed to be holding some small metal object in his hand. I thought it rather a queer affair, so, when I came down I went across to the lodge and told the porter about it. The porter came out across the square with me and I showed him the window. Then he told me to go up the stairs to Mr. Blackmore’s chambers on the second pair and knock and keep on knocking until I got an answer. I went up and knocked and kept on knocking as loud as I could, but, though I fetched everybody out of all the other chambers in the house, I couldn’t get any answer from Mr. Blackmore. So I went downstairs again and then Mr. Walker, the porter, sent me for a policeman.

“ ‘ I went out and met a policeman just by Dane’s Inn and told him about the affair, and he came back with me. He and the porter consulted together, and then they told me to go up the ladder and get in at

the window and open the door of the chambers from the inside. So I went up; and as soon as I got in at the window I saw that the gentleman was dead. I went through the other room and opened the outer door and let in the porter and the policeman.'

"That," said Mr. Marchmont, laying down the paper containing the depositions, "is the way in which poor Jeffrey Blackmore's death came to be discovered.

"The constable reported to his inspector and the inspector sent for the divisional surgeon, whom he accompanied to New Inn. I need not go into the evidence given by the police officers, as the surgeon saw all that they saw and his statement covers everything that is known about Jeffrey's death. This is what he says, after describing how he was sent for and arrived at the Inn:

" 'In the bedroom I found the body of a man between fifty and sixty years of age, which has since been identified in my presence as that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore. It was fully dressed and wore boots on which was a moderate amount of dry mud. It was lying on its back on the bed, which did not appear to have been slept in, and showed no sign of any struggle or disturbance. The right hand loosely grasped a hypodermic syringe containing a few drops of clear liquid which I have since analysed and found to be a concentrated solution of strophanthin.

" 'On the bed, close to the left side of the body, was a brass opium-pipe of a pattern which I believe is made in China. The bowl of the pipe contained

a small quantity of charcoal, and a fragment of opium together with some ash, and there was on the bed a little ash which appeared to have dropped from the bowl when the pipe fell or was laid down. On the mantelshelf in the bedroom I found a small glass-stoppered jar containing about an ounce of solid opium, and another, larger jar containing wood charcoal broken up into small fragments. Also a bowl containing a quantity of ash with fragments of half-burned charcoal and a few minute particles of charred opium. By the side of the bowl were a knife, a kind of awl or pricker and a very small pair of tongs, which I believe to have been used for carrying a piece of lighted charcoal to the pipe.

“ ‘ On the dressing-table were two glass tubes labelled “ Hypodermic Tabloids : Strophanthin $\frac{1}{500}$ grain,” and a minute glass mortar and pestle, of which the former contained a few crystals which have since been analysed by me and found to be strophanthin.

“ ‘ On examining the body, I found that it had been dead about twelve hours. There were no marks of violence or any abnormal condition excepting a single puncture in the right thigh, apparently made by the needle of the hypodermic syringe. The puncture was deep and vertical in direction as if the needle had been driven in through the clothing.

“ ‘ I made a post-mortem examination of the body and found that death was due to poisoning by strophanthin, which appeared to have been injected into the thigh. The two tubes which I found on the dressing-table would each have contained, if full,

twenty tabloids, each tabloid representing one five-hundredth of a grain of strophanthin. Assuming that the whole of this quantity was injected the amount taken would be forty five-hundredths, or about one twelfth of a grain. The ordinary medicinal dose of strophanthin is one five-hundredth of a grain.

“ ‘ I also found in the body appreciable traces of morphine—the principal alkaloid of opium—from which I infer that the deceased was a confirmed opium-smoker. This inference was supported by the general condition of the body, which was ill-nourished and emaciated and presented all the appearances usually met with in the bodies of persons addicted to the habitual use of opium.’

“ That is the evidence of the surgeon. He was recalled later, as we shall see, but, meanwhile, I think you will agree with me that the facts testified to by him fully account, not only for the change in Jeffrey’s habits—his solitary and secretive mode of life—but also for the alteration in his handwriting.”

“ Yes,” agreed Thorndyke, “ that seems to be so. By the way, what did the change in the handwriting amount to ? ”

“ Very little,” replied Marchmont. “ It was hardly perceptible. Just a slight loss of firmness and distinctness ; such a trifling change as you would expect to find in the handwriting of a man who had taken to drink or drugs, or anything that might impair the steadiness of his hand. I should not have noticed it, myself, but, of course, the people

at the bank are experts, constantly scrutinizing signatures and scrutinizing them with a very critical eye."

"Is there any other evidence that bears on the case?" Thorndyke asked.

Marchmont turned over the bundle of papers and smiled grimly.

"My dear Thorndyke," he said, "none of this evidence has the slightest bearing on the case. It is all perfectly irrelevant as far as the will is concerned. But I know your little peculiarities and I am indulging you, as you see, to the top of your bent. The next evidence is that of the chief porter, a very worthy and intelligent man named Walker. This is what he says, after the usual preliminaries.

"I have viewed the body which forms the subject of this inquiry. It is that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore, the tenant of a set of chambers on the second floor of number thirty-one, New Inn. I have known the deceased nearly six months, and during that time have seen and conversed with him frequently. He took the chambers on the second of last October and came into residence at once. Tenants at New Inn have to furnish two references. The references that the deceased gave were his bankers and his brother, Mr. John Blackmore. I may say that the deceased was very well known to me. He was a quiet, pleasant-mannered gentleman, and it was his habit to drop in occasionally at the lodge and have a chat with me. I went into his chambers with him once or twice on some small matters of business and I

noticed that there were always a number of books and papers on the table. I understood from him that he spent most of his time indoors engaged in study and writing. I know very little about his way of living. He had no laundress to look after his rooms, so I suppose he did his own house-work and cooking; but he told me that he took most of his meals outside, at restaurants or his club.

“ ‘ Deceased impressed me as a rather melancholy, low-spirited gentleman. He was very much troubled about his eyesight and mentioned the matter to me on several occasions. He told me that he was practically blind in one eye and that the sight of the other was failing rapidly. He said that this afflicted him greatly, because his only pleasure in life was in the reading of books, and that if he could not read he should not wish to live. On another occasion he said that “ to a blind man life was not worth living.”

“ ‘ On the twelfth of last November he came to the lodge with a paper in his hand which he said was his will’—But I needn’t read that,” said Marchmont, turning over the leaf, “ I’ve told you how the will was signed and witnessed. We will pass on to the day of poor Jeffrey’s death.

“ ‘ On the fourteenth of March,’ the porter says, ‘ at about half-past six in the evening, the deceased came to the Inn in a four-wheeled cab. That was the day of the great fog. I do not know if there was anyone in the cab with the deceased, but I think not, because he came to the lodge just before eight o’clock and had a little talk with me. He said that

he had been overtaken by the fog and could not see at all. He was quite blind and had been obliged to ask a stranger to call a cab for him as he could not find his way through the streets. He then gave me a cheque for the rent. I reminded him that the rent was not due until the twenty-fifth, but he said he wished to pay it now. He also gave me some money to pay one or two small bills that were owing to some of the tradespeople—a milk-man, a baker and a stationer.

“ ‘ This struck me as very strange, because he had always managed his business and paid the tradespeople himself. He told me that the fog had irritated his eye so that he could hardly read, and he was afraid he should soon be quite blind. He was very depressed ; so much so that I felt quite uneasy about him. When he left the lodge, he went back across the square as if returning to his chambers. There was then no gate open excepting the main gate where the lodge is situated. That was the last time that I saw the deceased alive.’ ”

Mr. Marchmont laid the paper on the table. “ That is the porter’s evidence. The remaining depositions are those of Noble, the night porter, John Blackmore and our friend here, Mr. Stephen. The night porter had not much to tell. This is the substance of his evidence :

“ ‘ I have viewed the body of the deceased and identify it as that of Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore. I knew the deceased well by sight and occasionally had a few words with him. I know nothing of his habits excepting that he used to sit up rather late.

It is one of my duties to go round the Inn at night and call out the hours until one o'clock in the morning. When calling out "one o'clock" I often saw a light in the sitting-room of the deceased's chambers. On the night of the fourteenth instant, the light was burning until past one o'clock, but it was in the bedroom. The light in the sitting-room was out by ten o'clock.'

"We now come to John Blackmore's evidence. He says:

" 'I have viewed the body of the deceased and recognize it as that of my brother Jeffrey. I last saw him alive on the twenty-third of February, when I called at his chambers. He then seemed in a very despondent state of mind and told me that his eyesight was fast failing. I was aware that he occasionally smoked opium, but I did not know that it was a confirmed habit. I urged him, on several occasions, to abandon the practice. I have no reason to believe that his affairs were in any way embarrassed or that he had any reason for making away with himself other than his failing eyesight; but, having regard to his state of mind when I last saw him, I am not surprised at what has happened.'

"That is the substance of John Blackmore's evidence, and, as to Mr. Stephen, his statement merely sets forth the fact that he had identified the body as that of his uncle Jeffrey. And now I think you have all the facts. Is there anything more that you want to ask me before I go, for I must really run away now?"

"I should like," said Thorndyke, "to know a

little more about the parties concerned in this affair. But perhaps Mr. Stephen can give me the information."

"I expect he can," said Marchmont; "at any rate, he knows more about them than I do; so I will be off. If you should happen to think of any way," he continued, with a sly smile, "of upsetting that will, just let me know, and I will lose no time in entering a caveat. Good-bye! Don't trouble to let me out."

As soon as he was gone, Thorndyke turned to Stephen Blackmore.

"I am going," he said, "to ask you a few questions which may appear rather trifling, but you must remember that my methods of inquiry concern themselves with persons and things rather than with documents. For instance, I have not gathered very completely what sort of person your uncle Jeffrey was. Could you tell me a little more about him?"

"What shall I tell you?" Stephen asked with a slightly embarrassed air.

"Well, begin with his personal appearance."

"That is rather difficult to describe," said Stephen. "He was a medium-sized man and about five feet seven—fair, slightly grey, clean-shaved, rather spare and slight, had grey eyes, wore spectacles and stooped a little as he walked. He was quiet and gentle in manner, rather yielding and irresolute in character, and his health was not at all robust though he had no infirmity or disease excepting his bad eyesight. His age was about fifty-five."

“How came he to be a civil-service pensioner at fifty-five?” asked Thorndyke.

“Oh, that was through an accident. He had a nasty fall from a horse, and, being a rather nervous man, the shock was very severe. For some time after he was a complete wreck. But the failure of his eyesight was the actual cause of his retirement. It seems that the fall damaged his eyes in some way; in fact he practically lost the sight of one—the right—from that moment; and, as that had been his good eye, the accident left his vision very much impaired. So that he was at first given sick leave and then allowed to retire on a pension.”

Thorndyke noted these particulars and then said:

“Your uncle has been more than once referred to as a man of studious habits. Does that mean that he pursued any particular branch of learning?”

“Yes. He was an enthusiastic Oriental scholar. His official duties had taken him at one time to Yokohama and Tokio and at another to Bagdad, and while at those places he gave a good deal of attention to the languages, literature and arts of the countries. He was also greatly interested in Babylonian and Assyrian archæology, and I believe he assisted for some time in the excavations at Birs Nimroud.”

“Indeed!” said Thorndyke. “This is very interesting. I had no idea that he was a man of such considerable attainments. The facts mentioned by Mr. Marchmont would hardly have led one to think of him as what he seems to have been: a scholar of some distinction.”

“ I don't know that Mr. Marchmont realized the fact himself,” said Stephen ; “ or that he would have considered it of any moment if he had. Nor, as far as that goes, do I. But, of course, I have no experience of legal matters.”

“ You can never tell beforehand,” said Thorndyke, “ what facts may turn out to be of moment, so that it is best to collect all you can get. By the way, were you aware that your uncle was an opium-smoker ? ”

“ No, I was not. I knew that he had an opium-pipe which he brought with him when he came home from Japan ; but I thought it was only a curio. I remember him telling me that he once tried a few puffs at an opium-pipe and found it rather pleasant, though it gave him a headache. But I had no idea he had contracted the habit ; in fact, I may say that I was utterly astonished when the fact came out at the inquest.”

Thorndyke made a note of this answer, too, and said :

“ I think that is all I have to ask you about your uncle Jeffrey. And now as to Mr. John Blackmore. What sort of man is he ? ”

“ I am afraid I can't tell you very much about him. Until I saw him at the inquest, I had not met him since I was a boy. But he is a very different kind of man from Uncle Jeffrey ; different in appearance and different in character.”

“ You would say that the two brothers were physically quite unlike, then ? ”

“ Well,” said Stephen, “ I don't know that I

ought to say that. Perhaps I am exaggerating the difference. I am thinking of Uncle Jeffrey as he was when I saw him last and of uncle John as he appeared at the inquest. They were very different then. Jeffrey was thin, pale, clean shaven, wore spectacles and walked with a stoop. John is a shade taller, a shade greyer, has good eyesight, a healthy, florid complexion, a brisk, upright carriage, is distinctly stout and wears a beard and moustache which are black and only very slightly streaked with grey. To me they looked as unlike as two men could, though their features were really of the same type; indeed, I have heard it said that, as young men, they were rather alike, and they both resembled their mother. But there is no doubt as to their difference in character. Jeffrey was quiet, serious and studious, whereas John rather inclined to what is called a fast life; he used to frequent race meetings, and, I think, gambled a good deal at times."

"What is his profession?"

"That would be difficult to tell; he has so many; he is so very versatile. I believe he began life as an articled pupil in the laboratory of a large brewery, but he soon left that and went on the stage. He seems to have remained in 'the profession' for some years, touring about this country and making occasional visits to America. The life seemed to suit him and I believe he was decidedly successful as an actor. But suddenly he left the stage and blossomed out in connection with a bucket-shop in London."

"And what is he doing now?"

“ At the inquest he described himself as a stock-broker, so I presume he is still connected with the bucket-shop.”

Thorndyke rose, and taking down from the reference shelves a list of members of the Stock Exchange, turned over the leaves.

“ Yes,” he said, replacing the volume, “ he must be an outside broker. His name is not in the list of members of ‘ the House.’ From what you tell me, it is easy to understand that there should have been no great intimacy between the two brothers, without assuming any kind of ill-feeling. They simply had very little in common. Do you know of anything more ? ”

“ No. I have never heard of any actual quarrel or disagreement. My impression that they did not get on very well may have been, I think, due to the terms of the will, especially the first will. And they certainly did not seek one another’s society.”

“ That is not very conclusive,” said Thorndyke. “ As to the will, a thrifty man is not usually much inclined to bequeath his savings to a gentleman who may probably employ them in a merry little flutter on the turf or the Stock Exchange. And then there was yourself ; clearly a more suitable subject for a legacy, as your life is all before you. But this is mere speculation and the matter is not of much importance, as far as we can see. And now, tell me what John Blackmore’s relations were with Mrs. Wilson. I gather that she left the bulk of her property to Jeffrey, her younger brother. Is that so ? ”

“ Yes. She left nothing to John. The fact is that they were hardly on speaking terms. I believe John had treated her rather badly, or, at any rate, she thought he had. Mr. Wilson, her late husband, dropped some money over an investment in connection with the bucket-shop that I spoke of, and I think she suspected John of having let him in. She may have been mistaken, but you know what ladies are when they get an idea into their heads.”

“ Did you know your aunt well ? ”

“ No ; very slightly. She lived down in Devonshire and saw very little of any of us. She was a taciturn, strong-minded woman ; quite unlike her brothers. She seems to have resembled her father’s family.”

“ You might give me her full name.”

“ Julia Elizabeth Wilson. Her husband’s name was Edmund Wilson.”

“ Thank you. There is just one more point. What has happened to your uncle’s chambers in New Inn since his death ? ”

“ They have remained shut up. As all his effects were left to me, I have taken over the tenancy for the present to avoid having them disturbed. I thought of keeping them for my own use, but I don’t think I could live in them after what I have seen.”

“ You have inspected them, then ? ”

“ Yes ; I have just looked through them. I went there on the day of the inquest.”

“ Now tell me : as you looked through those rooms, what kind of impression did they convey to you as to your uncle’s habits and mode of life ? ”

Stephen smiled apologetically. "I am afraid," said he, "that they did not convey any particular impression in that respect. I looked into the sitting-room and saw all his old familiar household gods, and then I went into the bedroom and saw the impression on the bed where his corpse had lain; and that gave me such a sensation of horror that I came away at once."

"But the appearance of the rooms must have conveyed something to your mind," Thorndyke urged.

"I am afraid it did not. You see, I have not your analytical eye. But perhaps you would like to look through them yourself? If you would, pray do so. They are my chambers now."

"I think I should like to glance round them," Thorndyke replied.

"Very well," said Stephen. "I will give you my card now, and I will look in at the lodge presently and tell the porter to hand you the key whenever you like to look over the rooms."

He took a card from his case, and, having written a few lines on it, handed it to Thorndyke.

"It is very good of you," he said, "to take so much trouble. Like Mr. Marchmont, I have no expectation of any result from your efforts, but I am very grateful to you, all the same, for going into the case so thoroughly. I suppose you don't see any possibility of upsetting that will—if I may ask the question?"

"At present," replied Thorndyke, "I do not. But until I have carefully weighed every fact connected with the case—whether it seems to have any

bearing or not—I shall refrain from expressing, or even entertaining, an opinion either way.”

Stephen Blackmore now took his leave; and Thorn dyke, having collected the papers containing his notes, neatly punched a couple of holes in their margins and inserted them into a small file, which he slipped into his pocket.

“That,” said he, “is the nucleus of the body of data on which our investigations must be based; and I very much fear that it will not receive any great additions. What do you think, Jervis?”

“The case looks about as hopeless as a case could look,” I replied.

“That is what I think,” said he; “and for that reason I am more than ordinarily keen on making something of it. I have not much more hope than Marchmont has; but I shall squeeze the case as dry as a bone before I let go. What are you going to do? I have to attend a meeting of the board of directors of the Griffin Life Office.”

“Shall I walk down with you?”

“It is very good of you to offer, Jervis, but I think I will go alone. I want to run over these notes and get the facts of the case arranged in my mind. When I have done that, I shall be ready to pick up new matter. Knowledge is of no use unless it is actually in your mind, so that it can be produced at a moment’s notice. So you had better get a book and your pipe and spend a quiet hour by the fire while I assimilate the miscellaneous mental feast that we have just enjoyed. And you might do a little rumination yourself.”

With this, Thorndyke took his departure ; and I, adopting his advice, drew my chair closer to the fire and filled my pipe. But I did not discover any inclination to read. The curious history that I had just heard, and Thorndyke's evident determination to elucidate it further, disposed me to meditation. Moreover, as his subordinate, it was my business to occupy myself with his affairs. Wherefore, having stirred the fire and got my pipe well alight, I abandoned myself to the renewed consideration of the facts relating to Jeffrey Blackmore's will.

*Chapter VII**The Cuneiform Inscription*

THE surprise which Thorndyke's proceedings usually occasioned, especially to lawyers, was principally due, I think, to my friend's habit of viewing occurrences from an unusual standpoint. He did not look at things quite as other men looked at them. He had no prejudices and he knew no conventions. When other men were cocksure, Thorndyke was doubtful. When other men despaired, he entertained hopes ; and thus it happened that he would often undertake cases that had been rejected contemptuously by experienced lawyers, and, what is more, would bring them to a successful issue.

Thus it had been in the only other case in which I had been personally associated with him—the so-called “ Red Thumb Mark ” case. There he was presented with an apparent impossibility ; but he

had given it careful consideration. Then, from the category of the impossible he had brought it to that of the possible; from the merely possible to the actually probable; from the probable to the certain; and in the end had won the case triumphantly.

Was it conceivable that he could make anything of the present case? He had not declined it. He had certainly entertained it and was probably thinking it over at this moment. Yet could anything be more impossible? Here was the case of a man making his own will, probably writing it out himself, bringing it voluntarily to a certain place and executing it in the presence of competent witnesses. There was no suggestion of any compulsion or even influence or persuasion. The testator was admittedly sane and responsible; and if the will did not give effect to his wishes—which, however, could not be proved—that was due to his own carelessness in drafting the will and not to any unusual circumstances. And the problem—which Thorndyke seemed to be considering—was how to set aside that will.

I reviewed the statements that I had heard, but turn them about as I would, I could get nothing out of them but confirmation of Mr. Marchmont's estimate of the case. One fact that I had noted with some curiosity I again considered; that was Thorndyke's evident desire to inspect Jeffrey Blackmore's chambers. He had, it is true, shown no eagerness, but I had seen at the time that the questions which he put to Stephen were put, not with any expectation of eliciting information but

for the purpose of getting an opportunity to look over the rooms himself.

I was still cogitating on the subject when my colleague returned, followed by the watchful Polton with the tea-tray, and I attacked him forthwith.

“ Well, Thorndyke,” I said, “ I have been thinking about this Blackmore case while you have been gadding about.”

“ And may I take it that the problem is solved ? ”

“ No, I’m hanged if you may. I can make nothing of it.”

“ Then you are in much the same position as I am.”

“ But, if you can make nothing of it, why did you undertake it ? ”

“ I only undertook to think about it,” said Thorndyke. “ I never reject a case off-hand unless it is obviously fishy. It is surprising how difficulties, and even impossibilities, dwindle if you look at them attentively. My experience has taught me that the most unlikely case is, at least, worth thinking over.”

“ By the way, why do you want to look over Jeffrey’s chambers ? What do you expect to find there ? ”

“ I have no expectations at all. I am simply looking for stray facts.”

“ And all those questions that you asked Stephen Blackmore ; had you nothing in your mind—no definite purpose ? ”

“ No purpose beyond getting to know as much about the case as I can.”

“ But,” I exclaimed, “ do you mean that you are

going to examine those rooms without any definite object at all?"

"I wouldn't say that," replied Thorndyke. "This is a legal case. Let me put an analogous medical case as being more within your present sphere. Supposing that a man should consult you, say, about a progressive loss of weight. He can give no explanation. He has no pain, no discomfort, no symptoms of any kind; in short, he feels perfectly well in every respect; *but* he is losing weight continuously. What would you do?"

"I should overhaul him thoroughly," I answered.

"Why? What would you expect to find?"

"I don't know that I should start by expecting to find anything in particular. But I should overhaul him organ by organ and function by function, and if I could find nothing abnormal I should have to give it up."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "And that is just my position and my line of action. Here is a case which is perfectly regular and straightforward excepting in one respect. It has a single abnormal feature. And for that abnormality there is nothing to account.

"Jeffrey Blackmore made a will. It was a well-drawn will and it apparently gave full effect to his intentions. Then he revoked that will and made another. No change had occurred in his circumstances or in his intentions. The provisions of the new will were believed by him to be identical with those of the old one. The new will differed from the old one only in having a defect in the drafting

from which the first will was free, and of which he must have been unaware. Now why did he revoke the first will and replace it with another which he believed to be identical in its provisions? There is no answer to that question. It is an abnormal feature in the case. There must be some explanation of that abnormality and it is my business to discover it. But the facts in my possession yield no such explanation. Therefore it is my purpose to search for new facts which may give me a starting-point for an investigation."

This exposition of Thorndyke's proposed conduct of the case, reasonable as it was, did not impress me as very convincing. I found myself coming back to Marchmont's position, that there was really nothing in dispute. But other matters claimed our attention at the moment, and it was not until after dinner that my colleague reverted to the subject.

"How should you like to take a turn round to New Inn this evening?" he asked.

"I should have thought," said I, "that it would be better to go by daylight. Those old chambers are not usually very well illuminated."

"That is well thought of," said Thorndyke. "We had better take a lamp with us. Let us go up to the laboratory and get one from Polton."

"There is no need to do that," said I. "The pocket-lamp that you lent me is in my overcoat pocket. I put it there to return it to you."

"Did you have occasion to use it?" he asked.

"Yes. I paid another visit to the mysterious

house and carried out your plan. I must tell you about it later."

"Do. I shall be keenly interested to hear all about your adventures. Is there plenty of candle left in the lamp?"

"Oh yes. I only used it for about an hour."

"Then let us be off," said Thorndyke; and we accordingly set forth on our quest; and, as we went, I reflected once more on the apparent vagueness of our proceedings. Presently I reopened the subject with Thorndyke.

"I can't imagine," said I, "that you have absolutely nothing in view. That you are going to this place with no defined purpose whatever."

"I did not say exactly that," replied Thorndyke. "I said that I was not going to look for any particular thing or fact. I am going in the hope that I may observe something that may start a new train of speculation. But that is not all. You know that an investigation follows a certain logical course. It begins with the observation of the conspicuous facts. We have done that. The facts were supplied by Marchmont. The next stage is to propose to oneself one or more provisional explanations or hypotheses. We have done that, too—or, at least I have, and I suppose you have."

"I haven't," said I. "There is Jeffrey's will, but why he should have made the change I cannot form the foggiest idea. But I should like to hear your provisional theories on the subject."

"You won't hear them at present. They are

mere wild conjectures. But to resume : what do we do next ? ”

“ Go to New Inn and rake over the deceased gentleman’s apartments.”

Thorndyke smilingly ignored my answer and continued—

“ We examine each explanation in turn and see what follows from it ; whether it agrees with all the facts and leads to the discovery of new ones, or, on the other hand, disagrees with some facts or leads us to an absurdity. Let us take a simple example.

“ Suppose we find scattered over a field a number of largish masses of stone, which are entirely different in character from the rocks found in the neighbourhood. The question arises, how did those stones get into that field ? Three explanations are proposed. One : that they are the products of former volcanic action ; two : that they were brought from a distance by human agency ; three : that they were carried thither from some distant country by icebergs. Now each of those explanations involves certain consequences. If the stones are volcanic, then they were once in a state of fusion. But we find that they are unaltered limestone and contain fossils. Then they are not volcanic. If they were borne by icebergs, then they were once part of a glacier and some of them will probably show the flat surfaces with parallel scratches which are found on glacier-borne stones. We examine them and find the characteristic scratched surfaces. Then they have probably been brought to this place by

icebergs. But this does not exclude human agency, for they might have been brought by men to this place from some other where the icebergs had deposited them. A further comparison with other facts would be needed.

“So we proceed in cases like this present one. Of the facts that are known to us we invent certain explanations. From each of those explanations we deduce consequences; and if those consequences agree with new facts, they confirm the explanation, whereas if they disagree they tend to disprove it. But here we are at our destination.”

We turned out of Wych Street into the arched passage leading into New Inn, and, halting at the half-door of the lodge, perceived a stout, purple-faced man crouching over the fire, coughing violently. He held up his hand to intimate that he was fully occupied for the moment, and we accordingly waited for his paroxysm to subside. At length he turned towards us, wiping his eyes, and inquired our business.

“Mr. Stephen Blackmore,” said Thorndyke, “has given me permission to look over his chambers. He said that he would mention the matter to you.”

“So he has, sir,” said the porter; “but he has just taken the key himself to go to the chambers. If you walk across the Inn you’ll find him there; it’s on the farther side; number thirty-one, second floor.”

We made our way across to the house indicated, the ground floor of which was occupied by a solicitor’s offices and was distinguished by a good-sized brass

plate. Although it had now been dark some time there was no light on the lower stairs, but we encountered on the first-floor landing a man who had just lit the lamp there. Thorndyke halted to address him.

“Can you tell me who occupies the chambers on the third floor?”

“The third floor has been empty about three months,” was the reply.

“We are going up to look at the chambers on the second floor,” said Thorndyke. “Are they pretty quiet?”

“Quiet!” exclaimed the man. “Lord bless you the place is like a cemetery for the deaf and dumb. There’s the solicitors on the ground floor and the architects on the first floor. They both clear out about six, and when they’re gone the ’ouse is as empty as a blown hegg. I don’t wonder poor Mr. Blackmore made away with his-self. Livin’ up there all alone, it must have been like Robinson Crusoe without no man Friday and not even a blooming goat to talk to. Quiet! It’s quiet enough, if that’s what you want. Wouldn’t be no good to *me*.”

With a contemptuous shake of the head, he turned and retired down the next flight, and, as the echoes of his footsteps died away we resumed our ascent.

“So it would appear,” Thorndyke commented, “that when Jeffrey Blackmore came home that last evening, the house was empty.”

Arrived on the second-floor landing, we were confronted by a solid-looking door on the lintel of which

the deceased man's name was painted in white lettering which still looked new and fresh. Thorn-
dyke knocked at the door, which was at once opened
by Stephen Blackmore.

"I haven't wasted any time before taking advantage of your permission, you see," my colleague said as we entered.

"No, indeed," said Stephen; "you are very prompt. I have been rather wondering what kind of information you expect to gather from an inspection of these rooms."

Thorndyke smiled genially, amused, no doubt, by the similarity of Stephen's remarks to those of mine which he had so recently criticized.

"A man of science, Mr. Blackmore," he said, "expects nothing. He collects facts and keeps an open mind. As to me, I am a mere legal Autolytus, a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles of evidence. When I have accumulated a few facts, I arrange them, compare them and think about them. Sometimes the comparison yields new matter and sometimes it doesn't; but in any case, believe me, it is a capital error to decide beforehand what data are to be sought for."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," said Stephen; "though, to me, it almost looks as if Mr. Marchmont was right; that there is nothing to investigate."

"You should have thought of that before you consulted me," laughed Thorndyke. "As it is, I am engaged to look into the case and I shall do so; and, as I have said, I shall keep an open mind until I have all the facts in my possession."

He glanced round the sitting-room, which we had now entered, and continued :

“ These are fine, dignified old rooms. It seems a sin to have covered up all this oak panelling and that carved cornice and mantel with paint. Think what it must have been like when the beautiful figured wood was exposed.”

“ It would be very dark,” Stephen observed.

“ Yes,” Thorndyke agreed, “ and I suppose we care more for light and less for beauty than our ancestors did. But now, tell me ; looking round these rooms, do they convey to you a similar impression to that which the old rooms did ? Have they the same general character ? ”

“ Not quite, I think. Of course the rooms in Jermyn Street were in a different kind of house, but beyond that, I seem to feel a certain difference ; which is rather odd, seeing that the furniture is the same. But the old rooms were more cosy, more homelike. I find something rather bare and cheerless, I was almost going to say squalid, in the look of these chambers.”

“ That is rather what I should have expected,” said Thorndyke. “ The opium habit alters a man’s character profoundly ; and, somehow, apart from the mere furnishing, a room reflects in some subtle way, but very distinctly, the personality of its occupant, especially when that occupant lives a solitary life. Do you see any evidences of the activities that used to occupy your uncle ? ”

“ Not very much,” replied Stephen. “ But the place may not be quite as he left it. I found one

or two of his books on the table and put them back in the shelves, but I found no manuscript or notes such as he used to make. I noticed, too, that his ink-slab which he used to keep so scrupulously clean is covered with dry smears and that the stick of ink is all cracked at the end, as if he had not used it for months. It seems to point to a great change in his habits."

"What used he to do with Chinese ink?" Thorn-dyke asked.

"He corresponded with some of his native friends in Japan, and he used to write in the Japanese character even if they understood English. That was what he chiefly used the Chinese ink for. But he also used to copy the inscriptions from these things." Here Stephen lifted from the mantel-piece what looked like a fossil Bath bun, but was actually a clay tablet covered with minute indented writing.

"Your uncle could read the cuneiform character, then?"

"Yes; he was something of an expert. These tablets are, I believe, leases and other legal documents from Eridu and other Babylonian cities. He used to copy the inscriptions in the cuneiform writing and then translate them into English. But I mustn't stay here any longer as I have an engagement for this evening. I just dropped in to get these two volumes—*Thornton's History of Babylonia*, which he once advised me to read. Shall I give you the key? You'd better have it and leave it with the porter as you go out."

He shook hands with us and we walked out with him to the landing and stood watching him as he ran down the stairs. Glancing at Thorndyke by the light of the gas lamp on the landing, I thought I detected in his impassive face that almost imperceptible change of expression to which I have already alluded as indicating pleasure or satisfaction.

“You are looking quite pleased with yourself,” I remarked.

“I am not displeased,” he replied calmly. “Autolycus has picked up a few crumbs; very small ones, but still crumbs. No doubt his learned junior has picked up a few likewise?”

I shook my head—and inwardly suspected it of being rather a thick head.

“I did not perceive anything in the least degree significant in what Stephen was telling you,” said I. “It was all very interesting, but it did not seem to have any bearing on his uncle’s will.”

“I was not referring only to what Stephen has told us, although that was, as you say, very interesting. While he was talking I was looking about the room, and I have seen a very strange thing. Let me show it to you.”

He linked his arm in mine and, walking me back into the room, halted opposite the fire-place.

“There,” said he, “look at that. It is a most remarkable object.”

I followed the direction of his gaze and saw an oblong frame enclosing a large photograph of an inscription in the weird and cabalistic arrow-head character. I looked at it in silence for some

seconds and then, somewhat disappointed, remarked:

"I don't see anything very remarkable in it, under the circumstances. In any ordinary room it would be, I admit; but Stephen has just told us that his uncle was something of an expert in cuneiform writing."

"Exactly," said Thorndyke. "That is my point. That is what makes it so remarkable."

"I don't follow you at all," said I. "That a man should hang upon his wall an inscription that is legible to him does not seem to me at all out of the way. It would be much more singular if he should hang up an inscription that he could *not* read."

"No doubt," replied Thorndyke. "But you will agree with me that it would be still more singular if a man should hang upon his wall an inscription that he *could* read—and hang it upside down."

I stared at Thorndyke in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me," I exclaimed, "that that photograph is really upside down?"

"I do indeed," he replied.

"But how do you know? Have we here yet another Oriental scholar?"

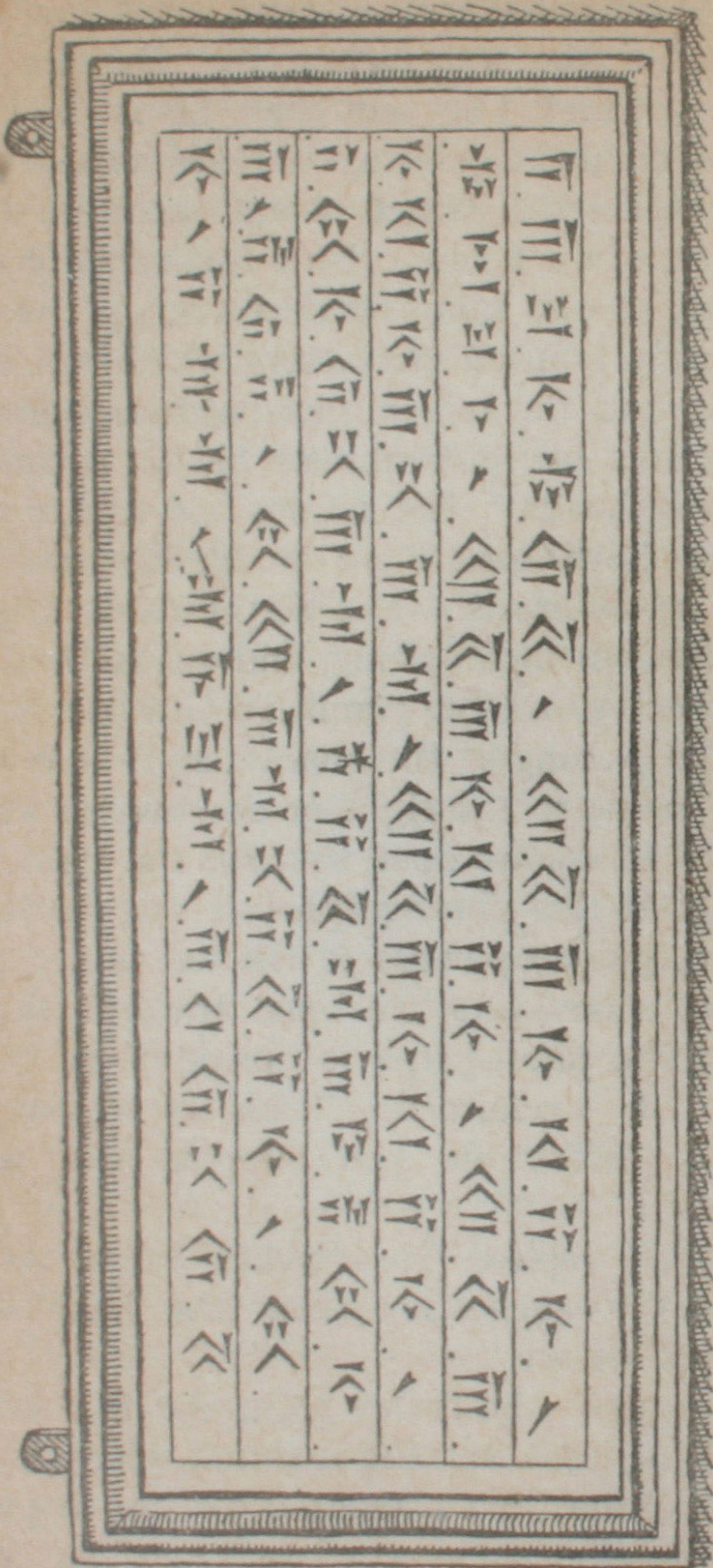
Thorndyke chuckled. "Some fool," he replied, "has said that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' Compared with much knowledge, it may be; but it is a vast deal better than no knowledge. Here is a case in point. I have read with very keen interest the wonderful history of the decipherment of the cuneiform writing, and I happen to recollect one or two of the main facts that seemed to me to be worth remembering. This particular inscription is

in the Persian cuneiform, a much more simple and open form of the script than the Babylonian or Assyrian ; in fact, I suspect that this is the famous inscription from the gateway at Persepolis—the first to be deciphered ; which would account for its presence here in a frame. Now this script consists, as you see, of two kinds of characters ; the small, solid, acutely pointed characters which are known as wedges, and the larger, more obtuse characters, somewhat like our government broad arrows, and called arrow-heads. The names are rather unfortunate, as both forms are wedge-like and both resemble arrow-heads. The script reads from left to right, like our own writing, and unlike that of the Semitic peoples and the primitive Greeks ; and the rule for the placing of the characters is that all the ‘wedges’ point to the right or downwards and the arrow-head forms are open towards the right. But if you look at this photograph you will see that all the wedges point upwards to the left and that the arrow-head characters are open towards the left. Obviously the photograph is upside down.”

“But,” I exclaimed, “this is really most mysterious. What do you suppose can be the explanation ?”

“I think,” replied Thorndyke, “that we may perhaps get a suggestion from the back of the frame. Let us see.”

He disengaged the frame from the two nails on which it hung, and, turning it round, glanced at the back ; which he then presented for my inspection. A label on the backing paper bore the words,



THE INVERTED INSCRIPTION.

“ J. Budge, Frame-maker and Gilder, 16, Gt. Anne Street, W.C.”

“ Well ? ” I said, when I had read the label without gathering from it anything fresh.

“ The label, you observe, is the right way up as it hangs on the wall.”

“ So it is,” I rejoined hastily, a little annoyed that I had not been quicker to observe so obvious a fact. “ I see your point. You mean that the frame-maker hung the thing upside down and Jeffrey never noticed the mistake ? ”

“ That is a perfectly sound explanation,” said Thorndyke. “ But I think there is something more. You will notice that the label is an old one ; it must have been on some years, to judge by its dingy appearance, whereas the two mirror-plates look to me comparatively new. But we can soon put that matter to the test, for the label was evidently stuck on when the frame was new, and if the plates were screwed on at the same time, the wood that they cover will be clean and new-looking.”

He drew from his pocket a “ combination ” knife containing, among other implements, a screw-driver, with which he carefully extracted the screws from one of the little brass plates by which the frame had been suspended from the nails.

“ You see,” he said, when he had removed the plate and carried the photograph over to the gas-jet, “ the wood covered by the plate is as dirty and time-stained as the rest of the frame. The plates have been put on recently.”

“ And what are we to infer from that ? ”

“ Well, since there are no other marks of plates or rings upon the frame, we may safely infer that the photograph was never hung up until it came to these rooms.”

“ Yes, I suppose we may. But what then? What inference does that lead to? ”

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments and I continued :

“ It is evident that this photograph suggests more to you than it does to me. I should like to hear your exposition of its bearing on the case, if it has any.”

“ Whether or no it has any real bearing on the case,” Thorndyke answered, “ it is impossible for me to say at this stage. I told you that I had proposed to myself one or two hypotheses to account for and explain Jeffrey Blackmore’s will, and I may say that the curious misplacement of this photograph fits more than one of them. I won’t say more than that, because I think it would be profitable to you to work at this case independently. You have all the facts that I have and you shall have a copy of my notes of Marchmont’s statement of the case. With this material you ought to be able to reach some conclusion. Of course neither of us may be able to make anything of the case—it doesn’t look very hopeful at present—but whatever happens, we can compare notes after the event and you will be the richer by so much experience of actual investigation. But I will start you off with one hint, which is this : that neither you nor Marchmont seem to appreciate in the least the very extraordinary nature of the facts that he communicated to us.”

“ I thought Marchmont seemed pretty much alive to the fact that it was a very queer will.”

“ So he did,” agreed Thorndyke. “ But that is not quite what I mean. The whole set of circumstances, taken together and in relation to one another, impressed me as most remarkable ; and that is why I am giving so much attention to what looks at first sight like such a very unpromising case. Copy out my notes, Jervis, and examine the facts critically. I think you will see what I mean. And now let us proceed.”

He replaced the brass plate and having reinserted the screws, hung up the frame, and proceeded to browse slowly round the room, stopping now and again to inspect the Japanese colour-prints and framed photographs of buildings and other objects of archæological interest that formed the only attempts at wall-decoration. To one of the former he drew my attention.

“ These things are of some value,” he remarked. “ Here is one by Utamaro—that little circle with the mark over it is his signature—and you notice that the paper is becoming spotted in places with mildew. The fact is worth noting in more than one connection.”

I accordingly made a mental note and the perambulation continued.

“ You observe that Jeffrey used a gas-stove, instead of a coal fire, no doubt to economize work, but perhaps for other reasons. Presumably he cooked by gas, too ; let us see.”

We wandered into the little cupboard-like kitchen

and glanced round. A ring-burner on a shelf, a kettle, a frying-pan and a few pieces of crockery were its sole appointments. Apparently the porter was correct in his statement as to Jeffrey's habits.

Returning to the sitting-room, Thorndyke resumed his inspection, pulling out the table drawers, peering inquisitively into cupboards and bestowing a passing glance on each of the comparatively few objects that the comfortless room contained.

"I have never seen a more characterless apartment," was his final comment. "There is nothing that seems to suggest any kind of habitual activity on the part of the occupant. Let us look at the bedroom."

We passed through into the chamber of tragic memories, and, when Thorndyke had lit the gas, we stood awhile looking about us in silence. It was a bare, comfortless room, dirty, neglected and squalid. The bed appeared not to have been remade since the catastrophe, for an indentation still marked the place where the corpse had lain, and even a slight powdering of ash could still be seen on the shabby counterpane. It looked to me a typical opium-smoker's bedroom.

"Well," Thorndyke remarked at length, "there is character enough here—of a kind. Jeffrey Blackmore would seem to have been a man of few needs. One could hardly imagine a bedroom in which less attention seemed to have been given to the comfort of the occupant."

He looked about him keenly and continued: "The syringe and the rest of the lethal appliances

and material have been taken away, I see. Probably the analyst did not return them. But there are the opium-pipe and the jar and the ash-bowl, and I presume those are the clothes that the undertakers removed from the body. Shall we look them over?"

He took up the clothes which lay, roughly folded, on a chair and held them up, garment by garment.

"These are evidently the trousers," he remarked, spreading them out on the bed. "Here is a little white spot on the middle of the thigh which looks like a patch of small crystals from a drop of the solution. Just light the lamp, Jervis, and let us examine it with a lens."

I lit the lamp, and when we had examined the spot minutely and identified it as a mass of minute crystals, Thorndyke asked:

"What do you make of those creases? You see there is one on each leg."

"It looks as if the trousers had been turned up. But if they have been they must have been turned up about seven inches. Poor Jeffrey couldn't have had much regard for appearances, for they would have been right above his socks. But perhaps the creases were made in undressing the body."

"That is possible," said Thorndyke: "though I don't quite see how it would have happened. I notice that his pockets seem to have been emptied—no, wait; here is something in the waistcoat pocket"

He drew out a shabby, pigskin card-case and a stump of lead pencil, at which latter he looked with

what seemed to me much more interest than was deserved by so commonplace an object.

"The cards, you observe," said he, "are printed from type, not from a plate. I would note that fact. And tell me what you make of that."

He handed me the pencil, which I examined with concentrated attention, helping myself even with the lamp and my pocket lens. But even with these aids I failed to discover anything unusual in its appearance. Thorndyke watched me with a mischievous smile, and, when I had finished, inquired:

"Well; what is it?"

"Confound you!" I exclaimed. "It's a pencil. Any fool can see that, and this particular fool can't see any more. It's a wretched stump of a pencil, villainously cut to an abominably bad point. It is coloured dark red on the outside and was stamped with some name that began with C—O—Co-operative Stores, perhaps."

"Now, my dear Jervis," Thorndyke protested, "don't begin by confusing speculation with fact. The letters which remain are C—O. Note that fact and find out what pencils there are which have inscriptions beginning with those letters. I am not going to help you, because you can easily do this for yourself. And it will be good discipline even if the fact turns out to mean nothing."

At this moment he stepped back suddenly, and, looking down at the floor, said:

"Give me the lamp, Jervis. I've trodden on something that felt like glass."

I brought the lamp to the place where he had been

standing, close by the bed, and we both knelt on the floor, throwing the light of the lamp on the bare and dusty boards. Under the bed, just within reach of the foot of a person standing close by, was a little patch of fragments of glass. Thorndyke produced a piece of paper from his pocket and delicately swept the little fragments on to it, remarking :

“ By the look of things, I am not the first person who has trodden on that object, whatever it is. Do you mind holding the lamp while I inspect the remains ? ”

I took the lamp and held it over the paper while he examined the little heap of glass through his lens.

“ Well,” I asked. “ What have you found ? ”

“ That is what I am asking myself,” he replied. “ As far as I can judge by the appearance of these fragments, they appear to be portions of a small watch-glass. I wish there were some larger pieces.”

“ Perhaps there are,” said I. “ Let us look about the floor under the bed.”

We resumed our groping about the dirty floor, throwing the light of the lamp on one spot after another. Presently, as we moved the lamp about, its light fell on a small glass bead, which I instantly picked up and exhibited to Thorndyke.

“ Is this of any interest to you ? ” I asked.

Thorndyke took the bead and examined it curiously.

“ It is certainly,” he said, “ a very odd thing to find in the bedroom of an old bachelor like Jeffrey, especially as we know that he employed no woman to look after his rooms. Of course, it may be a

relic of the last tenant. Let us see if there are any more."

We renewed our search, crawling under the bed and throwing the light of the lamp in all directions over the floor. The result was the discovery of three more beads, one entire bugle and the crushed remains of another, which had apparently been trodden on. All of these, including the fragments of the bugle that had been crushed, Thorndyke placed carefully on the paper, which he laid on the dressing-table the more conveniently to examine our find.

"I am sorry," said he, "that there are no more fragments of the watch-glass, or whatever it was. The broken pieces were evidently picked up, with the exception of the one that I trod on, which was an isolated fragment that had been overlooked. As to the beads, judging by their number and the position in which we found some of them—that crushed bugle, for instance—they must have been dropped during Jeffrey's tenancy and probably quite recently."

"What sort of garment do you suppose they came from?" I asked.

"They may have been part of a beaded veil or the trimming of a dress, but the grouping rather suggests to me a tag of bead fringe. The colour is rather unusual."

"I thought they looked like black beads."

"So they do by this light, but I think that by daylight we shall find them to be a dark, reddish-brown. You can see the colour now if you look at the smaller fragments of the one that is crushed."

He handed me his lens, and, when I had verified his statement, he produced from his pocket a small tin box with a closely-fitting lid in which he deposited the paper, having first folded it up into a small parcel.

“We will put the pencil in too,” said he; and, as he returned the box to his pocket he added: “you had better get one of these little boxes from Polton. It is often useful to have a safe receptacle for small and fragile articles.”

He folded up and replaced the dead man's clothes as we had found them. Then, observing a pair of shoes standing by the wall, he picked them up and looked them over thoughtfully, paying special attention to the backs of the soles and the fronts of the heels.

“I suppose we may take it,” said he, “that these are the shoes that poor Jeffrey wore on the night of his death. At any rate there seem to be no others. He seems to have been a fairly clean walker. The streets were shockingly dirty that day, as I remember most distinctly. Do you see any slippers? I haven't noticed any.”

He opened and peeped into a cupboard in which an overcoat surmounted by a felt hat hung from a peg like an attenuated suicide; he looked in all the corners and into the sitting-room, but no slippers were to be seen.

“Our friend seems to have had surprisingly little regard for comfort,” Thorndyke remarked. “Think of spending the winter evenings in damp boots by a gas fire!”

"Perhaps the opium-pipe compensated," said I; "or he may have gone to bed early."

"But he did not. The night porter used to see the light in his rooms at one o'clock in the morning. In the sitting-room, too, you remember. But he seems to have been in the habit of reading in bed—or perhaps smoking—for here is a candlestick with the remains of a whole dynasty of candles in it. As there is gas in the room, he couldn't have wanted the candle to undress by. He used stearine candles, too; not the common paraffin variety. I wonder why he went to that expense."

"Perhaps the smell of the paraffin candle spoiled the aroma of the opium," I suggested; to which Thorndyke made no reply but continued his inspection of the room, pulling out the drawer of the washstand—which contained a single, worn-out nail-brush—and even picking up and examining the dry and cracked cake of soap in the dish.

"He seems to have had a fair amount of clothing," said Thorndyke, who was now going through the chest of drawers, "though, by the look of it, he didn't change very often, and the shirts have a rather yellow and faded appearance. I wonder how he managed about his washing. Why, here are a couple of pairs of boots in the drawer with his clothes! And here is his stock of candles. Quite a large box—though nearly empty now—of stearine candles, six to the pound."

He closed the drawer and cast another inquiring look round the room.

"I think we have seen all now, Jervis," he said,

“ unless there is anything more that you would like to look into ? ”

“ No,” I replied. “ I have seen all that I wanted to see and more than I am able to attach any meaning to. So we may as well go.”

I blew out the lamp and put it in my overcoat pocket, and, when we had turned out the gas in both rooms, we took our departure.

As we approached the lodge, we found our stout friend in the act of retiring in favour of the night porter. Thorndyke handed him the key of the chambers, and, after a few sympathetic inquiries about his health—which was obviously very indifferent—said :

“ Let me see ; you were one of the witnesses to Mr. Blackmore’s will, I think ? ”

“ I was, sir,” replied the porter.

“ And I believe you read the document through before you witnessed the signature ? ”

“ I did, sir.”

“ Did you read it aloud ? ”

“ Aloud, sir ! Lor’ bless you, no, sir ! Why should I ? The other witness read it, and, of course, Mr. Blackmore knew what was in it, seeing that it was in his own handwriting. What should I want to read it aloud for ? ”

“ No, of course you wouldn’t want to. By the way, I have been wondering how Mr. Blackmore managed about his washing.”

The porter evidently regarded this question with some disfavour, for he replied only with an interrogative grunt. It was, in fact, rather an odd question.

"Did you get it done for him," Thorndyke pursued.

"No, certainly not, sir. He got it done for himself. The laundry people used to deliver the basket here at the lodge, and Mr. Blackmore used to take it in with him when he happened to be passing."

"It was not delivered at his chambers, then?"

"No, sir. Mr. Blackmore was a very studious gentleman and he didn't like to be disturbed. A studious gentleman would naturally not like to be disturbed."

Thorndyke cordially agreed with these very proper sentiments and finally wished the porter "good night." We passed out through the gateway into Wych Street, and, turning our faces eastward towards the Temple, set forth in silence, each thinking his own thoughts. What Thorndyke's were I cannot tell, though I have no doubt that he was busily engaged in piecing together all that he had seen and heard and considering its possible application to the case in hand.

As to me, my mind was in a whirl of confusion. All this searching and examining seemed to be the mere flogging of a dead horse. The will was obviously a perfectly valid and regular will and there was an end of the matter. At least, so it seemed to me. But clearly that was not Thorndyke's view. His investigations were certainly not purposeless; and, as I walked by his side trying to conceive some purpose in his actions, I only became more and more mystified as I recalled them

one by one, and perhaps most of all by the cryptic questions that I had just heard him address to the equally mystified porter.

*Chapter VIII**The Track Chart*

AS Thorndyke and I arrived at the main gateway of the Temple and he swung round into the narrow lane, it was suddenly borne in on me that I had made no arrangements for the night. Events had followed one another so continuously and each had been so engrossing that I had lost sight of what I may call my domestic affairs.

“We seem to be heading for your chambers, Thorndyke,” I ventured to remark. “It is a little late to think of it, but I have not yet settled where I am to put up to-night.”

“My dear fellow,” he replied, “you are going to put up in your own bedroom which has been waiting in readiness for you ever since you left it. Polton went up and inspected it as soon as you arrived. I take it that you will consider my chambers yours until such time as you may join the benedictine majority and set up a home for yourself.”

“That is very handsome of you,” said I. “You didn’t mention that the billet you offered was a resident appointment.”

“Rooms and commons included,” said Thorndyke; and when I protested that I should at least contribute to the costs of living he impatiently

waved the suggestion away. We were still arguing the question when we reached our chambers—as I will now call them—and a diversion was occasioned by my taking the lamp from my pocket and placing it on the table.

“Ah,” my colleague remarked, “that is a little reminder. We will put it on the mantelpiece for Polton to collect and you shall give me a full account of your further adventures in the wilds of Kennington. That was a very odd affair. I have often wondered how it ended.”

He drew our two arm-chairs up to the fire, put on some more coal, placed the tobacco jar on the table exactly equidistant from the two chairs, and settled himself with the air of a man who is anticipating an agreeable entertainment.

I filled my pipe, and, taking up the thread of the story where I had broken off on the last occasion, began to outline my later experiences. But he brought me up short.

“Don’t be sketchy, Jervis. To be sketchy is to be vague. Detail, my child, detail is the soul of induction. Let us have all the facts. We can sort them out afterwards.”

I began afresh in a vein of the extremest circumstantiality. With deliberate malice I loaded a prolix narrative with every triviality that a fairly retentive memory could rake out of the half-forgotten past. I cudgelled my brains for irrelevant incidents. I described with the minutest accuracy things that had not the faintest significance. I drew a vivid picture of the carriage inside and out ;

I painted a lifelike portrait of the horse, even going into particulars of the harness—which I was surprised to find that I had noticed. I described the furniture of the dining-room and the cobwebs that had hung from the ceiling; the auction-ticket on the chest of drawers, the rickety table and the melancholy chairs. I gave the number per minute of the patient's respirations and the exact quantity of coffee consumed on each occasion, with an exhaustive description of the cup from which it was taken; and I left no personal details unconsidered, from the patient's finger-nails to the roseate pimples on Mr. Weiss's nose.

But my tactics of studied prolixity were a complete failure. The attempt to fatigue Thorndyke's brain with superabundant detail was like trying to surfeit a pelican with whitebait. He consumed it all with calm enjoyment and asked for more; and when, at last, I did really begin to think that I had bored him a little, he staggered me by reading over his notes and starting a brisk cross-examination to elicit fresh facts! And the most surprising thing of all was that when I had finished I seemed to know a great deal more about the case than I had ever known before.

"It was a very remarkable affair," he observed, when the cross-examination was over—leaving me somewhat in the condition of a cider-apple that has just been removed from a hydraulic press—"a very suspicious affair with a highly unsatisfactory end. I am not sure that I entirely agree with your police officer. Nor do I fancy that some of my

acquaintances at Scotland Yard would have agreed with him."

"Do you think I ought to have taken any further measures?" I asked uneasily.

"No; I don't see how you could. You did all that was possible under the circumstances. You gave information, which is all that a private individual can do, especially if he is an overworked general practitioner. But still, an actual crime is the affair of every good citizen. I think we ought to take some action."

"You think there really was a crime, then?"

"What else can one think? What do you think about it yourself?"

"I don't like to think about it at all. The recollection of that corpse-like figure in that gloomy bedroom has haunted me ever since I left the house. What do you suppose has happened?"

Thorndyke did not answer for a few seconds. At length he said gravely:

"I am afraid, Jervis, that the answer to that question can be given in one word."

"Murder?" I asked with a slight shudder.

He nodded, and we were both silent for a while.

"The probability," he resumed after a pause, "that Mr. Graves is alive at this moment seems to me infinitesimal. There was evidently a conspiracy to murder him, and the deliberate, persistent manner in which that object was being pursued points to a very strong and definite motive. Then the tactics adopted point to considerable forethought and judgment. They are not the tactics

of a fool or an ignoramus. We may criticize the closed carriage as a tactical mistake, calculated to arouse suspicion, but we have to weigh it against its alternative."

"What is that?"

"Well, consider the circumstances. Suppose Weiss had called you in in the ordinary way. You would still have detected the use of poison. But now you could have located your man and made inquiries about him in the neighbourhood. You would probably have given the police a hint and they would almost certainly have taken action, as they would have had the means of identifying the parties. The result would have been fatal to Weiss. The closed carriage invited suspicion, but it was a great safeguard. Weiss's method's were not so unsound after all. He is a cautious man, but cunning and very persistent. And he could be bold on occasion. The use of the blinded carriage was a decidedly audacious proceeding. I should put him down as a gambler of a very discreet, courageous and resourceful type."

"Which all leads to the probability that he has pursued his scheme and brought it to a successful issue."

"I am afraid it does. But—have you got your notes of the compass-bearings?"

"The book is in my overcoat pocket with the board. I will fetch them."

I went into the office, where our coats hung, and brought back the notebook with the little board to which it was still attached by the ubber band.

Thorndyke took them from me, and, opening the book, ran his eye quickly down one page after another. Suddenly he glanced at the clock.

"It is a little late to begin," said he, "but these notes look rather alluring. I am inclined to plot them out at once. I fancy, from *their* appearance, that they will enable us to locate the house without much difficulty. But don't let me keep you up if you are tired. I can work them out by myself."

"You won't do anything of the kind," I exclaimed. "I am as keen on plotting them as you are, and, besides, I want to see how it is done. It seems to be a rather useful accomplishment."

"It is," said Thorndyke. "In our work, the ability to make a rough but reliable sketch survey is often of great value. Have you ever looked over these notes?"

"No. I put the book away when I came in and have never looked at it since."

"It is a quaint document. You seem to be rich in railway bridges in those parts, and the route was certainly none of the most direct, as you noticed at the time. However, we will plot it out and then we shall see exactly what it looks like and whither it leads us."

He retired to the laboratory and presently returned with a T-square, a military protractor, a pair of dividers and a large drawing-board on which was pinned a sheet of cartridge paper.

"Now," said he, seating himself at the table with the board before him, "as to the method. You started from a known position and you arrived

at a place the position of which is at present unknown. We shall fix the position of that spot by applying two factors, the distance that you travelled and the direction in which you were moving. The direction is given by the compass; and, as the horse seems to have kept up a remarkably even pace, we can take time as representing distance. You seem to have been travelling at about eight miles an hour, that is, roughly, a seventh of a mile in one minute. So if, on our chart, we take one inch as representing one minute, we shall be working with a scale of about seven inches to the mile."

"That doesn't sound very exact as to distance," I objected.

"It isn't. But that doesn't matter much. We have certain landmarks, such as these railway arches that you have noted, by which the actual distance can be settled after the route is plotted. You had better read out the entries, and, opposite each, write a number for reference, so that we need not confuse the chart by writing details on it. I shall start near the middle of the board, as neither you nor I seem to have the slightest notion what your general direction was."

I laid the open notebook before me and read out the first entry:

"'Eight fifty-eight. West by South. Start from home. Horse thirteen hands.'"

"You turned round at once, I understand," said Thorndyke, "so we draw no line in that direction. The next is——?"

"'Eight fifty-eight minutes, thirty seconds,

East by North ' ; and the next is ' Eight fifty-nine, North-east.' ”

“ Then you travelled east by north about a fifteenth of a mile and we shall put down half an inch on the chart. Then you turned north-east. How long did you go on ? ”

“ Exactly a minute. The next entry is ' Nine, West north-west.' ”

“ Then you travelled about the seventh of a mile in a north-easterly direction and we draw a line an inch long at an angle of forty-five degrees to the right of the north and south line. From the end of that we carry a line at an angle of fifty-six and a quarter degrees to the left of the north and south line, and so on. The method is perfectly simple, you see.”

“ Perfectly ; I quite understand it now.”

I went back to my chair and continued to read out the entries from the notebook while Thorndyke laid off the lines of direction with the protractor, taking out the distances with the dividers from a scale of equal parts on the back of the instrument. As the work proceeded, I noticed, from time to time, a smile of quiet amusement spread over my colleague's keen, attentive face, and at each new reference to a railway bridge he chuckled softly.

“ What, again ! ” he laughed, as I recorded the passage of the fifth or sixth bridge. “ It's like a game of croquet. Go on. What is the next ? ”

I went on reading out the notes until I came to the final one :

“ ‘ Nine twenty-four. South-east. In covered way. Stop. Wooden gates closed.’ ”

Thorndyke ruled off the last line, remarking: "Then your covered way is on the south side of a street which bears north-east. So we complete our chart. Just look at your route, Jervis."

He held up the board with a quizzical smile and I stared in astonishment at the chart. The single line, which represented the route of the carriage, zigzagged in the most amazing manner, turning, re-turning and crossing itself repeatedly, evidently passing more than once down the same thoroughfares and terminating at a comparatively short distance from its commencement.

"Why!" I exclaimed, the "rascal must have lived quite near to Stillbury's house!"

Thorndyke measured with the dividers the distance between the starting and arriving points of the route and took it off from the scale.

"Five-eighths of a mile, roughly," he said. "You could have walked it in less than ten minutes. And now let us get out the ordnance map and see if we can give to each of those marvellously erratic lines 'a local habitation and a name.'"

He spread the map out on the table and placed our chart by its side.

"I think," said he, "you started from Lower Kennington Lane?"

"Yes, from this point," I replied, indicating the spot with a pencil.

"Then," said Thorndyke, "if we swing the chart round twenty degrees to correct the deviation of the compass, we can compare it with the ordnance map."

He set off with the protractor an angle of twenty