

wonder. He seemed to take in everything at a single glance and in an instant to appreciate the meaning of everything that he had seen.

Here was a case in point. I had myself seen all that he had seen, and, indeed, much more; for I had looked on the very people and witnessed their actions, whereas he had never set eyes on any of them. I had examined the little handful of rubbish that he had gathered up so carefully, and would have flung it back under the grate without a qualm. Not a glimmer of light had I perceived in the cloud of mystery, nor even a hint of the direction in which to seek enlightenment. And yet Thorndyke had, in some incomprehensible manner, contrived to piece together facts that I had probably not even observed, and that so completely that he had already, in these few days, narrowed down the field of inquiry to quite a small area.

From these reflections I returned to the objects on the table. The spectacles, as things of which I had some expert knowledge, were not so profound a mystery to me. A pair of spectacles might easily afford good evidence for identification; that I perceived clearly enough. Not a ready-made pair, picked up casually at a shop, but a pair constructed by a skilled optician to remedy a particular defect of vision and to fit a particular face. And such were the spectacles before me. The build of the frames was peculiar; the existence of a cylindrical lens—which I could easily make out from the remaining fragments—showed that one glass had been cut to a prescribed shape and almost certainly ground to a

particular formula, and also that the distance between centres must have been carefully secured. Hence these spectacles had an individual character. But it was manifestly impossible to inquire of all the spectacle-makers in Europe—for the glasses were not necessarily made in England. As confirmation the spectacles might be valuable; as a starting-point they were of no use at all.

From the spectacles I turned to the pieces of reed. These were what had given Thorndyke his start. Would they give me a leading hint too? I looked at them and wondered what it was that they had told Thorndyke. The little fragment of the red paper label had a dark-brown or thin black border ornamented with a fret-pattern, and on it I detected a couple of tiny points of gold like the dust from leaf-gilding. But I learned nothing from that. Then the shorter piece of reed was artificially hollowed to fit on the longer piece. Apparently it formed a protective sheath or cap. But what did it protect? Presumably a point or edge of some kind. Could this be a pocket-knife of any sort, such as a small stencil-knife? No; the material was too fragile for a knife-handle. It could not be an etching-needle for the same reason; and it was not a surgical appliance—at least it was not like any surgical instrument that was known to me.

I turned it over and over and cudgelled my brains; and then I had a brilliant idea. Was it a reed pen of which the point had been broken off? I knew that reed pens were still in use by draughtsmen of decorative leanings with an affection for

the "fat line." Could any of our friends be draughtsmen? This seemed the most probable solution of the difficulty, and the more I thought about it the more likely it seemed. Draughtsmen usually sign their work intelligibly, and even when they use a device instead of a signature their identity is easily traceable. Could it be that Mr. Graves, for instance, was an illustrator, and that Thorndyke had established his identity by looking through the works of all the well-known thick-line draughtsmen?"

This problem occupied me for the rest of the day. My explanation did not seem quite to fit Thorndyke's description of his methods; but I could think of no other. I turned it over during my solitary lunch; I meditated on it with the aid of several pipes in the afternoon; and having refreshed my brain with a cup of tea, I went forth to walk in the Temple gardens—which I was permitted to do without breaking my parole—to think it out afresh.

The result was disappointing. I was basing my reasoning on the assumption that the pieces of reed were parts of a particular appliance, appertaining to a particular craft; whereas they might be the remains of something quite different, appertaining to a totally different craft or to no craft at all. And in no case did they point to any known individual or indicate any but the vaguest kind of search. After pacing the pleasant walks for upwards of two hours, I at length turned back towards our chambers, where I arrived as the lamp-lighter was just finishing his round.

My fruitless speculations had left me somewhat irritable. The lighted windows that I had noticed as I approached had given me the impression that Thorndyke had returned. I had intended to press him for a little further information. When, therefore, I let myself into our chambers and found, instead of my colleague, a total stranger—and only a back view at that—I was disappointed and annoyed.

The stranger was seated by the table, reading a large document that looked like a lease. He made no movement when I entered, but when I crossed the room and wished him "Good evening," he half rose and bowed silently. It was then that I first saw his face, and a mighty start he gave me. For one moment I actually thought he was Mr. Weiss, so close was the resemblance, but immediately I perceived that he was a much smaller man.

I sat down nearly opposite and stole an occasional furtive glance at him. The resemblance to Weiss was really remarkable. The same flaxen hair, the same ragged beard and a similar red nose, with the patches of *acne rosacea* spreading to the adjacent cheeks. He wore spectacles, too, through which he took a quick glance at me now and again, returning immediately to his document.

After some moments of rather embarrassing silence, I ventured to remark that it was a mild evening; to which he assented with a sort of Scotch "Hm—hm" and nodded slowly. Then came another interval of silence, during which I speculated on the possibility of his being a relative of

Mr. Weiss and wondered what the deuce he was doing in our chambers.

“Have you an appointment with Dr. Thorn-dyke?” I asked, at length.

He bowed solemnly, and by way of reply—in the affirmative, as I assumed—emitted another “hm—hm.”

I looked at him sharply, a little nettled by his lack of manners; whereupon he opened out the lease so that it screened his face, and as I glanced at the back of the document, I was astonished to observe that it was shaking rapidly.

The fellow was actually laughing! What he found in my simple question to cause him so much amusement I was totally unable to imagine. But there it was. The tremulous movements of the document left me in no possible doubt that he was for some reason convulsed with laughter.

It was extremely mysterious. Also, it was rather embarrassing. I took out my pocket file and began to look over my notes. Then the document was lowered and I was able to get another look at the stranger's face. He was really extraordinarily like Weiss. The shaggy eyebrows, throwing the eye-sockets into shadow, gave him, in conjunction with the spectacles, the same owlish, solemn expression that I had noticed in my Kennington acquaintance; and which, by the way, was singularly out of character with the frivolous behaviour that I had just witnessed.

From time to time as I looked at him, he caught my eye and instantly averted his own, turning rather

red. Apparently he was a shy, nervous man, which might account for his giggling; for I have noticed that shy or nervous people have a habit of smiling inopportunately and even giggling when embarrassed by meeting an over-steady eye. And it seemed my own eye had this disconcerting quality, for even as I looked at him, the document suddenly went up again and began to shake violently.

I stood it for a minute or two, but, finding the situation intolerably embarrassing, I rose, and brusquely excusing myself, went up to the laboratory to look for Polton and inquire at what time Thorndyke was expected home. To my surprise, however, on entering, I discovered Thorndyke himself just finishing the mounting of a microscopical specimen.

"Did you know that there is some one below waiting to see you?" I asked.

"Is it anyone you know?" he inquired.

"No," I answered. "It is a red-nosed, sniggering fool in spectacles. He has got a lease or a deed or some other sort of document which he has been using to play a sort of idiotic game of Peep-Bo! I couldn't stand him, so I came up here."

Thorndyke laughed heartily at my description of his client.

"What are you laughing at?" I asked sourly; at which he laughed yet more heartily and added to the aggravation by wiping his eyes.

"Our friend seems to have put you out," he remarked.

“He put me out literally. If I had stayed much longer I should have punched his head.”

“In that case,” said Thorndyke, “I am glad you didn’t stay. But come down and let me introduce you.”

“No, thank you. I’ve had enough of him for the present.”

“But I have a very special reason for wishing to introduce you. I think you will get some information from him that will interest you very much; and you needn’t quarrel with a man for being of a cheerful disposition.”

“Cheerful be hanged!” I exclaimed. “I don’t call a man cheerful because he behaves like a gibbering idiot.”

To this Thorndyke made no reply but a broad and appreciative smile, and we descended to the lower floor. As we entered the room, the stranger rose, and, glancing in an embarrassed way from one of us to the other, suddenly broke out into an undeniable snigger. I looked at him sternly, and Thorndyke, quite unmoved by his indecorous behaviour, said in a grave voice:

“Let me introduce you, Jervis; though I think you have met this gentleman before.”

“I think not,” I said stiffly.

“Oh yes, you have, sir,” interposed the stranger; and, as he spoke, I started; for the voice was uncommonly like the familiar voice of Polton.

I looked at the speaker with sudden suspicion. And now I could see that the flaxen hair was a wig; that the beard had a decidedly artificial look, and

that the eyes that beamed through the spectacles were remarkably like the eyes of our factotum. But the blotchy face, the bulbous nose and the shaggy, overhanging eyebrows were alien features that I could not reconcile with the personality of our refined and aristocratic-looking little assistant.

“Is this a practical joke?” I asked.

“No,” replied Thorndyke; “it is a demonstration. When we were talking this morning it appeared to me that you did not realize the extent to which it is possible to conceal identity under suitable conditions of light. So I arranged, with Polton’s rather reluctant assistance, to give you ocular evidence. The conditions are not favourable—which makes the demonstration more convincing. This is a very well-lighted room and Polton is a very poor actor; in spite of which it has been possible for you to sit opposite him for several minutes and look at him, I have no doubt, very attentively, without discovering his identity. If the room had been lighted only with a candle, and Polton had been equal to the task of supporting his make-up with an appropriate voice and manner, the deception would have been perfect.”

“I can see that he has a wig on, quite plainly,” said I.

“Yes; but you would not in a dimly lighted room. On the other hand, if Polton were to walk down Fleet Street at mid-day in this condition, the make-up would be conspicuously evident to any moderately observant passer-by. The secret of making up consists in a careful adjustment to the

conditions of light and distance in which the make-up is to be seen. That in use on the stage would look ridiculous in an ordinary room; that which would serve in an artificially lighted room would look ridiculous out of doors by daylight."

"Is any effective make-up possible out of doors in ordinary daylight?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Thorndyke. "But it must be on a totally different scale from that of the stage. A wig, and especially a beard or moustache, must be joined up at the edges with hair actually stuck on the skin with transparent cement and carefully trimmed with scissors. The same applies to eyebrows; and alterations in the colour of the skin must be carried out much more subtly. Polton's nose has been built up with a small covering of toupée-paste, the pimples on the cheeks produced with little particles of the same material; and the general tinting has been done with grease-paint with a very light scumble of powder colour to take off some of the shine. This would be possible in outdoor make-up, but it would have to be done with the greatest care and delicacy; in fact, with what the art-critics call 'reticence.' A very little make-up is sufficient and too much is fatal. You would be surprised to see how little paste is required to alter the shape of the nose and the entire character of the face."

At this moment there came a loud knock at the door; a single, solid dab of the knocker which Polton seemed to recognize, for he ejaculated:

"Good lord, sir! That'll be Wilkins, the cab-

man! I'd forgotten all about him. Whatever's to be done?"

He stared at us in ludicrous horror for a moment or two, and then, snatching off his wig, beard and spectacles, poked them into a cupboard. But his appearance was now too much even for Thorndyke—who hastily got behind him—for he had now resumed his ordinary personality—but with a very material difference.

"Oh, it's nothing to laugh at, sir," he exclaimed indignantly as I crammed my handkerchief into my mouth. "Somebody's got to let him in, or he'll go away."

"Yes; and that won't do," said Thorndyke. "But don't worry, Polton. You can step into the office. I'll open the door."

Polton's presence of mind, however, seemed to have entirely forsaken him, for he only hovered irresolutely in the wake of his principal. As the door opened, a thick and husky voice inquired:

"Gent of the name of Polton live here?"

"Yes, quite right," said Thorndyke. "Come in. Your name is Wilkins, I think?"

"That's me, sir," said the voice; and in response to Thorndyke's invitation, a typical "growler" cabman of the old school, complete even to imbricated cape and dangling badge, stalked into the room, and glancing round with a mixture of embarrassment and defiance, suddenly fixed on Polton's nose a look of devouring curiosity.

"Here you are, then," Polton remarked nervously.

“Yus,” replied the cabman in a slightly hostile tone. “Here I am. What am I wanted to do? And where’s this here Mr. Polton?”

“I am Mr. Polton,” replied our abashed assistant.

“Well, it’s the other Mr. Polton what I want,” said the cabman, with his eyes still riveted on the olfactory prominence.

“There isn’t any other Mr. Polton,” our subordinate replied irritably. “I am the—er—person who spoke to you in the shelter.”

“Are you though?” said the manifestly incredulous cabby. “I shouldn’t have thought it; but you ought to know. What do you want me to do?”

“We want you,” said Thorndyke, “to answer one or two questions. And the first one is, Are you a teetotaller?”

The question being illustrated by the production of a decanter, the cabman’s dignity relaxed somewhat.

“I ain’t bigoted,” said he.

“Then sit down and mix yourself a glass of grog. Soda or plain water?”

“May as well have all the extries,” replied the cabman, sitting down and grasping the decanter with the air of a man who means business. “Per’aps you wouldn’t mind squirtin’ out the soda, sir, bein’ more used to it.”

While these preliminaries were being arranged, Polton silently slipped out of the room, and when our visitor had fortified himself with a gulp of the uncommonly stiff mixture, the examination began.

“Your name, I think, is Wilkins?” said Thorn-dyke.

“That’s me, sir. Samuel Wilkins is my name.”

“And your occupation?”

“Is a very tryin’ one and not paid for as it deserves. I drives a cab, sir; a four-wheeled cab is what I drives; and a very poor job it is.”

“Do you happen to remember a very foggy day about a month ago?”

“Do I not, sir! A regler sneezer that was! Wednesday, the fourteenth of March. I remember the date because my benefit society came down on me for arrears that morning.”

“Will you tell us what happened to you between six and seven in the evening of that day?”

“I will, sir,” replied the cabman, emptying his tumbler by way of bracing himself up for the effort. “A little before six I was waiting on the arrival side of the Great Northern Station, King’s Cross, when I see a gentleman and a lady coming out. The gentleman he looks up and down and then he sees me and walks up to the cab and opens the door and helps the lady in. Then he says to me: ‘Do you know New Inn?’ he says. That’s what he says to me what was born and brought up in White Horse Alley, Drury Lane.

“‘Get inside,’ says I.

“‘Well,’ says he, ‘you drive in through the gate in Wych Street,’ he says, as if he expected me to go in by Houghton Street and down the steps, ‘and then,’ he says, ‘you drive nearly to the end and you’ll see a house with a large brass plate at

the corner of the doorway. That's where we want to be set down,' he says, and with that he nips in and pulls up the windows and off we goes.

"It took us a full half-hour to get to New Inn through the fog, for I had to get down and lead the horse part of the way. As I drove in under the archway, I saw it was half-past six by the clock in the porter's lodge. I drove down nearly to the end of the inn and drew up opposite a house where there was a big brass plate by the doorway. It was number thirty-one. Then the gent crawls out and hands me five bob—two 'arf-crowns—and then he helps the lady out, and away they waddles to the doorway and I see them start up the stairs very slow—regler Pilgrim's Progress. And that was the last I see of 'em."

Thorndyke wrote down the cabman's statement verbatim together with his own questions, and then asked :

"Can you give us any description of the gentleman?"

"The gent," said Wilkins, "was a very respectable-looking gent, though he did look as if he'd had a drop of something short, and small blame to him on a day like that. But he was all there, and he knew what was the proper fare for a foggy evening, which is more than some of 'em do. He was a elderly gent, about sixty, and he wore spectacles, but he didn't seem to be able to see much through 'em. He was a funny 'un to look at; as round in the back as a turtle and he walked with his head stuck forward like a goose."

“What made you think he had been drinking?”

“Well, he wasn't as steady as he might have been on his pins. But he wasn't drunk, you know. Only a bit wobbly on the plates.”

“And the lady; what was she like?”

“I couldn't see much of her because her head was wrapped up in a sort of woollen veil. But I should say she wasn't a chicken. Might have been about the same age as the gent, but I couldn't swear to that. She seemed a trifle rickety on the pins too; in fact they were a rum-looking couple. I watched 'em tottering across the pavement and up the stairs, hanging on to each other, him peering through his blinkers and she trying to see through her veil, and I thought it was a jolly good job they'd got a nice sound cab and a steady driver to bring 'em safe home.”

“How was the lady dressed?”

“Can't rightly say, not being a hexpert. Her head was done up in this here veil like a pudden in a cloth and she had a small hat on. She had a dark brown mantle with a fringe of beads round it and a black dress; and I noticed when she got into the cab at the station that one of her stockings looked like the bellows of a concertina. That's all I can tell you.”

Thorndyke wrote down the last answer, and, having read the entire statement aloud, handed the pen to our visitor.

“If that is all correct,” he said, “I will ask you to sign your name at the bottom.”

“Do you want me to swear a affidavit that it’s all true?” asked Wilkins.

“No, thank you,” replied Thorndyke. “We may have to call you to give evidence in court, and then you’ll be sworn; and you’ll also be paid for your attendance. For the present I want you to keep your own counsel and say nothing to anybody about having been here. We have to make some other inquiries and we don’t want the affair talked about.”

“I see, sir,” said Wilkins, as he laboriously traced his signature at the foot of the statement; “you don’t want the other parties for to ogle your lay. All right, sir; you can depend on me. I’m fly, I am.”

“Thank you, Wilkins,” said Thorndyke. “And now what are we to give you for your trouble in coming here?”

“I’ll leave the fare to you, sir. You know what the information’s worth; but I should think ‘arf a thick-un wouldn’t hurt you.”

Thorndyke laid on the table a couple of sovereigns, at the sight of which the cabman’s eyes glistened.

“We have your address, Wilkins,” said he. “If we want you as a witness we shall let you know, and if not, there will be another two pounds for you at the end of a fortnight, provided you have not let this little interview leak out.”

Wilkins gathered up the spoils gleefully. “You can trust me, sir,” said he, “for to keep my mouth shut. I knows which side my bread’s buttered. Good night, gentlemen all.”

With this comprehensive salute he moved towards the door and let himself out.

"Well, Jervis; what do you think of it?" Thorndyke asked, as the cabman's footsteps faded away in a creaky diminuendo.

"I don't know what to think. This woman is a new factor in the case and I don't know how to place her."

"Not entirely new," said Thorndyke. "You have not forgotten those beads that we found in Jeffrey's bedroom, have you?"

"No, I had not forgotten them, but I did not see that they told us much excepting that some woman had apparently been in his bedroom at some time."

"That, I think, is all that they did tell us. But now they tell us that a particular woman was in his bedroom at a particular time, which is a good deal more significant."

"Yes. It almost looks as if she must have been there when he made away with himself."

"It does, very much."

"By the way, you were right about the colours of those beads, and also about the way they were used."

"As to their use, that was a mere guess; but it has turned out to be correct. It was well that we found the beads, for, small as is the amount of information they give, it is still enough to carry us a stage further."

"How so?"

"I mean that the cabman's evidence tells us only that this woman entered the house. The beads tell

us that she was in the bedroom ; which, as you say, seems to connect her to some extent with Jeffrey's death. Not necessarily, of course. It is only a suggestion ; but a rather strong suggestion under the peculiar circumstances."

"Even so," said I, "this new fact seems to me so far from clearing up the mystery, only to add to it a fresh element of still deeper mystery. The porter's evidence at the inquest could leave no doubt that Jeffrey contemplated suicide, and his preparations pointedly suggest this particular night as the time selected by him for doing away with himself. Is not that so?"

"Certainly. The porter's evidence was very clear on that point."

"Then I don't see where this woman comes in. It is obvious that her presence at the inn, and especially in the bedroom, on this occasion and in these strange, secret circumstances, has a rather sinister look ; but yet I do not see in what way she could have been connected with the tragedy. Perhaps, after all, she has nothing to do with it. You remember that Jeffrey went to the lodge about eight o'clock, to pay his rent, and chatted for some time with the porter. That looks as if the lady had already left."

"Yes," said Thorndyke. "But, on the other hand, Jeffrey's remarks to the porter with reference to the cab do not quite agree with the account that we have just heard from Wilkins. Which suggests—as does Wilkins's account generally—some secrecy as to the lady's visit to his chambers."

“Do you know who the woman was?” I asked.

“No, I don’t know,” he replied. “I have a rather strong suspicion that I can identify her, but I am waiting for some further facts.”

“Is your suspicion founded on some new matter that you have discovered, or is it deducible from facts that are known to me?”

“I think,” he replied, “that you know practically all that I know, although I have, in one instance, turned a very strong suspicion into a certainty by further inquiries. But I think you ought to be able to form some idea as to who this lady probably was.”

“But no woman has been mentioned in the case at all.”

“No; but I think you should be able to give this lady a name, notwithstanding.”

“Should I? Then I begin to suspect that I am not cut out for medico-legal practice, for I don’t see the faintest glimmer of a suggestion.”

Thorndyke smiled benevolently. “Don’t be discouraged, Jervis,” said he. “I expect that when you first began to go round the wards, you doubted whether you were cut out for medical practice. I did. For special work one needs special knowledge and an acquired faculty for making use of it. What does a second year’s student make of a small thoracic aneurysm? He knows the anatomy of the chest; he begins to know the normal heart sounds and areas of dullness; but he cannot yet fit his various items of knowledge together. Then comes the experienced physician and perhaps makes a complete diagnosis without any examination at all, merely from hearing

the patient speak or cough. He has the same facts as the student, but he has acquired the faculty of instantly connecting an abnormality of function with its correleated anatomical change. It is a matter of experience. And, with your previous training, you will soon acquire the faculty. Try to observe everything. Let nothing escape you. And try constantly to find some connection between facts and events that seem to be unconnected. That is my advice to you ; and with that we will put away the Blackmore case for the present and consider our day's work at an end."

*Chapter XIV**Thorndyke Lays the Mine*

THE information supplied by Mr. Samuel Wilkins, so far from dispelling the cloud of mystery that hung over the Blackmore case, only enveloped it in deeper obscurity, so far as I was concerned. The new problem that Thorndyke offered for solution was a tougher one than any of the others. He proposed that I should identify and give a name to this mysterious woman. But how could I? No woman, excepting Mrs. Wilson, had been mentioned in connection with the case. This new *dramatis persona* had appeared suddenly from nowhere and straightway vanished without leaving a trace, excepting the two or three beads that we had picked up in Jeffrey's room.

Nor was it in the least clear what part, if any, she had played in the tragedy. The facts still pointed

as plainly to suicide as before her appearance. Jeffrey's repeated hints as to his intentions, and the very significant preparations that he had made, were enough to negative any idea of foul play. And yet the woman's presence in the chambers at that time, the secret manner of her arrival and her precautions against recognition, strongly suggested some kind of complicity in the dreadful event that followed.

But what complicity is possible in the case of suicide? The woman might have furnished him with the syringe and the poison, but it would not have been necessary for her to go to his chambers for that purpose. Vague ideas of persuasion and hypnotic suggestion floated through my brain; but the explanations did not fit the case and the hypnotic suggestion of crime is not very convincing to the medical mind. Then I thought of blackmail in connection with some disgraceful secret; but though this was a more hopeful suggestion, it was not very probable, considering Jeffrey's age and character.

And all these speculations failed to throw the faintest light on the main question: "Who was this woman?"

A couple of days passed, during which Thorndyke made no further reference to the case. He was, most of the time, away from home, though how he was engaged I had no idea. What was rather more unusual was that Polton seemed to have deserted the laboratory and taken to outdoor pursuits. I assumed that he had seized the opportunity of leaving me in charge, and I dimly surmised that he was acting as Thorndyke's private inquiry agent,

as he seemed to have done in the case of Samuel Wilkins.

On the evening of the second day Thorndyke came home in obviously good spirits, and his first proceedings aroused my expectant curiosity. He went to a cupboard and brought forth a box of Trichinopoly cheroots. Now the Trichinopoly cheroot was Thorndyke's one dissipation, to be enjoyed only on rare and specially festive occasions; which, in practice, meant those occasions on which he had scored some important point or solved some unusually tough problem. Wherefore I watched him with lively interest.

"It's a pity that the 'Trichy' is such a poisonous beast," he remarked, taking up one of the cheroots and sniffing at it delicately. "There is no other cigar like it, to a really abandoned smoker." He laid the cigar back in the box and continued: "I think I shall treat myself to one after dinner to celebrate the occasion."

"What occasion?" I asked.

"The completion of the Blackmore case. I am just going to write to Marchmont advising him to enter a caveat."

"Do you mean to say that you have discovered a flaw in the will, after all?"

"A flaw!" he exclaimed. "My dear Jervis, that second will is a forgery."

I stared at him in amazement; for his assertion sounded like nothing more or less than arrant nonsense.

"But the thing is impossible, Thorndyke," I said.

“Not only did the witnesses recognize their own signatures and the painter’s greasy finger-marks, but they had both read the will and remembered its contents.”

“Yes; that is the interesting feature in the case. It is a very pretty problem. I shall give you a last chance to solve it. To-morrow evening we shall have to give a full explanation, so you have another twenty-four hours in which to think it over. And, meanwhile, I am going to take you to my club to dine. I think we shall be pretty safe there from Mrs. Schallibaum.”

He sat down and wrote a letter, which was apparently quite a short one, and having addressed and stamped it, prepared to go out.

“Come,” said he, “let us away to ‘the gay and festive scenes and halls of dazzling light.’ We will lay the mine in the Fleet Street pillar box. I should like to be in Marchmont’s office when it explodes.”

“I expect, for that matter,” said I, “that the explosion will be felt pretty distinctly in these chambers.”

“I expect so, too,” replied Thorndyke; “and that reminds me that I shall be out all day to-morrow, so, if Marchmont calls, you must do all that you can to persuade him to come round after dinner and bring Stephen Blackmore, if possible. I am anxious to have Stephen here, as he will be able to give us some further information and confirm certain matters of fact.”

I promised to exercise my utmost powers of

persuasion on Mr. Marchmont which I should certainly have done on my own account, being now on the very tiptoe of curiosity to hear Thorndyke's explanation of the unthinkable conclusion at which he had arrived—and the subject dropped completely; nor could I, during the rest of the evening, induce my colleague to reopen it even in the most indirect or allusive manner.

Our explanations in respect of Mr. Marchmont were fully realized; for, on the following morning, within an hour of Thorndyke's departure from our chambers, the knocker was plied with more than usual emphasis, and, on my opening the door, I discovered the solicitor in company with a somewhat older gentleman. Mr. Marchmont appeared somewhat out of humour, while his companion was obviously in a state of extreme irritation.

“How d'you do, Dr. Jervis?” said Marchmont as he entered at my invitation. “Your friend, I suppose, is not in just now?”

“No; and he will not be returning until the evening.”

“Hm; I'm sorry. We wished to see him rather particularly. This is my partner, Mr. Winwood.”

The latter gentleman bowed stiffly and Marchmont continued:

“We have had a letter from Dr. Thorndyke, and it is, I may say, a rather curious letter; in fact, a very singular letter indeed.”

“It is the letter of a madman!” growled Mr. Winwood.

“No, no, Winwood; nothing of the kind.

Control yourself, I beg you. But really, the letter is rather incomprehensible. It relates to the will of the late Jeffrey Blackmore—you know the main facts of the case; and we cannot reconcile it with those facts."

"This is the letter," exclaimed Mr. Winwood, dragging the document from his wallet and slapping it down on the table. "If you are acquainted with the case, sir, just read that, and let us hear what *you* think."

I took up the letter and read aloud:

"JEFFREY BLACKMORE, DECD.

"DEAR MR. MARCHMONT,—

"I have gone into this case with great care and have now no doubt that the second will is a forgery. Criminal proceedings will, I think, be inevitable, but meanwhile it would be wise to enter a caveat.

"If you could look in at my chambers to-morrow evening we could talk the case over; and I should be glad if you could bring Mr. Stephen Blackmore; whose personal knowledge of the events and the parties concerned would be of great assistance in clearing up obscure details.

"I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN EVELYN THORNDYKE.

"C. F. MARCHMONT, ESQ."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Winwood, glaring feroci-

ously at me, "what do you think of the learned counsel's opinion?"

"I knew that Thorndyke was writing to you to this effect," I replied, "but I must frankly confess that I can make nothing of it. Have you acted on his advice?"

"Certainly not!" shouted the irascible lawyer. "Do you suppose that we wish to make ourselves the laughing-stock of the courts? The thing is impossible—ridiculously impossible!"

"It can't be that, you know," I said, a little stiffly, for I was somewhat nettled by Mr. Winwood's manner, "or Thorndyke would not have written this letter. The conclusion looks as impossible to me as it does to you; but I have complete confidence in Thorndyke. If he says that the will is a forgery, I have no doubt that it is a forgery."

"But how the deuce can it be?" roared Winwood. "You know the circumstances under which the will was executed."

"Yes; but so does Thorndyke. And he is not a man who overlooks important facts. It is useless to argue with me. I am in a complete fog about the case myself. You had better come in this evening and talk it over with him as he suggests."

"It is very inconvenient," grumbled Mr. Winwood. "We shall have to dine in town."

"Yes," said Marchmont, "but it is the only thing to be done. As Dr. Jervis says, we must take it that Thorndyke has something solid to base his opinion on. He doesn't make elementary mistakes."

And, of course, if what he says is correct, Mr. Stephen's position is totally changed."

"Bah!" exclaimed Winwood, "he has found a mare's nest, I tell you. Still, I agree that the explanation should be worth hearing."

"You mustn't mind Winwood," said Marchmont, in an apologetic undertone; "he's a peppery old fellow with a rough tongue, but he doesn't mean any harm." Which statement Winwood assented to—or dissented from; for it was impossible to say which—by a prolonged growl.

"We shall expect you then," I said, "about eight to-night, and you will try to bring Mr. Stephen with you?"

"Yes," replied Marchmont; "I think we can promise that he shall come with us. I have sent him a telegram asking him to attend."

With this the two lawyers took their departure, leaving me to meditate upon my colleague's astonishing statement; which I did, considerably to the prejudice of other employment. That Thorndyke would be able to justify the opinion that he had given, I had no doubt whatever; but yet there was no denying that his proposition was what Mr. Dick Swiveller would call "a staggerer."

When Thorndyke returned, I informed him of the visit of our two friends, and acquainted him with the sentiments that they had expressed; whereat he smiled with quiet amusement.

"I thought," he remarked, "that letter would bring Marchmont to our door before long. As to Winwood, I have never met him, but I gather that

he is one of those people whom you 'mustn't mind.' In a general way, I object to people who tacitly claim exemption from the ordinary rules of conduct that are held to be binding on their fellows. But, as he promises to give us what the variety artists call 'an extra turn,' we will make the best of him and give him a run for his money."

Here Thorndyke smiled mischievously—I understood the meaning of that smile later in the evening—and asked: "What do you think of the affair yourself?"

"I have given it up," I answered. "To my paralysed brain, the Blackmore case is like an endless algebraical problem propounded by an insane mathematician."

Thorndyke laughed at my comparison, which I flatter myself was a rather apt one.

"Come and dine," said he, "and let us crack a bottle, that our hearts may not turn to water under the frown of the disdainful Winwood. I think the old 'Bell' in Holborn will meet our present requirements better than the club. There is something jovial and roystering about an ancient tavern; but we must keep a sharp lookout for Mrs. Schallibaum."

Thereupon we set forth; and, after a week's close imprisonment, I once more looked upon the friendly London streets, the cheerfully lighted shop windows and the multitudes of companionable strangers who moved unceasingly along the pavements.

WE had not been back in our chambers more than a few minutes when the little brass knocker on the inner door rattled out its summons. Thorndyke himself opened the door, and, finding our three expected visitors on the threshold, he admitted them and closed the "oak."

"We have accepted your invitation, you see," said Marchmont, whose manner was now a little flurried and uneasy. "This is my partner, Mr. Winwood; you haven't met before, I think. Well, we thought we should like to hear some further particulars from you, as we could not quite understand your letter."

"My conclusion, I suppose," said Thorndyke, "was a little unexpected?"

"It was more than that, sir," exclaimed Winwood. "It was absolutely irreconcilable either with the facts of the case or with common physical possibilities."

"At the first glance," Thorndyke agreed, "it would probably have that appearance."

"It has that appearance still to me," said Winwood, growing suddenly red and wrathful, "and I may say that I speak as a solicitor who was practising in the law when you were an infant in arms. You tell us, sir, that this will is a forgery; this will, which was executed in broad daylight in the presence of two unimpeachable witnesses who have sworn, not

only to their signatures and the contents of the document, but to their very finger-marks on the paper. Are those finger-marks forgeries, too? Have you examined and tested them?"

"I have not," replied Thorndyke. "The fact is they are of no interest to me, as I am not disputing the witnesses' signatures."

At this, Mr. Winwood fairly danced with irritation.

"Marchmont!" he exclaimed fiercely, "you know this good gentleman, I believe. Tell me, is he addicted to practical jokes?"

"Now, my dear Winwood," groaned Marchmont, "I pray you—I beg you to control yourself. No doubt——"

"But confound it!" roared Winwood, "you have, yourself, heard him say that the will is a forgery, but that he doesn't dispute the signatures; which," concluded Winwood, banging his fist down on the table, "is damned nonsense."

"May I suggest," interposed Stephen Blackmore, "that we came here to receive Dr. Thorndyke's explanation of his letter. Perhaps it would be better to postpone any comments until we have heard it."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," said Marchmont. "Let me entreat you, Winwood, to listen patiently and refrain from interruption until we have heard our learned friend's exposition of the case."

"Oh, very well," Winwood replied sulkily; "I'll say no more."

He sank into a chair with the manner of a man

who shuts himself up and turns the key; and so remained—excepting when the internal pressure approached bursting-point—throughout the subsequent proceedings, silent, stony and impassive, like a seated statue of Obstinacy.

“ I take it,” said Marchmont, “ that you have some new facts that are not in our possession ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Thorndyke; “ we have some new facts, and we have made some new use of the old ones. But how shall I lay the case before you? Shall I state my theory of the sequence of events and furnish the verification afterwards? Or shall I retrace the actual course of my investigations and give you the facts in the order in which I obtained them myself, with the inferences from them? ”

“ I almost think,” said Mr. Marchmont, “ that it would be better if you would put us in possession of the new facts. Then, if the conclusions that follow from them are not sufficiently obvious, we could hear the argument. What do you say, Winwood? ”

Mr. Winwood roused himself for an instant, barked out the one word “ Facts,” and shut himself up again with a snap.

“ You would like to have the new facts by themselves? ” said Thorndyke.

“ If you please. The facts only, in the first place, at any rate.”

“ Very well,” said Thorndyke; and here I caught his eye with a mischievous twinkle in it that I understood perfectly; for I had most of the facts myself and realized how much these two lawyers

were likely to extract from them. Winwood was going to "have a run for his money," as Thorndyke had promised.

My colleague, having placed on the table by his side a small cardboard box and the sheets of notes from his file, glanced quickly at Mr. Winwood and began :

"The first important new facts came into my possession on the day on which you introduced the case to me. In the evening, after you left, I availed myself of Mr. Stephen's kind invitation to look over his uncle's chambers in New Inn. I wished to do so in order to ascertain, if possible, what had been the habits of the deceased during his residence there. When I arrived with Dr. Jervis, Mr. Stephen was in the chambers, and I learned from him that his uncle was an Oriental scholar of some position and that he had a very thorough acquaintance with the cuneiform writing. Now, while I was talking with Mr. Stephen I made a very curious discovery. On the wall over the fire-place hung a large framed photograph of an ancient Persian inscription in the cuneiform character ; and that photograph was upside down."

"Upside down !" exclaimed Stephen. "But that is really very odd."

"Very odd indeed," agreed Thorndyke, "and very suggestive. The way in which it came to be inverted is pretty obvious and also rather suggestive. The photograph had evidently been in the frame some years but had apparently never been hung up before."

"It had not," said Stephen, "though I don't know how you arrived at the fact. It used to stand on the mantelpiece in his old rooms in Jermyn Street."

"Well," continued Thorndyke, "the frame-maker had pasted his label on the back of the frame, and as this label hung the right way up, it appeared as if the person who fixed the photograph on the wall had adopted it as a guide."

"It is very extraordinary," said Stephen. "I should have thought the person who hung it would have asked Uncle Jeffrey which was the right way up; and I can't imagine how on earth it could have hung all those months without his noticing it. He must have been practically blind."

Here Marchmont, who had been thinking hard, with knitted brows, suddenly brightened up.

"I see your point," said he. "You mean that if Jeffrey was as blind as that, it would have been possible for some person to substitute a false will, which he might sign without noticing the substitution."

"That wouldn't make the will a forgery," growled Winwood. "If Jeffrey signed it, it was Jeffrey's will. You could contest it if you could prove the fraud. But he said: 'This is my will,' and the two witnesses read it and have identified it."

"Did they read it aloud?" asked Stephen.

"No, they did not," replied Thorndyke.

"Can you prove substitution?" asked Marchmont.

"I haven't asserted it," answered Thorndyke.

"My position is that the will is a forgery."

"But it is not," said Winwood.

"We won't argue it now," said Thorndyke. "I ask you to note the fact that the inscription was upside down. I also observed on the walls of the chambers some valuable Japanese colour-prints on which were recent damp-spots. I noted that the sitting-room had a gas-stove and that the kitchen contained practically no stores or remains of food and hardly any traces of even the simplest cooking. In the bedroom I found a large box that had contained a considerable stock of hard stearine candles, six to the pound, and that was now nearly empty. I examined the clothing of the deceased. On the soles of the boots I observed dried mud, which was unlike that on my own and Jervis's boots, from the gravelly square of the inn. I noted a crease on each leg of the deceased man's trousers as if they had been turned up half-way to the knee; and in the waistcoat pocket I found the stump of a 'Contango' pencil. On the floor of the bedroom, I found a portion of an oval glass somewhat like that of a watch or locket, but ground at the edge to a double bevel. Dr. Jervis and I also found one or two beads and a bugle, all of dark brown glass."

Here Thorndyke paused, and Marchmont, who had been gazing at him with growing amazement, said nervously:

"Er—yes. Very interesting. These observations of yours—er—are——"

"Are all the observations that I made at New Inn."

The two lawyers looked at one another and Stephen Blackmore stared fixedly at a spot on the hearth-rug. Then Mr. Winwood's face contorted itself into a sour, lopsided smile.

"You might have observed a good many other things, sir," said he, "if you had looked. If you had examined the doors, you would have noted that they had hinges and were covered with paint; and, if you had looked up the chimney you might have noted that it was black inside."

"Now, now, Winwood," protested Marchmont in an agony of uneasiness as to what his partner might say next, "I must really beg you—er—to refrain from—what Mr. Winwood means, Dr. Thorndyke, is that—er—we do not quite perceive the relevancy of these—ah—observations of yours."

"Probably not," said Thorndyke, "but you will perceive their relevancy later. For the present, I will ask you to note the facts and bear them in mind, so that you may be able to follow the argument when we come to that.

"The next set of data I acquired on the same evening, when Dr. Jervis gave me a detailed account of a very strange adventure that befell him. I need not burden you with all the details, but I will give you the substance of his story."

He then proceeded to recount the incidents connected with my visits to Mr. Graves, dwelling on the personal peculiarities of the parties concerned and especially of the patient, and not even for-

getting the very singular spectacles worn by Mr. Weiss. He also explained briefly the construction of the chart, presenting the latter for the inspection of his hearers. To this recital our three visitors listened in utter bewilderment, as, indeed did I also; for I could not conceive in what way my adventures could possibly be related to the affairs of the late Mr. Blackmore. This was manifestly the view taken by Mr. Marchmont, for, during a pause in which the chart was handed to him, he remarked somewhat stiffly:

“I am assuming, Dr. Thorndyke, that the curious story you are telling us has some relevance to the matter in which we are interested.”

“You are quite correct in your assumption,” replied Thorndyke. “The story is very relevant indeed, as you will presently be convinced.”

“Thank you,” said Marchmont, sinking back once more into his chair with a sigh of resignation.

“A few days ago,” pursued Thorndyke, “Dr. Jervis and I located, with the aid of this chart, the house to which he had been called. We found that the late tenant had left somewhat hurriedly and that the house was to let; and, as no other kind of investigation was possible, we obtained the keys and made an exploration of the premises.”

Here he gave a brief account of our visit and the conditions that we observed, and was proceeding to furnish a list of the articles that we had found under the grate, when Mr. Winwood started from his chair.

“Really, sir!” he exclaimed, “this is too much!”

Have I come here, at great personal inconvenience, to hear you read the inventory of a dust-heap?"

Thorndyke smiled benevolently and caught my eye, once more, with a gleam of amusement.

"Sit down, Mr. Winwood," he said quietly. "You came here to learn the facts of the case, and I am giving them to you. Please don't interrupt needlessly and waste time."

Winwood stared at him ferociously for several seconds; then, somewhat disconcerted by the unruffled calm of his manner, he uttered a snort of defiance, sat down heavily and shut himself up again.

"We will now," Thorndyke continued, with unmoved serenity, "consider these relics in more detail, and we will begin with this pair of spectacles. They belonged to a person who was near-sighted and astigmatic in the left eye and almost certainly blind in the right. Such a description agrees entirely with Dr. Jervis's account of the sick man."

He paused for the moment, and then, as no one made any comment, proceeded:

"We next come to these little pieces of reed, which you, Mr. Stephen, will probably recognize as the remains of a Japanese brush, such as is used for writing in Chinese ink or for making small drawings."

Again he paused, as though expecting some remark from his listeners; but no one spoke, and he continued:

"Then there is this bottle with the theatrical wig-maker's label on it, which once contained

cement such as is used for fixing on false beards, moustaches or eyebrows."

He paused once more and looked round expectantly at his audience, none of whom, however, volunteered any remark.

"Do none of these objects that I have described and shown you, seem to have any significance for us?" he asked, in a tone of some surprise.

"They convey nothing to me," said Mr. Marchmont, glancing at his partner, who shook his head like a restive horse.

"Nor to you, Mr. Stephen?"

"No," replied Stephen. "Under the existing circumstances they convey no reasonable suggestion to me."

Thorndyke hesitated as if he were half inclined to say something more; then, with a slight shrug, he turned over his notes and resumed:

"The next group of new facts is concerned with the signatures of the recent cheques. We have photographed them and placed them together for the purpose of comparison and analysis."

"I am not prepared to question the signatures," said Winwood. "We have had a highly expert opinion, which would override ours in a court of law even if we differed from it; which I think we do not."

"Yes," said Marchmont; "that is so. I think we must accept the signatures, especially as that of the will has been proved, beyond any question, to be authentic."

"Very well," agreed Thorndyke; "we will pass

over the signatures. Then we have some further evidence, in regard to the spectacles, which serves to verify our conclusions respecting them."

"Perhaps," said Marchmont, "we might pass over that, too, as we do not seem to have reached any conclusions."

"As you please," said Thorndyke. "It is important, but we can reserve it for verification. The next item will interest you more, I think. It is the signed and witnessed statement of Samuel Wilkins, the driver of the cab in which the deceased came home to the inn on the evening of his death."

My colleague was right. An actual document, signed by a tangible witness, who could be put in the box and sworn, brought both lawyers to a state of attention; and when Thorndyke read out the cabman's evidence, their attention soon quickened into undisguised astonishment.

"But this is a most mysterious affair," exclaimed Marchmont. "Who could this woman have been, and what could she have been doing in Jeffrey's chambers at this time? Can you throw any light on it, Mr. Stephen?"

"No, indeed I can't," replied Stephen. "It is a complete mystery to me. My uncle Jeffrey was a confirmed old bachelor, and, although he did not dislike women, he was far from partial to their society, wrapped up as he was in his favourite studies. To the best of my belief, he had not a single female friend. He was not on intimate terms even with his sister, Mrs. Wilson."

"Very remarkable," mused Marchmont; "most

remarkable. But, perhaps, you can tell us, Dr. Thorndyke, who this woman was?"

"I think," replied Thorndyke, "that the next item of evidence will enable you to form an opinion for yourselves. I only obtained it yesterday, and, as it made my case quite complete, I wrote off to you immediately. It is the statement of Joseph Ridley, another cabman, and unfortunately, a rather dull, unobservant fellow, unlike Wilkins. He has not much to tell us, but what little he has is highly instructive. Here is the statement, signed by the deponent and witnessed by me:

"My name is Joseph Ridley. I am the driver of a four-wheeled cab. On the fourteenth of March, the day of the great fog, I was waiting at Vauxhall Station, where I had just set down a fare. About five o'clock a lady came and told me to drive over to Upper Kennington Lane to take up a passenger. She was a middle-sized woman. I could not tell what her age was, or what she was like, because her head was wrapped up in a sort of knitted, woollen veil to keep out the fog. I did not notice how she was dressed. She got into the cab and I led the horse over to Upper Kennington Lane and a little way up the lane, until the lady tapped at the front window for me to stop.

"She got out of the cab and told me to wait. Then she went away and disappeared in the fog. Presently a lady and gentleman came from the direction in which she had gone. The lady looked like the same lady, but I won't answer to that. Her head was wrapped up in the same kind of veil

or shawl, and I noticed that she had on a dark coloured mantle with bead fringe on it.

“ ‘The gentleman was clean shaved and wore spectacles, and he stooped a good deal. I can’t say whether his sight was good or bad. He helped the lady into the cab and told me to drive to the Great Nothern Station, King’s Cross. Then he got in himself and I drove off. I got to the station about a quarter to six and the lady and gentleman got out. The gentleman paid my fare and they both went into the station. I did not notice anything unusual about either of them. Directly after they had gone, I got a fresh fare and drove away.’

“ That,” Thorndyke concluded, “ is Joseph Ridley’s statement ; and I think it will enable you to give a meaning to the other facts that I have offered for your consideration.”

“ I am not so sure about that,” said Marchmont. “ It is all exceedingly mysterious. Your suggestion is, of course, that the woman who came to New Inn in the cab was Mrs. Schallibaum ! ”

“ Not at all,” replied Thorndyke. “ My suggestion is that the woman was Jeffrey Blackmore.”

There was deathly silence for a few moments. We were all absolutely thunderstruck, and sat gaping at Thorndyke in speechless-astonishment. Then—Mr. Winwood fairly bounced out of his chair.

“ But—my—good—sir ! ” he screeched. “ Jeffrey Blackmore was with her at the time ! ”

“ Naturally,” replied Thorndyke, “ my sugges-

tion implies that the person who was with her was not Jeffrey Blackmore."

"But he was!" bawled Winwood. "The porter saw him!"

"The porter saw a person whom he believed to be Jeffrey Blackmore. I suggest that the porter's belief was erroneous."

"Well," snapped Winwood, "perhaps you can prove that it was. I don't see how you are going to; but perhaps you can."

He subsided once more into his chair and glared defiantly at Thorndyke.

"You seemed," said Stephen, "to suggest some connection between the sick man, Graves, and my uncle. I noted it at the time, but put it aside as impossible. Was I right. Did you mean to suggest any connection?"

"I suggest something more than a connection. I suggest identity. My position is that the sick man, Graves, was your uncle."

"From Dr. Jervis's description," said Stephen, "this man must have been very like my uncle. Both were blind in the right eye and had very poor vision with the left; and my uncle certainly used brushes of the kind that you have shown us, when writing in the Japanese character, for I have watched him and admired his skill; but——"

"But," said Marchmont, "there is the insuperable objection that, at the very time when this man was lying sick in Kennington Lane, Mr. Jeffrey was living at New Inn."

“What evidence is there of that?” asked Thorndyke.

“Evidence!” Marchmont exclaimed impatiently. “Why, my dear sir——”

He paused suddenly, and, leaning forward, regarded Thorndyke with a new and rather startled expression.

“You mean to suggest——” he began.

“I suggest that Jeffrey Blackmore never lived at New Inn at all.”

For the moment, Marchmont seemed absolutely paralysed by astonishment.

“This is an amazing proposition!” he exclaimed, at length. “Yet the thing is certainly not impossible, for, now that you recall the fact, I realize that no one who had known him previously—excepting his brother, John—ever saw him at the inn. The question of identity was never raised.”

“Excepting,” said Mr. Winwood, “in regard to the body; which was certainly that of Jeffrey Blackmore.”

“Yes, yes. Of course,” said Marchmont. “I had forgotten that for the moment. The body was identified beyond doubt. You don’t dispute the identity of the body, do you?”

“Certainly not,” replied Thorndyke.

Here Mr. Winwood grasped his hair with both hands and stuck his elbows on his knees, while Marchmont drew forth a large handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Stephen Blackmore looked from one to the other expectantly, and finally said:

"If I might make a suggestion, it would be that, as Dr. Thorndyke has shown us the pieces now of the puzzle, he should be so kind as to put them together for our information."

"Yes," agreed Marchmont, "that will be the best plan. Let us have the argument, Doctor, and any additional evidence that you possess."

"The argument," said Thorndyke, "will be a rather long one, as the data are so numerous, and there are some points in verification on which I shall have to dwell in some detail. We will have some coffee to clear our brains, and then I will bespeak your patience for what may seem like a rather prolix demonstration."

*Chapter XVI**An Exposition and a Tragedy*

"YOU may have wondered," Thorndyke commenced, when he had poured out the coffee and handed round the cups, "what induced me to undertake the minute investigation of so apparently simple and straightforward a case. Perhaps I had better explain that first and let you see what was the real starting-point of the inquiry."

"When you, Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Stephen, introduced the case to me, I made a very brief précis of the facts as you presented them, and of these there were one or two which immediately attracted my attention. In the first place, there was the will. It was a very strange will. It was perfectly unnecessary. It contained no new

matter; it expressed no changed intentions; it met no new circumstances, as known to the testator. In short it was not really a new will at all, but merely a repetition of the first one, drafted in different and less suitable language. It differed only in introducing a certain ambiguity from which the original was free. It created the possibility that, in certain circumstances, not known to or anticipated by the testator, John Blackmore might become the principal beneficiary, contrary to the obvious wishes of the testator.

“The next point that impressed me was the manner of Mrs. Wilson’s death. She died of cancer. Now people do not die suddenly and unexpectedly of cancer. This terrible disease stands almost alone in that it marks out its victim months in advance. A person who has an incurable cancer is a person whose death may be predicted with certainty and its date fixed within comparatively narrow limits.

“And now observe the remarkable series of coincidences that are brought into light when we consider this peculiarity of the disease. Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March of this present year. Mr. Jeffrey’s second will was signed on the twelfth of November of last year; at a time, that is to say, when the existence of cancer must have been known to Mrs. Wilson’s doctor, and might have been known to any of her relatives who chose to inquire after her.

“Then you will observe that the remarkable change in Mr. Jeffrey’s habits coincides in the most singular way with the same events. The cancer

must have been detectable as early as September of last year ; about the time, in fact, at which Mrs. Wilson made her will. Mr. Jeffrey went to the inn at the beginning of October. From that time his habits were totally changed, and I can demonstrate to you that a change—not a gradual, but an abrupt change—took place in the character of his signature.

“ In short, the whole of this peculiar set of circumstances—the change in Jeffrey’s habits, the change in his signature, and the execution of his strange will—came into existence about the time when Mrs. Wilson was first known to be suffering from cancer.

“ This struck me as a very suggestive fact.

“ Then there is the extraordinarily opportune date of Mr. Jeffrey’s death. Mrs. Wilson died on the twelfth of March. Mr. Jeffrey was found dead on the fifteenth of March, having apparently died on the fourteenth, on which day he was seen alive. If he had died only three days sooner, he would have predeceased Mrs. Wilson, and her property would never have devolved on him at all ; while, if he had lived only a day or two longer, he would have learned of her death and would certainly have made a new will or codicil in his nephew’s favour.

“ Circumstances, therefore, conspired in the most singular manner in favour of John Blackmore.

“ But there is yet another coincidence. Jeffrey’s body was found, by the merest chance, the day after his death. But it might have remained undiscovered for weeks, or even months ; and if it had, it would have been impossible to fix the date of

his death. Then Mrs. Wilson's next of kin would certainly have contested John Blackmore's claim—and probably with success—on the ground that Jeffrey died before Mrs. Wilson. But all this uncertainty is provided for by the circumstance that Mr. Jeffrey paid his rent personally—and prematurely—to the porter on the fourteenth of March, thus establishing beyond question the fact that he was alive on that date; and yet further, in case the porter's memory should be untrustworthy or his statement doubted, Jeffrey furnished a signed and dated document—the cheque—which could be produced in a court to furnish incontestable proof of survival.

“To sum up this part of the evidence. Here was a will which enabled John Blackmore to inherit the fortune of a man who, almost certainly, had no intention of bequeathing it to him. The wording of that will seemed to be adjusted to the peculiarities of Mrs. Wilson's disease; and the death of the testator occurred under a peculiar set of circumstances which seemed to be exactly adjusted to the wording of the will. Or, to put it in another way: the wording of the will and the time, the manner and the circumstances of the testator's death, all seemed to be precisely adjusted to the fact that the approximate date of Mrs. Wilson's death was known some months before it occurred.

“Now you must admit that this compound group of coincidences, all conspiring to a single end—the enrichment of John Blackmore—has a very singular appearance. Coincidences are common enough in

real life ; but we cannot accept too many at a time. My feeling was that there were too many in this case and that I could not accept them without searching inquiry."

Thorndyke paused, and Mr. Marchmont, who had listened with close attention, nodded, as he glanced at his silent partner.

"You have stated the case with remarkable clearness," he said ; "and I am free to confess that some of the points that you have raised had escaped my notice."

"My first idea," Thorndyke resumed, "was that John Blackmore, taking advantage of the mental enfeeblement produced by the opium habit, had dictated this will to Jeffrey. It was then that I sought permission to inspect Jeffrey's chambers ; to learn what I could about him and to see for myself whether they presented the dirty and disorderly appearance characteristic of the regular opium-smoker's den. But when, during a walk into the City, I thought over the case, it seemed to me that this explanation hardly met the facts. Then I endeavoured to think of some other explanation ; and looking over my notes I observed two points that seemed worth considering. One was that neither of the witnesses to the will was really acquainted with Jeffrey Blackmore ; both being strangers who had accepted his identity on his own statement. The other was that no one who had previously known him, with the single exception of his brother John, had ever seen Jeffrey at the inn.

"What was the import of these two facts?

Probably they had none. But still they suggested the desirability of considering the question: Was the person who signed the will really Jeffrey Blackmore? The contrary supposition—that some one had personated Jeffrey and forged his signature to a false will—seemed wildly improbable, especially in view of the identification of the body; but it involved no actual impossibility; and it offered a complete explanation of the, otherwise inexplicable, coincidences that I have mentioned.

“I did not, however, for a moment, think that this was the true explanation, but I resolved to bear it in mind, to test it when the opportunity arose, and consider it by the light of any fresh facts that I might acquire.

“The new facts came sooner than I had expected. That same evening I went with Dr. Jervis to New Inn and found Mr. Stephen in the chambers. By him I was informed that Jeffrey was a learned Orientalist, with a quite expert knowledge of the cuneiform writing; and even as he was telling me this, I looked over his shoulder and saw a cuneiform inscription hanging on the wall upside down.”

“Now, of this there could be only one reasonable explanation. Disregarding the fact that no one would screw the suspension plates on a frame without ascertaining which was the right way up, and assuming it to be hung up inverted, it was impossible that the misplacement could have been overlooked by Jeffrey. He was not blind, though his sight was defective. The frame was thirty inches long and

the individual characters nearly an inch in length—about the size of the D 18 letters of Snellen's test-types, which can be read by a person of ordinary sight at a distance of fifty-five feet. There was, I repeat, only one reasonable explanation ; which was that the person who had inhabited those chambers was not Jeffrey Blackmore.

“ This conclusion received considerable support from a fact which I observed later, but mention in this place. On examining the soles of the shoes taken from the dead man's feet, I found only the ordinary mud of the streets. There was no trace of the peculiar gravelly mud that adhered to my own boots and Jervis's, and which came from the square of the inn. Yet the porter distinctly stated that the deceased, after paying the rent, walked back towards his chambers across the square ; the mud of which should, therefore, have been conspicuous on his shoes.

“ Thus, in a moment, a wildly speculative hypothesis had assumed a high degree of probability.

“ When Mr. Stephen was gone, Jervis and I looked over the chambers thoroughly ; and then another curious fact came to light. On the wall were a number of fine Japanese colour-prints, all of which showed recent damp-spots. Now, apart from the consideration that Jeffrey, who had been at the trouble and expense of collecting these valuable prints, would hardly have allowed them to rot on his walls, there arose the question : How came they to be damp ? There was a gas stove

in the room, and a gas stove has at least the virtue of preserving a dry atmosphere. It was winter weather, when the stove would naturally be pretty constantly alight. How came the walls to be so damp? The answer seemed to be that the stove had not been constantly alight, but had been lighted only occasionally. This suggestion was borne out by a further examination of the rooms. In the kitchen there were practically no stores and hardly any arrangements even for simple bachelor cooking; the bedroom offered the same suggestion; the soap in the wash-stand was shrivelled and cracked; there was no cast-off linen, and the shirts in the drawers, though clean, had the peculiar yellowish, faded appearance that linen acquires when long out of use. In short, the rooms had the appearance of not having been lived in at all, but only visited at intervals.

“Against this view, however, was the statement of the night porter that he had often seen a light in Jeffrey’s sitting-room at one o’clock in the morning, with the apparent implication that it was then turned out. Now a light may be left in an empty room, but its extinction implies the presence of some person to extinguish it; unless some automatic device be adopted for putting it out at a given time. Such a device—the alarm movement of a clock, for instance, with a suitable attachment—is a simple enough matter, but my search of the rooms failed to discover anything of the kind. However, when looking over the drawers in the bedroom, I came upon a large box that had held a considerable

quantity of hard stearine candles. There were only a few left, but a flat candlestick with numerous wick-ends in its socket accounted for the remainder.

“ These candles seemed to dispose of the difficulty. They were not necessary for ordinary lighting, since gas was laid on in all three rooms. For what purpose, then, were they used, and in such considerable quantities? I subsequently obtained some of the same brand—Price’s stearine candles, six to the pound—and experimented with them. Each candle was seven and a quarter inches in length, not counting the cone at the top, and I found that they burned in still air at the rate of a fraction over one inch in an hour. We may say that one of these candles would burn in still air a little over six hours. It would thus be possible for the person who inhabited these rooms to go away at seven o’clock in the evening and leave a light which would burn until past one in the morning and then extinguish itself. This, of course, was only surmise, but it destroyed the significance of the night porter’s statement.

“ But, if the person who inhabited these chambers was not Jeffrey, who was he?

“ The answer to that question seemed plain enough. There was only one person who had a strong motive for perpetrating a fraud of this kind, and there was only one person to whom it was possible. If this person was not Jeffrey, he must have been very like Jeffrey; sufficiently like for the body of the one to be mistaken for the body of the other. For the production of Jeffrey’s body was an essential part of the plan and must have

been contemplated from the first. But the only person who fulfills the conditions is John Blackmore.

“ We have learned from Mr. Stephen that John and Jeffrey, though very different in appearance in later years, were much alike as young men. But when two brothers who are much alike as young men, become unlike in later life, we shall find that the unlikeness is produced by superficial differences and that the essential likeness remains. Thus, in the present case, Jeffrey was clean shaved, had bad eyesight, wore spectacles and stooped as he walked ; John wore a beard and moustache, had good eyesight, did not wear spectacles and had a brisk gait and upright carriage. But supposing John to shave off his beard and moustache, to put on spectacles and to stoop in his walk, these conspicuous but superficial differences would vanish and the original likeness reappear.

“ There is another consideration. John had been an actor and was an actor of some experience. Now, any person can, with some care and practice, make up a disguise ; the great difficulty is to support that disguise by a suitable manner and voice. But to an experienced actor this difficulty does not exist. To him, personation is easy ; and, moreover, an actor is precisely the person to whom the idea of disguise and impersonation would occur.

“ There is a small item bearing on this point, so small as to be hardly worth calling evidence, but just worth noting. In the pocket of the waistcoat taken from the body of Jeffrey I found the stump of a ‘ Contango ’ pencil ; a pencil that is

sold for the use of stock dealers and brokers. Now John was an outside broker and might very probably have used such a pencil, whereas Jeffrey had no connection with the stock markets and there is no reason why he should have possessed a pencil of this kind. But the fact is merely suggestive ; it has no evidential value.

“ A more important inference is to be drawn from the collected signatures. I have remarked that the change in the signature occurred abruptly, with one or two alterations of manner, last September, and that there are two distinct forms with no intermediate varieties. This is, in itself, remarkable and suspicious. But a remark made by Mr. Britton furnishes a really valuable piece of evidence on the point we are now considering. He admitted that the character of the signature had undergone a change, but observed that the change did not affect the individual or personal character of the writing. This is very important ; for handwriting is, as it were, an extension of the personality of the writer. And just as a man to some extent shares his personality with his near blood-relations in the form of family resemblances, so his handwriting often shows a subtle likeness to that of his near relatives. You must have noticed, as I have, how commonly the handwriting of one brother resembles that of another, and in just this peculiar and subtle way. The inference, then, from Mr. Britton's statement is, that if the signature of the will was forged, it was probably forged by a relative of the deceased. But the only relative in question is his brother John.

"All the facts, therefore, pointed to John Blackmore as the person who occupied these chambers, and I accordingly adopted that view as a working hypothesis."

"But this was all pure speculation," objected Mr. Winwood.

"Not speculation," said Thorndyke. "Hypothesis. It was ordinary inductive reasoning such as we employ in scientific research. I started with the purely tentative hypothesis that the person who signed the will was not Jeffrey Blackmore. I assumed this; and I may say that I did not believe it at the time, but merely adopted it as a proposition that was worth testing. I accordingly tested it, 'Yes?' or 'No?' with each new fact; but as each new fact said 'Yes,' and no fact said definitely 'No,' its probability increased rapidly by a sort of geometrical progression. The probabilities multiplied into one another. It is a perfectly sound method, for one knows that if a hypothesis be true, it will lead one, sooner or later, to a crucial fact by which its truth can be demonstrated.

"To resume our argument. We have now set up the proposition that John Blackmore was the tenant of New Inn and that he was personating Jeffrey. Let us reason from this and see what it leads to.

"If the tenant of New Inn was John, then Jeffrey must be elsewhere, since his concealment at the inn was clearly impossible. But he could not have been far away, for he had to be producible at short notice whenever the death of Mrs. Wilson

should make the production of his body necessary. But if he was producible, his person must have been in the possession or control of John. He could not have been at large, for that would have involved the danger of his being seen and recognized. He could not have been in any institution or place where he would be in contact with strangers. Then he must be in some sort of confinement. But it is difficult to keep an adult in confinement in an ordinary house. Such a proceeding would involve great risk of discovery and the use of violence which would leave traces on the body, to be observed and commented on at the inquest. What alternative method could be suggested?

“The most obvious method is that of keeping the prisoner in such a state of debility as would confine him to his bed. But such debility could be produced by only starvation, unsuitable food, or chronic poisoning. Of these alternatives, poisoning is much more exact, more calculable in its effect and more under control. The probabilities, then, were in favour of chronic poisoning.

“Having reached this stage, I recalled a singular case which Jervis had mentioned to me and which seemed to illustrate this method. On our return home I asked him for further particulars, and he then gave me a very detailed description of the patient and the circumstances. The upshot was rather startling. I had looked on his case as merely illustrative, and wished to study it for the sake of the suggestions that it might offer. But when I had heard his account, I began to suspect that

there was something more than mere parallelism of method. It began to look as if his patient, Mr. Graves, might actually be Jeffrey Blackmore.

“The coincidences were remarkable. The general appearance of the patient tallied completely with Mr. Stephen’s description of his uncle Jeffrey. The patient had a tremulous iris in his right eye and had clearly suffered from dislocation of the crystalline lens. But from Mr. Stephen’s account of his uncle’s sudden loss of sight in the right eye after a fall, I judged that Jeffrey had also suffered from dislocation of the lens and therefore had a tremulous iris in the right eye. The patient, Graves, evidently had defective vision in his left eye, as proved by the marks made behind his ears by the hooked side-bars of his spectacles; for it is only on spectacles that are intended for constant use that we find hooked side-bars. But Jeffrey had defective vision in his left eye and wore spectacles constantly. Lastly, the patient Graves was suffering from chronic morphine poisoning, and morphine was found in the body of Jeffrey.

“Once more, it appeared to me that there were too many coincidences.

“The question as to whether Graves and Jeffrey were identical admitted of fairly easy disproof; for if Graves was still alive, he could not be Jeffrey. It was an important question and I resolved to test it without delay. That night, Jervis and I plotted out the chart, and on the following morning we located the house. But it was empty and to

let. The birds had flown, and we failed to discover whither they had gone.

“ However, we entered the house and explored. I have told you about the massive bolts and fastenings that we found on the bedroom doors and window, showing that the room had been used as a prison. I have told you of the objects that we picked out of the dust-heap under the grate. Of the obvious suggestion offered by the Japanese brush and the bottle of ‘ spirit gum ’ or cement, I need not speak now ; but I must trouble you with some details concerning the broken spectacles. For here we had come upon the crucial fact to which, as I have said, all sound inductive reasoning brings one sooner or later.

“ The spectacles were of a rather peculiar pattern. The frames were of the type invented by Mr. Stopford of Moorfields and known by his name. The right eye-piece was fitted with plain glass, as is usual in the case of a blind, or useless, eye. It was very much shattered, but its character was obvious. The glass of the left eye was much thicker and fortunately less damaged, so that I was able accurately to test its refraction.

“ When I reached home, I laid the pieces of the spectacles together, measured the frames very carefully, tested the left eye-glass, and wrote down a full description such as would have been given by the surgeon to the spectacle-maker. Here it is, and I will ask you to note it carefully.

“ ‘ Spectacles for constant use. Steel frame, Stopford’s pattern, curl sides, broad bridge with

gold lining. Distance between centres, 6.2 centimetres; extreme length of side-bars, 13.3 centimetres.

“ ‘ Right eye plain glass.

“ ‘ Left eye – 5.75 D. spherical
– 3.25 D. cylindrical, axis 35° .’

“ The spectacles, you see, were of a very distinctive character and seemed to offer a good chance of identification. Stopford’s frames are, I believe, made by only one firm of opticians in London, Parry & Cuxton of Regent Street. I therefore wrote to Mr. Cuxton, who knows me, asking him if he had supplied spectacles to the late Jeffrey Blackmore, Esq.—here is a copy of my letter—and if so, whether he would mind letting me have a full description of them, together with the name of the oculist who prescribed them.

“ He replied in this letter, which is pinned to the copy of mine, that, about four years ago, he supplied a pair of glasses to Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore, and described them thus: ‘ The spectacles were for constant use and had steel frames of Stopford’s pattern with curl sides, the length of the side-bars including the curled ends being 13.3 cm. The bridge was broad with a gold lining-plate, shaped as shown by the enclosed tracing from the diagram on the perscription. Distance between centres 6.2 cm.

“ ‘ Right eye plain glass.

“ ‘ Left eye – 5.75 D. spherical
– 3.25 D. cylindrical, axis 35° .’

“ ‘ The spectacles were prescribed by Mr. Hindley of Wimpole Street.’

“ You see that Mr. Cuxton’s description is identical with mine. However, for further confirmation, I wrote to Mr. Hindley, asking certain questions, to which he replied thus :

“ ‘ You are quite right. Mr. Jeffrey Blackmore had a tremulous iris in his right eye (which was practically blind), due to dislocation of the lens. The pupils were rather large ; certainly not contracted.’

“ Here, then, we have three important facts. One is that the spectacles found by us at Kennington Lane were undoubtedly Jeffrey’s ; for it is as unlikely that there exists another pair of spectacles exactly identical with those as that there exists another face exactly like Jeffrey’s face. The second fact is that the description of Jeffrey tallies completely with that of the sick man, Graves, as given by Dr. Jervis ; and the third is that when Jeffrey was seen by Mr. Hindley, there was no sign of his being addicted to the taking of morphine. The first and second facts, you will agree, constitute complete identification.”

“ Yes,” said Marchmont ; “ I think we must admit the identification as being quite conclusive, though the evidence is of a kind that is more striking to the medical than to the legal mind.”

“ You will not have that complaint to make against the next item of evidence,” said Thorndyke. “ It is after the lawyer’s own heart, as you shall

hear. A few days ago I wrote to Mr. Stephen asking him if he possessed a recent photograph of his uncle Jeffrey. He had one, and he sent it to me by return. This portrait I showed to Dr. Jervis and asked him if he had ever seen the person it represented. After examining it attentively, without any hint whatever from me, he identified it as the portrait of the sick man, Graves."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Marchmont. "This is most important. Are you prepared to swear to the identity, Dr. Jervis?"

"I have not the slightest doubt," I replied, "that the portrait is that of Mr. Graves."

"Excellent!" said Marchmont, rubbing his hands gleefully; "this will be much more convincing to a jury. Pray go on, Dr. Thorndyke."

"That," said Thorndyke, "completes the first part of my investigation. We had now reached a definite, demonstrable fact; and that fact, as you see, disposed at once of the main question—the genuineness of the will. For if the man at Kennington Lane was Jeffrey Blackmore, then the man at New Inn was not. But it was the latter who had signed the will. Therefore the will was not signed by Jeffrey Blackmore; that is to say, it was a forgery. The case was complete for the purposes of the civil proceedings; the rest of my investigations had reference to the criminal prosecution that was inevitable. Shall I proceed, or is your interest confined to the will?"

"Hang the will!" exclaimed Stephen. "I want to hear how you propose to lay hands on the villain

who murdered poor old uncle Jeffrey—for I suppose he did murder him? ”

“ I think there is no doubt of it,” replied Thorn-
dyke.

“ Then,” said Marchmont, “ we will hear the rest of the argument, if you please.”

“ Very well,” said Thorndyke. “ As the evidence stands, we have proved that Jeffrey Blackmore was a prisoner in the house in Kennington Lane and that some one was personating him at New Inn. That some one, we have seen, was, in all probability, John Blackmore. We now have to consider the man Weiss. Who was he? and can we connect him in any way with New Inn? ”

“ We may note in passing that Weiss and the coachman were apparently one and the same person. They were never seen together. When Weiss was present, the coachman was not available even for so urgent a service as the obtaining of an antidote to the poison. Weiss always appeared some time after Jervis’s arrival and disappeared some time before his departure, in each case sufficiently long to allow of a change of disguise. But we need not labour the point, as it is not of primary importance.

“ To return to Weiss. He was clearly heavily disguised, as we see by his unwillingness to show himself even by the light of a candle. But there is an item of positive evidence on this point which is important from having other bearings. It is furnished by the spectacles worn by Weiss, of which you have heard Jervis’s description. These

spectacles had very peculiar optical properties. When you looked *through* them they had the properties of plain glass; when you looked *at* them they had the appearance of lenses. But only one kind of glass possesses these properties; namely, that which, like an ordinary watch-glass, has curved, parallel surfaces. But for what purpose could a person wear 'watch-glass' spectacles? Clearly, not to assist his vision. The only alternative is disguise.

"The properties of these spectacles introduce a very curious and interesting feature into the case. To the majority of persons, the wearing of spectacles for the purpose of disguise or personation, seems a perfectly simple and easy proceeding. But, to a person of normal eyesight, it is nothing of the kind. For, if he wears spectacles suited for long sight he cannot see distinctly through them at all; while, if he wears concave, or near sight, glasses, the effort to see through them produces such strain and fatigue that his eyes become disabled altogether. On the stage the difficulty is met by using spectacles of plain window-glass; but in real life this would hardly do; the 'property' spectacles would be detected at once and give rise to suspicion.

"The personator is therefore in this dilemma: if he wears actual spectacles, he cannot see through them; if he wears sham spectacles of plain glass, his disguise will probably be detected. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that not a very satisfactory one; but Mr. Weiss seems to

have adopted it in lieu of a better. It is that of using watch-glass spectacles such as I have described.

“ Now, what do we learn from these very peculiar glasses? In the first place they confirm our opinion that Weiss was wearing a disguise. But, for use in a room so very dimly lighted, the ordinary stage spectacles would have answered quite well. The second inference is, then, that these spectacles were prepared to be worn under more trying conditions of light—out of doors, for instance. The third inference is that Weiss was a man with normal eyesight; for otherwise he could have worn real spectacles suited to the state of his vision.

“ These are inferences by the way, to which we may return. But these glasses furnish a much more important suggestion. On the floor of the bedroom at New Inn I found some fragments of glass which had been trodden on. By joining one or two of them together, we have been able to make out the general character of the object of which they formed parts. My assistant—who was formerly a watch-maker—judged that object to be the thin crystal glass of a lady’s watch, and this, I think, was Jervis’s opinion. But the small part which remains of the original edge furnishes proof in two respects that this was not a watch-glass. In the first place, on taking a careful tracing of this piece of the edge, I found that its curve was part of an ellipse; but watch-glasses, nowadays, are invariably circular. In the second place, watch-glasses are ground on the edge to a single bevel to

snap into the bezel or frame ; but the edge of this object was ground to a double bevel, like the edge of a spectacle-glass, which fits into a groove in the frame and is held by the side-bar screw. The inevitable inference was that this was a spectacle-glass. But, if so, it was part of a pair of spectacles identical in properties with those worn by Mr. Weiss.

“ The importance of this conclusion emerges when we consider the exceptional character of Mr. Weiss’s spectacles. They were not merely peculiar or remarkable ; they were probably unique. It is exceedingly likely that there is not in the entire world another similar pair of spectacles. Whence the finding of these fragments of glass in the bedroom establishes a considerable probability that Mr. Weiss was, at some time, in the chambers at New Inn.

“ And now let us gather up the threads of this part of the argument. We are inquiring into the identity of the man Weiss. Who was he ?

“ In the first place, we find him committing a secret crime from which John Blackmore alone will benefit. This suggests the *prima-facie* probability that he was John Blackmore.

“ Then we find that he was a man of normal eyesight who was wearing spectacles for the purpose of disguise. But the tenant of New Inn, whom we have seen to be, almost certainly, John Blackmore—and whom we will, for the present, assume to have been John Blackmore—was a man with normal eyesight who wore spectacles for disguise.

“ John Blackmore did not reside at New Inn, but at some place within easy reach of it. But Weiss resided at a place within easy reach of New Inn.

“ John Blackmore must have had possession and control of the person of Jeffrey. But Weiss had possession and control of the person of Jeffrey.

“ Weiss wore spectacles of a certain peculiar and probably unique character. But portions of such spectacles were found in the chambers at New Inn.

“ The overwhelming probability, therefore, is that Weiss and the tenant of New Inn were one and the same person ; and that that person was John Blackmore.”

“ That,” said Mr. Winwood, “ is a very plausible argument. But, you observe, sir, that it contains an undistributed middle term.”

Thorndyke smiled genially. I think he forgave Winwood everything for that remark.

“ You are quite right, sir,” he said. “ It does. And, for that reason, the demonstration is not absolute. But we must not forget, what logicians seem occasionally to overlook : that the ‘ undistributed middle,’ while it interferes with absolute proof, may be quite consistent with a degree of probability that approaches very near to certainty. Both the Bertillon system and the English fingerprint system involve a process of reasoning in which the middle term is undistributed. But the great probabilities are accepted in practice as equivalent to certainties.”

Mr. Winwood grunted a grudging assent, and Thorndyke resumed :

“ We have now furnished fairly conclusive evidence on three heads : we have proved that the sick man, Graves, was Jeffrey Blackmore ; that the tenant of New Inn was John Blackmore ; and that the man Weiss was also John Blackmore. We now have to prove that John and Jeffrey were together in the chambers at New Inn on the night of Jeffrey’s death.

“ We know that two persons, and two persons only, came from Kennington Lane to New Inn. But one of those persons was the tenant of New Inn—that is, John Blackmore. Who was the other? Jeffrey is known by us to have been at Kennington Lane. His body was found on the following morning in the room at New Inn. No third person is known to have come from Kennington Lane ; no third person is known to have arrived at New Inn. The inference, by exclusion, is that the second person—the woman—was Jeffrey.

“ Again ; Jeffrey had to be brought from Kennington to the inn by John. But John was personating Jeffrey and was made up to resemble him very closely. If Jeffrey were undisguised the two men would be almost exactly alike ; which would be very noticeable in any case and suspicious after the death of one of them. Therefore Jeffrey would have to be disguised in some way ; and what disguise could be simpler and more effective than the one that I suggest was used ?

“ Again ; it was unavoidable that some one—

the cabman—should know that Jeffrey was not alone when he came to the inn that night. If the fact had leaked out and it had become known that a man had accompanied him to his chambers, some suspicion might have arisen, and that suspicion would have pointed to John, who was directly interested in his brother's death. But if it had transpired that Jeffrey was accompanied by a woman, there would have been less suspicion, and that suspicion would not have pointed to John Blackmore.

“Thus all the general probabilities are in favour of the hypothesis that this woman was Jeffrey Blackmore. There is, however, an item of positive evidence that strongly supports this view. When I examined the clothing of the deceased, I found on the trousers a horizontal crease on each leg as if the trousers had been turned up half-way to the knees. This appearance is quite understandable if we suppose that the trousers were worn under a skirt and were turned up so that they should not be accidentally seen. Otherwise it is quite incomprehensible.”

“Is it not rather strange,” said Marchmont, “that Jeffrey should have allowed himself to be dressed up in this remarkable manner?”

“I think not,” replied Thorndyke. “There is no reason to suppose that he knew how he was dressed. You have heard Jervis's description of his condition; that of a mere automaton. You know that without his spectacles he was practically blind, and that he could not have worn them since

we found them at the house in Kennington Lane. Probably his head was wrapped up in the veil, and the skirt and mantle put on afterwards; but, in any case, his condition rendered him practically devoid of will power. That is all the evidence I have to prove that the unknown woman was Jeffrey. It is not conclusive but it is convincing enough for our purpose, seeing that the case against John Blackmore does not depend upon it."

"Your case against him is on the charge of murder, I presume?" said Stephen.

"Undoubtedly. And you will notice that the statements made by the supposed Jeffrey to the porter, hinting at suicide, are now important evidence. By the light of what we know, the announcement of intended suicide becomes the announcement of intended murder. It conclusively disproves what it was intended to prove; that Jeffrey died by his own hand."

"Yes, I see that," said Stephen, and then after a pause he asked: "Did you identify Mrs. Schallibaum? You have told us nothing about her."

"I have considered her as being outside the case as far as I am concerned," replied Thorndyke. "She was an accessory; my business was with the principal. But, of course, she will be swept up in the net. The evidence that convicts John Blackmore will convict her. I have not troubled about her identity. If John Blackmore is married, she is probably his wife. Do you happen to know if he is married?"

"Yes; but Mrs. John Blackmore is not much

like Mrs. Schallibaum, excepting that she has a cast in the left eye. She is a dark woman with very heavy eyebrows."

"That is to say that she differs from Mrs. Schallibaum in those peculiarities that can be artificially changed and resembles her in the one feature that is unchangeable. Do you know if her Christian name happens to be Pauline?"

"Yes, it is. She was a Miss Pauline Hagenbeck, a member of an American theatrical company. What made you ask?"

"The name which Jervis heard poor Jeffrey struggling to pronounce seemed to me to resemble Pauline more than any other name."

"There is one little point that strikes me," said Marchmont. "Is it not rather remarkable that the porter should have noticed no difference between the body of Jeffrey and the living man whom he knew by sight, and who must, after all, have been distinctly different in appearance?"

"I am glad you raised that question," Thorndyke replied, "for that very difficulty presented itself to me at the beginning of the case. But on thinking it over, I decided that it was an imaginary difficulty, assuming, as we do, that there was a good deal of resemblance between the two men. Put yourself in the porter's place and follow his mental processes. He is informed that a dead man is lying on the bed in Mr. Blackmore's rooms. Naturally, he assumes that the dead man is Mr. Blackmore—who, by the way, had hinted at suicide only the night before. With this idea he enters the

chambers and sees a man a good deal like Mr. Blackmore and wearing Mr. Blackmore's clothes, lying on Mr. Blackmore's bed. The idea that the body could be that of some other person has never entered his mind. If he notes any difference of appearance he will put that down to the effects of death ; for every one knows that a man dead looks somewhat different from the same man alive. I take it as evidence of great acuteness on the part of John Blackmore that he should have calculated so cleverly, not only the mental process of the porter, but the erroneous reasoning which every one would base on the porter's conclusions. For, since the body was actually Jeffrey's, and was identified by the porter as that of his tenant, it has been assumed by every one that no question was possible as to the identity of Jeffrey Blackmore and the tenant of New Inn."

There was a brief silence, and then Marchmont asked :

" May we take it that we have now heard all the evidence ? "

" Yes," replied Thorndyke. " That is my case."

" Have you given information to the police ? "

Stephen asked eagerly.

" Yes. As soon as I had obtained the statement of the cabman, Ridley, and felt that I had enough evidence to secure a conviction, I called at Scotland Yard and had an interview with the Assistant Commissioner. The case is in the hands of Superintendent Miller of the Criminal Investigation Department, a most acute and energetic officer. I have

been expecting to hear that the warrant has been executed, for Mr. Miller is usually very punctilious in keeping me informed of the progress of the cases to which I introduce him. We shall hear to-morrow, no doubt."

"And, for the present," said Marchmont, "the case seems to have passed out of our hands."

"I shall enter a caveat, all the same," said Mr. Winwood.

"That doesn't seem very necessary," Marchmont objected. "The evidence that we have heard is amply sufficient to ensure a conviction and there will be plenty more when the police go into the case. And a conviction on the charges of forgery and murder would, of course, invalidate the second will."

"I shall enter a caveat, all the same," repeated Mr. Winwood.

As the two partners showed a disposition to become heated over this question, Thorndyke suggested that they might discuss it at leisure by the light of subsequent events. Acting on this hint—for it was now close upon midnight—our visitors prepared to depart; and were, in fact, just making their way towards the door when the bell rang. Thorndyke flung open the door, and, as he recognized his visitor, greeted him with evident satisfaction.

"Ha! Mr. Miller; we were just speaking of you. These gentlemen are Mr. Stephen Blackmore and his solicitors, Mr. Marchmont and Mr. Winwood. You know Dr. Jervis, I think."

The officer bowed to our friends and remarked: "I am just in time, it seems. A few minutes more and I should have missed these gentlemen. I don't know what you'll think of my news."

"You haven't let that villain escape, I hope," Stephen exclaimed.

"Well," said the Superintendent, "he is out of my hands and yours too; and so is the woman. Perhaps I had better tell you what has happened."

"If you would be so kind," said Thorndyke, motioning the officer to a chair.

The superintendent seated himself with the manner of a man who has had a long and strenuous day, and forthwith began his story.

"As soon as we had your information, we procured a warrant for the arrest of both parties, and then I went straight to their flat with Inspector Badger and a sergeant. There we learned from the attendant that they were away from home and were not expected back until to-day about noon. We kept a watch on the premises, and this morning, about the time appointed, a man and a woman, answering to the description, arrived at the flat. We followed them in and saw them enter the lift, and we were going to get into the lift too, when the man pulled the rope, and away they went. There was nothing for us to do but run up the stairs, which we did as fast as we could race; but they got to their landing first, and we were only just in time to see them nip in and shut the door. However, it seemed that we had them safe enough, for there was no dropping out of the windows at

that height ; so we sent the sergeant to get a locksmith to pick the lock or force the door, while we kept on ringing the bell.

“ About three minutes after the sergeant left, I happened to look out of the landing window and saw a hansom pull up opposite the flats. I put my head out of the window, and, hang me if I didn't see our two friends getting into the cab. It seems that there was a small lift inside the flat communicating with the kitchen, and they had slipped down it one at a time.

“ Well, of course, we raced down the stairs like acrobats, but by the time we got to the bottom the cab was off with a fine start. We ran out into Victoria Street, and there we could see it half-way down the street and going like a chariot race. We managed to pick up another hansom and told the cabby to keep the other one in sight, and away we went like the very deuce ; along Victoria Street and Broad Sanctuary, across Parliament Square, over Westminster Bridge and along York Road ; we kept the other beggar in sight, but we couldn't gain an inch on him. Then we turned into Waterloo Station, and, as we were driving up the slope we met another hansom coming down ; and when the cabby kissed his hand and smiled at us, we guessed that he was the sportsman we had been following.

“ But there was no time to ask questions. It is an awkward station with a lot of different exits, and it looked a good deal as if our quarry had got away. However, I took a chance. I remembered that

the Southampton express was due to start about this time, and I took a short cut across the lines and made for the platform that it starts from. Just as Badger and I got to the end, about thirty yards from the rear of the train, we saw a man and a woman running in front of us. Then the guard blew his whistle and the train began to move. The man and the woman managed to scramble into one of the rear compartments and Badger and I raced up the platform like mad. A porter tried to head us off, but Badger capsized him and we both sprinted harder than ever, and just hopped on the foot-board of the guard's van as the train began to get up speed. The guard couldn't risk putting us off, so he had to let us into his van, which suited us exactly, as we could watch the train on both sides from the look-out. And we did watch, I can tell you; for our friend in front had seen us. His head was out of the window as we climbed on to the foot-board.

“ However, nothing happened until we stopped at Southampton West. There, I need not say, we lost no time in hopping out, for we naturally expected our friends to make a rush for the exit. But they didn't. Badger watched the platform, and I kept a look-out to see that they didn't slip away across the line from the off-side. But still there was no sign of them. Then I walked up the train to the compartment which I had seen them enter. And there they were, apparently fast asleep in the corner by the off-side window, the man leaning back with his mouth open and the woman resting against him with her head on his shoulder.

She gave me quite a turn when I went in to look at them, for she had her eyes half-closed and seemed to be looking round at me with a most horrible expression ; but I found afterwards that the peculiar appearance of looking round was due to the cast in her eye."

" They were dead, I suppose ? " said Thorndyke.

" Yes, sir. Stone dead ; and I found these on the floor of the carriage."

He held up two tiny yellow glass tubes, each labelled " Hypodermic tabloids. Aconitine Nitrate gr. $\frac{1}{640}$."

" Ha ! " exclaimed Thorndyke, " this fellow was well up in alkaloidal poisons, it seems ; and they appear to have gone about prepared for emergencies. These tubes each contained twenty tabloids, a thirty-second of a grain altogether, so we may assume that about twelve times the medicinal dose was swallowed. Death must have occurred in a few minutes, and a merciful death too."

" A more merciful death than they deserved," exclaimed Stephen, " when one thinks of the misery and suffering that they inflicted on poor old uncle Jeffrey. I would sooner have had them hanged."

" It's better as it is, sir," said Miller. " There is no need, now, to raise any questions in detail at the inquest. The publicity of a trial for murder would have been very unpleasant for you. I wish Dr. Jervis had given the tip to me instead of to that confounded, over-cautious—but there, I mustn't run down my brother officers : and it's easy to be wise after the event."

“ Good night, gentlemen. I suppose this accident disposes of your business as far as the will is concerned ? ”

“ I suppose it does,” agreed Mr. Winwood. “ But I shall enter a caveat, all the same.”

THE END

