

from the station and dived down the first by-street. I zig-zagged through quiet lanes and courts to the farther side of the town—dropping the cloak-room ticket into a convent letter-box on my way—and, having bought a cloth cap and deposited the straw hat (which was marked inside “I. Cohen”) in a deep doorway in an unfrequented by-street, I began to consider the outfit necessary for my proposed raid on Simon Glynn’s vault. A crow-bar, a pick and a shovel were what was really needed; but this equipment would be just a trifle conspicuous. Besides, I really did not contemplate operations on that scale. If there was actual digging to be done, I should have to compound with Burbler and share the proceeds. The outfit that I eventually purchased at the tool shop consisted of a large case-opener—practically a small crow-bar—a half-dozen window-wedges (to prevent the stone from dropping back when I had prised it up), one or two candles, and a botanist’s trowel; a feeble set of appliances,

but sufficient if it was only a question of lifting a covering-stone and exploring a vault.

“The shades of night were falling fast” when I approached the village of Bouldersby by a solitary footpath. I had not hurried; for time was no object. And I was not hurrying now. On the contrary, I found my footsteps lagging more and more as the distance lessened and the old church loomed up more distinctly in the gathering gloom. It was not mere caution that made me linger, though I went mighty warily and kept a bright look-out. The fact is, that as I drew nearer to the church, I began to develop a most uncommon distaste for the job. It is all very well to sneer at vulgar superstition, but there is something very revolting in the idea of breaking into the resting-place of the dead in the mere, sordid search for money. Moreover, it was only now that I began fully to realise the extreme vagueness of my quest. Supposing I got the vault open? What then?

The treasure could not be exposed to view, or the people who buried Simon, himself, would have seen it. And if it was hidden in the vault, what clue had I to the hiding-place ?

It was quite dark when, in a chastened, and even depressed, frame of mind, I sneaked in through the lychgate and crept stealthily across the churchyard. Through the open and lighted windows of the adjoining rectory there stole out into the summer night sounds of revelry and mirth, including a mid-Victorian solo by a brassy-voiced gentleman who (according to his own statement) bore the unusual name of "Champagne Charley." The light and life, the laughter and the gay, if unmelodious song, seemed by contrast to accentuate the sordid gruesomeness of my ghoulish quest. Tremulously and guiltily I sought the little doorway and groped my way down the mossy steps, not daring to strike a light for fear of being seen from the rectory windows.

The crypt was as dark as a vault. I had to back down the last few steps on all fours, and, when I reached the bottom, I felt my way along the wall to the farthest corner. And here I thought it safe to strike a match and light one of my candles.

But I was loath to begin. I unpacked my parcel of tools and laid them on the stone floor, speculating once more on what I should do when I got down into the vault. Then I examined the joints of the stone that I was to raise and was almost disappointed to find them amply wide enough to admit the chisel-edge of the case-opener. At last, violently screwing up my courage to the sticking-point, I seized the case-opener and one or two wedges and prepared to make the first, repulsive effort. And at that moment my ear caught distinctly a sound of movement from somewhere above with an audible metallic clink.

Instantly, I blew out my candle, and, standing stock-still, listened. The sounds

were repeated—nearer, this time : and then I heard a fumbling footstep on the stone stairs and again the clink of metal. I shrank back into the uttermost corner ; a useless proceeding, for there was not cover enough to conceal an earwig. The intruder reached the floor, and, having laid on it some metallic objects, struck a match, by the light of which I saw a large man with his back towards me. He was lighting a sort of Guy Fawkes lantern such as carters use, and, when he had got the wick alight, he turned towards me, staring into the lantern as he regulated the flame, so that the light shone full on his face. Need I say that the face was that of Sergeant Burbler ?

Having adjusted the wick, the detective threw the light of the lantern round the crypt and, naturally, its rays fell upon me ; whereupon the sergeant opened his eyes and mouth unnecessarily widely and let fall one or two unconsidered remarks which I need not report *verbatim*.

“ I thought you were at Tunbridge Wells, Mr. Cobb ! ” he concluded.

“ I thought you were at Chatham ! ” I retorted.

“ Well, I came back unexpectedly ” said he.

“ So did I, ” was my rejoinder.

An embarrassing silence followed during which we eyed one another with hostile stares. Finally the sergeant’s face relaxed into a sour grin.

“ Well, here we are, ” said he, stating an incontestible truth. “ It’s no good gaping at one another like a couple of fools. I suppose it will have to be a partnership job. That suit you ? ”

“ Perfectly, ” I replied. “ We go halves, of course ? ”

“ That’s it. And, look here, Mr. Cobb : we keep our mouths shut about this little affair. This is a matter of treasure-trove, and I suppose you know how the law stands, being, I understand, a sort of half-baked lawyer. ”

“Nothing of the kind, sir!” I exclaimed indignantly. “I am an articled clerk and I shall be a fully qualified solicitor in a few months. And I may tell you that this is not a case of treasure-trove. We are acting on the express instructions of the deceased. I regard that inscription on the mirror as having a testamentary character. The treasure is definitely stated to be a personal bequest to the finder.”

“I doubt if a court of law would take that view,” said Burbler. “Anyhow, it will be safer for us to keep our own counsel. Morally speaking, the stuff is ours, and that is all that matters.”

This being an eminently reasonable view to take of the case, I agreed to inviolable secrecy as to the treasure, and the sergeant then began his preparations. His outfit was a much more business-like one than mine, for it included a small spade and a very large and massive folding jemmy. The latter, when the joints were screwed together, was about

three feet long and was a decidedly hefty tool for use either as a crow or a pick; and when the sergeant had "jumped" its beak into the joint between the stones, one or two vigorous heaves at the knobbed handle fairly lifted the inscribed slab out of its bed.

"Now, Mr. Cobb," exclaimed Burbler, "just stick that bar of yours into the opening while I get a fresh purchase."

I thrust in the case-opener, and the sergeant took a fresh purchase with his jemmy. Another strong heave, and the stone came up a couple of inches. I seized its edge and held it until the sergeant, dropping the jemmy, came to my assistance. Then with a united effort we hoisted the stone right up and turned it back, disclosing a square, black hole and the top of a flight of brick steps.

It was an uninviting-looking entrance and we both gazed at it in silence and without any enthusiastic tendency to struggle for precedence.

“Well,” the sergeant remarked, at length, “it’s a small hole, Mr. Cobb; we can’t both go down at once.”

I admitted that we could not, and suggested the propriety of lowering the lantern to make sure that the air was not too foul.

“Yes, that’s true,” said Burbler, “but I haven’t got any string. Just hold the lantern down at arm’s length and see how it burns.”

I lay down on the pavement and let the lantern down as far as I could reach. It burned quite well but failed to make the interior of the vault clearly visible; in fact, I could see nothing at all save an enormous cluster of horrible-looking fungi which occupied the lower steps and generated in me an urgent desire to see Burbler go down first.

I lifted up the lantern, and the sergeant and I gazed at one another irresolutely. And then the deathly silence of the crypt was

suddenly shattered by a brassy voice which shouted :

“ Body-snatchers, by Jingo ! ”

The sergeant and I leaped to our feet, and Burbler nearly fell down the hole. The light of the lantern revealed two men, one of whom—a fiddle-faced, red-jowled old sinner who looked like a retired military officer—was in evening dress, while the other was obviously a clergyman. The new-comers stared at us and we stared at them ; and a very embarrassing situation it was for the sergeant and me.

“ Taken red-handed, by Jove ! ” said the violin-faced warrior. “ Caught on the bally hop ! What ! ”

As this remark, though vulgarly expressed, stated an undeniable truth, no comment seemed to be called for. Moreover, neither the sergeant nor I was at the moment bursting with conversational matter. So we continued to gape at the intruders like a couple of fools.

Then the parson spoke.

“Would you kindly explain,” said he, “what is the meaning of these very strange proceedings?”

I left the explanation to Burbler as the more expert and accomplished liar. But he was not so ready as I should have expected. He gibbered confusedly for a few seconds and then replied with a most unconvincing stammer:

“We are—er—engaged in—er—er—archæological research.”

The parson smiled faintly and the warrior, glaring ferociously at Burbler, growled:

“Archæological bunkum!” and then fixed an inquisitive eye on the sergeant’s jemmy.

“If you wish to know what is under this crypt,” said the parson, “I can save you the trouble of further excavation, for I was not only present but I personally supervised the reconstruction of the Glynn vault some twenty years ago.”

“ Indeed ! ” gasped Burbler.

“ Yes. There seems to have been some silly tradition of a buried treasure in the vault, and as a result we suffered a good deal of inconvenience. There was a tendency on the part of unauthorised persons to injure the iron gate and—and, in short, to engage in archæological research.”

Here the fiddle-faced ass flung up his fat head and roared :

“ Ha ! ha ! Archæological, by gum ! Dam good that ! Excuse me, Padre.”

“ So,” pursued the parson, “ I thought it desirable to set the matter at rest by a thorough examination of the vault. Needless to say, nothing was discovered beyond the bones of the deceased and the decayed remnants of two oaken coffins. I had the entire floor of the crypt dug up and the foundations examined, and then the vault was rebuilt, the remains re-coffined, and the pavement of the crypt relaid as you see it now. Is

there anything else that you would like to know ? ”

“ No, thank you,” replied Burbler. “ That settles our hash—I mean to say, that is all the information that we require.”

“ Then, in that case, perhaps you would like me to show you the most convenient way out of the precincts ? ”

“ Thank you, it’s very good of you, sir,” said Burbler : and the parson rejoined : “ Not at all.”

We picked up our ridiculous tools—excepting the jemmy, which the warrior pounced on and examined attentively before handing it to the sergeant—and took our way sadly up the steps and along the churchyard path. At the lychgate the parson wished us a courteous “ Good-evening,” and his companion leaned over the gate and bellowed after us :

“ You’ve had a devilish easy let-off, you two rascals. Suppose you know it’s a misdemeanour to be found at night with house-

breaking tools? What? Oh, I know a jemmy when I see one, don't you make any mistake!"

"I expect you do," snapped Burbler. "Done a bit in that line yourself, eh?" and he turned away, leaving the fiddle-faced warrior gasping.

The sergeant and I trudged dejectedly along the high road, and for a while neither of us spoke. At length I ventured to remark:

"Well, sergeant, Simon Glynn has been one too many for us this time."

But Burbler's heart was too full for conversation. He only replied with a morose growl:

"Damn Simon Glynn."

A MERMAID AND A RED HERRING

THERE is a world of difference as to the resulting knowledge between a cursory observation that notes only generalities and an attentive examination that considers particular details. I realised this with great force when, having strolled out from my lodgings at the Royal George inn to smoke my morning pipe on the little green, I turned to look up at the picturesque house. Between the middle windows, close under the eaves, was a small square of stone in which were cut three initial letters and a date. I had noticed it when I first came to the inn and I had frequently glanced at it since ; but if I had been asked to describe the inscription I could have told no more than that it consisted of three initial letters sur-

rounding a heart with the date 1636 underneath. What the letters were I certainly could not have told, though I should have remembered the date.

The explanation of this is perfectly simple. A group of figures forming a date conveys a definite meaning, whereas the initial letters of an unknown person's name have none; and meaningless things neither stimulate the attention nor impress the memory.

Yet I had often looked, and not without interest, at the little tablet. For these simple memorials illustrate a very pretty old-world custom. The initials—usually set in a triangle about a heart or flower or star—are those of a man and wife and the date below is that on which the house was finished and the young couple entered into possession to begin their married life. The upper letter is the initial of the joint surname and the lower ones represent the Christian names of the husband and wife respectively.

This morning I was in a reflective vein and

somewhat at a loose end. Only the previous day I had made that abortive search in the vault. The treasure, deliberately hidden by old Simon over two centuries ago, was still undiscovered. I had been hot on the scent; and though that scent had proved a false one, the search had warmed my blood with the treasure-hunting fever.

I looked up at the tablet and somewhat absently read the brief inscription. The upper letter was G; the lower two S and M. And then I started, suddenly wide awake. For these were the initials of Simon and Margery Glynn.

At first I thought it must be a mere coincidence. Glynn was a man of means who lived in the great house of Elham Manor. How should his name appear on this obscure wayside inn? The initials must be those of some other couple; Solomon and Miriam Gobbler, for instance. But then there was the date, 1636. I made a rapid calculation from the dates on Glynn's tomb in Bouldersby

church. He died in 1692, aged eighty-one. Then in 1636 he was twenty-five years old; a very likely age at which to marry and settle down. Margery Glynn died in 1662, aged forty-five. Then in 1636 she would be nineteen; again a very likely age. It looked uncommonly as if these initials were those of Glynn and his wife.

Suddenly I recalled a passage in Botteler's "Manor Houses of Kent," which stated that "from a reference to him (Glynn) in Pepys' Diary, it would seem that he had property in this neighbourhood, of which he was probably a native." Now it happened that, only a day or two previously, I had picked up on a book-stall in Canterbury an old copy of Pepys' Diary, which I had not looked at since. Full of my new discovery, I bustled indoors, and, running up to my room, opened the volume and eagerly ran my eye down the index, until it lighted on the name "Glynn, Simon," when, with a trembling hand, I turned up the entry.

“ 23d April (1664). Upp and to the Coffee House by the Exchange to talk with Mr. Gannett a Turkey Merchant. While we are talking comes Mr. Simon Glynn (a Goldsmith and Secretary of the Mint in Oliver’s time) a pleasant fellow but whimsicall. Much good discourse and merriment. Mr. Gannett asketh Glynn how he, being a widower without issue, shall devise his wealth; to which Glynn answers that his house and lands and a tavern that he hath he shall give to his sister’s sons, but not his money. And then he makes this observation (which methought mighty pretty) viz:—That some doe possess much money and little wit, and others much wit and little money, but whoso inherits his gatherings shall have both.”

Here was matter indeed! There could be very little doubt that the “tavern that he hath” was the very inn in which I was lodging; and that concluding observation seemed to hint that when Simon deposited his “gatherings” in a hiding-place for the benefit

of some future treasure-hunter, he intended that "wit" and not chance should be the instrument of its discovery. And no doubt he had made suitable arrangements. At any rate, upwards of two centuries had passed, and, though, according to all accounts, there had been no lack of treasure-seekers, Simon Glynn's hoard still waited for the adventurer with wit enough to locate it.

Was it possible that I was to be that fortunate adventurer? Elham Manor-house had been ransacked again and again, its garden excavated and its very panelling torn down; the vault under the church had been opened and dug out to the foundations. But no one, so far as I knew, had ever searched the tavern; indeed, its connection with Glynn would appear to have been forgotten. Which might easily have happened, seeing that the existence of hidden treasure did not become known until nearly half a century after Simon's death.

Since the finding of the mirror every likely place seemed to have been searched. The

Manor House had been searched ; the vault under the monument had been explored. But no treasure had come to light. The treasure-seekers had apparently struck the wrong place each time.

Could it be that Glynn had after all secreted his savings somewhere in the inn ? It was intrinsically probable enough. The small house in which he had made his start in life and to which he had brought home his young wife, must have had happier memories for him than the stately Manor House in which he had lived a solitary widower. It was highly probable that he would choose that place in which to hide his curious legacy ; but—there was not the slightest evidence that he had. No vestige of any harp or cross or anchors three had I seen since I had lodged at the inn.

But wait ! There was one thing that I had seen and had meant to investigate. On the main gable of the house—which, oddly enough, looked on the garden and the river—was some

kind of tablet or ornamental panel of carved brick. Only a corner of the moulding that framed it was visible, the whole of the remainder being hidden by a too-luxuriant creeper; but the size of the frame showed that it was a work of more pretensions than the little tablet on the front of the house.

I walked through into the garden, and, backing away from the house until I was stopped by the great mulberry tree that dominated the lawn, looked up at the gable. The corner of a well-carved frame poked out from under the creeper; and, even as I looked, a breath of wind lifted the foliage and showed me the date 1640. That settled it. The panel was put up in Glynn's time. The frame almost certainly enclosed some kind of sculpture. Perhaps a harp and a cross—but I would soon see. For my bedroom window was just underneath it and the principal branch of the offending creeper was within easy reach.

Full of my investigation and oblivious of

the remoter consequences of what I was about to do, I ran up to my bedroom and thrust my head out of the window. The panel was but a few feet above, embedded in the mass of creeper that covered the gable. I grasped the large branch that strayed past the jamb of the window and gave it a gentle pull. The plant was a species of Virginian creeper ; the kind which attaches itself to the wall without artificial support, though not with the security of the less handsome *Ampelopsis* ; and, as I pulled, I could feel some of the little tendrils break away. I gave one or two more jerks—quite gentle ones lest I should damage the possibly fragile ornament of the panel. At each jerk I felt more of the tendrils break and then suddenly the whole branch separated from the wall and came tumbling down so that I had to cut it through with my knife and let it drop to the ground.

Once more I thrust out my head and looked up ; but crane out as I might, I could see no more than the bottom edge of the frame,

though the gable was now clear of the creeper. But if I could not see the panel, there was somebody else who could. I observed him just as I was withdrawing my head, and in a moment realised what an idiot I had been. The man was standing under a clump of willows on the opposite side of the river and was in such deep shadow that I could not see what he was like, though it was clear enough that he was looking up at the gable and mightily interested in my proceedings. But though I could not recognise him, an uneasy suspicion as to his identity flitted through my mind ; a suspicion that this untimely observer was none other than Detective-Sergeant Burbler.

If this should really turn out to be the case, then I had brought my pigs to a pretty fine market ! For the worthy detective, who had come down to this neighbourhood on official business, was admittedly staying here for his own purposes. He was " taking a few weeks' leave to enjoy the quiet and the beautiful

scenery.” That was how he put it. The actual fact was that he had caught the scent of Simon Glynn’s treasure and was hanging about in the hope of picking up some further clues. And, as he believed me to be in possession of some private information respecting the hiding-place of that treasure, he had made it his special business to shadow me ever since I had begun my researches. He hadn’t got much by his shadowing up to the present, for the simple reason that there had been nothing to get. I knew no more than he. But now, by uncovering that panel for all the world to see, I had, perhaps put him in possession of a valuable clue.

I raced down the stairs, all agog to see what that panel really was. Hurrying out into the garden, I backed away under the great mulberry tree and looked up. And as my eye lighted on the carved brick sculpture enclosed within the frame, a wave of mingled exultation and alarm swept over me; exultation because here was a first-class clue;

alarm lest my inveterate rival should have seen it too. For the panel exhibited in bold relief the figure of an unmistakable mermaid.

It was clearly not the work of an ordinary village mason. The ornament of the frame was but a plain and simple lattice pattern, but the figure was quite competently done; entirely unlike the crude and childish figure-work of the rustic sculptor. Indeed, the whole panel, in both design and finish, was singularly out of character with the homely building—little more than a cottage—on which it was placed; and this suggested that by the year 1640 Glynn had already begun to be a prosperous man. Probably he worked here at his trade, while his wife managed the inn, and found in the city hard by plenty of customers for his work.

But the immediate question was as to the meaning of this sculptured figure. I repeated the doggerel lines:

“Ankores three atte the foot of a tree and
a maid from the sea on high.”

And it was instantly borne in on me that I was standing at the foot of a tree to look up at the sea-maid ; and that, as there was no other tree near, this was the only one that could possibly be referred to. I turned to look at the mulberry tree. Obviously, it was of great age. It might well have been—and probably was—planted by Glynn himself. And if it was ; if Glynn had planted it soon after he came to the house in 1636, then, at the time when the treasure was buried—which was, apparently, about 1684—it would be nearly fifty years old and quite a large and well-grown tree. The reasonable inference was that this was the tree referred to in the doggerel and that Simon Glynn's hoard was buried at its foot.

Of course there were objections to this conclusion. There was no sign of any harp or cross and the “ankores three” were nowhere to be seen. But the harp and cross might easily have been removed by Vandalic “restorers” if they were originally carved on,

or affixed to, the house ; and as to the anchors, they were probably incised on the bark of the tree itself, and if so, would naturally have disappeared after all these years. Simon Glynn could never have reckoned that two hundred and thirty years would elapse before a really intelligent man should appear to claim his legacy. It was unsatisfactory, I could not but admit, that those confirmatory signs were absent ; but still, there was the tree, and there was the "maid from the sea on high," and that seemed good enough to justify a careful exploration.

Already a delighted imagination was filling in the outline of the picture. I saw the hole at the foot of the mulberry tree and heard the thud as my pick or spade impinged on the iron-bound chest : and I was beginning to speculate on the nature of the precious contents, when, suddenly, the recollection of Burbler came like the shadow of the Upas Tree, to blot out the sunlight of my dreams. Had he seen me uncover the panel ? or was

that figure under the willows merely a chance rustic, curious but innocuous ?

I ran down to the landing-stage and, getting into the boat that belonged to the inn, pulled up-stream. But there was no one under the willows now. I landed and searched the neighbourhood of the tow-path, but not a soul was to be seen. Rustic loiterer or watchful detective, that unwelcome observer had vanished and left no trace.

With mixed feelings, in which pleasurable excitement predominated, I pulled back to the inn and landed. The suspicion that Burbler had seen the tell-tale figure of the mermaid could not influence my course of action except to hasten it. At the foot of the mulberry tree lay Simon Glynn's "gatherings." Of that I had very little doubt. The course was to dig them up ; and, under the circumstances, the sooner the better. I had the great advantage over Burbler that I was a resident of the inn. When the premises were shut up for the night I should have the

place practically to myself, for old Mrs. Hodger, my landlady, was the only other person who slept in the house, and she was as deaf as a post. When once she had retired to her room in the front of the house, which she usually did about ten o'clock, I was as free as if I were quite alone.

The necessary preparations were few and simple and I had the day before me in which to make them. First I visited the cellar, in which I knew the garden tools were kept. There was a good enough assortment; two spades and three stout forks, in addition to the smaller tools. Unfortunately, however, there was no pick. But to dig a deep hole in undisturbed ground without a pick was a task that I felt to be beyond me; and accordingly I set forth, without delay, to procure the necessary implement from a tool shop in Canterbury. I kept a sharp lookout for Burbler, whose unpleasant habit of shadowing and spying on me I have mentioned, and when I emerged from the shop with the

pick, thinly disguised in brown paper, I made at once for the least frequented by-streets and left the town by a footpath across the meadows. But it was an anxious business ; for if the detective had met me with that incriminating tool under my arm, the murder would have been out with a vengeance. I should never have got a chance to use it.

But it seemed that I was in luck, for the perilous passage was accomplished without my seeing any sign of Burbler. I sneaked into the inn by the garden door and at once proceeded to deposit the pick in a corner of the cellar. So far, good. I had made my preparations unobserved. If I had the same luck with my midnight explorations, I might get the treasure safely stowed in my trunk before Burbler was ready to begin. That is, assuming that my worst suspicions of him were correct.

In this mood of self-congratulation I slowly ascended the cellar steps. But at the top I halted and my self-congratulations came to

a sudden end. In fact, I got a most severe shock.

A deaf person somewhat resembles a telephone ; which appears to be an appliance for conveying verbal information to everybody but the person addressed. There was a stranger in the bar. I knew he was a stranger because he was talking to Mrs. Hodger. The regular customers simply reached down a mug from the shelf and held it under the tap of the selected cask. But what had filled me with consternation was the sound of the voice. It was pitched in a low and confidential key, and the words were indistinguishable but I seemed to recognise it.

“ Ah,” said Mrs. Hodger, “ you’re right. This hot weather do make you thirsty. So much the better for me. He ! he ! ”

The stranger rejoined, a little louder ; and, though I could not hear what he said, I knew that he was repeating his former remark. Strangers always did.

“ Well,” said Mrs. Hodger, “ what I says is,

wooden taps is better'n lead pipes when all's said 'n done. More wholesome, like, you know."

Here the stranger, abandoning his former confidential and rather secret tone, let off a howl that must have been audible half a mile away. And that howl settled the question of the speaker's identity.

"I'm—asking—you," roared the unmistakable voice of Sergeant Burbler, "if you can—let—me—have—a BEDROOM?"

Mrs. Hodger evidently had some slight misgivings as to whether she had quite caught that last remark. But she was a woman of spirit.

"Ho," she replied, "then you'd better get a mug down and droar it yourself. Then you'll know that you've got what you want."

There was a short pause. I knew what was coming; and it came, sure enough. It always did.

"There ain't any need to write it," said

Mrs. Hodger, a little huffily. "I may be a trifle hard of hearing, but this ain't an asylum for the deaf and dumb. . . . Oh, I see. Got a sore throat and lost your voice? Dear, dear. Surprising what a lot o' people is took that way nowadays. There's my lodger, Mr. Cobb, and the Rector and—but you're asking about a bedroom. Well, you can have the little blue room if you'll take things as they come and not expect no waiting on."

Apparently the little blue room—so called from the colour of its paint—answered Burbler's requirements, for he turned up that very day about tea-time accompanied by a barrow on which was a large cabin trunk and an elongated parcel enclosed in sacking. That parcel looked as if it contained a spade and pick, but I couldn't be quite sure, as Burbler declined my offer to carry it upstairs for him.

Now here was a nice cheerful state of affairs! Of course, my proposed nocturnal exploration was impossible so long as Burbler was about. And he seemed to have come to stay. At any

rate he would probably see my visit out, for I couldn't squeeze more than a week or two of extended holiday out of my firm, indulgent as they were.

It was an intolerable situation. Burbler clung to me as if I had been a long-lost brother. He walked abroad with me, of course he took meals with me, and he would even pop into my bedroom unexpectedly when I was dressing—though I put a stopper on that by bolting the door. Even when I escaped for a few minutes' quiet, I have reason to believe that he consoled himself by visiting my room and raking over my personal effects ; an intrusion that I was powerless to prevent, for, though every door in the house seemed to be fitted with massive bolts inside and out, there was not a single workable lock.

It is true that Burbler's conduct was not without its compensations ; for if he could not afford to lose sight of me, neither could I afford to lose sight of him. And there was a further consolation. The continual watch that

he kept over my movements and especially his repeated searchings in my room showed that he still believed me to possess some clue to the whereabouts of the treasure that he did not. Still, as I have said, it was an intolerable situation and something would have to be done. There, I felt no doubt, was the treasure, lying *perdu* at the foot of the mulberry tree, and, somehow, by hook or by crook, I must manage to get it exhumed.

Necessity is the mother of invention. During those dreary walks with Burbler my brain was hard at work ; while I sat at table with him I turned over scheme after scheme ; and especially in the watches of the night, when I lay by the open window listening for the sound of a surreptitious pick from the lawn below, was my mind busy with plans for getting rid of Burbler. And at last I hit on one.

It was clear to me that the sergeant did not share my certainty as to where the treasure was hidden. Not being gifted, like me, with

a brilliant constructive imagination, he was baffled by the absence of the Harp, the Cross and the "Ankores three." Hence his continual attendance on me and his searchings of my room. He thought I knew more than he did, and he was waiting for me to give him a lead. Very well. I would give him one.

The inspiration of my plan came from a prehistoric monument that stood in a field not far from the inn; a structure of the kind known as a dolmen—a sort of rude tomb-chamber roofed in by a huge, flat "table-stone." Near to it was the hollow trunk of an ancient oak, which, with it, occupied a space that was reserved from cultivation. There is something rather stimulating to the imagination in these prehistoric remains, especially when associated with an ancient and decayed oak. Not that Burbler had much imagination; but it was as well to give him all the assistance possible.

I made a preliminary sketch-plan of the place and then, after breakfast, while Burbler

was giving his boots a brush in the scullery, I sneaked out of the house and legged it as hard as I could go. The dolmen was visible from the road across one or two open meadows, and I suspected that I shouldn't have it very long to myself. Nor had I. Within five minutes of my arrival a distant figure appeared getting over a fence and approaching; somewhat circuitously, it is true, for the adjoining meadow, through which the direct footpath led, was occupied by Farmer Babbage's short-horn bull. I affected not to see him, and proceeded slowly and with long strides to pace the distance from the dolmen to the tree, noting down the measurements and compass-bearings on a good-sized piece of paper. When the sergeant climbed over the last fence I looked at him with a startled expression, hurriedly pocketed the paper and walked forward to meet him.

“Rum-looking concern, that,” he remarked, nodding at the dolmen and casting a suspicious glance round the field.

“Yes. Nothing to see, though,” I replied indifferently, making as if to return to the road.

“May as well have a look at it,” said Burler; and he approached the venerable structure, and, having stared at it blankly for a while, remarked that it “looked as if it had been there some time.”

“Getting on for three thousand years,” said I.

“You don’t say so!” he exclaimed. “Three thousand years! Gad! A repairing lease was worth something in those days.”

He continued to cast puzzled glances at the dolmen and the old tree-trunk, but failing to make anything of either of them, allowed himself ultimately to be led away.

On the following morning, having bolted my door, I prepared the final document, which consisted of a rough plan of the field, showing the dolmen and the tree and a number of dotted lines connecting them. At the bottom of the paper I wrote the following explanatory references :

“From dolmen to harp stone, 20 yards English cloth measure, due north.

From harp to first anchor 15 due west.

From first anchor to second anchor 5 due north.

. . second anchor to third anchor $7\frac{1}{2}$ due east.

. . third anchor to cross $7\frac{1}{2}$ due south.

Three and a half feet below the surface.”

It is needless to say that this was all nonsense. But it had a fine, piratical, treasure-seeking appearance. I folded it neatly and laid it on a shelf in my cupboard with a couple of half-crowns on it ; and having measured with my pocket dividers the exact distances from the half-crowns to the edges of the paper, I made a note of them and then went down to breakfast. Burbler had not yet left his room ; but he appeared some ten minutes later with the most ludicrous expression of bewilderment that I have ever seen. I could have laughed in his face.

In the middle of breakfast I suddenly left

the table and rushed upstairs as if I had forgotten something. Bolting my door, I carefully tested the position of the half-crowns on the sheet of paper ; and when I found that it had changed by a full sixteenth of an inch, I knew that Burbler had gorged the bait, for Mrs. Hodger had not left the kitchen. I accordingly pocketed the document and descended to finish my breakfast with renewed appetite. All the preliminaries were now arranged. I could reckon on getting rid of Burbler for an hour or so at least, and perhaps in the interval I might manage to lift or at any rate locate the treasure.

That very night I proceeded to carry my plan into execution. Soon after half-past ten, the house being then all quiet, I stole silently (but not *too* silently, you understand) out of my room and descended to the cellar to provide myself with the needful appliances. A bundle of half-inch iron rods, each about four feet long and pointed at one end, stood in a corner ; the remains, I suppose, of some

kind of iron fence. One of these I selected as a sounding-rod, and having annexed a good-sized hammer, a spade and a half-dozen clothes-pegs, I crept up from the cellar and listened for a few moments. The house was very silent, but once I thought I could distinguish faint sounds of stealthy movement above; on which I unbolted the front door and went out, shutting it behind me.

It was an ideal night for the purpose. The nearly full moon was covered by a thin veil of cloud, so that there was plenty of diffused light, and yet one was not too conspicuous; though, for that matter, there was not a soul about. The road was as deserted as the fields, and I arrived at the dolmen—by a slight detour, to avoid the neighbourhood of Farmer Babbage's bull—and without having seen a living creature.

Resting the spade against the dolmen, and taking a look through a large opening into the dark interior, I reflected awhile, studying my sketch-plan and a pocket compass by the

feeble light. There was no hurry. If Burbler was on my track, I must give him time to reach the spot. And yet I must not seem to dawdle if he had already arrived. I kept an eye on a clump of elders that would cover his approach, hoping to make out some signs of his presence ; but the clouds now grew more dense and the light faded until the elders were no more than a vague dark mass. There was nothing for it but to begin and assume that Burbler was there.

I paced out the first line with long strides (and an eye on the elders) and at the end of it hammered one of the clothes-pegs into the ground. From this point I slowly paced to the " first anchor " and hammered in another peg ; and so on until I had made the whole round and arrived at the spot marked on my sketch with the cross. And still there was no sign of Burbler.

A sudden, horrible suspicion entered my mind that I was going through all this tomfoolery without any audience at all. That

was a frightful thought. But worse than that was the suspicion that now seized me and chilled my very blood, that Burbler might have taken advantage of my absence, and, even at this moment, while I was playing this fool's pantomime in an empty field, might be digging at the foot of the mulberry tree!

I broke out into a cold sweat. It was an awful dilemma. I couldn't stop my foolery for fear he might be watching after all; and yet I was in a fever to get back to the inn and see that nothing terrible was happening.

I had stuck the sounding-rod in the ground and had the hammer poised for the first blow when a voice—a distinctly agricultural voice—broke the stillness of the night.

“Now then, you, what are you doing here at this time o' night?”

Naturally I thought that the unseen speaker was addressing me. But he wasn't. For a familiar voice answered sheepishly:

“Nothing in particular. Just having a walk round.”

“ Oh. Then you just take a walk out ; out of my meadows. And you there ! What are you up to ? ”

This question, bellowed in stentorian tones, was obviously addressed to me. It being impossible to ignore it, I walked towards the elders, whence the voice appeared to proceed, mumbling ambiguous explanations. By the fence under the trees I found Burbler and a stout, elderly man ; presumably Farmer Babbage.

“ Now then,” said the latter, “ you just come over the fence and I’ll show you the way off my land. This here is the path.”

“ But,” I protested “ there is a bull in that meadow.”

“ Oh, he won’t hurt you,” said Babbage. “ He’s as quiet as a lamb, he is.”

“ Excuse me,” said Burbler, “ but I think I’d rather go some other way.”

“ You’ll go along the footpath,” the farmer began doggedly ; but at this moment a roar like the blast of a colossal motor-horn rent

the silence, and a huge black shape emerged from the darkness of the meadow.

“He won’t hurt you,” repeated the farmer, getting over the fence with uncommon agility nevertheless. “He’s as quiet as a——”

Now a bull is the most thick-headed of animals, literally and metaphorically. This particular Behemoth had apparently selected Burbler as the object of assault, and he came on like—well, like a motor omnibus. I can’t think of any more terrifying simile. But, of course, when he arrived Burbler wasn’t there. But he didn’t care for that. He proceeded to hurl a ton or so of beef and bones at the place where Burbler had been ; and the consequence was that he hit the fence—a miserable row of rickety hurdles. And then the fence wasn’t there.

What immediately followed I can’t say, not being provided like the spider with eyes in my back. I only know that Farmer Babbage continued to asseverate “He won’t hurt you,” as distinctly as could be expected of a stout,

elderly man who is crossing a field at about sixteen miles an hour. When I next looked back, from the shelter of another fence, Burbler appeared to be performing a kind of Druidical dance round the oak-tree with the bull as an active and sympathetic acolyte.

Presently, taking advantage of a momentary lapse of attention on the part of the bull, the sergeant bolted across to the dolmen and shot in through the opening like a harlequin; and the last thing that I saw as I turned away was the bull with his nose thrust in through the opening of the dolmen uttering sonorous greetings to the sojourner within.

I made my way back to the inn with as little delay as possible. For the present Burbler was safe—safe, I mean, from my point of view. And when the bull released him he would probably lurk in the neighbourhood to see what I had been doing and to watch for my return. Still there was no time to be lost. I must find the treasure quickly or put off the search to another time.

I was still carrying the sounding-rod and hammer, and that fact suggested to me the desirability of probing the ground under the mulberry tree before beginning to dig; for if Glynn's hoard lay deep down, out of reach of the four-foot rod, the amount of digging required would be greater than circumstances rendered possible on this occasion. Accordingly, having let myself in and bolted the door, I went straight through to the garden, and, taking my stand under the mulberry tree, looked up at the house. It was reasonable to suppose that the spot chosen would be as nearly as possible opposite the "maid from the sea on high," and, on this supposition, I stuck the point of the rod in the ground exactly in a line with the tablet, about a dozen feet from the tree, and drove it in with the hammer. It entered easily enough for the first eighteen inches. After that it became more and more difficult to drive in. But it met with no obstruction and after driving it in two feet six inches, I pulled

it up and tried a fresh place in the same line.

I sounded in four or five places with the same discouraging result ; and then I " struck soundings." It was at about two feet from the surface that I felt the resistance suddenly increase, and, when I had freed the rod a little I could make out a definite solid obstacle. Eagerly I pulled up the rod, and, sticking the point in the ground about a foot nearer the tree, hammered it in. Again at about two feet down its progress was checked. There was certainly something there, and something of considerable size. Not a block of stone, as I could tell by working the rod up and down and striking the obstruction with the point, but apparently a massive wooden object, such as, for instance, a solidly-built chest.

I paused for a moment to consider. How long would it be before Burbler would be likely to return ? That was a question to which I could give no answer. And meanwhile here was a solid something only a couple of feet

down. With a pick and spade I could reach it in a few minutes. It might be a treasure chest or it might not, but in any case prudence whispered to me to take the opportunity lest I should never get another.

All a-tremble with excitement, I darted into the house and groped my way to the cellar. Quickly lighting a candle-lantern, I found my pick and a spade and having carried them up to the passage, I stood them against the wall and returned for the lantern. And then came the catastrophe. I was but half-way down the steps when someone leaped on me from behind, pinioning my arms and gripping my wrists. The impact was so violent that my assailant and I flew down the remaining steps and rolled together on the brick floor; and before I could extricate myself from the bear-like embrace, a chilly contact and a sharp, metallic snap told me that I was handcuffed and helpless.

“What the deuce is the meaning of this?” I exclaimed furiously.

“The meaning is,” replied the too-familiar voice of Sergeant Burbler, “that you’ve been a bit too artful this time, Mr. Cobb. Thought I was a regular greenhorn, didn’t you? But I ain’t. I’ve been watching you over the back gate for the last quarter of an hour. Now then, stop kicking, will you?”

I did stop, as a matter of fact; not voluntarily but in consequence of his lashing my ankles together. I heaped on him every objectionable epithet that a fairly retentive memory could recall; I called him a thief, a liar, a swindler and a traitor. But he was perfectly impassive. With a calm air of business he passed a cord round my arms at the elbows, and, having tied it behind, dragged me to an oaken chest, on which he seated me with my face towards the door.

“Now, Mr. Cobb,” said he, “if you’ll excuse me, I’ll just run away and attend to that little business outside. I’ll leave you the lantern, as I have one of my own.”

With this he departed, bolting the door

after him; and very soon there came in, through the little grated ventilators, the sound of a pick—my pick!—plied with furious energy.

I could have wept with rage and disappointment. Here was a pretty end to all my scheming! I had played the jackal that this mangy Scotland Yard lion might gobble up the prey!

After a time I grew calmer. The sound of the pick continued from without and I listened to it with growing resignation. Presently it intermitted and then I heard the sharper sound of the hammer striking the sounding-rod. Not a soothing sound it might be thought; and yet it comforted me. For it told me that what I had struck was certainly not the treasure and that, so far, the villain Burbler had drawn a blank. Supposing the treasure was not there, after all! What an anticlimax that would be! And what an awful fool the Sergeant would look!

The old proverb that “the wish is father to the thought” now received an apt illustration

in the psychic phenomena that my reflections exhibited. So long as the hidden treasure was potentially mine, I had dwelt rather exclusively on the evidence that it was there ; but now that it was potentially Burbler's I found myself dwelling rather on the facts that suggested that it was not there. And, really, when one came to consider the facts, it did look as if I had jumped at a somewhat hasty conclusion. The harp and the cross and the anchors three, which I had brushed aside as not so very material, now began to loom up as factors of prime importance. It seemed as if the circumstances required careful reconsideration.

And now, for the first time, I began to give that mystical jingle of old Simon's really systematic thought. I went over it line by line and applied its quaint phrases to the present conditions. And the more I did so, the less they seemed to fit. Gradually, I came to the conclusion that I had made a false shot ; a mere hasty guess. That the

foot of the mulberry-tree could not be the place where the treasure was buried at all, and that the whole of the data needed to be revised.

And all the time, the sound of the pick and spade drifted in monotonously through the little grating.

A couple of hours passed. Slowly my ideas, from a formless ambiguity, began to crystallise into something like definite shape. A few minutes more of concentrated thought and I should have evolved a more or less complete solution of the riddle. But at that moment the sound of the pick ceased ; heavy footsteps clumped along the passage ; the cellar door was unbolted and flung open ; and Sergeant Burbler entered, wiping his forehead with a very dirty hand.

“ Look here, Mr. Cobb ” he said, irritably, “ do you know where that stuff is, or don't you ? ”

“ No, I'm hanged if I do,” said I, “ unless you've got it.”

“ Well, I haven’t. And I don’t believe it was ever there.”

“ Neither do I. But you haven’t wasted your time, you know, Sergeant. It might have been there. It was just as well to make sure. I’m very much obliged to you for all the trouble you’ve taken. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind unfastening these things now ; then I can help you to fill up the hole.”

Sulkily and with an air of deep depression, Burbler released me from the handcuffs and the lashings. He offered no apology for his conduct, and I asked for none. When I had stretched myself and secured another spade, we went out into the garden to repair damages. Under the mulberry tree yawned a wide and deep pit, bridged by the thick root on which my sounding-rod had struck. The sergeant and I fell to at once with our spades to fill up the hole ; and though we both worked with a will, it was with very different feelings. Burbler was silent and gloomy. Perhaps he was considering what he should say to Mrs.

Hodger. As to me, the "might have been" was with me no more, but only that which yet might be.

As I gleefully shovelled in the earth it seemed that perhaps success might, after all, rise, Phœnix-like, from the ashes of a dead and gone failure.

THE MAGIC MIRROR

HUMAN knowledge may be roughly divided into two categories: that which we acquire at school, and that which is of some practical use. Occasionally the two divisions overlap, as in the case of schoolmasters or crammers, who contrive to squeeze a livelihood out of their schooling; but in general they are completely separate. No academic course would have helped me one jot to solve the riddle of Simon Glynn's treasure, whereas one or two items of somewhat out-of-the-way knowledge—but I am rather anticipating. Let me tell the story in its proper sequence.

It was the morning after the excavation under the mulberry tree. That had failed. Previous attempts of mine had failed; and the

explorations of innumerable treasure-seekers before me had failed. And all for the same simple reason. None of us had given the problem sufficient preliminary thought. We had all, apparently, jumped from one or two clues to the solution; and the solution had turned out to be the wrong one every time.

I walked up and down the little green in front of the Royal George, and my fellow-lodger sat in the orchard at the side of the house in his shirt-sleeves and a pair of hideous carpet slippers, reading yesterday's paper and keeping an eye on me. For Burbler was no longer an investigator; his rôle was to shadow me and suck my brains. Even now, he was watching me like a cat, to see if I looked as if I had hit on another clue.

I paced to and fro, thinking profoundly. There should be no more guess-work. I would go over the whole set of facts from the beginning and consider them systematically to see if I could not evolve some theory that would fit them all.

As I paced to and fro, deep in thought, I passed and repassed the signpost. And thus, glancing at it at each turn, I noticed for the first time what a very singular post it was. And then I began to look at it more particularly and note those peculiarities in which it differed from other signposts that I had seen.

In the first place, it was not planted in the ground, but set in a socket in a great block of stone. Then its lower third was encased in lead sheathing, very neatly finished, though now disguised by paint. The top was protected by a long iron cap to which the ironwork of the sign was attached, and the wooden shaft itself showed, through the crust of paint, obscure traces of strap-work carving. Looking attentively at the iron scroll-work, I made out with some difficulty—for here, too, generations of painters had left their marks—four small figures, which together made the date 1636. Then the ironwork was actually that originally put up by Glynn ; and it looked

as if the post itself was the original one, which, indeed, it might easily have been, for, with its stone base, its lead sheathing, and its iron cap, it was so perfectly protected from damp that it might still last for a century or two.

But why this extraordinary care to preserve the wooden post? Oak was not such a very costly commodity in Glynn's time, and the stone base must have cost more than a dozen posts. Why, then, these elaborate precautions?

I turned this question over as I walked up and down with my eyes fixed meditatively on the sign. And then, in a flash, I saw it: and called myself a whole battalion of idiots for not having seen it before.

I looked up, I say, at the sign, which showed a portrait of a royal personage who wore a tie-wig and had a face somewhat like a well-scrubbed mangold-wurtzel—George the third, in fact. But it was obvious that in Glynn's day the sign of this tavern could not have been the Royal George. And if one

asked what the original sign was, the answer came at once from the sculptured mermaid on the back gable. That elaborate panel was not a cottage tablet but a tavern sign. Hence, too, the reason why that panel was at the back of the house; for the front had the painted mermaid on the signboard. And, of course, it was this sign and not the sculptured figure that was the "Maid from the Sea on high."

But, if this was so, where was the "tree" that was referred to in the rhyme? Again the answer was obvious. In Glynn's day the old use of the word "tree" as a synonym for "wood" still lingered; as, indeed, it does to-day in such words as roof-tree, chess-tree, tressel-tree, axle-tree, tree-nail (a wooden peg), and many others. Moreover, in those days, a large post actually was a tree; an entire trunk of suitable size shaped with the adze. The signpost itself was the tree.

And now I understood—or believed I understood—those elaborate arrangements to pre-

serve the post from decay, and to avoid disturbance of the ground if it did decay. The treasure was hidden at the foot of the post; and those precautions were taken to guard against its chance discovery by workmen engaged in carrying out repairs. For Simon had specially stipulated for "wit" on the part of the finder.

So far, it all looked very complete and consistent. But this was not to be guess-work. I must fairly consider the objections. And there were two serious defects in this theory. In the first place there was no vestige of any harp or cross; and in the second the "ankores three" were conspicuously absent. These seemed to be fatal objections to my theory as to the whereabouts of the treasure, and, for the moment, I was a good deal discouraged. But then I remembered that this was a riddle intentionally made difficult, and that if its solution had been more obvious it would not have remained, after all these years, for me to solve. Accordingly I addressed myself to

the first difficulty; that of the harp and cross.

Now, the association of ideas presents some very curious phenomena. You may have two or more separate ideas, each of which, by itself, is meaningless and vague; but bring them together and forthwith they yield a compound idea of the utmost significance. So it happened now. The words "harp and cross" had, from the first, vaguely suggested to me some half-forgotten incident which I could not recall. And again, when I had read on Simon Glynn's monument the motto, "God with us," I had felt some chord of memory vibrate, but had been too preoccupied to analyse the impression. Just now, however, I was in an analytical mood and I recalled both these vague recollections and asked myself what they meant. And then, in a moment, the two ideas ran together and led me back straight to their joint origin.

The incident occurred in front of one of the cabinets of a coin-collecting friend. He had

just taken out a Commonwealth twenty-shilling piece and handed it to me.

“There, Cobb,” he had said, “that is a piece of old Oliver’s. Observe the pious inscription, ‘God with us.’ This is the coin, you know, that Pepys refers to as ‘the old Harp and Cross money.’”

I recalled it now, perfectly, and the appearance of the piece, with the device of the Harp and Cross and the motto, “God with us.” This, of course, was the money that was struck when Simon Glynn was at the mint.

It was all clear enough now. The Harp and Cross were not marks on the hiding-place of the treasure. They were on the treasure itself. The words in the rhyme, were, in fact, a trap set by the “whimsicall” Simon to catch the unwary; and the unwary had been caught in very considerable numbers.

The difficulty of the “ankores three” now seemed to melt away of itself; for the quibble of the Harp and Cross suggested a simple solution. It was a pun on Simon’s coat of

arms, the three anchors; as was, indeed, suggested by the ambiguous spelling of the word "ankores," which left the reader free to render it "anchors" or "ankers" according to his judgment. For my part, I had no doubt whatever. Here was old Simon's tavern in the midst of the smuggling country with a tidal river flowing past its very door. Many an anker of Dutch liquor must have drifted up from Sandwich in those good old days, and many an empty anker must have cumbered the cellar. What more natural than that the jovial Simon should have used these convenient vessels for treasure-chests?

I trust that I am not a conceited man; but I must admit that I paid myself a few handsome compliments on my ingenuity. For here I had a complete and reasonable solution of that cryptic rhyme which had puzzled generations of eager treasure-seekers. Three ankers filled with gold Harp and Cross money buried at the foot of the signpost on top of which swung the sign of the

mermaid. That was the solution. It was simple, and it covered every word of the rhyme, which no previous solution had done. All that remained was to gather the reward of my ingenuity. Others had "stepped over"; it was for me, the chosen one, to "take itt" and fulfil Simon's prophecy as to his legatee.

This was all very well. But "itt" was by no means conveniently situated. The signpost stood some twenty yards from the house at the side of a public road, and was, moreover, planted in a block of stone weighing a ton or two. To disinter the ankers would involve mining operations on a scale that would attract the attention, not only of Burbler and Mrs. Hodger, but of the whole countryside.

Here was another set-back. But I was not daunted by it; a moment's reflection convinced me that the difficulty—which was as great in Glynn's time as now—must have been provided for. Simon could never have meant the successful candidate to dig up the sign-

post. There must be some easier means of access to the treasure—probably from the inside of the house. I had seen, at Elham Manor, what Glynn could do in the way of secret chambers and hidden doors ; there was nothing for it but to explore the interior of the inn. But it was a little disappointing, just when I thought I had solved the riddle, to have a new and difficult problem presented, especially since I knew that every movement of mine would be eagerly watched by Burbler.

And then it was that, puzzling over this new difficulty, I had a really brilliant idea ; an inspiration, in fact.

It had often struck me as a little odd that Glynn should have elected to engrave his doggerel on the frame of a mirror. It was very inconvenient, for the inscription had to be zigzagged round the four sides in an awkwardly narrow space. A salver, or even a tankard or goblet, would have offered a much more convenient surface and would not have broken up the verse. Why had he chosen

a mirror-frame? Had he any special reason for his choice? And if he must have had a mirror, why a silver one? Glass mirrors were in common use in his time.

The study of optics has always had somewhat of a fascination for me; and especially that branch of it which deals with the quaint and the marvellous; in fact, with what one may call "optical magic." And thus it happened that as I cogitated on Simon Glynn's mirror with its cryptic rhyme, a very curious suggestion occurred to me.

I wonder how many people are acquainted with that queer product of old Japan, the "magic mirror?" A good many specimens exist. I have had the privilege of examining one or two myself. In its usual form, it is a smallish hand-mirror with a face of polished speculum metal and a richly-ornamented back; and the centre of the back is always occupied by a device—usually the figure of a dragon or bird—deeply and elaborately chased. Used in the ordinary way, it presents nothing

unusual. If you look into one, you see a reflection of your face—just an ordinary reflection, quite plain and free from distortion. But if you catch a gleam of sunlight on the polished face and throw the reflection on a smooth surface such as a whitewashed wall, a most remarkable and uncanny effect is produced. The device on the back of the mirror is plainly visible in the patch of reflected light on the wall, where it appears as a dark shape with a bright halo. It sounds like a sheer impossibility, and to an observer who isn't "in the know" it looks like black magic. The sort of magic, by the way, that Simon Glynn would have enjoyed. Which brings me back to my brilliant idea: Supposing Glynn's mirror should be a magic mirror!

These meditations had brought me unconsciously, to a halt at the end of the green, opposite the orchard. Happening to glance up, I became aware of Burbler, sitting erect in his chair and eyeing me intently. I suppose

that something of the excitement that surged within me was apparent in my face. That, in short, my expression had suggested a fresh clue.

Hang Burbler ! This spying and watching was distracting to a degree. And it was worse than distracting. I was now in a fever to test my new idea ; but I wasn't going to test it in Burbler's presence. There was only one thing to be done. I had my hat and boots on and a sovereign or so in my pockets. I had better take a flying start while I had the chance.

I took one or two more turns up and down the green to put Burbler off his guard ; then, when I reached the end of my walk, instead of turning yet again, I quickened my pace and strode off along the road. As I passed the orchard Burbler leaped from his chair, dropped his newspaper and made a bolt for the house—obviously to put on his boots and coat ; and I, having walked quickly to a bend in the road, vaulted over a stile and ran at the top

of my speed along the footpath that formed the short cut into Canterbury.

As I ran, I continued my speculations on Simon Glynn's mirror ; and the more I thought about it the more likely did it seem that the little silver plate held the final clue. For, after all, the miracle of the Japanese mirror is quite a simple affair and I expect many of the old working goldsmiths and silversmiths knew all about it. It is just a matter of the hardening of metal under a hammered tool.

If you work a device, with chasing tool and hammer, on the back of a plate of annealed metal, that device will show through quite distinctly on the face in slight relief. If this relief is ground away on a wet stone, the device will, of course, disappear. But it has not really gone. For though the face of the plate is now perfectly even, the device is still there in the substance of the metal. Wherever the tool has struck, the metal is hardened right through ; and as soon as the face is polished, the hardness of the worked area

will cause the device to reappear. Its projection will be so infinitesimal as to be imperceptible to the eye, but it will be quite sufficient to deflect rays of parallel light and cause the device to be visible in the reflection. Even if the design is stoned off the back as well as the face, the hardness will remain and the device will still show in the reflection though it has disappeared from both surfaces of the plate. So that the process would offer a plan after the very heart of a whimsically secretive man like Simon Glynn.

By the time I entered the streets of Canterbury, I had shaped an immediate course of action. My first objective was a shop in which I had seen some very efficient-looking electric torches ; and, as I knew the price and had the money ready in my hand, the purchase was only a matter of seconds. With the torch in my pocket, I made a bee-line for the museum, and, passing through the galleries as rapidly as I dared, proceeded to the room

in the annexe in which Glynn's mirror was exhibited.

It was a critical moment. An inopportune visitor or attendant would have spoiled all; for Burbler would, no doubt, come straight to the museum, as the only place of which he knew as connected with our common quest. But fortune was kind. The room and the adjoining corridor were empty, and the mirror stood in its position on a side table. I took the precaution to open and inspect the curtained sedan-chair, which was the only possible hiding-place in the room; and, having shut it again, I looked round, listened, and then, with a thumping heart, approached the mirror.

The little silver object stood, as I have said, on a high side table, inclined at an angle of forty-five degrees—just the right position for me. I gave its face a hasty wipe with my silk handkerchief, stepped back a couple of paces, pointed the bull's-eye of my torch and pressed the switch. As the beam of light fell on the mirror, a bright oblong patch appeared

on the ceiling above it. But not a mere, plain patch of reflected light. On the bright space I could make out in dim and shadowy, but quite legible, lettering, the words :

“ Pull out y^e 3rd Stepp.”

I switched off the light, slipped the torch into my pocket and made my way out of the room as quickly as I had entered. For now I knew all that I wanted to know, and my business was to escape Burbler, at any rate until I had decided on my next move. And I was none too soon. As I passed a staircase window, I saw the sergeant taking the entrance steps two at a time, and I had barely slipped into the picture-gallery when he flew past the door on his way to the “ mirror room.”

As his steps died away I came forth from the gallery and hurried out of the building before he should return in search of me. My immediate need was that of a quiet place where I could reflect on what I had just learned and

decide what to do next. The streets were not very restful with Burbler prowling up and down in search of me; eventually I drifted into the cathedral precincts, and sought sanctuary in a remote corner of the cloisters.

“ Pull out y^e 3rd Stepp ! ”

I smiled as I repeated to myself that quaint message, whispered to me, as it were, in confidence across the gulf of two centuries. How like the pleasant and “ whimsicall ” Simon ! For, of course, that direction, intelligible enough to me, would have been perfectly meaningless to anyone else. The question would have arisen, “ what third step ? ” But I understood. The direction was addressed to the person of “ wit ” who had read the riddle. To me, in fact. And I knew that there was only one set of steps that bore any relation to the foot of the signpost ; but those steps I knew very well indeed, having sat opposite them, manacled and

bound, for a matter of three hours. The cellar steps of the Royal George (late The Mermaid) inn answered the conditions exactly ; and since there were five of them, the middle step was the third whichever way one counted.

It was all plain sailing so far. I should pull out the third step and probably find the entrance to a forgotten smugglers' hiding-hole under the signpost. That was what it looked like. But there was Burbler. He was the fly in the ointment ; and a mighty big fly, too ; a regular blue-bottle. If he spotted me going down to the cellar, he would be on my heels in a moment, and then the whole thing would be blown upon. I should be lucky if I got even a share of the treasure, for Burbler had shown himself a greedy, unscrupulous rascal.

No. Before I ventured to approach the hiding-place I must, by hook or by crook, get rid of Burbler. That was the pressing necessity of the moment.

I have remarked on a previous occasion that necessity is the mother of invention. The aphorism is not mine. It has been said before ; and I merely quote it as an appropriate observation. Because, at the end of an hour's pacing of the cloisters and after enough concentrated thought to furnish out a royal commission, I had evolved quite a pretty little scheme.

There is more than one kind of magic mirror. I have described the less known variety. A more familiar kind, known to us in our childhood and sold in the toy-shops of that prehistoric age, had somewhat different properties. You presented it to your most intimate and valued friend and invited him to breathe on it in order that he might see himself as others saw him. He accordingly breathed on it ; whereupon there appeared on its surface a life-like representation of a donkey's head.

There was nothing miraculous about it. I learned the secret of manufacture from a

Hebrew gentleman who sold second-hand furniture. He was in the habit of writing the prices on his looking-glasses with a piece of soap, and he made the interesting discovery that if he wiped off the soap-marked figures with a dry cloth and polished the glass, although the latter then appeared perfectly clear and bright, yet the figures would reappear quite distinctly if the glass was breathed upon.

Now here was a valuable piece of knowledge—not acquired through academic channels. It seemed to me that, with its aid, I might treat Sergeant Burbler to a little communication from the late Simon Glynn. And if the communication were discreetly worded, it might furnish him with enough occupation to keep him out of mischief while I transacted my business with the cellar steps. There was only one really serious difficulty. Burbler had got to be made to read that mystic message from the long-departed Simon; and I didn't quite see how to do it.

From the cathedral precincts I stole out warily into Burgate Street and wandered about until I encountered an oil-shop, where I purchased a small tablet of soap. Cutting a slice from this, I shaped it to the form of a moderately sharp crayon which I carefully wrapped in paper and dropped in my pocket. Then I executed a highly strategic advance on the museum. It was a delicate affair, for if I ran against Burbler it was quite probable that he would freeze on, and then I should have to postpone my little manœuvre; which would be most exasperating. For I need hardly say that I was suffering an agony of impatience to get back to the inn and see what was behind the "third Stepp."

I walked up to the entrance, and, after a precautionary look round, bolted in. There was no sign of Burbler. Breathlessly I threaded my way through the galleries, ready at a moment's notice to slip behind a door or show-case, until I came to the corridor that led into the "mirror room." Here I paused

for a moment, looking through into the room. A party of American tourists was in occupation at the moment, but otherwise the room seemed to be empty. I accordingly entered boldly, and, while the Americans were taking their lightning impressions of the exhibits, I passed the time by examining the interior of the sedan-chair—to make sure that the place really was empty, after all.

The Americans, having filled their intellectual crops with characteristic rapidity, departed, leaving me in sole possession: whereupon I took another glance round, shut the door of the sedan-chair, and stepped over to the mirror. There was no time to be lost. Burbler might arrive at any moment and rob me of my opportunity. Taking out my soap crayon, I wrote carefully on the silver surface in antique, but very legible characters the following mystical words:

“Under y^e floare of y^e litell blew Chamber.”

I was not very satisfied with the result, for, owing to the dryness of the soap, the writing

was almost invisible. However, when I had polished it off with my handkerchief until every sign of it was gone and then breathed heavily on the mirror, I was quite reassured; for the inscription stood out with the distinctness of engraving. But only for one instant. As the steamy film faded away, the writing faded with it; and, when I turned away, the surface of the mirror was as bright and blank as before the guileful crayon touched it.

The problem now was how to catch Burbler—or, rather, how to let him catch me. It would take some nice management, and I mustn't be caught prematurely. I had a roughly-shaped plan, and, as that plan was connected with the public library—which was in the same building—I made my way thither to think it over. I looked round a little anxiously as I entered the reference room and was half-relieved and half-disappointed to find that the sergeant was not there. I didn't want him until I had completed my little preparations, but, on the other hand, it would

be an absolute disaster if he had given up the pursuit and gone back to the inn.

But again fortune favoured me. Before reconnoitring the shelves, I happened to glance out of the window at the street below. And there he was, ostensibly gaping into a shop window, but actually keeping a watch on the entrance of the museum. So I shouldn't have to go out and angle for him in the town if I could attract his attention.

I snatched a large volume from a shelf and going close to the window, pored over the open book with as intent an expression as I could assume, watching Burbler out of the tail of my eye. For some time he failed to notice me, but continued, to my annoyance, to glance furtively up and down the street and across at the museum entrance. But at last he caught sight of me ; on which his interest in the shop window lapsed and he darted across the road.

I replaced the book on the shelf, and, running my eye along the volumes of the *Encyclopædia*