" I am not in actual possession of it, Mr. Webster. I am by way of being a connoisseur in rare and valuable books myself, although, of course, I have little money with which to indulge in the collection of them. I am acquainted, however, with the lovers of desirable books in different quarters of London. These three volumes, for instance, are from the library of a private gentleman in the West End. I have sold many books to him, and he knows I am trustworthy. He wishes to dispose of them at something under their real value, and has kindly allowed me to conduct the negotiation. I make it my business to find out those who are interested in rare books, and by such trading I add considerably to my income."

" How, for instance, did you learn that I was a bibliophile ? "

Mr. Macpherson laughed genially.

" Well, Mr. Webster, I must confess that I chanced it. I do that very often. I take a flat like this, and send in my card to the name on the door. If I am invited in, I ask the occupant the question I asked you just now : " Are you interested in rare editions ? " If he says no, I simply beg pardon and retire. If he says yes, then I show my wares."

" I see," said I, nodding. What a glib young liar he was, with that innocent face of his, and yet my next question brought forth the truth.

" As this is the first time you have called upon me, Mr. Macpherson, you have no objection to my making some further inquiry, I suppose. Would you mind telling me the name of the owner of these books in the West End ? "

" His name is Mr. Ralph Summertrees, of Park Lane."

" Of Park Lane ? Ah, indeed."

" I shall be glad to leave the books with you, Mr. Webster, and if you care to make an appointment with Mr. Summertrees, I am sure he will not object to say a word in my favour."

" Oh, I do not in the least doubt it, and should not think of troubling the gentleman."

" I was going to tell you," went on the young man, " that I have a friend, a capitalist, who, in a way, is my supporter ; for, as I said, I have little money of my own. I find it is often inconvenient for people to pay down any considerable sum. When, however, I strike a bargain, my capitalist buys the book, and I make an arrangement with my customer to pay a certain amount each week, and so even a large purchase is not felt, as I make the instalments small enough to suit my client."

"You are employed during the day, I take it?"

"Yes, I am a clerk in the City."

Again we were in the blissful realms of fiction!

"Suppose I take this book at ten pounds, what instalment should I have to pay each week?"

"Oh, what you like, sir. Would five shillings be too much?"

"I think not."

"Very well, sir, if you pay me five shillings now, I will leave the book with you, and shall have pleasure in calling this day week for the next instalment."

I put my hand into my pocket, and drew out two half-crowns, which I passed over to him.

"Do I need to sign any form or undertaking to pay the rest?"

The young man laughed cordially.

"Oh, no, sir, there is no formality necessary. You see, sir, this is largely a labour of love with me, although I don't deny I have my eye on the future. I am getting together what I hope will be a very valuable connection with gentlemen like yourself who are fond of books, and I trust some day that I may be able to resign my place with the insurance company and set up a choice little business of my own, where my knowledge of values in literature will prove useful."

And then, after making a note in a little book he took from his pocket, he bade me a most graceful good-bye and departed, leaving me cogitating over what it all meant.

Next morning two articles were handed to me. The first came by post and was a pamphlet on *Christian Science and Absent Mindedness*, exactly similar to the one I had taken away from the old curiosity shop; the second was a small key made from my wax impression that would fit the front door of the same shop—a key fashioned by an excellent anarchist friend of mine in an obscure street near Holborn.

That night at ten o'clock I was inside the old curiosity shop, with a small storage battery in my pocket, and a little electric glow lamp at my buttonhole, a most useful instrument for either burglar or detective.

I had expected to find the books of the establishment in a safe, which, if it was similar to the one in Park Lane, I was prepared to open with the false keys in my possession or to take an impression of the keyhole and trust to my anarchist friend for the rest. But to my amazement I discovered all the papers pertaining to the

concern in a desk which was not even locked. The books, three in number, were the ordinary day book, journal, and ledger referring to the shop; book-keeping of the older fashion; but in a portfolio lay half a dozen foolscap sheets, headed "Mr. Rogers's List," "Mr. Macpherson's," "Mr. Tyrrel's," the names I had already learned, and three others. These lists contained in the first column, names; in the second column, addresses; in the third, sums of money; and then in the small, square places following were amounts ranging from two-and-sixpence to a pound. At the bottom of Mr. Macpherson's list was the name of Alport Webster, Imperial Flats, £10; then in the small, square place, five shillings. These six sheets, each headed by a canvasser's name, were evidently the record of current collections, and the innocence of the whole thing was so apparent that if it were not for my fixed rule never to believe that I am at the bottom of any case until I have come on something suspicious, I would have gone out empty-handed as I came in.

The six sheets were loose in a thin portfolio, but standing on a shelf above the desk were a number of fat volumes, one of which I took down, and saw that it contained similar lists running back several years. I noticed on Mr. Macpherson's current list the name of Lord Semptam, an eccentric old nobleman whom I knew slightly. Then turning to the list immediately before the current one the name was still there; I traced it back through list after list until I found the first entry, which was no less than three years previous, and there Lord Semptam was down for a piece of furniture costing fifty pounds, and on that account he had paid a pound a week for more than three years, totalling a hundred and seventy pounds at the least, and instantly the glorious simplicity of the scheme dawned upon me, and I became so interested in the swindle that I lit the gas, fearing my little lamp would be exhausted before my investigation ended, for it promised to be a long one.

In several instances the intended victim proved shrewder than old Simpson had counted upon, and the word "Settled" had been written on the line carrying the name when the exact number of instalments was paid. But as these shrewd persons dropped out, others took their places, and Simpson's dependence on their absent-mindedness seemed to be justified in nine cases out of ten. His collectors were collecting long after the debt had been paid. In Lord Semptam's case, the payment had evidently become chronic, and the old man was giving away his pound a week to the

suave Macpherson two years after his debt had been liquidated.

From the big volume I detached the loose leaf, dated 1893, which recorded Lord Semptam's purchase of a carved table for fifty pounds, and on which he had been paying a pound a week from that time to the date of which I am writing, which was November 1896. This single document taken from the file of three years previous, was not likely to be missed, as would have been the case if I had selected a current sheet. I nevertheless made a copy of the names and addresses of Macpherson's present clients; then, carefully placing everything exactly as I had found it, I extinguished the gas, and went out of the shop, locking the door behind me. With the 1893 sheet in my pocket I resolved to prepare a pleasant little surprise for my suave friend Macpherson when he called to get his next instalment of five shillings.

Late as was the hour when I reached Trafalgar Square I could not deprive myself of the felicity of calling on Mr. Spenser Hale, who I knew was then on duty. He never appeared at his best during office hours, because officialism stiffened his stalwart frame. Mentally he was impressed with the importance of his position, and added to this he was not then allowed to smoke his big, black pipe and terrible tobacco. He received me with the curtness I had been taught to expect when I inflicted myself upon him at his office. He greeted me abruptly with:

"I say, Valmont, how long do you expect to be on this job?"

"What job?" I asked mildly.

"Oh, you know what I mean: the Summertrees affair."

"Oh, *that*!" I exclaimed, with surprise. "The Summertrees case is already completed, of course. If I had known you were in a hurry, I should have finished up everything yesterday, but as you and Podgers, and I don't know how many more, have been at it sixteen or seventeen days, if not longer, I thought I might venture to take as many hours, as I am working entirely alone. You said nothing about haste, you know."

"Oh, come now, Valmont, that's a bit thick. Do you mean to say you have already got evidence against the man?"

"Evidence absolute and complete."

"Then who are the coiners?"

"My most estimable friend, how often have I told you not to jump at conclusions? I informed you when you first spoke to me about the matter that Summertrees was neither a coiner nor a confederate of coiners. I secured evidence sufficient to convict

him of quite another offence, which is probably unique in the annals of crime. I have penetrated the mystery of the shop, and discovered the reason for all those suspicious actions which quite properly set you on his trail. Now I wish you to come to my flat next Wednesday night at a quarter to six, prepared to make an arrest."

" I must know who I am to arrest, and on what counts."

" Quite so, *mon ami* Hale ; I did not say you were to make an arrest, but merely warned you to be prepared. If you have time now to listen to the disclosures, I am quite at your service. I promise you there are some original features in the case. If, however, the present moment is inopportune, drop in on me at your convenience, previously telephoning so that you may know whether I am there or not, and thus your valuable time will not be expended purposelessly."

With this I presented to him my most courteous bow, and although his mystified expression hinted a suspicion that he thought I was chaffing him, as he would call it, official dignity dissolved somewhat, and he intimated his desire to hear all about it then and there. I had succeeded in arousing my friend Hale's curiosity. He listened to the evidence with perplexed brow, and at last ejaculated he would be blessed.

" This young man," I said in conclusion, " will call upon me at six on Wednesday afternoon, to receive his second five shillings. I propose that you, in your uniform, shall be seated there with me to receive him, and I am anxious to study Mr. Macpherson's countenance when he realises he has walked in to confront a policeman. If you will then allow me to cross-examine him for a few moments, not after the manner of Scotland Yard, with a warning lest he incriminate himself, but in the free and easy fashion we adopt in Paris, I shall afterwards turn the case over to you to be dealt with at your discretion."

" You have a wonderful flow of language, Monsieur Valmont," was the officer's tribute to me. " I shall be on hand at a quarter to six on Wednesday."

" Meanwhile," said I, " kindly say nothing of this to any one. We must arrange a complete surprise for Macpherson. That is essential. Please make no move in the matter at all until Wednesday night."

Spenser Hales, much impressed, nodded acquiescence, and I took a polite leave of him.

. . . .

The question of lighting is an important one in a room such as mine, and electricity offers a good deal of scope to the ingenious. Of this fact I have taken full advantage. I can manipulate the lighting of my room so that any particular spot is bathed in brilliancy, while the rest of the space remains in comparative gloom, and I arranged the lamps so that the full force of their rays impinged against the door that Wednesday evening, while I sat on one side of the table in semi-darkness and Hale sat on the other, with a light beating down on him from above which gave him the odd, sculptured look of a living statue of Justice, stern and triumphant. Any one entering the room would be first dazzled by the light, and next would see the gigantic form of Hale in the full uniform of his order.

When Angus Macpherson was shown into this room he was quite visibly taken aback, and paused abruptly on the threshold, his gaze riveted on the huge policeman. I think his first purpose was to turn and run, but the door closed behind him, and he doubtless heard, as we all did, the sound of the bolt being thrust in its place, thus locking him in.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "I expected to meet Mr. Webster."

As he said this, I pressed the button under my table, and was instantly enshrouded with light. A sickly smile overspread the countenance of Macpherson as he caught sight of me, and he made a very creditable attempt to carry off the situation with nonchalance.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Webster; I did not notice you at first."

It was a tense moment. I spoke slowly and impressively.

"Sir, perhaps you are not unacquainted with the name of Eugène Valmont."

He replied brazenly:

"I am sorry to say, sir, I never heard of the gentleman before."

At this came a most inopportune "Haw-haw" from that blockhead Spenser Hale, completely spoiling the dramatic situation I had elaborated with such thought and care. It is little wonder the English possess no drama, for they show scant appreciation of the sensational moments in life.

"Haw-haw," brayed Spenser Hale, and at once reduced the emotional atmosphere to a fog of commonplace. However, what

is a man to do? He must handle the tools with which it pleases Providence to provide him. I ignored Hale's untimely laughter.

" Sit down, sir," I said to Macpherson, and he obeyed.

" You have called on Lord Semptam this week," I continued sternly.

" Yes, sir."

" And collected a pound from him ? "

" Yes, sir."

" In October, 1893, you sold Lord Semptam a carved antique table for fifty pounds ? "

" Quite right, sir."

" When you were here last week you gave me Ralph Summertrees as the name of a gentleman living in Park Lane. You knew at the time that this man was your employer ? "

Macpherson was now looking fixedly at me, and on this occasion made no reply. I went on calmly :

" You also knew that Summertrees, of Park Lane, was identical with Simpson, of Tottenham Court Road ? "

" Well, sir," said Macpherson, " I don't exactly see what you're driving at, but it's quite usual for a man to carry on a business under an assumed name. There is nothing illegal about that."

" We will come to the illegality in a moment, Mr. Macpherson. You, and Rogers, and Tyrrel, and three others, are confederates of this man Simpson."

" We are in his employ ; yes, sir, but no more confederates than clerks usually are."

" I think, Mr. Macpherson, I have said enough to show you that the game is, what you call, up. You are now in the presence of Mr. Spenser Hale, from Scotland Yard, who is waiting to hear your confession."

Here the stupid Hale broke in with his :

" And remember, sir, that anything you say will be——"

" Excuse me, Mr. Hale," I interrupted hastily, " I shall turn over the case to you in a very few moments, but I ask you to remember our compact, and to leave it for the present entirely in my hands. Now, Mr. Macpherson, I want your confession, and I want it at once."

" Confession? Confederates ? " protested Macpherson with admirably simulated surprise. " I must say you use extraordinary terms, Mr.—Mr.—— What did you say the name was ? "

"Haw-haw," roared Hale. "His name is Monsieur Valmont."

"I implore you, Mr. Hale, to leave this man to me for a very few moments. Now, Macpherson, what have you to say in your defence?"

"Where nothing criminal has been alleged, Monsieur Valmont, I see no necessity for defence. If you wish me to admit that somehow you have acquired a number of details regarding our business, I am perfectly willing to do so, and to subscribe to their accuracy. If you will be good enough to let me know of what you complain, I shall endeavour to make the point clear to you if I can. There has evidently been some misapprehension, but for the life of me, without further explanation, I am as much in a fog as I was on my way coming here, for it is getting a little thick outside."

Macpherson certainly was conducting himself with great discretion, and presented, quite unconsciously, a much more diplomatic figure than my friend, Spenser Hale, sitting stiffly opposite me. His tone was one of mild expostulation, mitigated by the intimation that all misunderstanding speedily would be cleared away. To outward view he offered a perfect picture of innocence, neither protesting too much nor too little. I had, however, another surprise in store for him, a trump card, as it were, and I played it down on the table.

"There!" I cried with vim, "have you ever seen that sheet before?"

He glanced at it without offering to take it in his hand.

"Oh, yes," he said, "that has been abstracted from our file. It is what I call my visiting list."

"Come, come, sir," I cried sternly, "you refuse to confess, but I warn you we know all about it. You never heard of Dr. Willoughby, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is the author of the silly pamphlet on Christian Science."

"You are in the right, Mr. Macpherson; on Christian Science and Absent-Mindedness."

"Possibly. I haven't read it for a long while."

"Have you ever met this learned doctor, Mr. Macpherson?"

"Oh, yes. Dr. Willoughby is the pen-name of Mr. Summertrees. He believes in Christian Science and that sort of thing, and writes about it."

"Ah, really. We are getting your confession bit by bit, Mr. Macpherson. I think it would be better to be quite frank with us."

" I was just going to make the same suggestion to you, Monsieur Valmont. If you will tell me in a few words exactly what is your charge against either Mr. Summertrees or myself, I will know then what to say."

" We charge you, sir, with obtaining money under false pretences, which is a crime that has landed more than one distinguished financier in prison."

Spenser Hale shook his fat forefinger at me, and said :

" Tut, tut, Valmont ; we mustn't threaten, we mustn't threaten, you know ; " but I went on without heeding him.

" Take, for instance, Lord Semptam. You sold him a table for fifty pounds, on the instalment plan. He was to pay a pound a week, and in less than a year the debt was liquidated. But he is an absent-minded man, as all your clients are. That is why you came to me. I had answered the bogus Willoughby's advertisement. And so you kept on collecting and collecting for something more than three years. Now do you understand the charge ? "

Mr. Macpherson's head during this accusation was held slightly inclined to one side. At first his face was clouded by the most clever imitation of anxious concentration of mind I had ever seen, and this was gradually cleared away by the dawn of awakening perception. When I had finished, an ingratiating smile hovered about his lips.

" Really, you know," he said, " that is rather a capital scheme. The absent-minded league, as one might call them. Most ingenious. Summertrees, if he had any sense of humour, which he hasn't, would be rather taken by the idea that his innocent fad for Christian Science had led him to be suspected of obtaining money under false pretences. But, really, there are no pretensions about the matter at all. As I understand it, I simply call and receive the money through the forgetfulness of the persons on my list, but where I think you would have both Summertrees and myself, if there was anything in your audacious theory, would be an indictment for conspiracy. Still, I quite see how the mistake arises. You have jumped to the conclusion that we sold nothing to Lord Semptam except that carved table three years ago. I have pleasure in pointing out to you that his lordship is a frequent customer of ours, and has had many things from us at one time or another. Sometimes he is in our debt ; sometimes we are in his. We keep a sort of running contract with him by which he pays us a pound a week. He and several other customers deal on the same plan,

and in return for an income that we can count upon, they get the first offer of anything in which they are supposed to be interested. As I have told you, we call these sheets in the office our visiting lists, but to make the visiting lists complete you need what we term our encyclopædia. We call it that because it is in so many volumes ; a volume for each year, running back I don't know how long. You will notice little figures here from time to time above the amount stated on this visiting list. These figures refer to the page of the encyclopædia for the current year, and on that page is noted the new sale, and the amount of it, as it might be set down, say, in a ledger."

"That is a very entertaining explanation, Mr. Macpherson. I suppose this encyclopædia, as you call it, is in the shop at Tottenham Court Road ?"

"Oh, no, sir. Each volume of the encyclopædia is self-locking. These books contain the real secret of our business, and they are kept in the safe at Mr. Summertrees's house in Park Lane. Take Lord Semptam's account, for instance. You will find in faint figures under a certain date, 102. If you turn to page 102 of the encyclopædia for that year, you will then see a list of what Lord Semptam has bought, and the prices he was charged for them. It is really a very simple matter. If you will allow me to use your telephone for a moment, I will ask Mr. Summertrees, who has not yet begun dinner, to bring with him here the volume for 1893, and, within a quarter of an hour, you will be perfectly satisfied that everything is quite legitimate."

I confess that the young man's naturalness and confidence staggered me, the more so as I saw by the sarcastic smile on Hale's lips that he did not believe a single word spoken. A portable telephone stood on the table, and as Macpherson finished his explanation, he reached over and drew it towards him. Then Spenser Hale interfered.

"Excuse *me*," he said, "I'll do the telephoning. What is the call number of Mr. Summertrees ?"

"140 Hyde Park."

Hale at once called up Central, and presently was answered from Park Lane. We heard him say :

"Is this the residence of Mr. Summertrees ? Oh, is that you, Podgers ? Is Mr. Summertrees in ? Very well. This is Hale. I am in Valmont's flat—Imperial Flats—you know. Yes, where you went with me the other day. Very well, go to Mr. Summertrees,

and say to him that Mr. Macpherson wants the encyclopædia for 1893. Do you get that? Yes, encyclopædia. Oh, he'll understand what it is. Mr. Macpherson. No, don't mention my name at all. Just say Mr. Macpherson wants the encyclopædia for the year 1893, and that you are to bring it. Yes, you may tell him that Mr. Macpherson is at Imperial Flats, but don't mention my name at all. Exactly. As soon as he gives you the book, get into a cab, and come here as quickly as possible with it. If Summertrees doesn't want to let the book go, then tell him to come with you. If he won't do that, place him under arrest, and bring both him and the book here. All right. Be as quick as you can; we're waiting."

Macpherson made no protest against Hale's use of the telephone; he merely sat back in his chair with a resigned expression on his face which, if painted on canvas, might have been entitled "The Falsely Accused." When Hale rang off, Macpherson said:

"Of course you know your own business best, but if your man arrests Summertrees, he will make you the laughing-stock of London. There is such a thing as unjustifiable arrest, as well as getting money under false pretences, and Mr. Summertrees is not the man to forgive an insult. And then, if you will allow me to say so, the more I think over your absent-minded theory, the more absolutely grotesque it seems, and if the case ever gets into the newspapers, I am sure, Mr. Hale, you'll experience an uncomfortable half-hour with your chiefs at Scotland Yard."

"I'll take the risk of that, thank you," said Hale stubbornly.

"Am I to consider myself under arrest," enquired the young man.

"No, sir."

"Then, if you will pardon me, I shall withdraw. Mr. Summertrees will show you everything you wish to see in his books, and can explain his business much more capably than I, because he knows more about it; therefore, gentlemen, I bid you good-night."

"No, you don't. Not just yet awhile," exclaimed Hale, rising to his feet simultaneously with the young man.

"Then I *am* under arrest," protested Macpherson.

"You're not going to leave this room until Podgers brings that book."

"Oh, very well," and he sat down again.

And now, as talking is dry work, I set out something to drink, a box of cigars, and a box of cigarettes. Hale mixed his favourite

brew, but Macpherson, shunning the wine of his country, contented himself with a glass of plain mineral water, and lit a cigarette. Then he awoke my high regard by saying pleasantly as if nothing had happened :

" While we are waiting, Monsieur Valmont, may I remind you that you owe me five shillings ? "

I laughed, took the coin from my pocket, and paid him, whereupon he thanked me.

" Are you connected with Scotland Yard, Monsieur Valmont ? " asked Macpherson, with the air of a man trying to make conversation to bridge over a tedious interval ; but before I could reply, Hale blurted out :

" Not likely ! "

" You have no official standing as a detective, then, Monsieur Valmont ? "

" None whatever," I replied quickly, thus getting in my oar ahead of Hale.

" That is a loss to our country," pursued this admirable young man, with evident sincerity.

I began to see I could make a good deal of so clever a fellow if he came under my tuition.

" The blunders of our police," he went on, " are something deplorable. If they would but take lessons in strategy, say, from France, their unpleasant duties would be so much more acceptably performed, with much less discomfort to their victims."

" France," snorted Hale in derision, " why, they call a man guilty there until he's proven innocent."

" Yes, Mr. Hale, and the same seems to be the case in Imperial Flats. You have quite made up your mind that Mr. Summertrees is guilty, and will not be content until he proves his innocence. I venture to predict that you will hear from him before long in a manner that may astonish you."

Hale grunted and looked at his watch. The minutes passed very slowly as we sat there smoking, and at last even I began to get uneasy. Macpherson, seeing our anxiety, said that when he came in the fog was almost as thick as it had been the week before, and that there might be some difficulty in getting a cab. Just as he was speaking the door was unlocked from the outside, and Podgers entered, bearing a thick volume in his hand. This he gave to his superior, who turned over its pages in amazement, and then looked at the back, crying :

"*Encyclopædia of Sport*, 1893! What sort of a joke is this, Mr. Macpherson?"

There was a pained look on Mr. Macpherson's face as he reached forward and took the book. He said with a sigh:

"If you had allowed me to telephone, Mr. Hale, I should have made it perfectly plain to Summertrees what was wanted. I might have known this mistake was liable to occur. There is an increasing demand for out-of-date books of sport, and no doubt Mr. Summertrees thought this was what I meant. There is nothing for it but to send your man back to Park Lane and tell Mr. Summertrees that what we want is the locked volume of accounts for 1893, which we call the encyclopædia. Allow me to write an order that will bring it. Oh, I'll show you what I have written before your man takes it," he said, as Hale stood ready to look over his shoulder.

On my notepaper he dashed off a request such as he had outlined, and handed it to Hale, who read it and gave it to Podgers.

"Take that to Summertrees, and get back as quickly as possible. Have you a cab at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it foggy outside?"

"Not so much, sir, as it was an hour ago. No difficulty about the traffic now, sir."

"Very well, get back as soon as you can."

"Podgers saluted, and left with the book under his arm. Again the door was locked, and again we sat smoking in silence until the stillness was broken by the tinkle of the telephone. Hale put the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, this is the Imperial Flats. Yes. Valmont. Oh, yes; Macpherson is here. What? Out of what? Can't hear you. Out of print. What, the encyclopædia's out of print? Who is that speaking? Dr. Willoughby; thanks."

Macpherson rose as if he would go to the telephone, but instead (and he acted so quietly that I did not notice what he was doing until the thing was done), he picked up the sheet which he called his visiting list, and walking quite without haste, held it in the glowing coals of the fire-place until it disappeared in a flash of flame up the chimney. I sprang to my feet indignant, but too late to make even a motion towards saving the sheet. Macpherson regarded us both with that self-deprecatory smile which had several times lighted up his face.

"How dared you burn that sheet?" I demanded.

"Because, Monsieur Valmont, it did not belong to you; because you do not belong to Scotland Yard; because you stole it; because you had no right to it; and because you have no official standing in this country. If it had been in Mr. Hale's possession I should not have dared, as you put it, to destroy the sheet, but as this sheet was abstracted from my master's premises by you, an entirely unauthorised person, whom he would have been justified in shooting dead if he had found you housebreaking and you had resisted him on his discovery, I took the liberty of destroying the document. I have always held that these sheets should not have been kept, for, as has been the case, if they fell under the scrutiny of so intelligent a person as Eugène Valmont, improper inferences might have been drawn. Mr. Summertrees, however, persisted in keeping them, but made this concession, that if I ever telegraphed him or telephoned him the word 'Encyclopædia,' he would at once burn these records, and he, on his part, was to telegraph or telephone to me "The *Encyclopædia* is out of print," whereupon I would know that he had succeeded.

"Now, gentlemen, open this door, which will save me the trouble of forcing it. Either put me formally under arrest, or cease to restrict my liberty. I am very much obliged to Mr. Hale for telephoning, and I have made no protest to so gallant a host as Monsieur Valmont is, because of the locked door. However, the farce is now terminated. The proceedings I have sat through were entirely illegal, and if you will pardon me, Mr. Hale, they have been a little too French to go down here in old England, or to make a report in the newspapers that would be quite satisfactory to your chiefs. I demand either my formal arrest, or the unlocking of that door."

In silence I pressed a button, and my man threw open the door. Macpherson walked to the threshold, paused, and looked back at Spenser Hale, who sat there silent as a sphinx.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hale."

There being no reply, he turned to me with the same ingratiating smile:

"Good-evening, Monsieur Eugène Valmont," he said, "I shall give myself the pleasure of calling next Wednesday at six for my five shillings."

L. T. Meade & Robert Eustace

THE FACE IN THE DARK

from The London Magazine, 1903

I am an unmarried man with sufficient means to support myself in a quiet way. I enjoy a bachelor's life, am fond of dabbling in literature, write occasionally for the Press, possess a fair knowledge of science, and produce the best photographs of any amateur that I know. I have no present intention of marrying, but I am by no means unsociable. I like the company of my fellow-men, and go a good deal into Society. My name is Laurence Hyne, and I am thirty-two years of age.

In these days of intense living no man who is not a confirmed hermit can shut himself away from strong situations, from moments of danger, or from hours when the world seems more or less to totter beneath him. I, like others, have had my due share of adventures of one sort and another, and the one I am about to tell was by no means the least curious of those that occurred to me.

On the 18th of a very hot June, I went to the reception of some friends of mine, the Sitwells, who lived in Berkeley Square. This was always a brilliant function, and I knew that I should meet many of my friends there. On this occasion there was one in particular, a young fellow of the name of Granby Manners, whom I particularly wished to shake once more by the hand. I had known him as a boy, and as his mother had been my dearest and most valued friend, I took an interest in him. He was an open-handed, unselfish, clever lad, but was also one of the most nervous boys I had ever come across. His ideas were lofty and aspiring, but his nerves hampered him, and to such an extent that, when still quite a lad, not more than seventeen, he was ordered abroad, where he had resided under the care of a tutor ever since. Mrs. Manners had been a sort of elder sister to me—she had done me many good turns in life—had assisted me more than once, not only by her advice, but practically, and on her death-bed had charged me most emphatically to look after Granby, and if at any time I could do him a kindness, not to hesitate, for her sake, to do it.

" He is ten years your junior, don't forget that, Laurence," she said. " He knows little or nothing of English life. When the estate comes to him he will be surrounded by adventurers—help him if you can."

I promised faithfully, and now the time had come, for Granby's

mother and father were both dead—the boy inherited the old Croftwood estates, and had come home to attend to business matters. On the day of the Sitwells's function I received a letter from Lady Willoughby, Granby's aunt. She wrote from Scotland.

"My nephew is in London," she wrote. "Pray find him out and write to me with regard to his appearance, his prospects, his present ideas of life. He was always a strange boy, and not at all a person to own a big estate like Croftwood Hall. I am unable to travel, as you know, but my dear sister told me on her death-bed that you had promised to be good to him. Pray do what you can and let me know."

Accordingly I went to the Sitwells primed in every way to see after young Manners. Mrs. Manners had had an unhappy life—her burden was a heavy one, so heavy that it had sent her to her grave before her time. The facts were these. Her husband was one of the worst of men—a drunkard, reckless, fast, extravagant. There were rumours of even darker vices—of deeds committed that ought never to have seen the light of day. Some people said that the man was half insane. Well, he was dead, and the boy was not in the least like him.

I arrived at the Sitwells in good time. The house was already full of guests and very soon I ran up against young Manners. He had a bright face, a refined, elegant appearance, and an affectionate manner.

"I am glad to see you," he said to me. "This is quite like old times. Where can we go to have a long chat?"

"You must come to my rooms for that, Granby. But here—this terrace is empty for a few moments. Come and stand under this awning and let me look at you."

We went out through an open window and stood on a beautiful terrace screened by an awning and decked with flowers.

"You do look quite a man, Granby," I said. "Why, you must be two-and-twenty. Your hands must be pretty full of business now, my boy, with that big estate, and you the sole person to look after it."

"The fact is, Hyne," he answered, "I am so harried and rushed about that I have hardly a minute to call my own. I want to come to see you, and will at any hour you like to appoint."

"Here are two chairs," I said suddenly, for as he spoke I noticed the old nervous catch in his voice, and the quick movement of the head that spoke of a highly-strung system. "Sit down.

won't you, Granby. You have a big story to tell me. Let's begin to hear it at once."

"Well," he answered, "there's a great deal to say. My father has left things involved, but, of course, they *may* come all right; I can't say. Sometimes I fear—sometimes I hope. Anyhow, I shall know soon. What day is this—the 18th. I shall know, I must know, before the 24th."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked in astonishment.

"I will tell you presently. I could not in this crowd."

He glanced nervously behind him.

"Come and dine with me to-morrow night," was my answer.

His face lit up with pleasure. He was about to reply in the affirmative when some people came on to the terrace. They were two girls, both handsome and total strangers to me. I saw, however, that Granby knew them. His face flushed with vivid colour, and his eyes grew dark with delight. He greeted both girls, and especially the slighter and smaller of the two, with effusion.

"This is good," he said; "I was just talking to a special friend of mine. May I introduce you?"

A moment later I was shaking the hand and looking into the face of the brightest and most capable girl probably in the whole of England. Her name was Angela Dickinson. She was the daughter of a well-known barrister, who would undoubtedly be appointed to a judgeship before long. She had only lately come out—had met Manners when abroad; they were great chums. Oh, yes, it was good to see him again. They smiled at each other, and young Manners and Miss Angela Dickinson went off together; the other girl, whose name was Muriel, fell to my share to entertain.

"I am so glad we have met Mr. Manners and that he looks so well," she said. "When we saw him at Naples he often appeared very much troubled. I am glad he has met an old friend in you."

"Yes," I replied. "I have known Granby since he was a little boy. His mother was one of my best friends. Granby had a sad childhood; his father—I suppose everyone knows about him."

She nodded and looked grave.

"The man is dead," I continued. "Let his ashes rest in peace. It seems to me, Miss Dickinson, that Manners's only fault is that he is extremely sensitive."

"I know that," she replied. "Angela and he are great friends."

I followed the direction of her eyes. The pair were standing closely together at the further end of the balcony.

"There is not a doubt that they care for each other," said Miss Muriel; "but up to the present no word has been spoken—at least to my father. I wish he would speak—his silence puts Angela in a strained position."

Soon afterwards I took my leave, going home to attend to some special business which was occupying me that night. Just as I was going downstairs young Manners bounded after me.

"May I come to-night instead of to-morrow night?" he said. "It doesn't matter about dinner. I want to talk things over with you."

I told him to come in about nine o'clock, and he nodded his acceptance.

Punctually to the hour he arrived, looking handsome and gentlemanly in his evening clothes. I offered him a pipe; he sat down and we both smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"Well," I said, suddenly—for I saw that it must be my business to lead the way—"I felt rather anxious about you when we sat together in the balcony; but Miss Dickinson has relieved all my fears. You are all right, Manners—I congratulate you most heartily on your future."

He wrung my hand but did not speak.

"I suppose the engagement will soon be announced?" I said, after a pause.

"Oh, we are not engaged, at least, not exactly. I'd give the world if it could be, but I don't see my way—there are difficulties, and monstrous ones. It is about those I want to talk to you."

"Well, speak up, old chap. I am interested in you from every point of view. Tell me everything and we will take counsel together."

He drew his chair close to mine.

"When were you last at Croftwood?" was his remark.

"Not for some years now—not since your mother's death. I grant that the old place is gloomy, but nevertheless I love it. In your hands it will assume a very different appearance. You can rebuild and redecorate. You can cut down sufficient timber to give the place more air, and not such a crowded-up appearance. Croftwood Hall will be, I am sure, a lovely place in your reign, Manners, and Miss Angela is the very girl to make you happy there."

"I love the place," he answered—"it has been in our family for hundreds of years. Nevertheless I dread it very much. I had a

terrible fright there and have never been the same since. Did you hear of it?"

"No," I answered, puzzled at his tone.

"It happened a long time ago now, and it was on account of that I was sent abroad. My mother and father were away at the time—my mother was ordered to the sea for her health. You know, of course, that the old place is supposed to be haunted?"

"Most old places are," I answered in some heat. "But really, Manners, at this time of day to talk of haunted houses means nonsense. No old family seat is complete without its ghost. But what of that—no one really believes in the unearthly visitant."

"Some people do," he said with a shudder. "Well, let me tell you. My father and mother were both away—my mother wanted me to go to her, but my father refused. You know what a brute he was."

"Hush," I said, "he is dead."

"Dead or alive, I must speak the truth—he was a brute. I dreaded and hated him, but I worshipped my mother. I was terribly put out at being left behind. I was a big lad—fifteen at the time, but I cried myself ill. The house was horribly lonely, and there were only two servants—old Tarring, the butler, who is still there, and the cook. Half the rooms were shut up. The days were terrible and the long evenings were enough to turn one's brain. I had not even a book to read, for my father had locked up the library. I had not a friend to speak to, there was not a young person anywhere within miles. My nervousness, always a big thing, got worse. I lost my sleep—I used to wander about the old house half the night. On one special night I was so bad that I could not eat any dinner, and afterwards I had a fit of shivering and fancied I saw things whenever I looked up. I rang for Tarring at last and begged of him, for God's sake, to keep me company. You know him, of course, a bent old party with a nose like a beak. He came up and looked into my face and said solemnly:

"'Master Granby, if this goes on you will be mad soon.'

"'What do you mean?' I asked, looking at him with terror.

"'You have madness in your eyes, sir, and you inherit it—don't you forget that. There's that gentleman, your great-great-uncle, whose portrait is in the picture gallery. He died in Bedlam. You'd best go and look at his picture and be warned. A young gentleman like you ought to be happy. He should come to his meals with appetite and sleep sound o' nights. Take my advice,

sir, think no more about nerves or fancies, or they will be your undoing.'

"He went away, having positively refused to stay with me another moment, declaring that my face gave him the blues and that he preferred cook's company in the kitchen. I thought I would go to bed and drown my terrors in sleep. I covered myself well up with the bedclothes, but I could not rest. You remember the picture gallery at Croftwood, don't you, Hyne?"

"Perfectly well," I replied.

"It is on the ground floor, and occupies almost the whole west wing of the house. It communicates with the chapel at one end and with the dining-hall on the other. I lay with my eyes wide open, my heart beating like a hammer, and my thoughts full of my mad great-uncle. Suddenly I remembered that his name was also Granby Manners. I took an unhealthy desire to look at his face. It could not be combated. I got up, and candle in hand went down through the old house. At last I found myself in the picture gallery. You know those deep embrasures near the mullioned windows?"

I nodded.

"The picture was at the end close to the old chapel. Just as I got up to it, I saw someone standing behind me—someone in black—with a hood on. The whole thing was over in a minute' for I fainted away. But I remember now as distinctly as though it were only just happening, that the figure spoke and with outstretched hands pointed at me and said:

"'*Granby Manners, you will die in this room!*'

"My screams must have brought old Tarring. I was taken to my bedroom, the doctor was summoned, and I was in bed in danger of brain fever for many weeks. My mother got better and returned home. When I saw her I told her exactly what had happened. She was full of sympathy and tenderness and love. She took immediate steps and I was sent abroad with a tutor. We went from one sunny land to another, and I began to forget my troubles and grew strong and healthy once again. Then came the terrible news of my mother's death—I should never see my darling more. I was stricken to the earth—I resolved never to return to England. But two years after my father died, and the lawyers wrote and said that I must return home at once. I found the estate terribly involved, in short, the outlook is most gloomy."

"Have you told this strange story to Miss Dickinson?" I asked.

"I have. She knows everything. She knows that we cannot be engaged until things clear up a bit. If they never do, which is more than probable, I must give her up. Yes, I must, however hard it may be. As to the story of my mad ancestor, I do not think much about it. There has not been a second case of insanity in the family—so that goes for nothing; but I cannot ask Mr. Dickinson for Angela when I have no money to support her with."

"Surely that sounds ridiculous," I said. "You, as owner of Croftwood Hall, must have plenty of money."

"That is the point, Hyne," he replied. "The complications are enormous. I will come to that presently; but as we are talking of nerves and fancies, may I tell you something else? You have heard, of course, of the Croftwood Elm?"

I nodded. He was alluding to an enormous elm, of great age, which grew by itself just within sight of the house. There was a superstition in the old place that a branch from this elm always fell before the owner's death.

"I was at Croftwood last week," continued Granby. "The gardeners were clearing away the great branch which had fallen from the elm two days before my father's death."

"Well," I said, "you are not going to think anything of that. It was merely a coincidence. Gales of wind will break off the branches of old trees to the end of time. Come, Manners, I am ashamed that you should pin your faith to such rubbish. But tell me, when are you going to Croftwood again?"

"To-morrow."

"What! To-morrow! May I come with you?"

"Would you come?"

His face lighted up with intense pleasure.

"That would be splendid," he said. "I can't tell you how I hate these visits. A great deal hangs on what takes place in the next few days. Poltimore will be there. He is the horrible man to whom the estate is mortgaged."

"Croftwood Hall mortgaged?" I cried.

"Yes, and up to the hilt. I shall be awfully glad to tell you. Of course, what I say is in confidence. I don't want the whole world to know that I am a pauper."

"You cannot be that," I answered; "but anyhow, you can trust me."

"I will tell you everything to-morrow," was his answer.

He rose as he spoke, and soon afterwards took his leave.

According to my appointment, I met the lad at Waterloo the following day. We reached Croftwood soon after six o'clock. It was a lovely day, bright and not too warm, and as we drove through the park the old trees in their summer greenery restored many memories to my mind.

"Here we are," cried Granby, as the dog-cart put us down at the porch, where the old butler was waiting to receive us.

A more decrepit, bent old man I had never seen. His hooked nose, his distorted, claw-like hands, gave him the appearance more of a bird of ill-omen than anything else. As he glanced with a fixed and by no means amiable expression from Granby to myself, I observed that his eyes were keen, bright, and sharp as a needle. Whatever else had happened to old Tarring, his intellect was still well to the fore. Tarring knew me, although he pretended to regard me as a total stranger, and evidently viewed me with small favour.

"Are there no letters ?" asked Manners.

"The post won't be in just yet, sir."

"Well, Tarring, Mr. Hyne has come to stay with me. See that you get a room ready for him. Now, Hyne, let us have a stroll before dinner. Doesn't the place look lovely just now ? By the way, you never have met Mr. Poltimore. He was a great friend of my father's. I will tell you how my affairs stand before we see him."

We strolled off through one of the gardens.

"The situation is far worse than you have any idea of," he began. "I will endeavour to explain. No one knows exactly what my father's life was, but there is no doubt that on a certain night he got into a most terrible affair in London. Nobody knows what he did, but it was necessary for him to have twenty thousand pounds in cash that night. It was that or suicide. He obtained the sum, how I don't know, from Mr. Poltimore, who is a rich jewel merchant in the city.

"In exchange for the money my father gave the man a document, all duly attested and witnessed—a sort of mortgage on Croftwood. It is to this effect. That Mr. Poltimore holds the place as security for his money, and the mortgager has to pay 10 per cent. on the loan. There are arrears of interest now amounting to ten thousand pounds. This sum has to be paid on Midsummer day, or, according to the mortgage, Mr. Poltimore seizes the property, which is worth not less than a hundred thousand pounds. But there is another and more terrible clause. It is this : even if the interest is paid regularly, I shall only have the place for my life, after that

it passes altogether into Poltimore's hands, or into the hands of his heirs. If the arrears of interest can be paid by Midsummer day all will be well as far as I am concerned, but no child of mine can ever inherit the place. You must see for yourself that under such conditions I can't ask Angela Dickinson to be my wife."

" I am not surprised," I answered. " But have you no reasonable hope that your lawyers will raise the money ? "

" They say they will do their best. But it is by no means easy."

" Suppose they fail—have you no other means of getting the money ? "

" No," he answered. " I once purchased some shares in a gold mine, and I think they will, in time, bring me in a lot of money, but of course it is all a speculation, and I don't suppose anyone would lend on the chance."

" I see," I replied. " And of course it is very much to Mr. Poltimore's advantage that you should not pay the interest on Midsummer day, for he would then have a place worth one hundred thousand pounds for twenty thousand."

" Quite so," was his reply.

Our stroll had led us by this time to the old elm tree.

" Ah," cried Manners, " look for yourself. Here is the place where the branch fell before my father's death."

We struck off across the grass towards the gnarled old tree.

" I thought they had cleared it away before now, but it is still there. How odd."

We were standing exactly under the tree, and a big branch, looking very fresh and green, lay beneath it at our feet. Granby's face turned white.

" Another branch," he cried. " What does this mean ? "

" Nothing, except a fresh gale," was my answer.

" You don't understand," he replied impatiently. " A branch of the old elm always falls before the death of the owner. I am the present owner. What does this allude to ? "

" Come away, and don't be nonsensical," were the words which crowded to my lips, but before I could utter them a bass voice, loud and ringing, sounded through the trees.

" Hullo ! " it called.

I glanced up with relief at the interruption, and saw a tall, heavily-built man in corduroys approaching us rapidly.

" Hullo, Granby," he cried. " Just come down, eh ? How seedy you look—white as a turnip. What's the matter ? "

"Nothing, thanks. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Laurence Hyne, Mr. Poltimore."

Poltimore raised his hat. I thought I had never seen a more disagreeable face. He eyed me with small favour and turned again to the boy.

"Is your friend coming to stay ?" he asked somewhat pointedly.

"Certainly. As my guest," said Granby, in a low tone.

Poltimore uttered a mocking laugh.

"Your guest, forsooth," he said. "By the way, have you had that letter ?"

"No, but it may come by this evening's post."

"You will be out of suspense at least, after you have heard," said Poltimore.

He glanced round with a frown at me, and we turned towards the house. As we entered it, Tarring approached and handed Manners a letter in a blue envelope.

"Ah, here it is," he cried.

He turned aside to open it, his fingers shaking. Poltimore watched him with intense excitement.

"Well," he said impatiently, "what is the news ?"

"Good news for you, Mr. Poltimore," said Granby then. "There need be no secret," he continued, and he glanced from me to the other man. "The loan cannot be raised, therefore in four days this house is yours."

Poltimore raised his hand and brought it down again with great force on his thigh.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he said. "Upon my soul, I am sorry for you, lad, but I can't pretend that I'm not pleased on my own account at the turn events are taking. No offence to you, Mr. Hyne, but when the property comes into my hands I choose my own guests. You understand, sir. Now I'm off to the village. Don't wait dinner for me."

He went away with a great stride, banging the heavy oak door after him.

Manners turned to me. "Isn't he a brute ?" he said. "But for my sake you will try to endure him, Hyne."

"My dear lad, Poltimore is nothing to me, nothing whatever, except as far as you are concerned. But show me that letter. I don't believe that the worst can have happened."

"But it has," he answered, and he handed me the letter, the contents of which had so elated Mr. Poltimore.

I read it ; it ran as follows :—

" DEAR SIR,—We regret to inform you that we cannot raise the money. The shares in the mine you hold are of no value as security. The estate will therefore pass to Mr. Poltimore on Midsummer day."

" But surely," I cried, " it would be possible to find twenty thousand pounds in order to let you keep the property. To tell you the truth, Manners, I don't believe in that extraordinary document your father signed. At least, I should like to have a good look at it. The estate is entailed."

" Yes ; but he broke the entail."

" How so ? How is that possible ? He could not do it without your permission, and you were not of age."

" He sent me a paper to sign on my twenty-first birthday. I never even guessed what it was, and signed practically without reading, but now I am certain it was that, and I signed away my birthright."

I could not help feeling a sense of dismay, Manners had no more notion of business than an infant.

I thought hard during the remainder of that evening, and at last it suddenly occurred to me to consult no less a man than Mr. Dickinson, the father of Miss Angela. I determined to tell Granby of my resolution.

" You shan't want a friend at this juncture," I said. " If I had the money I would lend it to you with a heart and a half, and think myself well off, too," I added, " for Croftwood Hall is admirable security for any loan. But I have nothing like that amount at my command, so there is no good wasting time over that thought. The place, however, is worth saving, even if you had nothing to do with it. We don't want an old family place to get into the hands of a scoundrel of Poltimore's sort. Now I propose to go to London to-morrow, for there is, as you are aware, not a moment to lose, and when there I shall consult Dickinson."

" What ? " cried Granby. " Angela's father ? "

" The same."

He looked uncomfortable, started up, and began to pace the room. "You—would not surely tell him—about—— ? "

" You must leave that to me, my boy. Whatever happens, I must have an open hand. You cannot be worse off than you are

now, and it would be impossible for Dickinson to despise you for loving his daughter."

The poor fellow covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"I am off in the morning to do what I can," I said. "In the meantime, stay here and await events."

I was sorry afterwards that I had not insisted on taking him with me: but how could I foretell the horrible future.

I reached home soon after eleven o'clock, and telephoned immediately to Dickinson to know if he could see me. I had a reply in the affirmative, and went to his chambers soon after noon.

"Come out and have lunch with me," he said heartily, "and then you can tell me what it is all about. Young Manners and the Croftwood estate! But surely that is a fine property?"

"It is if we can rescue it," I replied, "and it is for that purpose I want to consult you."

We lunched in his favourite coffee house off the Strand, and I told Dickinson as much as I thought necessary of the story. He was a middle-aged man, with a staid, reserved face. It was difficult to understand how he could be the sparkling and vivacious Angela's father. He sat quietly after my communication had come to an end, then he said abruptly:

"Have you told me everything?"

I looked at him and resolved to trust him.

"There is one thing I have left out," I said. "It is this. Young Manners loves your youngest daughter as faithfully and truly as a man can love a woman. He would make her a good husband, and Croftwood is not to be despised."

"That is true," answered Dickinson. "I don't know what can be done, but I will consult my solicitor. If anyone can help you, Wantage is the man. Stay, I will give you a letter to take to him at once. You can explain matters more quickly than I could, and there isn't a moment to lose."

"The worst happens on Midsummer day, and this is the 20th. We have only four days."

He gave a low, significant whistle, then dashed off a few words to Wantage and put the letter into my hands.

Wantage was busy in his office in Lincoln's Inn. He was a little red-headed, freckled, elderly man, with a keen face, an observant eye, and manner which expressed nothing. He was very busy, as numerous clerks testified, but Dickinson's letter was *Open Sesame*, and I was allowed to see him almost immediately.

"A curious case," he said, after we had talked for over an hour. "Will you kindly leave me now, Mr. Hyne, and come back about this time to-morrow. I can give you my answer then—yes or no."

There was nothing for it but to comply. I spent the evening at my club, slept as best I could during the night that followed, and punctually to the moment was back with Wantage in the afternoon of the twenty-first. I was taken at once into his presence. He shut the door and locked it.

"I have not been idle since I saw you," he said to me. "I have been making enquiries with regard to those gold reefs. I have also heard several things by no means to Poltimore's credit. I do not believe that at the worst he can uphold his claim. It is my very firm impression that the law wants him, and sooner than he has any idea of. At any rate, one thing must be done—the cheque must be paid. I will let you have the amount. I heard, on the whole, favourable accounts with regard to those gold reefs. Croftwood is worth saving, the young man is worth rescuing. Now, if you will help me, the thing can be done."

"No fear of my not helping you," I answered cheerfully. "I would almost cut off my right hand to help that boy."

"Thanks, Mr. Hyne," he said, gazing at me critically and almost with a quizzical expression. "You are a good friend."

"His mother was a good friend to me."

"Ah, I respect you, Mr. Hyne. Well, this is your part in the matter. The cheque must be paid to you, and you must pay it to Poltimore. The lad himself must have nothing to do with it. You must accept Poltimore's letter of release. This is a matter for a lawyer, however, and if you are going down to Croftwood to-morrow I shall have pleasure in accompanying you. Poltimore may play tricks with Manners, and possibly also with you; but I do not think he will dare to try them on with me. Will you be ready to accompany me to Croftwood Hall to-morrow?"

"Certainly," I said.

We talked a little longer; matters were finally arranged, and I left in high spirits.

On my way home it occurred to me that I would wire to Granby.

I accordingly sent the following very cheerful message:

"All right. Money will be raised. Coming down with solicitor to-morrow. Cheer up.—LAURENCE HYNE."

The rest of the day passed as usual. It was not until nine o'clock, just after I had returned from dining at my club, that all of a sudden it flashed upon me what a deadly and dangerous thing I had done in sending that wire to Granby. I sprang from my chair. Manners would, of course, tell Poltimore, and the man would be beside himself with rage and disappointment. Beyond doubt, Poltimore was in a most serious position ; his own affairs were so critical that if he did not get relief soon, such as the Croftwood estate would furnish him with, he would go under, how deeply and how far I could not guess ; but he would be submerged—ruined. As far as he was concerned, everything depended on whether young Manners was able to pay him by Midsummer day, or—great heavens ! there was another alternative. Should Granby Manners *die* before Midsummer day, Poltimore would be equally safe—indeed, more safe than if the arrears of interest were paid. Then, beyond doubt, the estate would be his. He would be a rich man. Should Granby die, Poltimore would have attained the utmost height of his ambition. The position was too fearful to contemplate quietly. I, who had hoped to liberate the boy from all his troubles, had, by sending that telegram, in all possibility sealed his death warrant. A desperate and cruel man with no principle would do anything. Then there was that scoundrelly butler, a coward without a scrap of conscience. He had always hated the boy. I saw hatred in his eyes when he greeted us both at Croftwood Hall. Yes, beyond doubt, Manners was in the gravest danger.

It was impossible for me to rest. Late as it was, I found myself ten minutes afterwards in a hansom cab. I had determined to catch the ten o'clock train from Waterloo. Not an instant's delay must keep me from the place. I would wire to Wantage in the morning. He could come down and the necessary business could be transacted. But I, in the meantime, would be on the spot to prevent mischief.

I am not given to nervous fancies, but I must confess that during that railway journey to Croftwood station I had about as bad a time as a man often lives through. There was the lonely deserted house, steeped in all its superstitions ; there was the supposed ghost ; there was the villain who would stop at nothing ; there was his tool, the old butler ; and there was the boy himself, nervous, highly strung, innocent.

The train seemed to crawl—it stopped at every station. By the

time I reached Croftwood station it was nearly one o'clock. There was no fly to be had—there was nothing for it but to finish my journey on foot. I knew my way well, and struck off along the country lanes at a brisk pace. The night was fine with a high wind. Scuds of broken cloud raced across the moon, giving alternate moments of bright light followed by darkness.

At last I turned up the avenue and finally reached the house. There was no light in any of the windows. I determined not to ring the bell, but to make my way round to the left under some close-growing shrubberies. I thought it extremely probable that I could enter by the old chapel, a place no longer used either for prayer or praise. No one would think of the chapel, or be concerned as to whether the heavy oak door was locked or not. I had observed that it was unlocked when with Granby two days ago. Now it yielded to my pressure. I went straight through the chapel. This led me into the picture gallery, at the further end of which was a secret door by which I could eventually reach Granby's room.

As I walked quickly down the long picture gallery, the greater part of which was in intense darkness, the windows having been all barred and bolted, I suddenly paused and listened. Something had broken the silence. What could it be? It sounded like low guttural breathing. My heart beat fast as I advanced, then it almost stopped, for hanging unsupported, and brought into relief by a long ray of moonlight which fell through a badly-fitting shutter, was a face within a few feet of my own. Oh God!—the face was *upside down*, while breath passed quickly between the anguished lips. It was the face of Granby.

This scene lasted for only a minute; before I could speak everything was changed—a bright light flooded the apartment, and Poltimore, a candle in his hand, approached from the dining hall end. Granby was hanging by his feet. I rushed at the villain—a desperate encounter took place.

"What is this, you scoundrel?" I shouted.

He swung me off with the strength of a man nearly double my size, pushed the old butler towards me and dashed away. The latter I seized.

"Help me at once, Tarring," I cried, "or I'll wring your neck. Save Mr. Granby—what are you about, man? Be quick."

His face was ghastly, but he spoke no word. We worked quietly.

A step-ladder stood behind us and a few moments later Manners lay upon the floor, still breathing, but unconscious.

"Go and fetch brandy," I cried.

The man disappeared and soon returned with a decanter and a glass. I poured a little down the boy's throat, and he opened his eyes.

A few hours later Granby was able to tell his own story.

"I got your telegram, and was nearly mad with joy," he said. "Poltimore found me holding it in my hand. He rushed at me, seized the sheet, and read the news. I shall never forget his face. It was just as though I were in Hades, and saw the face of a lost spirit. But before I had time to realise anything he had caught me in his powerful grip. He said something to Tarring, who was not far off and they carried me away with them to the picture gallery. I think I fainted, for when I came to myself I was tied by the ankles to that beam. What I lived through during the next awful hours I can never by any possibility explain."

The doctor when he arrived made it clear that death must have ensued in a very short time. This would have been caused by the enormous congestion of the brain. The cunningness of the mode of murder was made apparent when the doctor further said that after the boy died and the body was lowered down, there would not be the slightest trace apparent to anyone of what had happened.

Both Poltimore and Tarring were arrested, and are now undergoing a term of penal servitude.

As to Granby, his friends clustered round him, and the estate was put on a firm basis. He is about to marry Angela Dickinson in a short time. The shares in the gold reef have also turned out trumps, and the owner of Croftwood Hall will once more be a very rich man.

In the bright, calm, handsome fellow, who shows not a trace of fear or nervousness, who is happy of the happy, and gay of the gay, few would recognise the boy whom I was the means of rescuing from the most terrible death.

R. Austin Freeman

THE BLUE SEQUIN

from John Thorndyke's Cases

Chatto & Windus, 1909

Thorndyke stood looking up and down the platform with anxiety that increased as the time drew near for the departure of the train.

"This is very unfortunate," he said, reluctantly stepping into an empty smoking compartment as the guard executed a flourish with his green flag. "I am afraid we have missed our friend." He closed the door, and, as the train began to move, thrust his head out of the window.

"Now I wonder if that will be he," he continued. "If so, he has caught the train by the skin of his teeth, and is now in one of the rear compartments."

The subject of Thorndyke's speculations was Mr. Edward Stopford, of the firm of Stopford & Myers, of Portugal Street, solicitors, and his connection with us at present arose out of a telegram that had reached our chambers on the preceding evening. It was reply-paid, and ran thus :

> "Can you come here to-morrow to direct defence? Important case. All costs undertaken by us.—Stopford & Myers."

Thorndyke's reply had been in the affirmative, and early on this present morning a further telegram—evidently posted overnight—had been delivered :

> "Shall leave for Woldhurst by 8.25 from Charing Cross. Will call for you if possible.—Edward Stopford."

He had not called, however, and, since he was unknown personally to us both, we could not judge whether or not he had been among the passengers on the platform.

"It is most unfortunate," Thorndyke repeated, "for it deprives us of that preliminary consideration of the case which is so invaluable." He filled his pipe thoughtfully, and, having made a fruitless inspection of the platform at London Bridge, took up the paper that he had bought at the bookstall, and began to turn over

the leaves, running his eye quickly down the columns, unmindful of the journalistic baits in paragraph or article.

"It is a great disadvantage," he observed, while still glancing through the paper, "to come plump into an inquiry without preparation—to be confronted with the details before one has a chance of considering the case in general terms. For instance——"

He paused, leaving the sentence unfinished, and as I looked up inquiringly I saw that he had turned over another page, and was now reading attentively.

"This looks like our case, Jervis," he said presently, handing me the paper and indicating a paragraph at the top of the page. It was quite brief, and was headed "Terrible Murder in Kent," the account being as follows:

"A shocking crime was discovered yesterday morning at the little town of Woldhurst, which lies on the branch line from Halbury Junction. The discovery was made by a porter who was inspecting the carriages of the train which had just come in. On opening the door of a first-class compartment, he was horrified to find the body of a fashionably dressed woman stretched upon the floor. Medical aid was immediately summoned, and on the arrival of the divisional surgeon, Dr. Morton, it was ascertained that the woman had not been dead more than a few minutes.

"The state of the corpse leaves no doubt that a murder of a most brutal kind has been perpetrated, the cause of death being a penetrating wound of the head, inflicted with some pointed implement, which must gave been used with terrible violence, since it has perforated the skull and entered the brain. That robbery was not the motive of the crime is made clear by the fact that an expensively fitted dressing-bag was found on the rack, and that the dead woman's jewellery, including several valuable diamond rings, was untouched. It is rumoured that an arrest has been made by the local police."

"A gruesome affair," I remarked, as I handed back the paper, "but the report does not give us much information."

"It does not," Thorndyke agreed, "and yet it gives us something to consider. Here is a perforating wound of the skull, inflicted with some pointed implement—that is, assuming that it is not a bullet wound. Now, what kind of implement would be capable of inflicting such an injury? How would such an

implement be used in the confined space of a railway-carriage, and what sort of person would be in possession of such an implement? These are preliminary questions that are worth considering, and I commend them to you, together with the further problems of the possible motive—excluding robbery—and any circumstances other than murder which might account for the injury."

"The choice of suitable implements is not very great," I observed.

"It is very limited, and most of them, such as a plasterer's pick or a geological hammer, are associated with certain definite occupations. You have a note-book?"

I had, and, accepting the hint, I produced it and pursued my further reflections in silence, while my companion, with his note-book also on his knee, gazed steadily out of the window. And thus he remained, wrapped in thought, jotting down an entry now and again in his book, until the train slowed down at Halbury Junction, where we had to change on to a branch line.

As we stepped out I noticed a well-dressed man hurrying up the platform from the rear and eagerly scanning the faces of the few passengers who had alighted. Soon he espied us, and, approaching quickly, asked, as he looked from one of us to the other:

"Dr. Thorndyke?"

"Yes," replied my colleague, adding, "And you, I presume, are Mr. Edward Stopford?"

The solicitor bowed. "This is a dreadful affair," he said, in an agitated manner. "I see you have the paper. A most shocking affair. I am immensely relieved to find you here. Nearly missed the train, and feared I should miss you."

"There appears to have been an arrest," Thorndyke began.

"Yes—my brother. Terrible business. Let us walk up the platform; our train won't start for a quarter of an hour yet."

We deposited our joint Gladstone and Thorndyke's travelling-case in an empty first-class compartment, and then, with the solicitor between us, strolled up to the unfrequented end of the platform.

"My brother's position," said Mr. Stopford, "fills me with dismay—but let me give you the facts in order, and you shall judge for yourself. This poor creature who has been murdered so brutally was a Miss Edith Grant. She was formerly an artist's model, and as such was a good deal employed by my brother, who is a painter—Harold Stopford, you know, A.R.A. now——"

"I know his work very well, and charming work it is."

"I think so, too. Well, in those days he was quite a youngster—about twenty—and he became very intimate with Miss Grant, in quite an innocent way, though not very discreet; but she was a nice, respectable girl, as most English models are, and no one thought any harm. However, a good many letters passed between them, and some little presents, amongst which was a beaded chain carrying a locket, and in this he was fool enough to put his portrait and the inscription, 'Edith, from Harold.'

"Later on, Miss Grant, who had a rather good voice, went on the stage, in the comic opera line, and, in consequence, her habits and associates changed somewhat; and, as Harold had meanwhile become engaged, he was naturally anxious to get his letters back, and especially to exchange the locket for some less compromising gift. The letters she eventually sent him, but refused absolutely to part with the locket.

"Now, for the last month Harold has been staying at Halbury, making sketching excursions into the surrounding country, and yesterday morning he took the train to Shinglehurst, the third station from here, and the one before Woldhurst.

"On the platform here he met Miss Grant, who had come down from London, and was going on to Worthing. They entered the branch train together, having a first-class compartment to themselves. It seems she was wearing his locket at the time, and he made another appeal to her to make an exchange, which she refused, as before. The discussion appears to have become rather heated and angry on both sides, for the guard and a porter at Munsden both noticed that they seemed to be quarrelling; but the upshot of the affair was that the lady snapped the chain, and tossed it together with the locket to my brother, and they parted quite amiably at Shinglehurst, where Harold got out. He was then carrying his full sketching kit, including a large holland umbrella, the lower joint of which is an ash staff fitted with a powerful steel spike for driving into the ground.

"It was about half-past ten when he got out at Shinglehurst; by eleven he had reached his pitch and got to work, and he painted steadily for three hours. Then he packed up his traps, and was just starting on his way back to the station, when he was met by the police and arrested.

"And now, observe the accumulation of circumstantial evidence against him. He was the last person seen in company with

the murdered woman—for no one seems to have seen her after they left Munsden ; he appeared to be quarrelling with her when she was last seen alive, he had a reason for possibly wishing for her death, he was provided with an implement—a spiked staff—capable of inflicting the injury which caused her death, and, when he was searched, there was found in his possession the locket and the broken chain, apparently removed from her person with violence.

" Against all this is, of course, his known character—he is the gentlest and most amiable of men—and his subsequent conduct—imbecile to the last degree if he had been guilty ; but, as a lawyer, I can't help seeing that appearances are almost hopelessly against him."

" We won't say ' hopelessly,' " replied Thorndyke, as we took our places in the carriage, " though I expect the police are pretty cocksure. When does the inquest open ? "

" To-day at four. I have obtained an order from the coroner for you to examine the body and be present at the post-mortem."

" Do you happen to know the exact position of the wound ? "

" Yes ; it is a little above and behind the left ear—a horrible round hole, with a ragged cut or tear running from it to the side of the forehead."

" And how was the body lying ? "

" Right along the floor, with the feet close to the off-side door."

" Was the wound on the head the only one ? "

" No ; there was a long cut or bruise on the right cheek—a contused wound the police surgeon called it, which he believes to have been inflicted with a heavy and rather blunt weapon. I have not heard of any other wounds or bruises."

" Did anyone enter the train yesterday at Shinglehurst ? " Thorndyke asked.

" No one entered the train after it left Halbury."

Thorndyke considered these statements in silence, and presently fell into a brown study, from which he roused only as the train moved out of Shinglehurst station.

" It would be about here that the murder was committed," said Mr. Stopford ; " at least, between here and Woldhurst."

Thorndyke nodded rather abstractedly, being engaged at the moment in observing with great attention the objects that were visible from the windows.

"I notice," he remarked presently, "a number of chips scattered about between the rails, and some of the chair-wedges look new. Have there been any platelayers at work lately?"

"Yes," answered Stopford, "they are on the line now, I believe—at least, I saw a gang working near Woldhurst yesterday, and they are said to have set a rick on fire; I saw it smoking when I came down."

"Indeed; and this middle line of rails is, I suppose, a sort of siding?"

"Yes; they shunt the goods trains and empty trucks on to it. There are the remains of the rick—still smouldering, you see."

Thorndyke gazed absently at the blackened heap until an empty cattle-truck on the middle track hid it from view. This was succeeded by a line of goods-waggons, and these by a passenger coach, one compartment of which—a first-class—was closed up and sealed. The train now began to slow down rather suddenly, and a couple of minutes later we brought up in Woldhurst station.

It was evident that rumours of Thorndyke's advent had preceded us, for the entire staff—two porters, an inspector, and the stationmaster—were waiting expectantly on the platform, and the latter came forward, regardless of his dignity, to help us with our luggage.

"Do you think I could see the carriage?" Thorndyke asked the solicitor.

"Not the inside, sir," said the stationmaster, on being appealed to. "The police have sealed it up. You would have to ask the inspector."

"Well, I can have a look at the outside, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

And to this the stationmaster readily agreed, and offered to accompany us.

"What other first-class passengers were there?" Thorndyke asked.

"None, sir. There was only one first-class coach, and the deceased was the only person in it. It has given us all a dreadful turn, this affair has," he continued, as we set off up the line. "I was on the platform when the train came in. We were watching a rick that was burning up the line, and a rare blaze it made, too; and I was just saying that we should have to move the cattle-truck that was on the mid-track, because, you see, sir, the smoke and sparks were blowing across, and I thought it would frighten

the poor beasts. And Mr. Felton he don't like his beasts handled roughly. He says it spoils the meat."

"No doubt he is right," said Thorndkye. "But now, tell me, do you think it is possible for any person to board or leave the train on the off-side unobserved? Could a man, for instance, enter a compartment on the off-side at one station and drop off as the train was slowing down at the next, without being seen?"

"I doubt it," replied the stationmaster. "Still, I wouldn't say it is impossible."

"Thank you. Oh, and there's another question. You have a gang of men at work on the line, I see. Now, do those men belong to the district?"

"No, sir; they are strangers, every one, and pretty rough diamonds some of 'em are. But I shouldn't say there was any real harm in 'em. If you was suspecting any of 'em of being mixed up in this——"

"I am not," interrupted Thorndyke rather shortly. "I suspect nobody; but I wish to get all the facts of the case at the outset."

"Naturally, sir," replied the abashed official; and we pursued our way in silence.

"Do you remember, by the way," said Thorndyke, as we approached the empty coach, "whether the off-side door of the compartment was closed and locked when the body was discovered?"

"It was closed, sir, but not locked. Why, sir, did you think——"

"Nothing, nothing. The sealed compartment is the one, of course?"

Without waiting for a reply, he commenced his survey of the coach, while I gently restrained our two companions from shadowing him, as they were disposed to do.

The off-side footboard occupied his attention specially, and when he had scrutinised minutely the part opposite the fatal compartment he walked slowly from end to end with his eyes but a few inches from its surface, as though he was searching for something.

Near what had been the rear end he stopped and drew from his pocket a piece of paper; then, with a moistened finger tip he picked up from the footboard some evidently minute object, which he carefully transferred to the paper, folding the latter and placing it in his pocket-book.

He next mounted the footboard, and, having peered in through

the window of the sealed compartment, produced from his pocket a small insufflator or powder-blower, with which he blew a stream of impalpable smoke-like powder on to the edges of the middle window, bestowing the closest attention on the irregular dusty patches in which it settled, and even measuring one on the jamb of the window with a pocket-rule.

At length he stepped down, and, having carefully looked over the near-side footboard, announced that he had finished for the present.

As we were returning down the line, we passed a working man, who seemed to be viewing the chairs and sleepers with more than casual interest.

"That, I suppose, is one of the platelayers?" Thorndyke suggested to the stationmaster.

"Yes, the foreman of the gang," was the reply.

"I'll just step back and have a word with him, if you will walk on slowly." And my colleague turned back briskly and overtook the man, with whom he remained in conversation for some minutes.

"I think I see the police inspector on the platform," remarked Thorndyke, as we approached the station.

"Yes, there he is," said our guide. "Come down to see what you are after, sir, I expect." Which was doubtless the case, although the officer professed to be there by the merest chance.

"You would like to see the weapon, sir, I suppose?" he remarked, when he had introduced himself.

"The umbrella-spike," Thorndyke corrected. "Yes, if I may. We are going to the mortuary now."

"Then you'll pass the station on the way; so, if you care to look in, I will walk up with you."

This proposition being agreed to, we all proceeded to the police-station, including the stationmaster, who was on the very tiptoe of curiosity.

"There you are, sir," said the inspector, unlocking his office, and ushering us in. "Don't say we haven't given every facility to the defence. There are all the effects of the accused, including the very weapon the deed was done with."

"Come, come," protested Thorndyke; "we mustn't be premature."

He took the stout ash staff from the officer, and, having examined the formidable spike through a lens, drew from his pocket

a steel calliper-gauge, with which he carefully measured the diameter of the spike, and the staff to which it was fixed.

"And now," he said, when he had made a note of the measurements in his book, "we will look at the colour-box and the sketch. Ha! a very orderly man, your brother, Mr. Stopford. Tubes all in their places, palette-knives wiped clean, palette cleaned off and rubbed bright, brushes wiped—they ought to be washed before they stiffen—all this is very significant."

He unstrapped the sketch from the blank canvas to which it was pinned, and, standing it on a chair in a good light, stepped back to look at it.

"And you tell me that that is only three hours' work!" he exclaimed, looking at the lawyer. "It is a really marvellous achievement."

"My brother is a very rapid worker," replied Stopford dejectedly.

"Yes, but this is not only amazingly rapid; it is in his very happiest vein—full of spirit and feeling. But we mustn't stay to look at it longer.

He replaced the canvas on its pins, and having glanced at the locket and some other articles that lay in a drawer, thanked the inspector for his courtesy and withdrew.

"That sketch and the colour-box appear very suggestive to me," he remarked, as we walked up the street.

"To me also," said Stopford gloomily, "for they are under lock and key, like their owner, poor old fellow."

He sighed heavily, and we walked on in silence.

The mortuary-keeper had evidently heard of our arrival, for he was waiting at the door with the key in his hand, and, on being shown the coroner's order, unlocked the door, and we entered together.

But, after a momentary glance at the ghostly, shrouded figure lying upon the slate table, Stopford turned pale and retreated, saying that he would wait for us outside with the mortuary-keeper.

As soon as the door was closed and locked on the inside, Thorndyke glanced curiously round the bare whitewashed building.

A stream of sunlight poured in through the skylight, and fell upon the silent form that lay so still under its covering-sheet, and one stray beam glanced into a corner by the door, where, on a row of pegs and a deal table, the dead woman's clothing was displayed.

"There is something unspeakably sad in these poor relics,

Jervis," said Thorndyke, as we stood before them. " To me they are more tragic, more full of pathetic suggestion, than the corpse itself. See the smart, jaunty hat, and the costly skirts hanging there, so desolate and forlorn ; the dainty *lingerie* on the table, neatly folded—by the mortuary-man's wife, I hope—the little French shoes and open-work silk stockings. How pathetically eloquent they are of harmless, womanly vanity, and the gay, careless life, snapped short in the twinkling of an eye. But we must not give way to sentiment. There is another life threatened, and it is in our keeping."

He lifted the hat from its peg and turned it over in his hand. It was, I think, what is called a " picture-hat "—a huge, flat, shapeless mass of gauze and ribbon and feather, spangled over freely with dark-blue sequins. In one part of the brim was a ragged hole, and from this the glittering sequins dropped off in little showers when the hat was moved.

" This will have been worn tilted over on the left side," said Thorndyke, " judging by the general shape and the position of the hole."

" Yes," I agreed. " Like that of the Duchess of Devonshire in Gainsborough's portrait."

" Exactly."

He shook a few of the sequins into the palm of his hand, and, replacing the hat on its peg, dropped the little discs into an envelope, on which he wrote, " From the hat," and slipped it into his pocket. Then, stepping over to the table, he drew back the sheet reverently and even tenderly from the dead woman's face, and looked down at it with grave pity.

It was a comely face, white as marble, serene and peaceful in expression, with half-closed eyes, and framed with a mass of brassy yellow hair ; but its beauty was marred by a long linear wound, half cut, half bruise, running down the right cheek from the eye to the chin.

" A handsome girl," Thorndyke commented—" a dark-haired blonde. What a sin to have disfigured herself so with that horrible peroxide."

He smoothed the hair back from her forehead, and added : " She seems to have applied the stuff last about ten days ago. There is about a quarter of an inch of dark hair at the roots. What do you make of that wound on the cheek ? "

" It looks as if she had struck some sharp angle in falling, though,

as the seats are padded in first-class carriages, I don't see what she could have struck."

"No. And now let us look at the other wound. Will you note down the description?"

He handed me his note-book, and I wrote down as he dictated:

"A clean-punched circular hole in skull, an inch behind and above margin of left ear—diameter, an inch and seven-sixteenths; starred fracture of parietal bone; membranes perforated, and brain entered deeply; ragged scalp-wound, extending forward to margin of left orbit; fragments of gauze and sequins in edges of wound. That will do for the present. Dr. Morton will give us further details if we want them."

He pocketed his callipers and rule, drew from the bruised scalp one or two loose hairs, which he placed in the envelope with the sequins, and, having looked over the body for other wounds or bruises (of which there were none), replaced the sheet, and prepared to depart.

As we walked away from the mortuary, Thorndyke was silent and deeply thoughtful, and I gathered that he was piecing together the facts that he had acquired.

At length Mr. Stopford, who had several times looked at him curiously, said:

"The post-mortem will take place at three, and it is now only half-past eleven. What would you like to do next?"

Thorndyke, who, in spite of his mental preoccupation, had been looking about him in his usual keen, attentive way, halted suddenly.

"Your reference to the post-mortem," said he, "reminds me that I forgot to put the ox-gall into my case."

"Ox-gall!" I exclaimed, endeavouring vainly to connect this substance with the technique of the pathologist. "What were you going to do with——"

But here I broke off, remembering my friend's dislike of any discussion of his methods before strangers.

"I suppose," he continued, "there would hardly be an artist's colourman in a place of this size?"

"I should think not," said Stopford. "But couldn't you get the stuff from a butcher? There's a shop just across the road."

"So there is," agreed Thorndyke, who had already observed the shop. "The gall ought, of course, to be prepared, but we can filter it ourselves—that is, if the butcher has any. We will try him, at any rate."

He crossed the road towards the shop, over which the name "Felton" appeared in gilt lettering, and, addressing himself to the proprietor, who stood at the door, introduced himself and explained his wants.

"Ox-gall?" said the butcher. "No, sir, I haven't any just now; but I am having a beast killed this afternoon, and I can let you have some then. In fact," he added, after a pause, "as the matter is of importance, I can have one killed at once if you wish it."

"That is very kind of you," said Thorndyke, "and it would greatly oblige me. Is the beast perfectly healthy?"

"They're in splendid condition, sir. I picked them out of the herd myself. But you shall see them—ay, and choose the one that you'd like killed."

"You are really very good," said Thorndyke warmly. "I will just run into the chemist's next door, and get a suitable bottle, and then I will avail myself of your exceedingly kind offer."

He hurried into the chemist's shop, from which he presently emerged, carrying a white paper parcel; and we then followed the butcher down a narrow lane by the side of his shop.

It led to an enclosure containing a small pen, in which were confined three handsome steers, whose glossy black coats contrasted in a very striking manner with their long, greyish-white, nearly straight horns.

"These are certainly very fine beasts, Mr. Felton," said Thorndyke, as we drew up beside the pen, "and in excellent condition, too."

He leaned over the pen and examined the beasts critically, especially as to their eyes and horns; then, approaching the nearest one, he raised his stick and bestowed a smart tap on the underside of the right horn, following it by a similar tap on the left one, a proceeding that the beast viewed with stolid surprise.

"The state of the horns," explained Thorndyke, as he moved on to the next steer, "enables one to judge, to some extent, of the beast's health."

"Lord bless you, sir," laughed Mr. Felton, "they haven't got no feeling in their horns, else what good 'ud their horns be to 'em?"

Apparently he was right, for the second steer was as indifferent to a sounding rap on either horn as the first.

Nevertheless, when Thorndyke approached the third steer, I unconsciously drew near to watch; and I noticed that, as the stick

struck the horn, the beast drew back in evident alarm, and that when the blow was repeated, it became manifestly uneasy.

" He don't seem to like that," said the butcher. " Seems as if— Hullo, that's queer ! "

Thorndyke had just brought his stick up against the left horn, and immediately the beast had winced and started back, shaking his head and moaning.

There was not, however, room for him to back out of reach, and Thorndyke, by leaning into the pen, was able to inspect the sensitive horn, which he did with the closest attention, while the butcher looked on with obvious perturbation.

" You don't think there's anything wrong with this beast, sir, I hope," said he.

" I can't say without a further examination," replied Thorndyke. " It may be the horn only that is affected. If you will have it sawn off close to the head, and sent up to me at the hotel, I will look at it and tell you. And, by way of preventing any mistakes, I will mark it and cover it up, to protect it from injury in the slaughterhouse."

He opened his parcel and produced from it a wide-mouthed bottle labelled " Ox-gall," a sheet of gutta-percha tissue, a roller bandage, and a stick of sealing-wax.

Handing the bottle to Mr. Felton, he encased the distal half of the horn in a covering by means of the tissue and the bandage, which he fixed securely with the sealing-wax.

" I'll saw the horn off and bring it up to the hotel myself, with the ox-gall," said Mr. Felton. " You shall have them in half an hour."

He was as good as his word, for in half an hour Thorndyke was seated at a small table by the window of our private sitting-room in the Black Bull Hotel.

The table was covered with newspaper, and on it lay the long grey horn and Thorndyke's travelling-case, now open and displaying a small microscope and its accessories.

The butcher was seated solidly in an armchair waiting, with a half-suspicious eye on Thorndyke, for the report ; and I was endeavouring by cheerful talk to keep Mr. Stopford from sinking into utter despondency, though I, too, kept a furtive watch on my colleague's rather mysterious proceedings.

I saw him unwind the bandage and apply the horn to his ear, bending it slightly to and fro.

I watched him as he scanned the surface closely through a lens and observed him as he scraped some substance from the pointed end on to a glass slide, and, having applied a drop of some reagent, began to tease out the scraping with a pair of mounted needles.

Presently he placed the slide under the microscope, and, having observed it attentively for a minute or two, turned round sharply.

"Come and look at this, Jervis," said he.

I wanted no second bidding, being on tenderhooks of curiosity, but came over and applied my eye to the instrument.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"A multipolar nerve corpuscle—very shrivelled, but unmistakable."

"And this?"

He moved the slide to a fresh spot.

"Two pyramidal nerve corpuscles and some portions of fibres."

"And what do you say the tissue is?"

"Cortical brain substance, I should say, without a doubt."

"I entirely agree with you. And that being so," he added, turning to Mr. Stopford, "we may say that the case for the defence is practically complete."

"What, in heaven's name, do you mean?" exclaimed Stopford, starting up.

"I mean that we can now prove when and where and how Miss Grant met her death. Come and sit down here, and I will explain. No, you needn't go away, Mr. Felton. We shall have to subpœna you. Perhaps," he continued, "we had better go over the facts and see what they suggest. And first we note the position of the body, lying with the feet close to the off-side door, showing that, when she fell, the deceased was sitting, or more probably standing, close to that door. Next there is this."

He drew from his pocket a folded paper, which he opened, displaying a tiny blue disc.

"It is one of the sequins with which her hat was trimmed, and I have in this envelope several more which I took from the hat itself.

"This single sequin I picked up on the rear end of the off-side footboard, and its presence there makes it nearly certain that at some time Miss Grant had put her head out of the window on that side.

"The next item of evidence I obtained by dusting the margins

of the off-side window with a light powder, which made visible a greasy impression three and a quarter inches long on the sharp corner of the right-hand jamb (right-hand from the inside, I mean).

"And now as to the evidence furnished by the body: The wound in the skull is behind and above the left ear, is roughly circular, and measures one inch and seven-sixteenths at most, and a ragged scalp-wound runs from it towards the left eye. On the right cheek is a linear contused wound three and a quarter inches long. There are no other injuries.

"Our next facts are furnished by this."

He took up the horn and tapped it with his finger, while the solicitor and Mr. Felton stared at him in speechless wonder.

"You notice it is a left horn, and you remember that it was highly sensitive. If you put your ear to it while I strain it, you will hear the grating of a fracture in the bony core.

"Now look at the pointed end, and you will see several deep scratches running lengthwise, and where those scratches end the diameter of the horn is, as you see by this calliper-gauge, one inch and seven-sixteenths. Covering the scratches is a dry blood-stain, and at the extreme tip is a small mass of a dried substance which Dr. Jervis and I have examined with the microscope and are satisfied is brain tissue."

"Good God!" exclaimed Stopford eagerly. "Do you mean to say——"

"Let us finish with the facts, Mr. Stopford," Thorndyke interrupted. "Now, if you look closely at that blood-stain, you will see a short piece of hair stuck to the horn, and through this lens you can make out the root-bulb. It is a golden hair, you notice, but near the root it is black, and our calliper-gauge shows us that the black portion is fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long.

"Now, in this envelope are some hairs that I removed from the dead woman's head. They also are golden hairs, black at the roots, and when I measure the black portion I find it to be fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long. Then, finally, there is this."

He turned the horn over and pointed to a small patch of dried blood. Embedded in it was a blue sequin.

Mr. Stopford and the butcher both gazed at the horn in silent amazement; then the former drew a deep breath and looked up at Thorndyke.

"No doubt," said he, "you can explain this mystery, but for my

part I am utterly bewildered, though you are filling me with hope."

"And yet the matter is quite simple," returned Thorndyke, "even with these few facts before us, which are only a selection from the body of evidence in our possession. But I will state my theory, and you shall judge."

He rapidly sketched a rough plan on a sheet of paper, and continued :

"These were the conditions when the train was approaching Woldhurst : Here was the passenger-coach, here was the burning rick, and here was a cattle-truck. This steer was in that truck. Now my hypothesis is that at that time Miss Grant was standing with her head out of the off-side window, watching the burning rick. Her wide hat, worn on the left side, hid from her view the cattle-truck which she was approaching, and then this is what happened."

He sketched another plan to a larger scale.

"One of the steers—this one—had thrust its long horn out through the bars. The point of that horn struck the deceased's head, driving her face violently against the corner of the window, and then, in disengaging, ploughed its way through the scalp, and suffered a fracture of its core from the violence of the wrench. This hypothesis is inherently probable, it fits all the facts, and those facts admit of no other explanation."

The solicitor sat for a moment as though dazed ; then he rose impulsively and seized Thorndyke's hands.

"I don't know what to say to you," he exclaimed huskily, "except that you have saved my brother's life, and for that may God reward you ! "

The butcher rose from his chair with a slow grin.

"It seems to me," said he, "as if that ox-gall was what you might call a blind, eh, sir ? "

And Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile.

When we returned to town on the following day we were a party of four, which included Mr. Harold Stopford.

The verdict of "Death by misadventure," promptly returned by the coroner's jury, had been shortly followed by his release from custody, and he now sat with his brother and me, listening with rapt attention to Thorndyke's analysis of the case.

"So, you see," the latter concluded, "I had six possible

theories of the cause of death worked out before I reached Halbury, and it only remained to select the one that fitted the facts. And when I had seen the cattle-truck, had picked up that sequin, had heard the description of the steers, and had seen the hat and the wounds, there was nothing left to do but the filling in of details."

"And you never doubted my innocence?" asked Harold Stopford.

Thorndyke smiled at his quondam client.

"Not after I had seen your colour-box, and your sketch," said he, "to say nothing of the spike."

Edgar Jepson & Robert Eustace

THE TEA-LEAF

from THE STRAND MAGAZINE, 1925

Arthur Kelstern and Hugh Willoughton met in the Turkish bath in Duke Street, St. James's, and rather more than a year later in that Turkish bath they parted. Both of them were bad-tempered men, Kelstern cantankerous and Willoughton violent. It was, indeed, difficult to decide which was the worse-tempered; and when I found that they had suddenly become friends, I gave that friendship three months. It lasted nearly a year.

When they did quarrel they quarrelled about Kelstern's daughter Ruth. Willoughton fell in love with her and she with him, and they became engaged to be married. Six months later, in spite of the fact that they were plainly very much in love with one another, the engagement was broken off. Neither of them gave any reason for breaking it off. My belief was that Willoughton had given Ruth a taste of his infernal temper and got as good as he gave.

Not that Ruth was at all a Kelstern to look at. Like the members of most of the old Lincolnshire families, descendants of the Vikings and the followers of Canute, one Kelstern is very like another Kelstern, fair-haired, clear-skinned, with light blue eyes and a good bridge to the nose. But Ruth had taken after her mother; she was dark, with a straight nose, dark-brown eyes of the

kind often described as liquid, dark-brown hair, and as kissable lips as ever I saw. She was a proud, self-sufficing, high-spirited girl, with a temper of her own. She needed it to live with that cantankerous old brute Kelstern. Oddly enough, in spite of the fact that he always would try to bully her, she was fond of him ; and I will say for him that he was very fond of her. Probably she was the only creature in the world of whom he was really fond. He was an expert in the application of scientific discoveries to industry ; and she worked with him in his laboratory. He paid her five hundred a year, so that she must have been uncommonly good.

He took the breaking off of the engagement very hard indeed. He would have it that Willoughton had jilted her. Ruth took it hard, too ; her warm colouring lost some of its warmth ; her lips grew less kissable and set in a thinner line. Willoughton's temper grew worse than ever ; he was like a bear with a perpetually sore head. I tried to feel my way with both him and Ruth with a view to help to bring about a reconciliation. To put it mildly, I was rebuffed. Willoughton swore at me ; Ruth flared up and told me not to meddle in matters that didn't concern me. Nevertheless, my strong impression was that they were missing one another badly and would have been glad enough to come together again if their stupid vanity could have let them.

Kelstern did his best to keep Ruth furious with Willoughton. One night I told him—it was no business of mine ; but I never did give a tinker's curse for his temper—that he was a fool to meddle and had much better leave them alone. It made him furious, of course ; he would have it that Willoughton was a dirty hound and a low blackguard—at least those were about the mildest things he said of him. Given his temper and the provocation, nothing less could be expected. Moreover, he was looking a very sick man and depressed.

He took immense trouble to injure Willoughton. At his clubs, the Athenæum, the Devonshire, and the Savile, he would display considerable ingenuity in bringing the conversation round to him ; then he would declare that he was a scoundrel of the meanest type. Of course, it did Willoughton harm, though not nearly as much as Kelstern desired, for Willoughton knew his job as few engineers knew it ; and it is very hard indeed to do much harm to a man who really knows his job. People have to have him. But of course it did him some harm ; and Willoughton knew that

Kelstern was doing it. I came across two men who told me that they had given him a friendly hint. That did not improve his temper.

An expert in the construction of those ferro-concrete buildings which are rising up all over London, he was as distinguished in his sphere as Kelstern in his. They were alike not only in the matters of brains and bad-temper ; but I think that their minds worked in very much the same way. At any rate, both of them seemed determined not to change their ordinary course of life because of the breaking off of that engagement.

It had been the habit of both of them to have a Turkish bath, at the baths in Duke Street, at four in the afternoon on the second and last Tuesday in every month. To that habit they stuck. The fact that they must meet on those Tuesdays did not cause either of them to change his hour of taking his Turkish bath by the twenty minutes which would have given them no more than a passing glimpse of one another. They continued to take it, as they always had, simultaneously. Thick-skinned ? They were thick-skinned. Neither of them pretended that he did not see the other ; he scowled at him ; and he scowled at him most of the time. I know this, for sometimes I had a Turkish bath myself at that hour.

It was about three months after the breaking off of the engagement that they met for the last time at that Turkish bath, and there parted for good.

Kelstern had been looking ill for about six weeks ; there was a greyness and a drawn look to his face ; and he was losing weight. On the second Tuesday in October he arrived at the bath punctually at four, bringing with him, as was his habit, a thermos flask full of a very delicate China tea. If he thought that he was not perspiring freely enough he would drink it in the hottest room ; if he did perspire freely enough, he would drink it after his bath. Willoughton arrived about two minutes later. Kelstern finished undressing and went into the bath a couple of minutes before Willoughton. They stayed in the hot room about the same time ; Kelstern went into the hottest room about a minute after Willoughton. Before he went into it he sent for his thermos flask, which he had left in the dressing-room, and took it into the hottest room with him.

As it happened, they were the only two people in the hottest room ; and they had not been in it two minutes before the four

men in the hot room heard them quarrelling. They heard Kelstern call Willoughton a dirty hound and a low blackguard, among other things, and declare he would do him in yet. Willoughton told him to go to the devil twice. Kelstern went on abusing him, and presently Willoughton fairly shouted : " Oh, shut up, you old fool ! Or I'll make you ! "

Kelstern did not shut up. About two minutes later Willoughton came out of the hottest room, scowling, walked through the hot room into the shampooing room, and put himself into the hands of one of the shampooers. Two or three minutes after that a man of the name of Helston went into the hottest room and fairly yelled. Kelstern was lying back on a couch, with the blood still flowing from a wound over his heart.

There was a devil of a hullabaloo. The police were called in ; Willoughton was arrested. Of course he lost his temper and, protesting furiously that he had had nothing whatever to do with the crime, abused the police. That did not incline them to believe him.

After examining the room and the dead body the detective-inspector in charge of the case came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been stabbed as he was drinking his tea. The thermos flask lay on the floor and some of the tea had evidently been spilt, for some tea-leaves—the tea in the flask must have been carelessly strained off the leaves by the maid who filled it—lay on the floor about the mouth of the empty flask. It looked as if the murderer had taken advantage of Kelstern's drinking his tea to stab him while the flask rather blocked his vision and prevented him from seeing what he would be at.

The case would have been quite plain sailing but for the fact that they could not find the weapon. It had been easy enough for Willoughton to take it into the bath in the towel in which he was draped. But how had he got rid of it ? Where had he hidden it? A Turkish bath is no place to hide anything in. It is as bare as an empty barn—if anything barer ; and Willoughton had been in the barest part of it. The police searched every part of it—not that there was much point in doing that, for Willoughton had come out of the hottest room and gone through the hot room into the shampooers' room. When Helston started shouting "Murder ! " he had rushed back with the shampooers to the hottest room and there he had stayed. Since it was obvious that he had committed the murder, the shampooers and the bathers

had kept their eyes on him. They were all of them certain that he had not left them to go to the dressing-room ; they would not have allowed him to do so.

It was obvious that he must have carried the weapon into the bath, hidden in the folds of the towel in which he was draped, and brought it away in the folds of that towel. He had laid the towel down beside the couch on which he was being shampooed ; and there it still lay when they came to look for it, untouched, with no weapon in it, with no traces of blood on it. There was not much in the fact that it was not stained with blood, since Willoughton could have wiped the knife, or dagger, or whatever weapon he used, on the couch on which Kelstern lay. There were no marks of any such wiping on the couch ; but the blood, flowing from the wound, might have covered them up. But why was the weapon not in the towel ?

There was no finding that weapon.

Then the doctors who made the autopsy came to the conclusion that the wound had been inflicted by a circular, pointed weapon nearly three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It had penetrated rather more than three inches, and, supposing that its handle was only four inches long, it must have been a sizeable weapon, quite impossible to overlook. The doctors also discovered a further proof of the theory that Kelstern had been drinking tea when he was stabbed. Half-way down the wound they found two halves of a tea-leaf which had evidently fallen on to Kelstern's body, been driven into the wound, and cut in half by the weapon. Also they discovered that Kelstern was suffering from cancer. This fact was not published in the papers ; I heard it at the Devonshire.

Willoughton was brought before the magistrates, and to most people's surprise did not reserve his defence. He went into the witness-box and swore that he had never touched Kelstern, that he had never had anything to touch him with, that he had never taken any weapon into the Turkish bath and so had had no weapon to hide, that he had never even seen any such weapon as the doctors described. He was committed for trial.

The papers were full of the crime ; everyone was discussing it ; and the question which occupied everyone's mind was : where had Willoughton hidden the weapon ? People wrote to the papers to suggest that he had ingeniously put it in some place under everybody's eyes and that it had been overlooked because it was so obvious. Others suggested that, circular and pointed, it must

be very like a thick lead-pencil, that it was a thick lead-pencil; and that was why the police had overlooked it in their search. The police had not overlooked any thick lead-pencil; there had been no thick lead-pencil to overlook. They hunted England through—Willoughton did a lot of motoring—to discover the man who had sold him this curious and uncommon weapon. They did not find the man who had sold it to him; they did not find a man who sold such weapons at all. They came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been murdered with a piece of steel, or iron, rod filed to a point like a pencil.

In spite of the fact that only Willoughton *could* have murdered Kelstern, I could not believe that he had done it. The fact that Kelstern was doing his best to injure him professionally and socially was by no means a strong enough motive. Willoughton was far too intelligent a man not to be very well aware that people do not take much notice of statements to the discredit of a man whom they need to do a job for them; and for the social injury he would care very little. Besides, he might very well injure, or even kill, a man in one of his tantrums; but his was not the kind of bad temper that plans a cold-blooded murder; and if ever a murder had been deliberately planned, Kelstern's had.

I was as close a friend as Willoughton had, and I went to visit him in prison. He seemed rather touched by my doing so, and grateful. I learnt that I was the only person who had done so. He was subdued and seemed much gentler. It might last. He discussed the murder readily enough, and naturally with a harassed air. He said quite frankly that he did not expect me, in the circumstances, to believe that he had not committed it; but he had not, and he could not for the life of him conceive who had. I did believe that he had not committed it; there was something in his way of discussing it that wholly convinced me. I told him that I was quite sure that he had not killed Kelstern; and he looked at me as if he did not believe the assurance. But again he looked grateful.

Ruth was grieving for her father; but Willoughton's very dangerous plight to some degree distracted her mind from her loss. A woman can quarrel with a man bitterly without desiring to see him hanged; and Willoughton's chance of escaping hanging was not at all a good one. But she would not believe for a moment that he had murdered her father.

"No; there's nothing in it—nothing whatever," she said, firmly. "If Dad had murdered Hugh I could have understood

it. He had reasons—or at any rate he had persuaded himself that he had. But whatever reason had Hugh for murdering Dad? It's all nonsense to suppose that he'd mind Dad's trying all he knew to injure him as much as that. All kinds of people are going about trying to injure other people in that way, but they don't really injure them very much ; and Hugh knows that quite well."

"Of course they don't ; and Hugh wouldn't really believe that your father was injuring him much," I said. "But you're forgetting his infernal temper."

"No, I'm not," she protested. "He might kill a man in one of his rages on the spur of the moment. But this wasn't the spur of the moment. Whoever did it had worked the whole thing out and came along with the weapon ready."

I had to admit that that was reasonable enough. But who had done it? I pointed out to her that the police had made careful inquiries about everyone in the bath at the time, the shampooers and the people taking their baths, but they found no evidence whatever that anyone of them had at any time had any relations, except that of shampooer, with her father.

"Either it was one of them, or somebody else who just did it and got right away, or there's a catch somewhere," she said, frowning thoughtfully.

"I can't see how there can possibly have been anyone in the bath, except the people who are known to have been there," said I. "In fact, there can't have been."

Then the Crown subpœnaed her as a witness for the prosecution. It seemed rather unnecessary and even a bit queer, for it could have found plenty of evidence of bad blood between the two men without dragging her into it. Plainly it was bent on doing all it knew to prove motive enough. Ruth worked her brain so hard trying to get to the bottom of the business that there came a deep vertical wrinkle just above her right eyebrow that stayed there.

On the morning of the trial I called for her after breakfast to drive her down to the New Bailey. She was pale and looked as if she had had a poor night's rest, and, naturally enough, she seemed to be suffering from an excitement she found hard to control. It was not like her to show any excitement she might be feeling.

She said in an excited voice : "I think I've got it!" and would say no more.

We had, of course, been in close touch with Willoughton's solicitor, Hamley; and he had kept seats for us just behind him. He wished to have Ruth to hand to consult should some point turn up on which she could throw light, since she knew more than anyone about the relations between Willoughton and her father. I had timed our arrival very well; the jury had just been sworn in. Of course, the Court was full of women, the wives of peers and bookmakers and politicians, most of them overdressed and overscented.

Then the Judge came in; and with his coming the atmosphere of the court became charged with that sense of anxious strain peculiar to trials for murder. It was rather like the atmosphere of a sick room in a case of fatal illness, but worse.

Willoughton came into the dock looking under the weather and very much subdued. But he was certainly looking dignified, and he said that he was not guilty in a steady enough voice.

Greatorex, the leading counsel for the Crown, opened the case for the prosecution. There was no suggestion in his speech that the police had discovered any new fact. He begged the jury not to lay too much stress on the fact that the weapon had not been found. He had to, of course.

Then Helston gave evidence of finding that Kelstern had been stabbed, and he and the other three men who had been with him in the hot room gave evidence of the quarrel they had overheard between Willoughton and the dead man, and that Willoughton came out of the hottest room scowling and obviously furious. One of them, a fussy old gentleman of the name of Underwood, declared that it was the bitterest quarrel he had ever heard. None of the four of them could throw any light on the matter of whether Willoughton was carrying the missing weapon in the folds of the towel in which he was draped; all of them were sure that he had nothing in his hands.

The medical evidence came next. In cross-examining the doctors who had made the autopsy, Hazeldean, Willoughton's counsel, established the fact quite definitely that the missing weapon was of a fair size; that its rounded blade must have been over half an inch in diameter and between three and four inches long. They were of the opinion that to drive a blade of that thickness into the heart a handle of at least four inches in length would be necessary to give a firm enough grip. They agreed that

it might very well have been a piece of a steel, or iron, rod sharpened like a pencil. At any rate, it was certainly a sizeable weapon, not one to be hidden quickly or to disappear wholly in a Turkish bath. Hazeldean could not shake their evidence about the tea-leaf ; they were confident that it had been driven into the wound and cut in half by the blade of the missing weapon, and that went to show that the wound had been inflicted while Kelstern was drinking his tea.

Detective-Inspector Brackett, who was in charge of the case, was cross-examined at great length about his search for the missing weapon. He made it quite clear that it was nowhere in that Turkish bath, neither in the hot rooms, nor the shampooing room, nor the dressing-rooms, nor the vestibule, nor the office. He had had the plunge bath emptied ; he had searched the roofs, though it was practically certain that the skylight above the hot room, not the hottest, had been shut at the time of the crime. In re-examination he scouted the idea of Willoughton's having had an accomplice who had carried away the weapon for him. He had gone into that matter most carefully.

The shampooer stated that Willoughton came to him scowling so savagely that he wondered what had put him into such a bad temper. In cross-examining him, Arbuthnot, Hazeldean's junior, made it clearer than ever that, unless Willoughton had already hidden the weapon in the bare hottest room, it was hidden in the towel. Then he drew from the shampooer the definite statement that Willoughton had set down the towel beside the couch on which he was shampooed ; that he had hurried back to the hot rooms in front of the shampooer ; that the shampooer had come back from the hot rooms, leaving Willoughton still in them discussing the crime, to find the towel lying just as Willoughton had set it down, with no weapon in it and no trace of blood on it.

Since the inspector had disposed of the possibility that an accomplice had slipped in, taken the weapon from the towel, and slipped out of the bath with it, this evidence really made it clear that the weapon had never left the hottest room.

Then the prosecution called evidence of the bad terms on which Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Three well-known and influential men told the jury about Kelstern's efforts to prejudice Willoughton in their eyes and the damaging statements he had made about him. One of them had felt it to be his duty to tell Willoughton about this ; and Willoughton had been very angry. Arbuthnot,

in cross-examining, elicited the fact that any damaging statement that Kelstern made about anyone was considerably discounted by the fact that everyone knew him to be in the highest degree cantankerous.

I noticed that during the end of the cross-examination of the shampooer and during this evidence Ruth had been fidgeting and turning to look impatiently at the entrance to the court, as if she were expecting someone. Then, just as she was summoned to the witness-box, there came in a tall, stooping, grey-headed, grey-bearded man of about sixty, carrying a brown-paper parcel. His face was familiar to me, but I could not place him. He caught her eye and nodded to her. She breathed a sharp sigh of relief, and bent over and handed a letter she had in her hand to Willoughton's solicitor and pointed out the grey-bearded man to him. Then she went quietly to the witness-box.

Hamley read the letter and at once bent over and handed it to Hazeldean and spoke to him. I caught a note of excitement in his hushed voice. Hazeldean read the letter and appeared to grow excited too. Hamley slipped out of his seat and went to the grey-bearded man, who was still standing just inside the door of the porch, and began to talk to him earnestly.

Greatorex began to examine Ruth ; and naturally I turned my attention to her. His examination was directed also to show on what bad terms Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Ruth was called on to tell the jury some of Kelstern's actual threats. Then he questioned Ruth about her own relations with Willoughton and the breaking off of the engagement and its infuriating effect on her father. She admitted that he had been very bitter about it, and had told her that he was resolved to do his best to do Willoughton in. I thought that she went out of her way to emphasize this resolve of Kelstern's. It seemed to me likely to prejudice the jury still more against Willoughton, making them sympathize with a father's righteous indignation, and making yet more obvious that he was a dangerous enemy. Yet she would not admit that her father was right in believing that Willoughton had jilted her.

Hazeldean rose to cross-examine Ruth with a wholly confident air. He drew from her the fact that her father had been on excellent terms with Willoughton until the breaking off of the engagement.

Then Hazeldean asked : " Is it a fact that since the breaking off

of your engagement the prisoner has more than once begged you to forgive him and renew it ? "

" Four times," said Ruth.

" And you refused ? "

" Yes," said Ruth. She looked at Willoughton queerly and added : " He wanted a lesson."

The Judge asked : " Did you intend, then, to forgive him ultimately ? "

Ruth hesitated ; then she rather evaded a direct answer ; she scowled frankly at Willoughton, and said : " Oh, well, there was no hurry. He would always marry me if I changed my mind and wanted to."

" And did your father know this ? " asked the Judge.

" No. I didn't tell him. I was angry with Mr. Willoughton," Ruth replied.

There was a pause. Then Hazeldean started on a fresh line.

In sympathetic accents he asked : " Is it a fact that your father was suffering from cancer in a painful form ? "

" It was beginning to grow very painful," said Ruth, sadly.

" Did he make a will and put all his affairs in order a few days before he died ? "

" Three days," said Ruth.

" Did he ever express an intention of committing suicide ? "

" He said that he would stick it out for a little while and then end it all," said Ruth. She paused and added : " *And that is what he did do.*"

One might almost say that the Court started. I think that everyone in it moved a little, so that there was a kind of rustling murmur.

" Will you tell the Court your reasons for that statement ? " said Hazeldean.

Ruth seemed to pull herself together—she was looking very tired—then she began in a quiet, even voice : " I never believed for a moment that Mr. Willoughton murdered my father. If my father had murdered Mr. Willoughton it would have been a different matter. Of course, like everybody else, I puzzled over the weapon ; what it was and where it had got to. I did not believe that it was a pointed piece of a half-inch steel rod. If anybody had come to the Turkish bath meaning to murder my father and hide the weapon, they wouldn't have used one so big and so difficult to hide, when a hat-pin would have done just as well and could be

hidden much more easily. But what puzzled me most was the tea-leaf in the wound. All the other tea-leaves that came out of the flask were lying on the floor. Inspector Brackett told me they were. And I couldn't believe that one tea-leaf had fallen on to my father at the very place above his heart at which the point of the weapon had penetrated the skin and got driven in by it. It was too much of a coincidence for me to swallow. But I got no nearer understanding it than anyone else."

She paused to ask if she might have a glass of water, for she had been up all night and was very tired. It was brought to her.

Then she went on in the same quiet voice : "Of course, I remembered that Dad had talked of putting an end to it ; but no one with a wound like that could get up and hide the weapon. So it was impossible that he had committed suicide. Then, the night before last, I dreamt that I went into the laboratory and saw a piece of steel rod, pointed, lying on the table at which my father used to work."

"Dreams ! " murmured Greatorex, a trifle pettishly, as if he was not pleased with the way things were going.

"I didn't think much of the dream, of course," Ruth went on. "I had been puzzling about it all so hard for so long that it was only natural to dream about it. But after breakfast I had a sudden feeling that the secret was in the laboratory if I could only find it. I did not attach any importance to the feeling ; but it went on growing stronger ; and after lunch I went to the laboratory and began to hunt.

"I looked through all the drawers and could find nothing. Then I went round the room looking at everything and into everything, instruments and retorts and tubes and so on. Then I went into the middle of the floor and looked slowly round the room pretty hard. Against the wall, near the door, lying ready to be taken away, was a gas cylinder, I rolled it over to see what gas had been in it and found no label on it."

She paused to look round the Court as if claiming its best attention ; then she went on : "Now that was very queer, because every gas cylinder must have a label on it—so many gases are dangerous. I turned on the tap of the cylinder and nothing came out of it. It was quite empty. Then I went to the book in which all the things which come in are entered, and found that ten days before Dad died he had had a cylinder of CO_2 and seven pounds of ice. Also he had had seven pounds of ice every day till the day of his death.

It was the ice and the CO_2 together that gave me the idea. CO_2, carbon dioxide, has a very low freezing-point—eighty degrees centigrade—and as it comes out of the cylinder and mixes with the air it turns into very fine snow ; and that snow, if you compress it, makes the hardest and toughest ice possible. It flashed on me that Dad could have collected this snow and forced it into a mould and made a weapon that would not only inflict that wound but would evaporate very quickly ! Indeed, in that heat you'd have to see the wound inflicted to know what had done it."

She paused again to look round the Court at about as rapt a lot of faces as any narrator could desire. Then she went on : " I knew that that was what he had done. I knew it for certain. Carbon dioxide ice would make a hard, tough dagger, and it would evaporate quickly in the hottest room of a Turkish bath and leave no smell because it is scentless. So there wouldn't be any weapon. And it explained the tea-leaf, too. Dad had made a carbon dioxide dagger perhaps a week before he used it, perhaps only a day. And he had put it into the thermos flask as soon as he had made it. The thermos flask keeps out the heat as well as the cold, you know. But to make sure that it couldn't melt at all, he kept the flask in ice till he was ready to use the dagger. It's the only way you can explain that tea-leaf. It came out of the flask sticking to the point of the dagger and was driven into the wound ! "

She paused again, and one might almost say that the Court heaved a deep sigh of relief.

" But why didn't you go straight to the police with this theory ? " asked the Judge.

" But that wouldn't have been any good," she protested quickly. " It was no use my knowing it myself ; I had to make other people believe it ; I had to find evidence. I began to hunt for it. I felt in my bones that there was some. What I wanted was the mould in which Dad compressed the carbon dioxide snow and made the dagger. I found it ! "

She uttered the words in a tone of triumph and smiled at Willoughton ; then she went on : " At least, I found bits of it. In the box into which we used to throw odds and ends, scraps of material, damaged instruments, and broken test tubes, I found some pieces of vulcanite ; and I saw at once that they were bits of a vulcanite container. I took some wax and rolled it into a rod about the right size, and then I pieced the container together on the outside of it—at least most of it—there are some small pieces

missing. It took me nearly all night. But I found the most important bit—*the pointed end* ! ”

She dipped her hand into her handbag and drew out a black object about nine inches long and three-quarters of an inch thick, and held it up for everyone to see.

Someone, without thinking, began to clap ; and there came a storm of applause that drowned the voice of the Clerk calling for order.

When the applause died down, Hazeldean, who never misses the right moment, said : “ I have no more questions to ask the witness, my lord,” and sat down.

That action seemed to clinch it in my eyes, and I have no doubt it clinched it in the eyes of the jury.

The Judge leant forward and said to Ruth in a rather shocked voice : “ Do you expect the jury to believe that a well-known man like your father died in the act of deliberately setting a trap to hang the prisoner ? ”

Ruth looked at him, shrugged her shoulders, and said, with a calm acceptance of the facts of human nature one would expect to find only in a much older woman : “ Oh, well, Daddy was like that. And he certainly believed he had very good reasons for killing Mr. Willoughton.”

There was that in her tone and manner which made it absolutely certain that Kelstern was not only like that, but that he had acted according to his nature.

Greatorex did not re-examine Ruth ; he conferred with Hazeldean. Then Hazeldean rose to open the case for the defence. He said that he would not waste the time of the Court, and that, in view of the fact that Miss Kelstern had solved the problem of her father's death, he would only call one witness, Professor Mozley.

The grey-headed, grey-bearded, stooping man, who had come to the Court so late, went into the witness-box. Of course his face had been familiar to me ; I had seen his portrait in the newspapers a dozen times. He still carried the brown-paper parcel.

In answer to Hazeldean's questions he stated that it was possible, not even difficult, to make a weapon of carbon dioxide hard enough and tough enough and sharp enough to inflict such a wound as that which had caused Kelstern's death. The method of making it was to fold a piece of chamois leather into a bag, hold that bag with the left hand, protected by a glove, over the nozzle of a cylinder containing liquid carbon dioxide, and open the valve

with the right hand. Carbon dioxide evaporates so quickly that its freezing-point, eighty degrees centigrade, is soon reached ; and it solidifies in the chamois-leather bag as a deposit of carbon dioxide snow. Then turn off the gas, spoon that snow into a vulcanite container of the required thickness, and ram it down with a vulcanite plunger into a rod of the required hardness. He added that it was advisable to pack the container in ice while filling it and ramming down the snow. Then put the rod into a thermos flask ; and keep it till it is needed.

" And you have made such a rod ? " said Hazeldean.

" Yes," said the Professor, cutting the string of the brown-paper parcel. " When Miss Kelstern hauled me out of bed at half-past seven this morning to tell me her discoveries, I perceived at once that she had found the solution of the problem of her father's death, which had puzzled me considerably. I had breakfast quickly and got to work to make such a weapon myself for the satisfaction of the Court. Here it is."

He drew a thermos flask from the brown-paper, unscrewed the top of it, and inverted it. There dropped into his gloved hand a white rod, with a faint sparkle to it, about eight inches long. He held it out for the jury to see, and said :

" This carbon dioxide ice is the hardest and toughest ice we know of ; and I have no doubt that Mr. Kelstern killed himself with a similar rod. The difference between the rod he used and this is that his rod was pointed. I had no pointed vulcanite container ; but the container that Miss Kelstern pieced together is pointed. Doubtless Mr. Kelstern had it specially made, probably by Messrs. Hawkins and Spender."

He dropped the rod back into the thermos flask and screwed on the top.

Hazeldean sat down. Greatorex rose.

" With regard to the point of the rod, Professor Mozley, would it remain sharp long enough to pierce the skin in that heat ? " he asked.

" In my opinion it would," said the Professor. " I have been considering that point, and bearing in mind the facts that Mr. Kelstern would from his avocation be very deft with his hands, and being a scientific man would know exactly what to do, he would have the rod out of the flask and the point in position in very little more than a second—perhaps less. He would, I think, hold it in his left hand and drive it home by striking the butt of it

hard with his right. The whole thing would not take him two seconds. Besides, if the point of the weapon had melted the tea-leaf would have fallen off it."

"Thank you," said Greatorex, and turned and conferred with the Crown solicitors.

Then he said: "We do not propose to proceed with the case, my Lord."

The foreman of the jury rose quickly and said: "And the jury doesn't want to hear anything more, my Lord. We're quite satisfied that the prisoner isn't guilty."

"Very good," said the Judge, and he put the question formally to the jury, who returned a verdict of "Not Guilty." He discharged Willoughton.

I came out of the Court with Ruth and we waited for Willoughton.

Presently he came out of the door and stopped and shook himself. Then he saw Ruth and came to her. They did not greet one another. She just slipped her hand through his arm; and they walked out of the New Bailey together.

We made a good deal of noise, cheering them.

Anthony Wynne

THE CYPRIAN BEES

from HUTCHINSON'S MYSTERY-STORY MAGAZINE 1924

Inspector Biles, of Scotland Yard, placed a small wooden box on the table in front of Dr. Hailey.

"There," he remarked in cheerful tones, "is a mystery which even you, my dear doctor, will scarcely be able to solve."

Dr. Hailey bent his great head, and examined the box with minute care. It was merely a hollowed-out block of wood, to which a lid, also of wood, was attached at one point by a nail. The lid rotated on this nail. He put out his hand to open it, but Biles checked that intention immediately.

"Take care!" he exclaimed; "there are three live bees in that box." He added, "There were four of them originally, but one stung a colleague of mine, who was incautious enough to pull the lid open without first finding out what it covered."

He leaned back in his chair, and drew a long whiff of the excellent cigar with which Dr. Hailey had supplied him. He remained silent, while a heavy vehicle went lumbering down Harley Street. Then he said :

" Last night, one of my men found the box lying in the gutter in Piccadilly Circus, just opposite the Criterion Theatre. He thought it looked peculiar, and brought it down to the Yard. We have a beekeeper of some distinction on the strength, and he declares that these insects are all workers, and that only a lunatic would carry them about in this fashion. Queens, it appears, are often transported in boxes."

Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass and set it in his eye.

" So I have heard." He opened his snuff-box, and took a large pinch. " You know, of course, my dear Biles," he added, " what this particular box contained before the bees were put into it ? "

" No—I don't."

" Serum—either anti-diphtheria serum or one of the other varieties. Practically every manufacturer of these products uses this type of receptacle for them."

" H'm ! " Biles leaned forward in his chair. " So that means that, in all probability, the owner of the bees is a doctor. How very interesting ! "

Dr. Hailey shook his head.

" It doesn't follow," he remarked. " The box was perhaps left in a patient's house after its contents had been used. The patient may have employed it for its present purpose."

Biles nodded. He appeared to hesitate a moment ; then he said :

" The reason why I troubled you was that, last night, a woman was found dead at the wheel of a motor car—a closed coupé—in Leicester Square. She had been stung by a bee just before her death."

He spoke in quiet tones, but his voice nevertheless revealed the fact that the disclosure he was making had assumed great importance in his mind. He added :

" The body was examined by a doctor almost immediately. He observed the sting, which was in her forehead. The dead bee was recovered later, from the floor of the car."

As he spoke he took another box from his pocket and opened it. He held it out to the doctor.

" You will notice that there are rather unusual markings on the

bee's body—these yellow rings. Our expert says that they indicate a special breed, the Cyprian, and that these insects are notoriously very ill-natured. The peculiar thing is that the bees in the wooden box are also Cyprian bees."

Dr. Hailey picked up a large magnifying glass which lay on the table beside him, and focused it on the body of the insect. His knowledge of bees was not extensive, but he recognised that this was not the ordinary brown English type. He set the glass down again, and leaned back in his chair.

"It is certainly very extraordinary," he declared. "Have you any theory ?"

Biles shook his head. "None, beyond the supposition that the shock caused by the sting was probably the occasion for the woman's sudden collapse. She was seen to pull quickly to the side of the road, and stop the car, so she must have had a presentiment of what was coming. I suppose heart-failure might be induced by a sting ?"

"It is just possible." Dr. Hailey took more snuff. "Once, long ago," he said, "I had personal experience of a rather similar case—that of a beekeeper who was stung some years after he had given up his own apiary. He died in about five minutes. But that was a clear case of anaphylaxis."

"I don't understand."

Dr. Hailey thought a moment. "Anaphylaxis," he explained, "is the name given to one of the most amazing phenomena in the whole of medical science. If a human being receives an injection of serum or blood, or any extract or fluid from the animal body, a tremendous sensitiveness is apt to develop, afterwards, towards that particular substance. For example, an injection of the white of a duck's egg will, after the lapse of a week or so, render a man so intensely sensitive to this particular egg-white that, if a further injection is given, instant death may result."

"Even if a duck's egg is eaten, there may be violent sickness and collapse, though hen's eggs will cause no ill effect. Queerly enough, however, if the injection is repeated within, say, a day of its first administration no trouble occurs. For the sensitiveness to develop, it is essential that time should elapse between the first injection and the second one. Once the sensitiveness has developed, it remains active for years. The beekeeper, whose death I happened to witness, had often been stung before : but he had not been stung for a very long time."

" Good God ! " Biles's face wore an expression of new interest. " So it is possible that this may actually be a case of—*murder* ! "

He pronounced the word in tones of awe. Dr. Hailey saw that already his instincts as a man-hunter were quickening.

" It is just possible. But do not forget, my dear Biles, that the murderer using this method would require to give his victim a preliminary dose—by inoculation—of bee-poison, because a single sting would scarcely be enough to produce the necessary degree of sensitiveness. That is to say, he would require to exercise an amount of force which would inevitably defeat his purpose —*unless he happened to be a doctor*."

" Ah ! the wooden serum-box ! " The detective's voice thrilled.

" Possibly. A doctor undoubtedly could inject bee-poison, supposing he possessed it, instead of ordinary serum, or of an ordinary vaccine. It would hurt a good deal—but patients expect inoculation to hurt them."

Biles rose. " There is no test, is there," he asked, " by which it would be possible to detect the presence of this sensitiveness you speak of in a dead body ? "

" None."

" So we can only proceed by means of circumstantial evidence." He drew a sharp breath. " The woman has been identified as the widow of an artist named Bardwell. She had a flat—a luxurious one—in Park Mansions, and seems to have been well off. But we have not been able to find any of her relations so far." He glanced at his watch. " I am going there now. I suppose I couldn't persuade you to accompany me ? "

Dr. Hailey's rather listless eyes brightened. For answer he rose, towering above the detective in that act.

" My dear Biles, you know that you can always persuade me."

The flat in Park Mansions was rather more, and yet rather less, than luxurious. It bespoke prodigality, but it bespoke also restlessness of mind—as though its owner had felt insecure in her enjoyment of its comforts. The rooms were too full, and their contents were saved from vulgarity only by sheer carelessness of their bestowal. This woman seemed to have bought anything, and to have cared for nothing. Thus, in her dining-room, an exquisite Queen Anne sideboard was set cheek by jowl with a most horrible Victorian armchair made of imitation walnut. In the drawing-room there were flower-glasses of the noblest period of Venetian craftsmanship, in which beauty was held captive in wonderful strands

of gold, and beside these, shocking and obscene examples of "golden glass" ware from some third-rate Bohemian factory.

Dr. Hailey began to form a mental picture of the dead woman. He saw her, changeable, greedy, gaudy, yet with a certain instinctive charm—the kind of woman who, if she is young and beautiful, gobbles a man up. Women of that sort, his experience had shown him, were apt to drive their lovers to despair with their extravagances or their infidelities. Had the owner of the bees embarked on his terrible course in order to secure himself against the mortification of being supplanted by some more attractive rival? Or was he merely removing from his path a woman of whom he had grown tired? In any case, if the murder theory was correct, he must have stood in the relationship to the dead girl of doctor to patient, and he must have possessed an apiary of his own.

A young detective, whom Biles introduced as Tadcaster, had already made a careful examination of the flat. He had found nothing, not even a photograph. Nor had the owners of neighbouring flats been able to supply any useful information. Mrs. Bardwell, it appeared, had had men friends who had usually come to see her after dark. They had not, apparently, been in the habit of writing to her, or, if they had, she had destroyed all their letters. During the last few weeks, she seemed to have been without a servant.

"So you have found nothing?" Biles's tones were full of disappointment.

"Nothing, sir—unless, indeed, this is of any importance."

Tadcaster held out a crumpled piece of paper. It was a shop receipt, bearing the name of *The Times* Book Club, for a copy of *The Love-Songs of Robert Browning*. There was no name on it.

Biles handed it to Dr. Hailey, who regarded it for a few moments in silence, and then asked:

"Where did you find this?"

"In the fireplace of the bedroom."

The doctor's eyes narrowed.

"It does not strike me," he said, "that such a collection of poems would be likely to interest the owner of this flat."

He folded the slip, and put it carefully into his pocket-book. He added:

"On the other hand, Browning's love-songs do appeal very strongly to some women." He fixed his eyeglass and regarded

the young detective. " You have not found the book itself, have you ? "

" No, sir. There are a few novels in the bedroom, but no poetry of any kind."

Dr. Hailey nodded. He asked to be shown the collection, and made a detailed examination of it. The novels were all of the lurid, sex type. It was as he had anticipated. He opened each of the books, and glanced at the fly-leaves. They were all blank. He turned to Biles.

" I am ready to bet that Mrs. Bardwell did not pay that bill at the Book Club," he declared. " And I am ready to bet also that this book was not bought for her."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

" Probably not," he said unconcernedly.

" Then, why should the receipt for it be lying in this room ? "

" My dear doctor, how should I know ? I suppose, because the man who possessed it chose to throw it away here."

The doctor shook his head.

" Men do not buy collections of love-songs for themselves, nor, for that matter, do women. They buy them—almost invariably—to give to people they are interested in. Everybody, I think, recognises that."

He broke off. A look of impatience came into Biles's face.

" Well ? "

" Therefore, a man does not, as a rule, reveal to one woman the fact that he has made such a purchase on behalf of another. I mean, it is difficult to believe that any man on intimate terms with Mrs. Bardwell would have invited her jealousy by leaving such plain evidence of his interest in another woman lying about in her rooms. I assume, you see, that no man would give that poor lady this particular book."

Biles shrugged his shoulders. The point seemed to him immaterial. He glanced round the bedroom with troubled eyes.

" I wish," he declared, " that we had something to go on—something definite, leading towards some individual."

His words were addressed impartially to his subordinate and to Dr. Hailey. The former looked blank, but the doctor's expression was almost eager. He raised his eyeglass, and put in into his eye.

" My dear Biles," he said, " we have something definite to go on. I was about to suggest to you when you interrupted me that the receipt for the book probably fell from the pocket of the

purchaser through a hole in that pocket. Just as the little box containing the additional bees, which he had not found it necessary to release, was destined to fall later, when the man, having assured himself that an insect of unimpaired vigour was loose and on the wing, descended in Piccadilly Circus from Mrs. Bardwell's car."

He paused. The detective had turned to him, interested once more. The thought crossed Dr. Hailey's mind that it was a pity Biles had not been gifted by Providence with an appreciation of human nature as keen as his grasp of material circumstances. He allowed his eyeglass to drop, in a manner which proclaimed that he had shot his bolt. He asked :

"You have not, perhaps, taken occasion to watch a man receiving a shop receipt for goods he has just bought and paid for ? Believe me, a spectacle full of instruction in human nature. The receipt is handed, as a rule, by a girl, and the man, as a rule, pushes it into his nearest pocket, because he does not desire to be so rude or so untidy as to drop it on the floor. Shyness, politeness, and tidyness, my dear Biles, are all prominent elements in our racial character."

Again he broke off, this time to take a pinch of snuff. The two detectives watched that process with some impatience.

"A man with a hole in his coat-pocket—a hole not very large, yet large enough to allow a piece of crumpled paper to work its way out as the wearer of the coat strode up and down the floor of the room—is not that a clue ? A doctor, perhaps, with, deep in his soul, the desire for such women as Mrs. Bardwell—cheap, yet attractive women——"

"I thought you expressed the opinion that he bought the love-songs for some other woman ! " Biles snapped.

"Exactly. Some other woman sufficiently like Mrs. Bardwell to attract him, though evidently possessed of a veneer of education to which Mrs. Bardwell could lay no claim." Dr. Hailey's large, kindly face grew thoughtful. "Has it not struck you," he asked, "that, though a man may not be faithful to any one woman, he is almost always faithful to a type ? Again and again I have seen in first and second wives the same qualities of mind and appearance, both good and bad. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that our first loves and our last are kindred spirits, recognised and chosen by needs and desires which do not change, or change but little, throughout the course of life."

"Even so, my dear Hailey."

Biles's look of perplexity had deepened. The doctor, however, was too eager to be discouraged.

" If Mrs. Bardwell was, in fact, murdered," he continued, " the figure of her murderer is not, I think, very difficult to visualise: a doctor in early middle life—because the dead woman is at least thirty—with a practice in the country, but the tastes of a townsman; a trifle careless of his clothes, since he tolerates holes in his pockets, a sentimental egoist, since he buys Browning's love-songs while plans of murder are turning over in his mind——" He broke off, and thought a moment. " It is probable that Mrs. Bardwell was an expensive luxury. Such women, too, fight like tigers for the possession of the men they rely on. Yet, though she had undoubtedly obtained a great, perhaps a terrible, hold on him, she had failed to make him marry her."

He turned to Biles, and readjusted his eyeglass.

" Why do you suppose," he asked, " Mrs. Bardwell failed to make this doctor marry her? "

" I have no idea." The detective's tones were crisp, almost to the point of abruptness.

Dr. Hailey moved across the room to a writing-table which stood near the window. He took a sheet of paper, and marked a small circle on it. Around this he drew a much larger circle. He returned to the detectives, who stood watching him.

" Here is London," he said, pointing to the small circle, " and here is the country round it up to a distance of forty miles—that is to say, up to a two-hour journey by motor-car. As our doctor seems to make frequent visits to town, that is not, I think, too narrow a radius. Beyond about forty miles, London is no longer within easy reach."

He struck his pencil at two places through the circumference of the larger circle, marking off a segment.

" Here," he went on, " are the Surrey highlands, the area, within our district, where heather grows, and where, in consequence, almost everyone keeps bees."

He raised his head, and faced the two men, whose interest he seemed to have recaptured.

" It should not," he suggested, " be impossible to discover whether or not, within this area, there is a doctor in practice who keeps Cyprian bees, is constantly running up to London, wears an overcoat with a hole in one of the pockets, and lives apart from his wife."

"Good heavens!" Biles drew his breath sharply. His instincts as a man-hunter had reasserted themselves. He glanced at the doctor with an enthusiasm which lacked nothing of generosity. The younger detective, however, retained his somewhat critical expression.

"Why should the doctor be living apart from his wife?" he asked.

"Because, had she not left him as soon as he tired of her, he would probably have killed her long ago; and, in that case, he would almost certainly have married Mrs. Bardwell during the first flush of his devotion to her. I know these sensualists, who are also puffed up with literary vanity. Marriage possesses for them an almost incredible attractiveness."

He glanced at his watch as he spoke. The recollection of a professional appointment had come suddenly to his memory.

"If you are to follow up the clue, my dear Biles," he remarked, as he left the flat, "I hope you will let me know the result. *The Medical Directory* should serve as a useful starting-point."

Dr. Hailey was kept fully occupied during the next day, and was unable, in consequence, to pursue the mystery of the Cyprian bees any further. In the late afternoon, however, he rang up Inspector Biles at Scotland Yard. A voice, the tones of which were sufficiently dispirited, informed him that the whole of the home counties did not contain a doctor answering the description with which he had furnished the police.

"Mrs. Bardwell," Biles added, "kept a maid, who has been on holiday. She returned last night, and has now told us that her mistress received very few men at her flat, and that a doctor was not among the number. Of course, it is possible that a doctor may have called during the last fortnight, in the girl's absence. But, in the circumstances, I'm afraid we must look on the murder theory as rather far-fetched. After all, the dead woman possessed a car, and may have been in the country herself on the morning on which she was stung. Bees often get trapped in cars."

Dr. Hailey hung up the receiver, and took a pinch of snuff. He sat down in his big armchair, and closed his eyes that he might pass, in fresh review, the various scraps of evidence he had collected. If the dead woman had not received the doctor at her house, then the idea that they were on intimate terms could scarcely be maintained. In that case, the whole of his deductions must be invalidated. He got up and walked down Harley Street

to *The Times* Book Club. He showed the receipt which he had retained, and asked if he might see the assistant who had conducted the sale. This girl remembered the incident clearly. It had occurred about a week earlier. The man who had bought the volume of poems was accompanied by a young woman.

" Did you happen to notice," Dr. Hailey asked, " what his companion looked like ? "

" I think she was very much ' made up.' She had fair hair ; but I can't say that I noticed her carefully."

" And the man ? "

The girl shrugged her shoulders. " I'm afraid I don't remember him clearly. A business man, perhaps." She thought a moment. " He was a good deal older than she was, I should say."

Dr. Hailey left the shop, and walked back towards Harley Street. On one point, at least, he had not been mistaken. The purchaser of the *Love-Songs* was a man, and he had bought them for a woman who was not Mrs. Bardwell. Biles had mentioned that this lady had auburn hair. Why should the man have visited Mrs. Bardwell so soon after making this purchase ? He sighed. After all, why not ? Biles was quite right in thinking that no jury in the world would listen to evidence the only basis of which was character-reading at second hand. He reached his door, and was about to let himself into the house when a cab drew up beside him. The young detective, Tadcaster, to whom Biles had introduced him at Park Mansions, got out.

" Can I see you a moment, doctor ? " he asked.

They entered the house together, Tadcaster produced a letter from his pocket, and handed it to Dr. Hailey. It was a prescription, written on Mrs. Bardwell's notepater, and signed only with initials, which were nearly indecipherable.

" I found it after you had gone," the young man explained. " It was dispensed, as you can see, by a local chemist. To-day I have seen him, and he says he has had other similar prescriptions to dispense. But he has no idea who the writer is. Mrs. Bardwell had the medicine a few days ago."

Dr. Hailey read the prescription, which was a simple iron tonic. The signature was illegible. He shook his head.

" This does not carry us much further, I'm afraid," he declared. " You can't tell from the initials who the doctor is."

" No."

" In that case, I think we shall have to throw our hands in."

Tadcaster's voice expressed considerable disappointment. It was obvious that he had hoped to make reputation out of the solution of the mystery. " Your reasoning yesterday," he added, " impressed me very much, sir, if I may say so."

Dr. Hailey inclined his head, but his eyes were vacant. So a doctor had called on the dead woman recently—and also, apparently, made earlier visits—a doctor, too, whose prescriptions were unfamiliar to the local chemist. He turned to the young detective.

" I have just heard from Biles," he said, " that the maid has come back. Do you happen to know if she has any recollection of these professional visits ? "

" I asked her that myself. She says that she knows nothing about them."

Again the far-away look came to the doctor's eyes. The fact that the prescriptions were written on Mrs. Bardwell's notepaper showed that they had been given during an attendance at the flat. For what reason had the dead woman been at pains to hide her doctor's visits from her maid ?

" Should I be troubling you very much," he said, " if I asked you to take me back to Park Mansions ? I confess that I would like to ask that girl a few questions. A doctor can obtain information which is not likely to be imparted to any layman."

As they drove through the crowded streets, Dr. Hailey asked himself again the question which had caused him to embark on this fresh investigation. What reason had Mrs. Bardwell for hiding her need of medical attendance from her maid ? Even supposing that her doctor was also her lover there seemed to be no sense in such a concealment. He opened his eyes and saw the stream of London's home-going population surging around the cab. Sweet-faced girls and splendid youths, mingled with women whose eyes told their story of disappointment, and men who wore pressing responsibility as an habitual expression. No wonder the police despaired of finding any one nameless human being in this vast tide of humanity, of hopes and fears, of desires and purposes !

The cab stopped. They entered the lift and came to the door of the flat. Tadcaster rang the bell. A moment later the door was opened by a young girl, who invited them to enter in tones which scarcely disguised the anxiety she apparently felt at the return of the police. She closed the door, and then led the way along the dim entrance corridor. She opened the door of the drawing-room.

As the light from the windows fell on her face, Dr. Hailey repressed an exclamation of amazement. He started, as though a new idea had sprung to his mind. A slight flush mounted to his cheeks. He raised his eyeglass and inserted it quickly in his eye.

" I have troubled you," he said to the girl, " because there are a few points about Mrs. Bardwell's health, before her fatal seizure, which I think you can help us to understand. I may say that I am a doctor, assisting the police."

" Oh, yes ! "

The girl's voice was low. Her pretty, heavily powdered face seemed drawn with anxiety, and her eyes moved restlessly from one man to the other. She raised her hand in a gesture of uneasiness, and clasped her brow, seeming to press her golden curls into the white flesh.

" Perhaps it might be better if I spoke to you alone ? "

Dr. Hailey's tones were very gentle. He looked at Tadcaster as he spoke, and the detective immediately got up and left the room. Then he turned to the girl.

" Your mistress," he asked, " discharged you from her employment a fortnight ago ? "

The girl started violently, and all the blood seemed to ebb from her cheeks. Wild fear stared at him from her big, lustrous eyes.

" No ! "

" My dear girl, if I may say so, you have everything to gain, nothing to lose, by telling the truth."

He spoke coldly, yet there was a reassuring note in his voice. He saw fear give place a little to that quality of weakness which he had expected to find in her character—the quality which had attracted Mrs. Bardwell's lover, and which explained, in some subtle fashion, the gift of the *Love-Songs*. He repeated his question. The girl hung her head. She consented. He let his eyeglass fall.

" Because of your intimacy with a man she had been accustomed to look on as her own particular friend."

" Oh, no, no ! It is not true ! "

Again her eyes challenged him ; she had thrown back her head, revealing the full roundness of her throat. The light gleamed among her curls. No wonder that this beauty had been able to dispossess her mistress !

" Listen to me." Dr. Hailey's face had grown stern. " You have denied that any doctor came to this flat—at least, so far as you know. As it happens, however, a number of prescriptions were

dispensed for Mrs. Bardwell by the local chemist ; so that, either she took great pains to hide from you the fact that she was calling in a doctor, or—you have not been speaking the truth."

"She did not tell me."

He raised his hand. "It will be easy," he said, "to get an answer to that question. If your mistress was really hiding her doctor's visits from you, she must have taken her prescriptions herself, personally, to the chemist. I shall find out from him later on whether or not that is so."

Again the girl's mood changed. She began to whimper, pressing a tiny lace handkerchief to her eyes in coquettish fashion.

Dr. Hailey drew a deep breath. He waited a moment before framing his next remark. Then he said :

"You realise, I suppose, that if a girl helps a man to commit a crime, she is as guilty as he is, in the eyes of the law."

"What do you mean ? "

All her defences now were abandoned. She stood before him, abject in her terror, with staring eyes and trembling lips.

"That your presence here to-day proves you have had a share in this business. Why did you return to the flat ? "

"Because—because——"

"*Because he—the man you are shielding—wanted to find out what the police were doing in the place ?*"

She tottered towards him, and laid her hands on his arm.

"Oh, God, I am so frightened," she whispered.

"You have reason—to be frightened."

He led her to a chair, but suddenly she seemed to get her strength anew. Her grasp on his arm tightened.

"I didn't want him to do it," she cried, in tones of anguish. "I swear that I didn't. And I swear that I have no idea, even yet, what he did do. We were going to be married—immediately."

"Married ! " His voice seemed to underline the word.

"I swear that. It was honest and above board, only he had her on his hands, and she had wasted so much of his money."

For the first time her voice rang true. She added :

"His wife cost a lot, too, though she was not living with him. She died a month ago."

They stood facing one another. In the silence of the room, the ticking of an ornate little clock on the mantelshelf was distinctly audible.

Dr. Hailev leaned forward.

" His name ? " he asked.

" No, I shall not tell you."

She had recaptured her feeble courage. It gleamed from her eyes, for an instant transforming even her weakness. The vague knowledge that she loved this man in her paltry, immoral way, came to him. He was about to repeat his demand, when the door of the room opened. Tadcaster came in with a small, leather-bound volume in his hand.

The girl uttered a shrill cry and sprang towards him ; but Dr. Hailey anticipated that move. He held her firmly.

" It is the collection of Browning's *Love-Songs*," the detective said. " I found it lying open in the next room. There is an inscription signed ' Michael Cornwall.' "

He held the book out for the doctor's inspection, but Dr. Hailey's face had grown as pale, almost, as that of the girl by his side.

He repeated the name—" Michael Cornwall "—almost like a man in a dream.

. . . .

The place was hidden among its trees. Dr. Hailey walked up the avenue with slow steps. The thought of the mission which had brought him to this lovely Hampstead house lay—as it had lain through all the hours of the night—like death on his spirits. Michael Cornwall, the well-known Wimpole Street bacteriologist, and he had been boys together at Uppingham. They were still acquaintances.

He came to the front door, and was about to ring the bell when the man he was looking for appeared round the side of the house, accompanied by an old man and a girl.

" Hailey—well I'm dashed ! "

Dr. Cornwall advanced with outstretched hand. His deep, rather sinister eyes welcomed his colleague with an enthusiasm which was entirely unaffected. He introduced : " My uncle, Colonel Cornwall, and my cousin, Miss Patsy Cornwall, whom you must congratulate on having just become engaged," in his quick, staccato manner.

" We're just going round the garden," he explained, " and you must accompany us. And, after that, to luncheon. Whereupon, my dear Hailey, if you have—as I feel you have—great business to discuss with me, we shall discuss it."

His bantering tones accorded well with his appearance, which

had changed but little in the years. He was the same astute, moody, inordinately vain fellow who had earned for himself, once upon a time, the nickname of "The Lynx."

They strolled across the lawn, and came to a brick wall of that rich russet hue which only time and the seasons can provide. Dr. Cornwall opened a door in the wall, and stood back for his companions to enter.

A sight of entrancing beauty greeted them, lines of fruit-trees in full blossom, as though the snows of some Alpine sunset had been spread, in all their glowing tints, on this English garden. Dr. Hailey, however, had no eyes for this loveliness. His gaze was fixed on a row of white-painted beehives which gleamed in the sunlight under the distant wall. Patsy Cornwall exclaimed in sheer wonder. Then a new cry of delight escaped her, as she detected, in a large greenhouse which flanked the wall, a magnificent display of scarlet tulips. She took Dr. Hailey, in whose eyes the melancholy expression seemed to have deepened, to inspect these, while her father and cousin strolled on up the garden path. She stood with him in the narrow gangway of the greenhouse, and feasted ecstatic eyes on the wonderful blossoms.

"Don't they make you wish to gather them all and take them away somewhere where there are no flowers?"

She turned to him, but he had sprung away from her side.

A cry, shrill and terrible, pierced the lazy silence of the morning. She saw her father and cousin fleeing back, pursued by an immense swarm of winged insects, towards the garden gate.

Blindly, franctically, they sought to ward off the dreadful onslaught. The old man stumbled, and would have fallen, had not his nephew caught him in his arms. She had a momentary glimpse of his face; it was as though she had looked on the face of Death.

"*The bees!*"

The words broke from Dr. Hailey's lips as a moan of despair. He had come to the closed door of the greenhouse, and seemed to be about to open it; but at the same moment one of the infuriated insects in delirious flight struck the glass pane beside him. Then another—and another—and another. He came reeling back towards the girl.

"Lie down on the gangway!" he shouted, at the highest pitch of his voice. "There may be a broken pane somewhere."

She turned her horror-stricken eyes to him.