trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, ' How quick the snow gets thick on the ground.'

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

' I've got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats,' said the genial and gold-laced giant, ' and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away.'

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly, ' Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau's.'

' Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me,' said the official, with beaming authority.

' Then I wonder what that is? ' said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture.

For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

'God!' cried Angus, involuntarily, 'the Invisible Man!'

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulder; but the Scotsman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked very like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said 'Murder!' and, plunging into the flat, had explored every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he

expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe simply was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. 'My friend,' said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, ' not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man.'

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe's own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him ?

' Eaten him ? ' said the nightmare at his ear ; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, ' Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world.'

' There is only one thing to be done,' said Flambeau, ' whether it belongs to this world or the other, I must go down and talk to my friend.'

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the commissionaire and the hovering

chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, 'Where is the policeman?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Father Brown; 'that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something—that I thought worth investigating.'

'Well, we want him back pretty soon,' said Angus, abruptly, 'for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out.'

'How?' asked the priest.

'Father,' said Flambeau, after a pause, 'upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I——'

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

'You're right, sir,' he panted, 'they've just found poor Mr. Smythe's body in the canal down below.'

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. 'Did he run down and drown himself?' he asked.

'He never came down, I'll swear,' said the constable, 'and he wasn't drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart.'

'And yet you saw no one enter?' said Flambeau in a grave voice.

'Let us walk down the road a little,' said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, 'Stupid of me! I forgot to

ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack.'

'Why a light brown sack?' asked Angus.

'Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again,' said Father Brown; 'but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished.'

'I am pleased to hear it,' said Angus with hearty irony. 'It hasn't begun, so far as I am concerned.'

'You must tell us all about it,' said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, 'Well, I'm afraid you'll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can't begin this story anywhere else.

'Have you ever noticed this—that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean—or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, 'Is anybody staying with you?" the lady doesn't answer "Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on," though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says "There is *nobody* staying with us," meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, "Who is staying in the house?" then the lady will remember the butler, parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite

honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him.'

'An invisible man?' inquired Angus, raising his red eyebrows.

'A mentally invisible man,' said Father Brown.

A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. 'Of course, you can't think of such a man, until you do think of him. That 's where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said—things that couldn't be true. Don't get annoyed,' he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotsman's head; 'she thought they were true all right, but they couldn't be true. A person *can't* be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible.'

'Why must there be somebody near her?' asked Angus.

'Because,' said Father Brown, 'barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter.'

'Do you really mean to say,' asked Flambeau, 'that Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady?'

'Yes,' said the priest. 'Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady. You see, he had to.'

'Oh, I can't stand much more of this,' exploded Flambeau. 'Who is this fellow? What does he look like. What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?'

'He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold,' replied the priest promptly with precision, 'and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himalaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms——'

'Reverend sir,' cried Angus, standing still, 'are you raving mad, or am I?'

'You are not mad,' said Brown, 'only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example.'

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

'Nobody ever notices postmen somehow,' he said thoughtfully; 'yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily.'

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to.

John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

THE BUSINESS MINISTER

By H. C. Bailey

Phase I.—The Scandal

'"Oh, to be in England now that April's here",' said Reggie Fortune as, trying to hide himself in his coat, he slipped and slid down the gangway to his native land. The Boulogne boat behind him, lost in driving snow, could be inferred from escaping steam and the glimmer of a rosette of lights. 'The Flying Dutchman's new packet,' Reggie muttered, and hummed the helmsman's song from the opera, till a squall coming round the corner stung what of his face he could not bury like small shot.

He continued to suffer. The heat in the Pullman was tinned. He did not like the toast. The train ran slow, and whenever he wiped the steamy window he saw white-blanketed country and fresh swirls of snow. So he came into Charing Cross some seven hours late, and it had no taxi. He said what he could. You imagine him, balanced by the two suit-cases which he could not bear to part with, wading through deep snow from the Tube station at Oxford Circus to Wimpole Street, and subsiding limp but still fluent into the arms of Sam his factotum. And the snow went on falling.

It was about this time, in his judgement, 11 p.m. on 15th April, that a man fell from the top story of Montmorency House, the hugest and newest of

the new blocks of flats thereabouts. He fell down the well which lights the inner rooms and, I suppose, made something of a thud as his body passed through the cushion of snow and hit the concrete below. But in the howl of the wind and the rattle of windows it would have been extraordinary if any one had heard him or taken him for something more than a slate or a chimney pot. He was not in a condition to explain himself. And the snow went on falling.

Mr. Fortune, though free from his coat and his hat and his scarf and his gloves, though scorching both hands and one foot at the hall fire, was still telling Sam his troubles when the Hon. Stanley Lomas came downstairs. Mr. Fortune said, 'Help!'

'Had a good time?' said Lomas, cheerily. 'Did you get to Seville?'

'Oh, Peter, don't say things like that. I can't bear it. Have the feelings of a man. Be a brother, Lomas. I've been in nice, kind countries with a well-bred climate, and I come back to this epileptic blizzard, and here's Lomas pale and perky waiting for me on the mat. And then you're civil! Oh, Sophonisba! Sophonisba, oh!'

'I did rather want to see you,' Lomas explained.

'I hate seeing you. I hate seeing anything raw and alive. If you talk to me I shall cry. My dear man, have you had dinner?'

'Hours ago.'

'That wasn't quite nice of you, you know. When you come to see me, you shouldn't dine first. It makes me suspect your taste. Well, well! Come and see me eat. That is a sight which has moved strong men to tears, the pure ecstasy of

joy, Lomas. The sublime and the beautiful, by R. Fortune. And Sam says Elise has a *timbale de foie gras* and her very own *entrecôte*. Dine again, Whittington. And we will look upon the wine when it is red. My Chambertin is strongly indicated. And then I will fall asleep for a thousand years, same like the Sleeping Beauty.'

'I wish I could.'

'Lomas, old dear!' Reggie turned and looked him over. 'Yes, you have been going it. You ought to get away.'

'I dare say I shall. That is one of the things I'm going to ask you—what you think about resignation.'

'Oh, Peter! As bad as that?' Reggie whistled. 'Sorry I was futile. But I couldn't know. There 's been nothing in the papers.'

'Only innuendoes. Damme, you can't get away from it in the clubs.'

They had it out over dinner.

Some months before a new Government had been formed, which was advertised to bring heaven down to earth without delay. And the first outward sign of its inward and spiritual grace was the Great Coal Ramp. Some folks in the City began to buy the shares of certain coal companies. Some folks in the City began to spread rumours that the Government was going to nationalize mines district by district—those districts first in which the shares had been bought. The shares then went to a vast price.

'All the usual nauseating features of a Stock Exchange boom,' said Reggie.

'No. This is founded on fact,' said Lomas. 'That 's the distinguishing feature. It was worked

on the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Whoever started the game had exact and precise information. They only touched those companies which the Government meant to take over; they knew everything and they knew it right. Somebody of the inner circle gave the plan away.'

'" Politics is a cursed profession ",' said Reggie.

Lomas looked gloomily at his Burgundy. 'Politicians are almost the lowest of God's creatures,' he agreed. 'I know that. I'm a Civil servant. But I don't see how any of them can have had a finger in this pie. The scheme hadn't come before the Cabinet. Everybody knew, of course, that something was going to be done. But the whole point is the particular companies concerned in this primary provisional scheme. And nobody knew which they were but the President of the Board of Trade and his private secretary.'

'The President—that 's Horace Kimball.'

'Yes. No politics about him. He 's the rubber king, you know. He was brought in on the business men for a business Cabinet cry. He was really put there to get these nationalization schemes through.'

'And he begins by arousing city scandal. Business men and business methods. Well, well! Give me the politicians after all. I was born respectable. I would rather be swindled in the quiet, old-fashioned way. I like a sense of style.'

'Quite—quite,' said Lomas, heartily. 'But I must say I have nothing against Kimball. He is the usual thing. Thinks he is like Napoleon—pathetically anxious you should suppose he has

been educated. But he really is quite an able fellow, and he means to be civil. Only he 's mad to catch the fellow who gave his scheme away. I don't blame him. But it 's damned awkward.'

'If only Kimball and his private secretary knew, either Kimball or the private secretary gave it away.'

'My dear Fortune, if you say things like that, I shall break down. That is the hopeless sort of jingle I say in my sleep. I believe Kimball 's honest. That 's his reputation. As keen as they make 'em, but absolutely straight. And why should he play double? He is ridiculously rich. If he wanted money it was idiotic to go into the Government. He would do much better for himself in business. No; he must have gone into politics for power and position and so on. And then at the start his career is mucked by a financial scandal. You can't suppose he had a hand in it. It 's too mad.'

'Remains the private secretary. Don't Mr. Kimball like his private secretary?'

'Oh yes. Kimball thinks very well of him. I pointed out to Kimball that on the facts we were bound to suspect Sandford, and he was quite huffy about it—said he had the highest opinion of Sandford, asked what evidence I had, and so on.'

'Very good and proper, and even intelligent. My respects to H. Kimball. What evidence have you, Lomas, old thing?'

'You just put the case yourself,' said Lomas, with some irritation. 'Only Kimball and Sandford were in the secret. It 's impossible in the nature of things Kimball should have sold it. Remains Sandford.'

'Oh, Peter! That 's not evidence, that 's an argument.'

'I know, confound you. But there is evidence of a sort. One of Sandford's friends is a young fellow called Walkden, and he 's in one of the firms which have been running the Stock Exchange boom.'

'It 's queer,' said Reggie, and lit a pipe. 'But it wouldn't hang a yellow dog.'

'Do you think I don't know that?' Lomas cried. 'We have nothing to act on, and they're all cursing me because we haven't!'

'Meaning Kimball?'

'Kimball—Kimball 's calling twice a day to know how the case is going on, please. But the whole Government 's on it now. Minutes from the Home Secretary—bitter mems. from the Prime Minister. They want a scapegoat, of course. Governments do.'

'Find us some one to hang or we'll hang you?'

'I told you I was thinking of resigning.'

'Because they want to bully you into making a case against the private secretary—and you have a conscience?'

'Lord, no. I'd convict him to-day if I could. I don't like the fellow. He 's a young prig. But I can't convict him. No; I don't think they want to hang anybody in particular. But they must have somebody to hang, and I can't find him.'

'It isn't much in my way,' Reggie murmured. 'The Civil Service frightens me. I have a brother-in-law in the Treasury. Sometimes he lets me dine with him. Meditations among the Tombs for Reginald. No. It isn't much in my way. I want passion and gore. But you intrigue me, Lomas,

you do indeed. I would know more of H. Kimball and Secretary Sandford. They worry me.'

'My God, they worry me,' said Lomas, heartily.

'They are too good to be true. I wonder if there 's any other nigger in the wood pile?'

'Well, I can't find him.'

'Hope on, hope ever. Don't you remember it was the dowager popped the Bohun sapphires? And don't you resign. If the Prime Minister sends you another nasty mem., say you have your eye on his golf pro. A man who putts like that must have something on his conscience. And don't you resign for all the politicians outside hell. It may be they want to get rid of you. I'll come and see you to-morrow.'

'I wish you would,' said Lomas. 'You have a mighty good eye for a face.'

'My dear old thing! I never believe in faces, that 's all. The only one I ever liked was that girl who broke her sister-in-law's nose. But I'll come round.'

Comforted by wine and sympathy, Lomas was sent away to trudge home through a foot of snow. And the snow went on falling.

Phase II.—The Private Secretary

The snow lingered. Though hoses washed it out of the highways, in every side street great mounds lay unmelted, and the park was dingily white. Reggie shivered as he got out of his car in Scotland Yard, and he scurried upstairs and put himself as close as he could to Lomas's fire—ousting Superintendent Bell.

'I'm waiting for you,' said Lomas, quietly.

'There 's a new fact. Three thousand pounds has been paid into Sandford's account. It was handed in over the counter in notes of small amounts yesterday morning. Cashier fancies it was paid in by a stoutish man in glasses—couldn't undertake to identify.'

'It 's a wicked world, Lomas. That wouldn't matter so much if it was sensible. Some day I will take to crime, just to show you how to do it. Who is Sandford, what is he, that such queer things happen round him?'

'I don't know so much about queer, sir,' said Superintendent Bell. 'I suppose this three thousand is his share of the swag.'

'That 's what we're meant to suppose,' Reggie agreed. 'That 's what I resent.'

'You mean, why the devil should he have it put in the bank? He must know his account would be watched. That 's the point I took,' said Lomas, wearily.

'Well, sir, as I was saying, it 's the usual sort of thing,' Superintendent Bell protested. 'When a city gang has bought a fellow in a good position and got all they can get out of him, it often happens they don't care any more about him. They'd rather break him than not. It happened in the Bewick affair, the Grantley deal——' He reeled off a string of cases. 'What I mean to say, sir, there isn't honour among thieves. When they see one of themselves in a decent position, they'll do him in if they can. Envy, that 's what it is. I suppose we're all envious. But in my experience, when a fellow isn't straight he gets a double go of envy in him. I mean to say, for sheer spiteful envy the crooks beat the band.'

Reggie nodded. 'Do you know, Bell, I don't ever remember your being wrong, when you had given an opinion. By the way, what is your opinion?'

Superintendent Bell smiled slowly. 'We do have to be so careful, sir. Would you believe it, I don't so much as know who did the open-air work in the Coal Ramp. There was half a dozen firms in the boom, quite respectable firms. But who had the tip first, and who was doing the big business, I know no more than the babe in arms.'

'Yes, there 's some brains about,' Lomas agreed.

But Reggie, who was watching the Superintendent, said, 'What 's up your sleeve, Bell?'

The Superintendent laughed. 'You do have a way of putting things, Mr. Fortune.' He lit a cigarette and looked at his chief. 'I don't know what you thought of Mr. Sandford, Mr. Lomas?'

'More do I, Bell,' said Lomas. 'I only know he 's not a man and a brother.'

'What I should describe as a lonely cove, sir,' Bell suggested. 'Chiefly interested in himself, you might say.'

'He 's a climber,' said Lomas.

'Well, well! Who is Sandford—what is he, that all the world don't love him?' Reggie asked. 'Who was his papa? What was his school?'

'Well, now, it 's rather odd you should ask that, sir,' said Superintendent Bell.

'He didn't have a school. He didn't have a father,' said Lomas. 'First he knows he was living with his widowed mother, an only child, in a little village in North Wales—Llan something. He went to the local grammar-school. He was a kind of prize boy. He got a scholarship at Pem-

broke, Oxford. Then Mrs. Sandford died, leaving him about a pound a week. He got firsts at Oxford, and came into the Home Civil pretty high. He 's done well in his Department, and they can't stand him.'

' Good brain, no geniality, if you take my meaning,' said the Superintendent.

' I hate him already,' Reggie murmured.

' That 's quite easy,' said Lomas. ' Well, he 's a clever second-rater, that 's what it comes to.'

' Poor devil,' Reggie murmured.

' There 's swarms of them in the service. The only odd thing about Sandford is that he don't seem to have any origins. Like that fellow in the Bible who had no ancestors—Melchizedek, was it ? Well, Mrs. Sandford had no beginning either. She wasn't native to Llanfairfechan—that 's the place. She came there when Sandford was a small kid. Nobody there knows where from. He says he don't know where from. Nobody knows who his father was. He says he don't know. He says she left no papers of any sort. She had an annuity, and the fifty pounds a year she left him was in Consols. He never knew of any relations. Nobody in Llan-what's-its-name can remember anybody ever coming to see her. And she died ten years ago.'

' You might say it looked as if she wanted to hide,' said Superintendent Bell. ' But, Lord, you can't tell. Might be just a sorrowful widow. It takes 'em that way sometimes.'

' Has anybody ever shown any interest in Melchizedek ? ' said Reggie.

' O Lord, no ! Nobody ever heard of him out of his Department. And there they all hate him. But he 's the sort of fellow you can't keep down.'

'Poor devil,' Reggie murmured again.

'You won't be so damned sympathetic when you've met him,' Lomas said. A slip of paper was presented to him. 'Hallo! Here's Kimball. I thought he was leaving me alone too long. Well, we've got something for him to-day.'

'He has a large fat head': thus some perky journalist began a sketch of the Rt. Hon. Horace Kimball. And he faithfully reported the first elementary effect of seeing Mr. Kimball, who looked a heavy fellow, with the bulk of his head and neck supported on a sturdy frame. But on further acquaintance people discovered a vivacity of movement and a keenness of expression which made them uncomfortable. Yet he had, as I intend you to observe, a bluff, genial manner, and his cruellest critics were always those who had not met him. For the rest, he aimed at a beautiful neatness in his clothes, and succeeded.

He rushed in. 'Well, Lomas, if we don't make an end of this business, it'll make an end of us,' he announced, and flung himself at a chair. 'Anything new?'

'I have just been discussing it with Mr. Fortune.'

'That's right. Want the best brains we can get.' He nodded his heavy head at Reggie. 'What do you make of it?'

'I don't wonder you find it harassing,' Reggie said.

'Harassing! That's putting it mildly. I've lost more sleep over it than I want to think about.' He became aware that Reggie was studying him. 'Doctor, aren't you?' he laughed ruefully. 'I'm not a case, you know.'

'I apologize for the professional instinct,'

Reggie said. ' But it does make me say you ought to see your doctor, sir.'

' My doctor can't tell me anything I don't know. It 's this scandal that 's the matter with me. You wouldn't say I was sentimental, would you ? You wouldn't take me for an innocent ? Well, do you know, I've been in business thirty years, and I've never had one of my own people break faith with me. That 's what irritates me. Somebody in my own office, somebody close to me, selling me. By God, it 's maddening ! '

' Whom do you suspect ? ' said Reggie.

Kimball flung himself about, and the chair creaked. ' Damn it, man, we've had all that out over and over again. I can't suspect any one. I won't suspect any one. But the thing 's been done.'

' As I understand, the only people who knew the scheme were yourself and Sandford, your secretary ? '

' I'd as soon suspect myself as Sandford.'

' Yesterday three thousand pounds in notes was paid by somebody, who didn't give his name, into Sandford's account,' said Lomas.

' Great God ! ' said Kimball, and rolled back in his chair, breathing heavily. ' That 's what I wouldn't let myself believe.'

' Have you got any brandy, Lomas ? ' said Reggie, watching his pallor professionally. Lomas started up. Reggie reached out and began to feel Kimball's pulse.

' Don't do that,' said Kimball sharply, and dragged his hand away. ' Good Lord, man, I'm not ill ! No, thanks, Lomas, nothing, nothing. I never touch spirits. I'll be all right in a moment. But it does rather knock me over to find I've got

to believe it was Sandford.' He struggled out of his chair, walked to the window, and flung it up and dabbed at his forehead. He stood there a moment in the raw air, took a pinch of snuff, and turned on them vigorously. 'There 's no doubt about this evidence, eh? We can't get away from it?'

'I'm afraid we must ask Sandford for an explanation,' said Lomas.

'Most unpleasant thing I ever did in my life,' Kimball said. 'Well, there 's no help for it, I suppose. Still, he may have a perfectly good explanation. Damn it, I won't make up my mind till I must. I've always found him quite straight—and very efficient too. Cleverest fellow I ever had about me. Send for him then; say I'll be glad to see him here. Come now, Lomas, what do you think yourself? He may be able to account for it quite naturally, eh?'

'He may. But I can't see how,' Lomas said gloomily. 'Can you?'

'I suppose you think I'm a fool, but I like to believe in my fellows,' said Kimball, and they passed an awkward five minutes till Sandford came.

He looked a good young man. He was rather small, he was very lean, he wore eyeglasses. Everything about him was correct and restrained. But there was an oddity of structure about his face: it seemed to come to a point at the end of his nose, and yet his lower jaw looked heavy.

He made graded salutations to Kimball his chief and to Lomas. He looked at Reggie and Superintendent Bell as though he expected them to retreat from his presence. And he turned upon Kimball a glance that bade him lose no time.

Kimball seemed to find some difficulty in beginning. He cleared his throat, blew his nose, and took another pinch of snuff. 'I don't know if you guess why I sent for you,' he broke out.

'I infer that it is on this matter of the gamble in coal shares,' said Sandford, precisely.

'Yes. Do you know of any new fact?'

'Nothing has come before me.'

'Well, there 's something I want you to explain. I dare say you have a satisfactory explanation. But I'm bound to ask for it.'

'I have nothing to explain that I know of.'

'It 's been brought to my knowledge that yesterday three thousand pounds in notes was paid into your account. Where did it come from?'

Sandford took off his eyeglasses and cleaned them, and put them on again. 'I have no information,' he said in the most correct official manner.

'Good God, man, you must see what it means!' Kimball cried.

'I beg your pardon, sir. I have no notion of what it means. I find it difficult to believe that you have been correctly informed.'

'You don't suppose I should take up a charge like this unless I was compelled to.'

'There 's no doubt of the fact, Mr. Sandford,' said Lomas, gloomily.

'Indeed! Then I have only to say that no one has any authority to make payments into my account. As you have gone into the affair so carefully, I suppose you have found out who did.'

'He didn't give his name, you see. Can you tell us who he was?' Lomas said.

'I repeat, sir, I know nothing about the transaction.'

'And that 's all you say?'

'I need hardly add that I shall not accept the money.'

'You know the matter can't end there!' Kimball cried. 'Come, man, you're not doing yourself justice. Nothing could be worse for you than this tone, can't you see that?'

'I beg your pardon, sir. I do not see what you wish me to say. You spoke of making a charge. Will you be so good as to state it?'

'If you must have it! This boom was begun on information which only you had besides myself. And immediately after the boom this large sum is paid secretly into your account. You must see what everybody will say—what I should say myself if I didn't know you—that you sold the plan, and this money is your price. Come, you must have some explanation for us—some defence, at least.'

'I say again, sir, I know nothing of the matter. I should hope that what scandal may say will have no influence upon any one who knows my character and my career.'

'Good God, man, we're dealing with facts! Where did that three thousand pounds come from?'

'I have no information. I have no idea.'

For the first time Reggie spoke. 'I wonder if you have a theory?'

'I don't consider it is my duty to imagine theories.'

'Do you know any one who wants to ruin you? Or why any one should?'

'I beg your pardon. I must decline to be led into wild speculations of that kind.'

Kimball started up. 'You make it impossible to do anything for you. I have given you every chance, remember that—every chance. It 's beyond me now. I can only advise you to consider your position. I don't know whether your resignation will save you from worse consequences. I'll do what I can. But you make it very hard. Good morning. You had better not go back to the office.'

'I deny every imputation,' said Sandford. 'Good morning, sir.'

Half apologetically Kimball turned to the others. 'There 's nothing for it, I suppose. We'll have to go through with it now. You'll let me have an official report. The fellow 's hopeless. Poor devil!'

'I can't say he touches my heart,' said Lomas.

Kimball laughed without mirth. 'He can't help himself,' he said, and went out.

'I shouldn't have thought Kimball was so human,' said Lomas.

'Well, sir, he always has stuck to his men, I must say,' said Superintendent Bell.

'I wonder he could stick to Sandford for a day.'

'That Mr. Sandford, he is what you might call a superior person,' Bell chuckled. 'Funny how they brazen it out, that kind.'

'Yes, I don't doubt he thinks he was most impressive. Well, Fortune, there 's not much here for you, I'm afraid.'

Reggie had gone to the window and was fidgeting there. 'I say, the wind 's changed,' said he. 'That 's something, anyway.'

Phase III.—The Man under the Snow

The porter of Montmorency House, awaking next morning, discovered that even in the well of his flats, where the air is ever the most stagnant in London, the snow was melting fast. After breakfast he saw some clothes emerging from the slush. This annoyed him, for he cherished that little court. The tenants, he remarked to his wife, were always doing something messy, but dropping their trousers down the well was the limit. He splashed out into the slush and found a corpse.

After lunch Reggie Fortune, drowsing over the last published play of Herr Wedekind, was roused by the telephone, which, speaking with the voice of Superintendent Bell, urged him to come at once to the mortuary.

'Who 's dead?' he asked. 'Sandford hanged himself in red tape? Kimball had a stroke?'

'It 's what you might call anonymous,' said the voice of the Superintendent. 'Just the sort of case you like.'

'I never like a case,' said Reggie, with indignation, and rang off.

At the door of the mortuary Superintendent Bell appeared as his car stopped.

'You're damned mysterious,' Reggie complained.

'Not me, sir. If you can tell me who the fellow is, I'll be obliged. But what I want to know first is, what was the cause of death. You'll excuse me. I won't tell you how he was found till you've formed your opinion.'

'What the devil do you mean by that?'

'I don't want you to be prejudiced in any way, sir, if you take my meaning.'

'Damn your impudence. When did you ever see me prejudiced?'

'Dear me, Mr. Fortune, I never heard you swear so much,' said Bell, sadly. 'Don't be hasty, sir. I have my reasons. I have, really.'

He led the way into the room where the dead man lay. He pulled back the sheet which covered the body. 'Well, well!' said Reggie Fortune. For the dead man's face was not there.

'You'll excuse me. I shouldn't be any good to you,' said the Superintendent thickly, and made for the door.

Reggie did not look round. 'Send Sam in with my things,' he said.

It was a long time afterwards when, rather pale for him, his round and comfortable face veiled in an uncommon gravity, he came out.

Superintendent Bell threw away his cigarette. 'Ghastly, isn't it?' he said with sympathy.

'Mad,' said Reggie. 'Come on.' A shower of warm rain was being driven before the west wind, but he opened everything in his car that would open, and told the chauffeur to drive round Regent's Park. 'Come on, Bell. The rain won't hurt you.'

'I don't wonder you want a blow, Poor chap! As ugly a mess as ever I saw.'

'I suppose I'm afraid,' said Reggie, slowly. 'It's unusual and annoying. I suppose the only thing that does make you afraid is what's mad. Not the altogether crazy—that's only a nuisance—but what's damned clever and yet mad. An able fellow with a mania on one point. I suppose that's what the devil is, Bell.'

'Good Lord, sir,' said Superintendent Bell.

'What I want is muffins,' said Reggie—'several muffins and a little tea and my domestic hearth. Then I'll feel safe.'

He spread himself out, sitting on the small of his back before his study fire, and in that position contrived to eat and drink with freedom.

'In another world, Bell,' he said dreamily—'in another and a gayer world it seems to me you wanted to know the cause of death. And you didn't want me to be prejudiced. Kindly fellow. But there 's no prejudice about. It 's quite a plain case.'

'Is it indeed, sir? You surprise me.'

'The dead man was killed by a blow on the left temple, from some heavy, blunt weapon—a life-preserver, perhaps, a stick, a poker. At the same time, or immediately after death, his face was battered in by the same or a similar weapon. Death probably occurred some days ago. After death, but not long after death, the body received other injuries, a broken rib and left shoulder-blade, probably by a fall from some height. That 's the medical evidence. There are other curious circumstances.'

'Just a few!' said Bell, with a grim chuckle. 'You're very definite, sir, if I might say so. I suppose he couldn't have been killed and had his face smashed like—like he did—by the fall?'

'You can cut that right out. He was killed by a blow and blows smashed his face in. Where did you find him?'

'He was found when the snow melted this morning in the well at Montmorency House.'

'Under the snow? That puts the murder on

the night of the fifteenth. Yes, that fits; that accounts for his sodden clothes.'

'There 's a good deal it don't account for,' said Bell, gloomily.

'I saw him just as he was found?' Bell nodded. 'Somebody took a lot of pains with him. He was fully dressed—collar and tie, boots. But a lot of his internal buttons were undone. And there 's not a name, not even a maker's name, on any of his clothes. His linen 's new and don't show a laundry mark. Yes, somebody took a lot of pains we shouldn't know him.'

'I don't know what you're getting at, sir.'

'Don't you? Is it likely a man wearing decent clothes would not have his linen marked and his tailor's name somewhere? Is it likely a man who had his tie and collar on wouldn't do up his under-shirt? No. The beggar's clothes were changed after he was killed. That must have been a grisly business too. He 's not a tender-hearted fellow who did this job. Valet the body you've killed and then bash its face in! Well, well! Have some more tea?'

'Not me,' said Bell, with a gulp. 'You talked about a madman, sir, didn't you?'

'Oh no, no, no. Not the kind of mad that runs amuck. Not homicidal mania. This isn't just smashing up a chap's body for the sake of smashing. There 's lots of purpose here. This is damned cold, calculating crime. That kind of mad. Some fellow 's got an object that makes it worth while to him to do any beastliness. That 's the worst kind of mad, Bell. Not homicidal mania—that only makes a man a beast. What 's here is the sort of thing that makes a man a devil.'

You're going a bit beyond me, sir. It 's a bloody murder, and that 's all I want.'

' Yes, that 's our job,' said Reggie, thoughtfully. Together they went off to Montmorency House.

' How would you describe deceased, sir ? ' said Bell.

' Man of about fifty, under middle height, inclined to be stout, unusual bald.'

' It ain't much to go by, is it ? ' Bell sighed. ' We don't so much as know if he was clean shaved or not.'

' He was, I think. I saw no trace of facial hair. But it 's rash to argue from not finding things. And he might have been shaved after he was killed.'

' And then smashed ? My Lord ! And they smashed him thorough too, didn't they ? '

' Very logical bit of crime, Bell.'

' Logical ! God bless my soul ! But I mean to say, sir, we haven't got much to go on. Suppose I advertise there 's a man of fifty missing, rather short and stout and bald, I shall look a bit of an ass.'

' Well, I wouldn't advertise. He'd had an operation, by the way—on the ear. But I wouldn't say that either. In fact, I wouldn't say anything about him just yet. Hold your trumps.'

' Trumps ? What is trumps then, Mr. Fortune ? '

' Anything you know is always trumps.'

' You'll excuse me, but it 's not my experience, sir.'

They came to Montmorency House, where detectives were already domesticated with the porter, and had done the obvious things. The body, it was to be presumed, had fallen from one

of the windows opening on the well. The men who had flats round the well were all accounted for, save one. Mr. Rand, tenant of a flat on the top story, had not been seen for some days. Ringing at Mr. Rand's door had produced no reply.

'Well, we do seem to be getting a bit warmer,' said Superintendent Bell. And his subordinate in charge of the inquiries at the flats beamed and rubbed his hands, and remarked that Rand seemed to have been a mysterious chap—only had his flat a few weeks, not used it regularly, not by any means; no visitors to speak of, civil but distant.

'That sounds all right,' said Bell, and looked at Reggie.

'What was he like?' said Reggie.

'Middle size to biggish, wore glasses, well dressed, brown hair, which he wore rather long, they say,' the inspector reeled off glibly.

'That 's put the lid on,' said Bell. 'Won't do for the corpse, Warren. Not a bit like it. Well, sir, where are we now?' He turned to Reggie.

'You will go so fast,' Reggie complained and sat down. 'I'm pantin' after you in vain. What 's the primary hypothesis, Bell?'

'Sir?'

'Do we assume the corpse is Rand, or that Rand chucked the corpse out of the window?'

'Ah, there 's that,' said the inspector eagerly. 'We hadn't worked on that.'

'We haven't worked on anything, if you ask me,' said Bell, gloomily. 'What 's your opinion then, Mr. Fortune?'

'The primary hypothesis is that we're looking for an able, masterful madman. Therefore my opinion is that the whole thing will look perfectly

rational when we've got it all combed out—grantin' the madman's original mad idea.'

'Am I to go round London looking for a rational madman?' Bell protested.

'My dear chap, you could catch 'em by the thousand. There 's nobody so damned rational as the lunatic. That 's where he falls down. Do not be discouraged. He 's logical. He don't keep his eye on the facts. That is where we come in.'

'We've come in all right, but we don't seem like getting out,' Bell grumbled. 'I'm keeping my eye on the facts all right. But they won't fit.'

'You're very hasty to-day, Bell,' said Reggie, mildly. 'Why is this?'

'I can see that fellow's face,' Bell muttered.

'Well, well! He 's told us all he can, poor devil. We'll get on, if you please. Because Rand 's away, it don't follow that Rand 's the corpse. It might have come out of some other tenant's window. Know anything about the other tenants?'

'All most respectable, sir,' said the inspector.

'My dear man, the whole affair is most respectable. Do get that into your head. I dare say we'll find the corpse was a conveyancer murdered by a civil servant. A crime of quiet, middle-class taste. What sort of fellows are the other fellows?'

'Well, sir, there 's a retired engineer, and a young chap, just married, in the Rimington firm, and a naval officer, and several young doctors with consulting-rooms in Harley Street, and one of the Maynards, the Devonshire family. That 's all with any rooms on the well. I've seen 'em all, and, if you ask me, they're right out of it; they're not the sort, not one of them.'

'I dare say,' said Reggie. 'They don't sound

as if they would fit. None of them heard anything?'

'No, sir; that 's queer, to be sure.'

'It happened the night of the blizzard. You wouldn't have noticed a bomb. Well, who was Rand?'

'That 's what no one knows, sir. He'd only been here a few weeks. They're service flats, you know, and furnished. He gave a banker's reference. Bank says he has no money reason to be missing. Quiet, stable account. Income from investments. Balance three hundred odd. But the bank don't know anything about him. He'd had an account for years. He used to live off Jermyn Street, apartment-house. The landlady died last year.'

'And the landlady died last year,' Reggie repeated. 'He 's elusive, is Mr. Rand. Same like our corpse. But is Rand missing, Bell? He 's not been seen for a few days. There 's not much in that. He never used his flat regularly.'

'And, so far as we know, deceased isn't Rand.'

'Well, I don't know quite as far as that,' said Reggie.

'Good Lord, the porter who found him didn't recognize the body.'

'Remember his face.'

'My God, don't talk about his face.'

'Sorry, sorry. Well, I dare say the porter was upset too.'

'Yes, but the porter said Rand was biggish, and the body 's on the small side. The porter said he had a lot of hair, and the body 's absolutely bald.'

'My dear chap, give a man a straight back and

a bit of manner and lots of fellows think he 's biggish—while he 's alive. And a man that 's absolutely bald is just the man to wear a wig.'

' I thought we were to go by facts,' Bell said gloomily.

' And so we are, Bell. Just a-going to begin, Mr. Snodgrass, sir. No rash haste.'

' Have you got something up your sleeve ? '

' Not one little trump. Oh, my dear Bell, how can you ? Did I ever ? My simple open heart is broken.'

' You're damned cheerful, aren't you ? '

' My dear man, I never made you swear before. My dear Bell ! Sorry. Let 's get on. Let 's get on. I want to call on the elusive Rand.'

There was nothing individual about the rooms of Mr. Rand. He had been content with the furniture supplied by the owners of the place, which was of the usual wholesale dullness. Reggie turned to the manager of the flats. ' I suppose there 's nothing in the place Mr. Rand owns ? Not even the pictures ? '

' The pictures were supplied by the contractors for the furniture, sir. So——'

' The Lord have mercy on their souls,' said Reggie.

' So there is nothing of the tenant's personal property except his clothes.'

' He is elusive, our friend Rand,' Reggie murmured, wandering about the room. ' Smoked rather a showy cigar. Drank a fair whisky. Doesn't tell us much about him. Do the servants come here every day ? '

The manager was embarrassed. ' Well, sir, in point of fact, we're short-handed just now. Not

unless they're rung for. Not unless we know the tenant's using the rooms.'

'Don't apologize, don't apologize. In point of fact, they haven't been here since'—he looked critically at some dust upon a grim bronze—'since when?'

'I should say some days,' said the manager, with diffidence.

'I should say a week. No matter. Many thanks.'

Superintendent Bell with some urgency ushered the manager out. When he had done that he turned upon his inspector. 'Confound you, Warren, what do you want to stare at the waste-paper basket for? That chap would have seen it if Mr. Fortune hadn't got interested in the smokes and drinks.'

Reggie laughed and the inspector abased himself. 'Very sorry, sir. Didn't know I stared. But it is so blooming odd.'

Bell snorted and lifted the basket on to the table. It was nearly full of black burnt paper. 'Why did they burn it in the basket?' said the inspector.

'Because the fireplaces are all gas stoves, I suppose,' said Bell. 'But I don't know why they couldn't leave the stuff on the hearth.'

'Because this is a tidy crime,' said Reggie. 'Nice, quiet, middle-class crime. No ugly mess. I told you that.'

The Superintendent gazed at him. 'Now what can you know, you know?'

'I don't know. I feel. I feel the kind of man that did it. Don't you? I'll lay you odds he came of a neat, virtuous, middle-class home.'

The Superintendent started. 'Who are you thinking of?'

'You are so hasty to-day, Bell. I haven't got a "who". Still anonymous is the slayer. But I'll swear I've got his character.'

'Have you, though!' said Bell. 'Tidy fellow! Don't make a mess! Remember that face?'

'Oh, I said he was mad.'

'Well, I'm not yet. I'm only feeling what I can feel.' He began to examine the burnt paper. 'Letters mostly. Some stoutish paper. Some stuff looks a bit like a note-book. That 's all we'll get out of that.

'Well, except the one thing. Whoever did that was clearing up. Clearing up something that might have left traces that might have been dangerous. Same like he cleared up the dead man's face. Don't you see? Somebody and some affair had to be absolutely abolished.'

'Yes. What was it?'

'We mayn't ever know that,' said Reggie, slowly.

'I believe you,' said Bell, and laughed. 'I feel that, sir.'

The inspector and he began to examine the room in detail, opening drawers and cupboards. But except for tobacco and spirits they found no trace of Mr. Rand. Nothing had been broken open, but nothing was locked. 'No keys on the deceased were there, Mr. Fortune?' said Bell suddenly. And that 's a point, too. Very few men go about without any keys.'

'Well, hang it, very few men go about without any money,' Reggie expostulated. 'The corpse hadn't a copper. You can take it the way we found

him wasn't the way he used to go about. He'd do his vest up, for instance.'

'Ah,' said Bell, sagely. 'You've got it all in your head, I must say. That 's the thing about you, Mr. Fortune, if you don't mind my saying so. You've always got a whole case in your mind at once; there 's some of us only see it in bits, so to speak.'

Reggie smiled. He understood that Superintendent Bell was repenting of having lost his temper, and was anxious to make it up. 'I never found so good a fellow to work with as you, Bell,' he said. 'You always keep a level head.'

Superintendent Bell shook it and stared at Reggie. 'Not to-day. As you know very well, Mr. Fortune, begging your pardon. I've been rattled, and that 's the truth. Ought to know better at my time of life, to be sure. I've seen a good deal, too, you might say. But there 's some things I'll never get used to. And that chap's face upset me.'

Reggie nodded. 'Yes. I was sayin'—the only things that make you afraid are the mad things. And the only thing that does you good is to fight 'em. That 's why I've cheered up.'

'That 's right, sir. Well, now, these facts of yours. There 's no papers anywhere. All burnt in that basket. Rather odd there is not so much as a book.'

'I don't think he was a man of culture, the elusive Rand. But you've missed something, haven't you?'

'I dare say,' Bell grinned. 'I generally do when you're about.'

'There 's not a sign the murder was done in this room.'

'Oh, I saw that all right. But we hadn't any reason to think it was.'

'No,' Reggie sighed, 'no. So tidy. So tidy.' And they went into Mr. Rand's bedroom.

That also was tidy. No trace of a struggle, of blood. That also had no papers, no books, nothing personal but clothes.

'Spent a good deal at his tailor's,' said Bell, looking into a well-filled wardrobe, and read out the name of a man in Savile Row. 'Hallo. They're not all the same make. Some cheaper stuff. Why, what 's the matter with his boots, sir?' For Reggie was taking up one pair after another.

'Nothing. All quite satisfactory. About a nine and rather broad. The corpse wore about a nine and had a broad foot. What 's that about his clothes? Different tailors? Are the clothes all the same size? All made for the same man?' Suit after suit was spread out on the bed. They were to the same measure; they all were marked 'W. H. Rand.' 'Quite satisfactory,' Reggie purred. 'They'd fit the corpse all right. Pretty different styles, though. He dressed to look different different times. He is elusive, is W. H. Rand.'

They began to open drawers. There was the same abundance, the same variety of styles in Mr. Rand's hosiery. 'Yes, he meant to be elusive,' Reggie murmured. 'Anything from a bookmaker to a churchwarden at a funeral. 16½ collars, though. And that 's the measure of the corpse. Is all the linen marked?'

It was, and with ink, so that the mark could only be removed by taking out a piece of the stuff. 'If the corpse is Rand, where the devil did his shirt come from?' said Reggie. 'The slayer unpicked the name from his coat. That was one of the Savile Row suits. But the shirt? Did the slayer bring a change of linen with him? Provident fellow, very provident.'

Bell, on his knees by a chest of drawers, gave a grunt. 'Lord, here's a drawer tumbled. And that's the first yet. It's new stuff, too—not worn.'

Reggie bent over him and whistled. 'Not marked. Same sort of stuff as the corpse wears. And the drawer's left untidy. The first untidy drawer. Well, well. Everybody breaks down somewhere. He began to be untidy then. When he got to the shirt and the vest.' He shivered and turned away to the window. 'This damned place looks out on the well,' he cried out, and turned back and sat down. 'Bah! The slayer did that, I suppose,' he muttered, and sprang up. 'Believe in ghosts, you men?'

'Good Lord, sir, don't you start giving us the jumps!' said Bell.

Reggie was at the dressing-table. 'Sorry, sorry,' he said over his shoulder, opening and shutting drawers. Then he turned with something in his hands. 'That wasn't such a bad shot of mine, Bell. Here's a wig. The corpse is uncommon bald. The elusive Rand had lots of brown hair. Here's a nice brown wig.'

'There's no blood on it!' Bell cried.

'No. I guess this is Mr. Rand's second best. The one he had on when he was killed wouldn't look nice now.'

'That about settles it,' Bell said slowly.

'We haven't seen the bathroom,' said Reggie.

Bell looked at him and shrugged.

'Not likely to be much there, sir,' said the inspector.

'There could be,' said Reggie gravely, and led the way.

It was a bathroom of some size but no luxury. Only the sheer necessities of bathing were provided. The lower half of the walls was tiled, the floor of linoleum. Reggie stopped in the doorway. 'Anything strike you about it, Bell?'

'Looks new, sir.'

'Yes. Nice and clean. Tidy, don't you know. But there 's no towels and no sponge. Yet in the bedroom everything was ready for Rand to sleep there to-night—pyjamas, brushes and comb, everything. Didn't he use towels? Didn't he have a sponge?'

'What do you mean, sir?'

'This is where the slayer cleared up after the murder. And he took the dirty towels and the bloody sponge away with him. Tidy fellow—always tidy. Just wait, will you?' And he went into the bathroom on all fours. About the middle of the room he stopped, and pored over the linoleum, and felt it with the tips of his fingers. Then he stood up and went to the window, opened it, and looked out. He examined the sill, and then sat himself on it in the manner of a window cleaner, and began to study the window frame. After a minute or two he pulled out a pocket-knife, and with great care cut a piece of wood. He put this down on the edge of the porcelain basin, and resumed his study. When he had finished he went

down again on his hands and knees, and wandered over the floor. He made an exclamation, he lay down on his stomach, and stretched underneath the bath. When he stood up he had in his hand something that glittered. He held it out on his palm to Bell.

'What 's that, sir? A match-box?'

'It might be. A gold match-box—provisionally. No name. No initials. On opening—we find inside—a little white powder'—he smelt it, put a fragment on the tip of his finger and tasted—'which is cocaine. Well, come in, Bell, come in. See what you can make of the place. I can't find a finger-print anywhere.' He slipped the gold box into his pocket.

The two detectives came in, and went over the room even more minutely than he. 'There 's nothing that tells me anything,' said Bell.

Reggie sat on the edge of the bath. 'Well, well, I wouldn't say that,' he said mildly. 'It 's not what we could wish, Bell. But there are points—there are points.'

'All right, sir. Call Mr. Fortune,' Bell grinned.

'I don't say it'll ever go into court. But some things we do know. The dead man is Rand, the elusive Rand. He had papers worth burning. He was killed by a powerful man with one or two blows, probably in the sitting-room. After death he was stripped and dressed in the unmarked clothes, probably here. For his body was brought where a mess could be cleaned up, to have the face smashed in. You can see the dents in the linoleum where his head lay. And then he was pitched out by that window. There 's a bit of animal matter, probably human tissue, on that scrap of wood.

Then the slayer packed up everything that was bloody and went off; and one of 'em—the tidy slayer or the elusive Rand—one of 'em used cocaine.'

Superintendent Bell shrugged his shoulders. 'It don't take us very far, sir, does it? It don't amount to so much. What I should call a baffling case. I mean to say, we don't seem to get near anybody.'

Reggie grunted, got off the bath, and taking with him his bit of wood, went back to the sitting-room, the two detectives in silent attendance. There he tumbled Mr. Rand's cigarettes out of their box, and put his bit of wood in it.

'I suppose there 's nothing more here,' he murmured, his eyes wandering round the room. 'Try it with the lights on. Switch on, inspector. . . . No. Ah, what 's that?' He went to the gas fire and picked out of its lumps of sham coal a scrap of gleaming metal. The next moment he was down on his knees, pulling the fire to pieces. 'Give me an envelope, will you?' he said over his shoulder, and they saw he was collecting scraps of broken glass.

'What is it, sir?'

'That 's the bridge of a pair of rimless eyeglasses. And if we're lucky we can reconstruct the lenses. When Rand was hit, his glasses jumped off and smashed themselves. That 's the fourth thing the slayer didn't think of.'

'You don't miss much, Mr. Fortune. Still, it is baffling, very baffling. Even now, we don't know anybody, so to speak. We don't even know Rand. What was Rand, would you say? It was worth somebody's while to do him in. I suppose he

knew something. But what did he know? Who was Rand?'

Reggie was putting on his overcoat. He collected his envelope and his cigarette box and put them away, looking the while with dreamy eyes at Superintendent Bell. 'Yes,' he said; 'yes, there 's a lot of unknown quantities about just now. Who the devil was Rand? Well, well! I think that finishes us here. Will you ring for the lift, inspector?' When he was left alone with Bell, he still gazed dreamily at that plump, stolid face. 'Yes. Who the devil was Rand? And if you come to that, who the devil is Sandford?'

'Good Lord, Mr. Fortune, do you mean this business is that business?'

'Well, there 's a lot of unknown quantities about,' said Reggie.

Phase IV.—The Charge

When they talked about the case afterwards, Reggie and Lomas used to agree that it was a piece of pure art. 'Crime unstained by any vulgar greed or sentiment; sheer crime; iniquity neat. An impressive thing, Lomas, old dear.'

'So it is,' Lomas nodded. 'One meets cases of the kind, but never quite of so pure a style. Upon my soul, Fortune, it has a sort of grandeur—the intensity of purpose, the contempt for ordinary values, the absolute uselessness of it. And it was damned clever.'

Reggie chose a cigar. 'Great work,' he sighed. 'All the marks of the real great man, if it wasn't diabolical. He was a great man, but for the hate in him. Just like the devil.'

'You're so moral,' Lomas protested. 'Don't you feel the beauty of it?'

'Of course, I'm moral. I'm sane. Oh, so sane, Lomas, old thing. That's why I beat the wily criminal. And the devil, God help him.'

'Yes, you're as sane as a boy,' Lomas nodded.

But all that was afterwards.

Everything that was done in the case is not (though you may have feared so) written here. We take it in the critical, significant scenes, and the next of them arrived some days after the discovery of the corpse.

Lomas was in his room with Superintendent Bell, when Kimball came to them. He was brisker than ever. 'Anything new, is there? Have you hit on anything? I came round at once, you see, when I got your note. Delighted to get it. Much better to have all the details cleared up. Well, what is it?'

'I'm afraid I've nothing for you myself,' said Lomas. 'The fact is, Fortune thought you might be able to give him some information on one or two points.'

'I? God bless me, you know all that I know. Where is he, then, if he wants me?'

And Reggie came. 'Have you been waitin'?' he said, with his airiest manner. 'So sorry. Things are really rollin' up, you know. New facts by every post. Well, well.' He dropped into a chair and blinked at the party. 'What are we all doin' here? Oh, ah! I remember.' He smiled and nodded at Kimball. 'It was that fellow I wanted to ask you about.'

Kimball, as was natural, did not relish this sort

of thing. 'I understood you had something important on hand. I've no time to waste.'

'Why, it 's so jolly hard to understand what 's important and what isn't, don't you know? But it all comes out in the end.'

'You think so, do you? This is the coal affair?'

'I wouldn't say that,' Reggie answered thoughtfully. 'No, I wouldn't say that. After all, the Coal Ramp isn't the only pebble on the beach.'

'Then why the devil do you bother me?' Kimball cried.

Reggie sat up suddenly. 'Because this is something you must know.' He rearranged his coat and slid down into the chair again, and drawled out what he had to say. 'Some time the end of last year—point of fact—last December—bein' quite precise, from fifth to twenty-ninth—in one of the nursin'-homes in Queen Anne Street—speakin' strictly, No. 1003—there was a man bein' operated on by Sir Jenkin Totteridge for an affection of the middle ear. This chap was called Mason. You went to see him several times. Who was Mason?'

Kimball stared at him with singular intensity. Then he swung half round in his chair with one of his characteristic jerky movements, and pulled out his snuff-box. He took a pinch. 'You've found a mare's nest,' he said, with a laugh, and took another pinch.

As he spoke, Reggie sprang up with some vehemence, bumping into his arm. 'Sorry—sorry. A mare's nest, you say? Now what exactly do you mean by that?'

Kimball stood up too. 'I mean you're wasting my time,' he said.

'That isn't what I should call an explanation,' Reggie murmured. 'For instance, do you mean you didn't go to see Mason?'

'Don't let's have any more of this damned trifling,' Kimball cried. 'Certainly I went to see Mason.'

'Good! Who is he?'

'Jack Mason is a fellow I knew in my early days. I went up and he didn't. I've seen little of him this ten years. When he had that operation, poor chap, he wrote to me, and I went to see him for the sake of old times. And what the devil has it to do with Scotland Yard?'

'Mason is the man who was found at the Montmorency House flats with his face smashed in.'

'God bless my soul! Mason! Poor chap, poor chap! But what are you talking about? The papers said that was a man called Rand.'

'Mason, otherwise Rand. Rand, otherwise Mason. Who was Mason, and why did somebody kill him?'

Kimball made one of his jerky gestures. 'Killed, was he? I thought he fell out of the window.'

'He was murdered.'

'Good God! Old Jack Mason! It's beyond me. I haven't a notion. You know this upsets me a good deal. I've seen little of him for a long time. I can hardly believe he's gone. But why the devil did he call himself Rand?'

'What was he?' said Reggie, sharply.

'God bless me, I couldn't tell you,' Kimball laughed. 'He was always very close. An agent in a small way, when I knew him—colonial produce, and so forth. I fancy he went in for building land.

Comfortably off always, but he never got on. Very reserved fellow. Loved to be mysterious. No. I suppose it isn't surprising he used two names.'

'Why was he murdered?' said Reggie.

'I can't help you.'

'That's all you can say?'

'Yes. Afraid so. Yes. Let me know as soon as you have anything more. Good morning, good morning.' He bustled out.

'A bit hurried, as you might say,' said Superintendent Bell.

Reggie picked up a paper-knife and fell on his knees. He rose with some fragments of white powder on the blade. 'I suppose you saw me jog his arm,' he said. 'And that's cocaine.' He tumbled Lomas's paper-clips out of their box and put the stuff in. 'Do you remember the first time we had him here, he took snuff? I thought he was rather odd about it and after it, and I went over to the window where he stood to see if I could find any of the stuff he used. But he'd been careful. He is careful, is Kimball.'

'He is damned careful,' Lomas agreed, and began to write on a scribbling-pad, looking at each word critically.

There was a pause. 'Beg your pardon, sir,' said Superintendent Bell. 'You talked about the murder being a madman's job. Do you mean Mr. Kimball, being a dope fiend, is not responsible for his actions?'

'O Lord, no. Kimball's not a dope fiend. He uses the stuff same like we use whisky. He's not a slave to it yet. Say he's a heavy drinker. It's just beginnin' to interfere with his efficiency. That's why he left the box behind in the bath-

room; that 's why he 's a little jerky. But he 's pretty adequate still.'

'You talked about mad. You were emphatic, as you might say,' Bell insisted. 'What might you have in your mind, sir? Mr. Kimball 's generally reckoned uncommon practical.'

He isn't ordinary mad,' said Reggie. 'He don't think he 's Julius Caesar or a poached egg. He don't go out without his trousers. He don't see red and go it blind. But there is something queer in him. I doubt if they're physical, these perversions. Call it a disease of the soul.'

'Ah, well, his soul,' said Bell, gravely. 'I judge he 's not a Christian man.'

'I wish I did know his creed,' said Reggie, with equal gravity. 'It would be very instructive.'

Lomas tapped his pencil impatiently. 'We're not evangelists, we're policemen,' he said. 'And what do we do next?'

'Take out a warrant and arrest Kimball,' said Reggie, carelessly.

Bell and Lomas looked at each other and then at him. 'I don't see my way,' said Lomas.

The corpse can be identified as Mason. I'll swear to the operation. Totteridge will swear it 's the man he operated on as Mason. Kimball admits several visits to Mason. In the room from which the corpse was thrown was a gold snuff-box containing cocaine. Shortman's will swear that box is their make and exactly similar to a box sold to Kimball. And Kimball takes cocaine. It 's a good prima facie case.'

'Yes. Did you ever see a jury that would hang a man on it?'

'We do have to be so careful,' Bell murmured.

Reggie laughed. 'And Kimball's a Cabinet Minister.'

'Damn it, Fortune, be fair!' Lomas cried. 'If I had a sound case against a man, he would stand his trial whoever he was. I don't wink at a fellow who 's got a pull. You know that. But there 's reason in all things. I can't charge a Cabinet Minister with murder on evidence like this. What is it, after all?' He picked up his scribbling-pad and read: '"Three circumstances—Kimball knew the murdered man; a snuff-box like Kimball's was found on the scene of the murder; that snuff-box held cocaine, and cocaine is what Kimball uses." Circumstantial evidence at its weakest. Neither judge nor jury would look at it. There 's no motive, there 's no explanation of the method of the crime. My dear chap, suppose you were on the other side, you'd tear it to ribands in five minutes.'

'On the other side?' Reggie repeated slowly. 'I'm not an advocate, Lomas. I'm always on the same side. I'm for justice. I'm for the man who 's been wronged.'

Lomas stared at him. 'Yes. Quite—quite. But we generally take all that for granted, don't we? My dear chap, you mustn't mind my saying so, but you do preach a good deal over this case.'

'I had noticed the same thing myself,' said Superintendent Bell, and they both looked curiously at Reggie.

'Why am I so moral? Because the thing 's so damned immoral,' said Reggie, vehemently. 'What 's most crime? Human. Human greed, human lust, human hostility. But this is diabolical. Sheer evil for evil's sake. Lomas, I'll swear, when

we have it all out, we'll find that it still looks unreasonable, futile, pure passion for wrong.'

'Meaning Mr. Kimball mad. You do come back to that, sir,' Bell said.

'Not legally mad. Probably not medically mad. I mean he has the devil in him.'

'Really, my dear Fortune, you do surprise me,' Lomas said. 'I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. The right honourable gentleman hath a devil! It isn't done, you know. This is the twentieth century. And you're a scientific man. Consider your reputation—and mine, if you don't mind. What the devil are we to do? Try exorcism?'

'You won't charge Kimball?' Lomas signified an impatient negative. 'Very well. You say you don't let a man off because he 's in the Government. Suppose you had a prima facie case like this against a nobody. Suppose I brought you as good grounds for arresting Sandford. Wouldn't you have him in the dock? On your conscience now!'

Again Bell and Lomas consulted each other's faces. 'I wonder why you drag in Sandford?' said Lomas, slowly.

'He 's in it all right. I asked you a question.'

'Well, if you insist. One might charge a man on a prima facie case, to hear his defence.'

Reggie struck his hand on the table. 'There it is! A man who is nobody—he can stand trial. Not a Cabinet Minister. Oh dear, no!'

'My dear fellow, the world is what it is. You know very well that if I wanted to charge Kimball on this evidence it would be turned down. I couldn't force the issue without a stronger case. Do have some sense of the practical.'

Reggie smiled. ' I'm not blaming you. I only want to rub it in.'

' Thanks very much. We are to suspect Kimball, I suppose.'

' Like the devil, and watch him.'

' I see. Yes, I think we shall be quite justified in watching Mr. Kimball. But, my dear fellow, you are rather odd this morning. If you want Kimball watched, why the devil do you handle him so violently ? You know, you almost accused him of the murder. Anything more likely to put him on his guard I can't imagine.'

' Yes, yes. I think I made him jump,' said Reggie, with satisfaction. ' Quite intentional, Lomas, old thing. He 's on his guard all right. But he don't know how little we know. I meant to put him in a funk. I want to see what a funk will make him do.'

Lomas looked at him steadily. ' For a very moral man,' he said, ' you have a good deal of the devil about you.'

' I think I ought to say, Mr. Fortune,' said Bell, ' we've all been in a hurry to judge Mr. Kimball. I said things myself. And I do say he 's not a Christian man—an unbeliever, I'm afraid. But I had ought to say too, he lives a very clean life. Always has. Temperate, very quiet style, a thorough good master, generous to his employees, and always ready to come down handsome for a good cause.'

' Who is Kimball, Bell ? ' said Reggie, quietly.

' Sir ? ' Bell stared. ' He 's always been known, sir. Started in Liverpool on the Cotton Exchange. Went into rubber. Came to London. That 's his career. All quite open and straight.'

'And we don't know a damned thing about him.'

'Well, really, Fortune, you're rather exacting. You're after his soul, I suppose,' said Lomas, with something like a sneer.

'Who is Kimball?' Reggie insisted. 'There 's two unknown quantities. Who is Kimball? Who is Sandford?'

'I'm afraid you want the Day of Judgement, my dear fellow,' said Lomas. '"Unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known"—that sort of thing. Well, we can't ring up the Recording Angel from here. It 's a trunk call.'

'I know you're worldly. But you might know your world. Look about, Lomas, old thing. I've been looking about.' He took out a newspaper cutting.

Lomas read: '"SANDFORD. Any one who can give any information about Mrs. Ellen Edith Sandford, resident Llanfairfechan from 1882–1900, formerly of Lancashire, is urgently begged to communicate with XYZ."' He looked up. 'Of Lancashire? That 's a guess?'

Reggie nodded. 'North Wales is mostly Lancashire people.'

'Well, there 's no harm in it. Do you want us to advertise for Kimball's wet nurse?'

'And his sisters and his cousins and his aunts. Yes. All in good time. But watch him first. Watch them both.' He nodded, and sauntered out.

Lomas lit a cigarette and pushed the box to Bell. Both men smoked a minute in silence. Then Lomas said, 'That 's a damned clever fellow, Bell.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I've often thought he was too clever by half.

But, damme, I don't remember thinking he was uncanny before.'

'I have noticed it,' said Bell, diffidently, 'in a manner of speaking. Of course he does know a lot, does Mr. Fortune, a rare lot of stuff. But that 's natural, as it were. What upsets you is the sort of way he feels men. It 's as if he had senses you haven't got. Very strange the way he knows men.'

Phase V.—The Reply

Their admiration for Reggie Fortune received a shock the next day. It came by telephone. Just after his late and lazy breakfast, Reggie was rung up from Scotland Yard. Bell spoke. Mr. Lomas thought that Mr. Fortune would like to know that Sandford had gone down to Mr. Kimball's place. Reggie answered, 'Oh, Peter!' In a quarter of an hour he was in Lomas's room asking for confirmation. There was no doubt. The detective watching Sandford's chambers had followed him to Victoria, and heard him take a ticket to Alwynstow, Kimball's place, and was gone with him.

'So that 's the next move,' said Lomas, 'and if you can tell me what it means I shall be obliged to you.'

Reggie dropped his hand on the table. 'Not a guess,' he said. 'How can a man guess? We don't even know how much they know, or whether one knows what the other knows. I could fancy Sandford—what 's the use?

> '"So runs my dream. But what am I?
> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry."

Same like you, Lomas.'

'I notice you are not so much the moral sage this morning,' Lomas said sourly.

'Lomas, dear, don't be unkind. I can't abear it. I wish to God I was down there!'

'Damn it, we've got two men down there now—one on Sandford, one on Kimball. They'll be knocking their heads together. What the devil do you think you could do?'

'Nothing. Lord, don't I know it? Nothing. That 's what makes me peevish.'

Lomas said severely that he had work to do, and Reggie left him, promising to come back and take him out to lunch, which he received as if it were a threat.

But when Reggie did come back, Superintendent Bell was in the room and Lomas listening to the telephone. Bell looked oddly at Reggie. Lomas raised a blank and pallid face from the receiver. 'Sandford has murdered Kimball,' he said.

'Oh, Peter! I wonder if he 's brought it off,' Reggie murmured. 'Has he brought it off after all?' He bit his lip. Lomas was talking into the telephone. Asking for details, giving instructions. 'Hold the line. Cut that out,' said Reggie. 'We'll go down, Lomas, please. Tell your chap to meet us at the house. My car 's here.'

Lomas gave the orders and rang off. 'I'll have to go, I suppose,' he agreed. 'One doesn't kill Cabinet Ministers every day. More 's the pity. Damn the case! There 's nothing in it, though, Fortune. Sandford was walking up to the house. He met Kimball in the lane. They were crossing the ornamental water in the park when they had a quarrel. Kimball was thrown in. He called out, "You scoundrel, you have murdered me." When

they got Kimball out he was dead. That's all. I'm afraid it washes your stuff about Kimball right out.'

'Well, well,' Reggie drawled, looking through his eyelashes. 'Where is he that knows, Lomas? From the great deep to the great deep he goes, Lomas. We'll get on.'

'What about lunch?'

'Damn lunch!' said Reggie, and went out.

The other two, who liked food far less than he but could not go without it, lingered to collect sandwiches, and found him chafing in the driver's seat.

They exchanged looks of horror. 'I'm too old for Mr. Fortune's driving, and that's a fact,' Bell mumbled.

'When I got out alive after that day at Woking I swore I'd never go again,' said Lomas.

But they quailed before Reggie's virulent politeness when he asked them if they would please get in. . . . It is in the evidence of Lomas that they only slowed once, when an old lady dropped her handkerchief in the middle of Croydon. He is in conflict with the statement of Bell as to the most awful moment. For he selects the episode of the traction-engine with trucks at the Alwynstow cross-roads, and Bell chooses the affair of the motor-bus and the caravan at Merstham. They agree that they arrived at Alwynstow Park in a cold sweat.

A detective came out on the steps to meet them, and watched reverently Bell and Lomas helping each other out. Reggie ran up to him. 'Which are you?'

'Beg pardon, sir? Oh, I'm Hall. I had

Mr. Kimball. It was Parker had Mr. Sandford.' He turned to Lomas. 'Good morning, sir. I tried to get you on the telephone, but they said you were on your way down.'

'Oh, you've been on the telephone too?'

'When I heard what Parker's information was I rung up quick, sir. It's a very queer business, sir.'

'Where's Parker? And where's Sandford? I suppose you've arrested him?'

'Well, no, sir. Not strictly speaking. We detained him pending instructions.'

'Damme, you're very careful. Parker saw the murder committed, didn't he?'

'Well, sir, if I may say so, that's drawing conclusions. I don't understand Parker would go as far as that.'

'Good Gad!' said Lomas. 'Where the devil is Parker?'

'Keeping Mr. Sandford under observation, sir, according to instructions. Beg your pardon, sir. I've heard his story, and I quite agree it all happened like that. But you haven't heard mine.'

Lomas looked round him. The house was too near. 'We'll walk on the lawn,' he announced. 'Now then. Parker says the two men quarrelled on the bridge over the lake and Kimball was thrown in, and as he fell he called out, "You scoundrel, you've murdered me!" And you say that isn't murder.'

'Did Sergeant Parker say "thrown in"?' said Hall, with surprise in his face and his voice.

'I believe he didn't,' said Lomas, slowly. 'No. He said Kimball was thrown off, and as he fell in he called out.'

'That's right, sir,' said Hall, heartily. 'But

I reckon there is more to it than that. When Mr. Kimball came out this morning I was waiting for him in the park. It was rather touch and go, because he had some men at work above the lake. He went down that way to the station. As he was crossing the bridge he tried the rails. It 's very odd, sir, but a bit of the bar—it 's a sort of rustic stuff—was that loose it came off in his hand. He put it back and went on. He met Mr. Sandford in the road and turned back with him. I had to get out of the way quick. I judged they were coming back to the house, so I did a run and dropped over the fence, and was away on the other side of the lake. Then I went into the rhododendrons and waited for them to pass. You see, sir, Parker had to keep well out of sight behind, and I was as near as makes no matter. Well, if you'll believe me, it was Mr. Kimball made the quarrel, and all in a minute he made it. One minute they were walking quite friendly, the next he whips round on Mr. Sandford and he called him a bad name. I couldn't hear all, he was talking so quick, but there was ugly words in it. Then he made to strike Mr. Sandford, and Mr. Sandford closed and chucked him back, and into the water he went just where that same rail that he looked at was loose. But it 's true enough as he fell he called out, " You scoundrel, you've murdered me ! " '

' Well, well. So he didn't bring it off, after all,' said Reggie. ' We trumped his last card.'

' Sir ? ' said the detective.

' You were the trump,' said Reggie. ' Oh, my aunt, I feel much better ! I wonder if there 's any lunch in these parts ? What about it, Lomas, old thing ? '

'I'm damned if I understand,' said Lomas. 'I want Sandford. Let 's go up to the house.'

They found Sandford sitting in an easy-chair in the dead man's library. He was reading; to Reggie's ineffable admiration he was reading a book by Mr. Sidney Webb on the history of trade unions. Sergeant Parker, the detective, made himself uncomfortable at the table and pored over his note-book.

'All right, all right, Parker. Quite understood.' Lomas waved him away. 'Good afternoon, Mr. Sandford. Sorry to detain you. Most unfortunate affair.'

'Good afternoon. It is not necessary to apologize,' said Sandford, completely himself. 'I realize that the police must require my account of the affair. Yesterday afternoon Mr. Kimball rang me up at my rooms. I did not learn from where he was speaking. He said that my affair—that was his phrase—my affair had taken a new turn, and he wished me to come and see him here this morning. He named the train by which I was to travel. I thought it strange that he should bring me into the country, but I had no valid ground of objection. Accordingly I came this morning. I thought it strange that he sent no conveyance to meet me. I started to walk to the house. In the lane he met me walking. He talked of indifferent things in a rather broken manner, I thought, but that was common with him, and yet I was surprised he did not come to the point. He was, however, quite friendly until we reached the bridge over the lake. Then without any warning or reason he turned upon me and was violently abusive. His language was vulgar and

even filthy. He attempted to strike me, and I defended myself. I was, in fact, a good deal alarmed, for he was, as you know, much bigger and heavier than I, and he was in a frenzy of rage. To my surprise, I may say my relief, I was able to resist him. I pushed him off—really, you know, it seemed quite easy—and the hand-rail behind him gave way and he fell into the water. As he fell he called out, " You scoundrel, you have murdered me ! " I can only suppose he was not responsible for his actions.'

' Much obliged,' said Lomas. ' I'm afraid you've had a distressing time.'

' It has been a remarkable experience,' said Sandford. ' May I ask if there is any reason why I should not return to town ? '

' No, no.' Lomas looked at him queerly. ' You have an uncommon cool head. They'll want your evidence at the inquest, of course. But it 's fair to say I quite accept your story.'

' I am obliged to you,' said Sandford, in a tone of surprise, as if he could not conceive that any one should not. ' I am told there is a train at 3.35. Good afternoon.'

' One moment. One moment,' said Reggie. ' Do you know of any reason in the world Kimball had to hate you ? '

' Certainly not,' said Sandford, in offended dignity. ' Our relations were short and wholly official. I conceive that he had no reason to complain of my services.'

' And yet he meant to murder you or have you hanged for his murder.'

' If he did, I can only suppose that he was out of his mind.'

'Was he out of his mind when he worked the Coal Ramp to ruin you?'

'Dear me,' said Sandford, 'do you really suggest, sir, that Mr. Kimball was responsible for that scandalous piece of finance?'

'Who else?'

'But really—you startle me. That is to say, as a Minister he betrayed the secrets of the department?'

'Well, he didn't stick at a trifle, did he?'

'The poor fellow must have been mad,' said Sandford, with grave sympathy.

'Yes, yes. But why was he mad? Why did he hate you? My dear chap, do search your memory. Can you think of any sort of connection between Kimball and you?'

'I never heard of him till he became prominent in the House. I never saw him till he came into the office. Our relations were always perfectly correct. No, I can only suppose that he was insane. Is it any use to try to discover reasons for the antipathies of madness? I have not studied the subject, but it seems obvious that they must be irrational. I am sorry I cannot help your investigations. I believe I had better catch my train. Good afternoon.'

'You know, I begin to like that fellow. He 's so damned honest,' said Reggie.

'Cold-blooded fish,' said Lomas. 'Begad, he don't know how near he was to dead. Did you ever hear anything less plausible than that yarn of his? If we didn't know it was true we wouldn't believe a word of it. Good God, suppose Hall hadn't been down here watching! We should have had the outside facts. Sandford, who had

been accused and suspended by Kimball, suddenly comes down to Kimball's house, meets him, quarrels with him, and throws him into the lake.'

'And the men working in the park a little way off just saw the struggle, just heard Kimball call out that he was murdered,' said Reggie. 'Don't forget the men. They're a most interesting touch. He always thought of everything, did Mr. Kimball. He had them there, just the right distance for the evidence he wanted. I don't know if you see the full significance of those men working in the park.'

Lomas sat down. 'I don't mind owning I thought they were accidental.'

'My dear chap! Oh, my dear chap, there was very little accidental in the vicinity of the late Kimball. They were there to give evidence that would hang Sandford. And that proves Kimball didn't mean to throw Sandford into the lake. He wanted to be thrown in, he wanted to be killed, and get Sandford hanged for it.'

'I suppose so,' Lomas agreed. 'It's a case that's happened before. And you couldn't always say the creatures that planned it were mad.'

'Not legally mad. Not medically mad. I always said that. No, I don't know that it's even very strange. Quite a lot of people would be ready to die if they could get their enemies killed by their death. Only they don't see their way. But he was an able fellow, the late Kimball.'

'Able! I should say so. If our men hadn't been here, Sandford would have been as good as hanged. Nobody could have believed his story. Why did he come here? There could be no evidence of Kimball's telephone call. What did Sandford come for? There's no reasonable reason. Kim-

ball put him under a cloud, he was furious, he meant murder, and did it. The jury wouldn't leave the box.'

'That's right, sir,' said Superintendent Bell. 'If it wasn't for Mr. Fortune he'd be down and out. What you might call a rarity in our work, that is, to save a man from a charge of murder before it comes along.'

'How do you mean?' Reggie seemed to come back from other thoughts. 'Oh, because I told you to have Kimball watched. Well, it was pretty clear he wasn't the kind to go about without a chaperon. We took that trick. I suppose Kimball's thinking, wherever he is, that we won the game. But I wouldn't say that—I wouldn't say that. Why did he hate Sandford?'

'My dear fellow, the man was mad.'

'You mean he didn't like the way Sandford does his hair—or he thought Sandford was a German spy. No. He wasn't that kind of mad. There's something we don't know, Lomas, old thing. I dare say it's crazy enough. I'll bet you my favourite shirt it's something the ordinary sane man feels.'

'If we are to go looking for something crazy which sane men feel!' said Lomas.

'Speakin' broadly, all the human emotions,' said Reggie. 'Didn't you ever hate a man because he married a girl who was pretty? Don't be so godlike.'

'They weren't either of them married, sir,' said Bell, in grave surprise.

'How do you know?' Reggie snapped. 'No, I don't suppose they were. But we don't know. We don't know anything. That's why I say we

haven't won the game. Well, well. For God's sake, let 's have some food! There was a modest pub in the village. I saw it when you let off your futile scream at the traction-engine. Let 's go. I don't seem to want to eat Kimball's grub.'

Phase VI.—Jane Brown

Two or three days after Lomas received an invitation to lunch in Wimpole Street.

'I owe you one,' Reggie wrote. 'I owe myself one. I want to forget the high tea of Alwynstow. Do you remember the pickles? And the bacon? What had that pig been doing? A neurasthenic, I fear. A student of the Nematoda.'

So naturally when Lomas came his first question was what may Nematoda be.

'Never mind,' Reggie sighed. 'It 's a painful subject. A disgusting subject. Same like what we make our living by. They are among the criminals of animal life. Real bad eggs. A sad world, Lomas, old thing. Let 's forget all about crime.'

They did. For an hour and a half. At the end of which Lomas said dreamily, 'You're a remarkable fellow, Fortune. I don't know how you can retain any brain. You do yourself so well. Yes, most seductive habit of life. I meant to say something when I came. What was it? I believe you have talked of everything else in creation. Ah yes, did you ever hear of the Kimball case? Well, I think we have combed it all out.'

'Have you, though?' Reggie sat up.

'Yes. We've been dealing with a stockbroker or two. I'm really afraid there was a little bullying.

We hinted that there might be developments about a certain murder case. And two of them began to talk. We've got Rand-Mason's past.'

'Oh, that!' Reggie said. 'Quite obvious, wasn't it? Kimball meant to use this coal scheme to ruin Sandford. He sent Mason, who had probably been his go-between in other financial things, to give the brokers the tip. It was also Rand-Mason who paid the money into Sandford's account. Remember the stout man in glasses. Then probably he struck for better pay or they had a row. Anyway, he threatened to give the show away. Kimball couldn't trust him any more. Daren't trust him. So he wiped Rand-Mason out. Is that right, sir?'

'I'm not omniscient myself. But certainly Rand-Mason was the man who put the brokers on to it. There is not much doubt he went to Sandford's bank. By the way, Kimball had several big sticks. His valet says he liked weight.'

'I dare say. Had Kimball any papers?'

'Not a line that throws light on this. As you know everything, I'd like to hear why Kimball tried this murder plan last instead of first?'

'How can you be so unkind, Lomas? I keep telling you I don't know anything. I come and shout it in your ear. I don't know the thing that really matters. Who was Kimball? Who is Sandford? What is he that Kimball couldn't bear him? I said that at the beginning. I say it now in italics. Good Lord, you can hear Kimball laughing at us!'

'Don't be uncanny.'

'Well, I'm not really sure he is laughing at us. Wait a while. But why did Kimball try murder

last instead of first ? Oh, that 's easy. He was an epicure in hate ! He didn't want mere blood. He wanted the beggar to suffer—to be ruined, not just dead. Hence he went to break Sandford. Then Rand-Mason complicated the affair. Kimball had a murder on his back and I scared him. He thought we had enough to convict him or that we'd get it. He said to himself, " I'm for it, anyway. I'll have to die. Well, why shouldn't my death hang Sandford ? " And he played that last card.'

'I suppose so,' Lomas agreed. 'In a way it 's all quite rational, isn't it ? '

'I always said it would be. Grant that it was worth anything to ruin Sandford and Kimball 's a most efficient fellow. But why was it worth anything to ruin Sandford ? '

'Ah, God knows,' said Lomas, gravely.

'Yes. I wonder if Jane Brown does.' He handed Lomas a letter.

'DEAR SIR,—Your advertisement for information about Mrs. Ellen Edith Sandford. I have some which is at your service if you can satisfy me why you want it.—Yours truly,

JANE BROWN.'

'I should say Jane is a character,' said Lomas.

'Yes, she allured me. I told her who I was and she said she'd come to tea.'

She kept her appointment. Reggie found himself facing a large young woman. In her construction nature had been very happy. She had decorated its work with admirable art. She was physically in the grand style, but she had a merry eye, and her clothes were not only charming but of a sophisticated elegance.

Reggie, there is no doubt, stared at her for a moment and a half. 'Miss—Jane—Brown,' he said slowly.

'I haven't brought my godfathers and godmothers, Mr. Fortune,' she smiled. 'But I am Jane Brown really. I always felt I couldn't live up to it. I see you know me.'

'If seeing were knowing, I should know Miss Joan Amber very well. It 's delightful to be able to thank her for the real Rosalind—all the Rosalind there is.'

She made him a curtsy. 'I'm lucky. I didn't think you'd be like this. I expected an old man with glasses and——'

'This,' said Reggie, maliciously—'this is the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department—Mr. Lomas.'

Lomas let his eyeglass fall. 'I also am young enough to go to the theatre. I shall go on being young as long as Miss Amber is acting.'

'May I sit down?' said she pathetically. 'You're rather overwhelming. I thought it would be terrific and severe and suspicious. But you know you are bland—simply bland.'

'This is your fault, Lomas,' said Reggie, severely. 'I have often been called flippant and even futile, but never bland before—never bland.'

'It is a tribute to your maturity, my dear Fortune.'

Her golden eyes sent a glance at Reggie. 'Mature!' she said. 'I suppose you are real? Oh, let 's be serious. I am Jane Brown, you know. Amber—of course I had to have another name for the stage—Amber because of my hair.' She touched it.

'And your eyes,' said Reggie.

'Never mind,' said she, with another glance, but the gaiety had gone out of them. 'My father was a doctor in Liverpool. He is worth twenty thousand of me, and he never made enough to live on. A poor middle-class practice, the work wore him out by the time he was fifty, and now he 's an invalid in Devonshire. He can't walk upstairs even—heart, you know. And he simply pines to work. Oh, I know this doesn't matter to you, but I can't forget it. If only people were paid what they're worth! I beg your pardon. This isn't business-like. Well, he was the doctor the Kimball family went to. Old Mr. Kimball was a clerk, and the son, the man who was drowned the other day, began like that too. The old people died about the time young Mr. Kimball and his sister grew up. She kept house for her brother. He began as a broker and got on. In a way—my father always says that—in a way he was devoted to her. Nothing he could pay for was too good for her. He always wanted her with him. But he made awful demands on her. She mustn't have any interests of her own. She mustn't make any friends. Like some men are with their wives, you know. Horrible, isn't it?' She turned upon Reggie.

'Common form of selfishness. Passing into mania. Not only male, you know. Some mothers are like that.'

'Yes, I know they are. But it 's worst with men and their wives.'

'The wife can't grow up. The children can,' Reggie agreed.

'It is exactly that,' said she eagerly. 'You

understand. Oh, well, this isn't business-like either. Ellen Kimball fell in love. He was just an ordinary sort of man, a clerk of some sort—Sandford was his name. Horace Kimball was furious. My father says Sandford was nothing in particular. There was no special reason why she should marry him or why she shouldn't. He was insignificant.'

'Heredity.' Reggie nodded to Lomas.

'I beg your pardon?'

'Your father understood men, Miss Amber.'

'Indeed he does. Of course Horace Kimball did the absurd thing, said she mustn't marry, abused Sandford, and so on, and of course that made her marry. Unfortunately—this really seems to be the only thing against her—unfortunately she was married in a sly, secret sort of way. She didn't tell her brother she'd made up her mind, or when the marriage was to be or anything. She simply slunk out of his house and left him to find out. I suppose he had terrified her, poor thing, or his bullying made her sullen,' said Miss Amber. 'It was rather feeble of her. Only one hates to blame her. Her brother was furious. My father says that he never saw such a strange case of a man holding down a passionate rage. He thought at one time that Horace Kimball would have gone mad. The thing seemed like an obsession. Doesn't it seem paltry? A man wild with temper because he was jealous of his sister marrying!'

'Most jealousy is paltry.' Lomas shrugged.

'Jealous of his sister marrying,' Reggie repeated. 'Yes, I dare say seven men in ten are. Common human emotion. Commonest in the form of mothers hating their sons' wives, Miss Amber. Still, men do their bit. Fathers proverbially object

to daughters marrying. Brothers—well, there 's quite a lot of folk-lore about brothers killing their sisters' lovers. Yes, common human emotion.'

'I think jealousy is simply loathsome,' said Miss Amber, with a quiver of her admirable nose. 'Well, it 's fair to say Horace Kimball seemed to get over the worst of his. He just lost himself in his business, my father says. He wouldn't see his sister again, not even when her child was born (it was a boy). He simply swept her out of his life. Even when Sandford got into trouble, he wouldn't hear of helping her. My father quarrelled with him over that. He said to my father, "She 's made her bed, and they can all die in it." Oh, I know he 's dead, and one oughtn't to say things. But I call that simply devilish.'

'Yes, I believe in the devil too,' said Reggie. 'Devilish! You're exactly right, Miss Amber. Sandford got into trouble, did he? What was that?'

'It was some scandal about his business. A breach of trust in some way. His employers didn't prosecute, but they dismissed him in disgrace. My father doesn't remember the details. It was giving away some business secrets.'

Reggie looked at Lomas. 'That 's very interesting,' he said.

'Interesting! Poor people, it was misery for them. Sandford was ruined. My father says he never really tried to make a fresh start. He just died because he didn't want to go on living. And his wife broke her heart over it. She seemed like a woman frightened out of her senses, my father says. She got it into her head that it was all her brother's fault, that he had planned the whole

thing. It was absurd, of course, but can you wonder ?'

'I don't wonder,' said Reggie.

'She was deadly afraid of her brother. She made up her mind that he would be the death of her baby too. So she ran away from Liverpool and hid in a little village in North Wales, Llanfairfechan, and nobody knew where she had gone. She had a little money of her own, and her husband had been well insured. She had just enough, and she lived quite alone in a cottage off the road to the mountains, and there she died. My father says her son did rather well. He got scholarships to Oxford, and my father fancies he went into the Civil Service, but he lost sight of him after the mother died.'

'I'm infinitely obliged to you, Miss Amber,' said Reggie, and rang for tea.

'Oh no, don't! I always thought that poor woman's story was too miserably sad. I don't know why you wanted it—no, no, I'm not asking—but if it could set anything right, or do anybody any good, it seems somehow to make it better. It wouldn't be so uselessly cruel.'

'Over the past the gods themselves have no power,' Reggie said. 'We can't help her, poor soul. I dare say it 's something to her to know that her son is safe and making good—in spite of all the devilry.'

'Something to her—of course it is!' said Miss Amber, and looked divine.

'There 's that,' said Reggie, watching her.

'You won't mind my saying professionally that you have been very useful, Miss Amber,' said Lomas. 'You have cleared up what was a very

tiresome mystery. I was being bothered. That 's a serious disturbance of the machinery of Empire.' He succeeded, as he desired, in setting the conversation to a lighter tune. He made Miss Amber's eyes again merry. He did not prevent Reggie from looking at her. 'You must promise me another opportunity to thank you,' he said, as she was going.

'Dear me, I thought you had been doing nothing else,' said she demurely, and looked at the table and made a face. 'Oh, Mr. Fortune, what, what a tea! I leave all my reputation behind me. Men hate to see women eat, don't they? But do men always make teas like this?'

'I've a simple mind. I live the simple life.'

She looked at him fairly. 'You said simple. Do you know how I feel? I feel as if I hadn't a secret left all my own,' and she swept away. He was a long time gone letting her out.

'And that 's that,' Reggie said when he came back.

'Really?' Lomas was dim behind cigar smoke.

'All quite natural now, isn't it?'

'My dear fellow, you knew it all and you knew it right. You told me so. Kamerad, kamerad.'

Reggie lit his pipe. 'Jealousy, hate, mania. He broke the man the girl married. Curious that affair, wasn't it? Even the great criminal, he runs in a groove, he keeps to one kind of crime. The same dodge for the son that he used for the father. Then either he lost track of the mother or he preferred to hurt her through the son. He was an epicure in his little pleasures. The son came along. I dare say Kimball took that department because the son was in it. And then he was ready to smash

everything for the sake of his hate—damage his own career, do a filthy murder, die himself, if he could torture his sister's child. Yes. The devil is with power, Lomas.'

'I fancy you annoy him a little, my dear Fortune. But how can you believe in the devil? You have just seen—her.'

Reggie smiled. 'She is a woman, isn't she?'

'I think you might act on that theory. When is it to be?'

'Lomas, old thing, you're not only bland, you're obvious. Which is much worse.'

CRIME WITHOUT DETECTION

A COSTUME PIECE

By E. W. Hornung

London was just then talking of one whose name is already a name and nothing more. Reuben Rosenthall had made his millions on the diamond fields of South Africa, and had come home to enjoy them according to his lights; how he went to work will scarcely be forgotten by any reader of the halfpenny evening papers, which revelled in endless anecdotes of his original indigence and present prodigality, varied with interesting particulars of the extraordinary establishment which the millionaire set up in St. John's Wood. Here he kept a retinue of Kaffirs, who were literally his slaves; and hence he would sally with enormous diamonds in his shirt and on his finger, in the convoy of a prize-fighter of heinous repute, who was not, however, by any means the worst element in the Rosenthall *menage*. So said common gossip; but the fact was sufficiently established by the interference of the police on at least one occasion, followed by certain magisterial proceedings which were reported with justifiable gusto and huge headlines in the newspapers aforesaid. And this was all one knew of Reuben Rosenthall up to the time when the Old Bohemian Club, having fallen on evil days, found it worth its while to organize a great dinner in honour of so wealthy an exponent of the club's principles. I was not at the banquet myself, but a member

took Raffles, who told me all about it that very night.

'Most extraordinary show I ever went to in my life,' said he. 'As for the man himself—well, I was prepared for something grotesque, but the fellow fairly took my breath away. To begin with, he 's the most astounding brute to look at, well over six feet, with a chest like a barrel and a great hook-nose, and the reddest hair and whiskers you ever saw. Drank like a fire-engine, but only got drunk enough to make us a speech that I wouldn't have missed for ten pounds. I'm only sorry you weren't there too, Bunny, old chap.'

I began to be sorry myself, for Raffles was anything but an excitable person, and never had I seen him so excited before. Had he been following Rosenthall's example? His coming to my rooms at midnight, merely to tell me about his dinner, was in itself enough to excuse a suspicion which was certainly at variance with my knowledge of A. J. Raffles.

'What did he say?' I inquired mechanically, divining some subtler explanation of this visit, and wondering what on earth it could be.

'Say?' cried Raffles. 'What did he not say! He boasted of his vice, he bragged of his riches, and he blackguarded society for taking him up for his money and dropping him out of sheer pique and jealousy because he had so much. He mentioned names, too, with the most charming freedom, and swore he was as good a man as the Old Country had to show—*pace* the Old Bohemians. To prove it he pointed to a great diamond in the middle of his shirt-front with a little finger loaded with another just like it: which of our bloated

princes could show a pair like that? As a matter of fact, they seemed quite wonderful stones, with a curious purple gleam to them that must mean a pot of money. But old Rosenthall swore he wouldn't take fifty thousand pounds for the two, and wanted to know where the other man was who went about with twenty-five thousand in his shirt-front, and the other twenty-five on his little finger. He didn't exist. If he did, he wouldn't have the pluck to wear them. But he had—he'd tell us why. And before you could say Jack Robinson he had whipped out a whacking great revolver!'

'Not at the table?'

'At the table! In the middle of his speech! But it was nothing to what he wanted to do. He actually wanted us to let him write his name in bullets on the opposite wall to show us why he wasn't afraid to go about in all his diamonds! That brute Purvis, the prize-fighter, who is his paid bully, had to bully his master before he could be persuaded out of it. There was quite a panic for the moment; one fellow was saying his prayers under the table, and the waiters bolted to a man.'

'What a grotesque scene!'

'Grotesque enough, but I rather wish they had let him go the whole hog and blaze away. He was as keen as knives to show us how he could take care of his purple diamonds; and, do you know, Bunny, I was as keen as knives to see.'

And Raffles leant towards me with a sly, slow smile that made the hidden meaning of his visit only too plain to me at last.

'So you think of having a try for his diamonds yourself?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'It is horridly obvious, I admit. But—yes, I have set my heart upon them! To be quite frank, I have had them on my conscience for some time; one couldn't hear so much of the man, and his prize-fighter, and his diamonds, without feeling it a kind of duty to have a go for them; but when it comes to brandishing a revolver and practically challenging the world, the thing becomes inevitable. It is simply thrust upon one. I was fated to hear that challenge, Bunny, and I, for one, must take it up. I was only sorry I couldn't get on my hind legs and say so then and there.'

'Well,' I said, 'I don't see the necessity as things are with us; but, of course, I'm your man.'

My tone may have been half-hearted. I did my best to make it otherwise. But it was barely a month since our Bond Street exploit, and we certainly could have afforded to behave ourselves for some time to come. We had been getting along so nicely: by his advice I had scribbled a thing or two; inspired by Raffles, I had even done an article on our own jewel robbery; and for the moment I was quite satisfied with this sort of adventure. I thought we ought to know when we were well off, and could see no point in our running fresh risks before we were obliged. On the other hand, I was anxious not to show the least disposition to break the pledge that I had given a month ago. But it was not on my manifest disinclination that Raffles fastened.

'Necessity, my dear Bunny? Does the writer only write when the wolf is at the door? Does the painter paint for bread alone? Must you and I be driven to crime like Tom of Bow and Dick of

Whitechapel? You pain me, my dear chap; you needn't laugh, because you do. Art for art's sake is a vile catchword, but I confess it appeals to me. In this case my motives are absolutely pure, for I doubt if we shall ever be able to dispose of such peculiar stones. But if I don't have a try for them —after to-night, I shall never be able to hold up my head again.'

His eye twinkled, but it glittered too.

'We shall have our work cut out,' was all I said.

'And do you suppose I should be keen on it if we hadn't?' cried Raffles. 'My dear fellow, I would rob St. Paul's Cathedral if I could, but I could no more scoop a till when the shopwalker wasn't looking than I could bag apples out of an old woman's basket. Even that little business last month was a sordid affair, but it was necessary, and I think its strategy redeemed it to some extent. Now there 's some credit, and more sport, in going where they boast they're on their guard against you. The Bank of England, for example, is the ideal crib; but that would need half a dozen of us with years to give to the job; and meanwhile Reuben Rosenthall is high enough game for you and me. We know he 's armed. We know how Billy Purvis can fight. It'll be no soft thing, I grant you. But what of that, my good Bunny—what of that? A man's reach must exceed his grasp, dear boy, or what the dickens is a heaven for?'

'I would rather we didn't exceed ours just yet,' I answered, laughing, for his spirit was irresistible, and the plan was growing upon me, despite my qualms.

'Trust me for that,' was his reply; 'I'll see

you through. After all, I expect to find that the difficulties are nearly all on the surface. These fellows both drink like the devil, and that should simplify matters considerably. But we shall see, and we must take our time. There will probably turn out to be a dozen different ways in which the thing might be done, and we shall have to choose between them. It will mean watching the house for at least a week in any case; it may mean lots of other things that will take much longer; but give me a week, and I will tell you more. That 's to say if you're really on ? '

' Of course I am,' I replied indignantly. ' But why should I give you a week ? Why shouldn't we watch the house together ? '

' Because two eyes are as good as four, and take up less room. Never hunt in couples unless you're obliged. But don't you look offended, Bunny; there'll be plenty for you to do when the time comes, that I promise you. You shall have your share of the fun, never fear, and a purple diamond all to yourself—if we're lucky.'

On the whole, however, this conversation left me less than lukewarm, and I still remember the depression which came over me when Raffles was gone. I saw the folly of the enterprise to which I had committed myself—the sheer, gratuitous, unnecessary folly of it. And the paradoxes in which Raffles revelled, and the frivolous casuistry which was nevertheless half sincere, and which his mere personality rendered wholly plausible at the moment of utterance, appealed very little to me when recalled in cold blood. I admired the spirit of pure mischief in which he seemed prepared to risk his liberty and his life, but I did not find it

and muttering to himself as though I had refused him alms. A few moments I stood astounded, indignant, at a loss; then I followed him. His feet trailed, his knees gave, his back was bowed, his head kept nodding; it was the gait of a man eighty years of age. Presently he waited for me midway between two lamp-posts. As I came up he was lighting rank tobacco, in a cutty pipe, with an evil-smelling match, and the flame showed me the suspicion of a smile.

'You must forgive my heat, Bunny, but it really was very foolish of you. Here am I trying every dodge—begging at the door one night—hiding in the shrubs the next—doing every mortal thing but stand and stare at the house as you went and did. It 's a costume piece, and in you rush in your ordinary clothes. I tell you they're on the look-out for us night and day. It 's the toughest nut I ever tackled!'

'Well,' said I, 'if you had told me so before I shouldn't have come. You told me nothing.'

He looked hard at me from under the broken rim of a battered billycock.

'You're right,' he said at length. 'I've been too close. It's become second nature with me, when I've anything on. But here's an end of it, Bunny, so far as you're concerned. I'm going home now, and I want you to follow me; but for heaven's sake keep your distance, and don't speak to me again till I speak to you. There—give me a start.' And he was off again, a decrepit vagabond, with his hands in his pockets, his elbows squared, and frayed coat-tails swinging raggedly from side to side.

I followed him to the Finchley Road. There he took an omnibus, and I sat some rows behind him

on the top, but not far enough to escape the pest of his vile tobacco. That he could carry his character-sketch to such a pitch—he who would only smoke one brand of cigarettes! It was the last, least touch of the insatiable artist, and it charmed away what mortification there still remained in me. Once more I felt the fascination of a comrade who was for ever dazzling one with a fresh and unsuspected facet of his character.

As we neared Piccadilly I wondered what he would do. Surely he was not going into the Albany like that? No, he took another omnibus to Sloane Street, I sitting behind him as before. At Sloane Street we changed again, and were presently in the long lean artery of the King's Road. I was now all agog to know our destination, nor was I kept many more minutes in doubt. Raffles got down. I followed. He crossed the road and disappeared up a dark turning. I pressed after him, and was in time to see his coat-tails as he plunged into a still darker flagged alley to the right. He was holding himself up and stepping out like a young man once more; also, in some subtle way, he already looked less disreputable. But I alone was there to see him, the alley was absolutely deserted, and desperately dark. At the farther end he opened a door with a latchkey, and it was darker yet within.

Instinctively I drew back and heard him chuckle. We could no longer see each other.

'All right, Bunny! There 's no hanky-panky this time. These are studios, my friend, and I'm one of the lawful tenants.'

Indeed, in another minute we were in a lofty room with skylight, easels, dressing-cupboard,

platform, and every other adjunct save the signs of actual labour. The first thing I saw, as Raffles lit the gas, was its reflection in his silk hat on the pegs beside the rest of his normal garments.

'Looking for the works of art?' continued Raffles, lighting a cigarette and beginning to divest himself of his rags. 'I'm afraid you won't find any, but there 's the canvas I'm always going to make a start upon. I tell them I'm looking high and low for my ideal model. I have the stove lit on principle twice a week, and look in and leave a newspaper and a smell of Sullivans—how good they are after shag! Meanwhile I pay my rent and am a good tenant in every way; and it 's a very useful little *pied-à-terre*—there 's no saying how useful it might be at a pinch. As it is, the billycock comes in and the topper goes out, and nobody takes the slightest notice of either; at this time of night the chances are that there 's not a soul in the building except ourselves.'

'You never told me you went in for disguises,' said I, watching him as he cleansed the grime from his face and hands.

'No, Bunny, I've treated you very shabbily all round. There was really no reason why I shouldn't have shown you this place a month ago, and yet there was no point in my doing so, and circumstances are just conceivable in which it would have suited us both for you to be in genuine ignorance of my whereabouts. I have something to sleep on, as you perceive, in case of need, and, of course, my name is not Raffles in the King's Road. So you will see that one might bolt farther and fare worse.'

'Meanwhile you use the place as a dressing-room?'

'It's my private pavilion,' said Raffles. 'Disguises? In some cases they're half the battle, and it's always pleasant to feel that, if the worst comes to the worst, you needn't necessarily be convicted under your own name. Then they're indispensable in dealing with the fences. I drive all my bargains in the tongue and raiment of Shoreditch. If I didn't there'd be the very devil to pay in blackmail. Now, this cupboard's full of all sorts of toggery. I tell the woman who cleans the room that it's for my models when I find 'em. By the way, I only hope I've got something that'll fit you, for you'll want a rig for to-morrow night.'

'To-morrow night!' I exclaimed. 'Why, what do you mean to do?'

'The trick,' said Raffles. 'I intended writing to you as soon as I got back to my rooms, to ask you to look me up to-morrow afternoon; then I was going to unfold my plan of campaign, and take you straight into action then and there. There's nothing like putting the nervous players in first; it's the sitting with their pads on that upsets their applecart; that was another of my reasons for being so confoundedly close. You must try to forgive me. I couldn't help remembering how well you played up last trip, without any time to weaken on it beforehand. All I want is for you to be as cool and smart to-morrow night as you were then; though, by Jove, there's no comparison between the two cases!'

'I thought you would find it so.'

'You were right. I have. Mind you, I don't say this will be the tougher job all round; we shall probably get in without any difficulty at all; it's

the getting out again that may flummux us. That 's the worst of an irregular household ! ' cried Raffles, with quite a burst of virtuous indignation. ' I assure you, Bunny, I spent the whole of Monday night in the shrubbery of the garden next door, looking over the wall, and, if you'll believe me, somebody was about all night long ! I don't mean the Kaffirs. I don't believe they ever get to bed at all, poor devils ! No, I mean Rosenthall himself, and that pasty-faced beast Purvis. They were up and drinking from midnight, when they came in, to broad daylight, when I cleared out. Even then I left them sober enough to slang each other. By the way, they very nearly came to blows in the garden, within a few yards of me, and I heard something that might come in useful and make Rosenthall shoot crooked at a critical moment. You know what an I. D. B. is ? '

' Illicit Diamond Buyer ? '

' Exactly. Well, it seems that Rosenthall was one. He must have let it out to Purvis in his cups. Anyhow, I heard Purvis taunting him with it, and threatening him with the breakwater at Capetown ; and I begin to think our friends are friend and foe. But about to-morrow night : there 's nothing subtle in my plan. It 's simply to get in while these fellows are out on the loose, and to lie low till they come back, and longer. If possible we must doctor the whisky. That would simplify the whole thing, though it 's not a very sporting game to play ; still, we must remember Rosenthall's revolver ; we don't want him to sign his name on us. With all those Kaffirs about, however, it 's ten to one on the whisky, and a hundred to one against us if we go looking for it. A brush with the

heathen would spoil everything, if it did no more. Besides, there are the ladies——'

'The deuce there are!'

'Ladies with an "i," and the very voices for raising Cain. I fear, I fear the clamour! It would be fatal to us. *Au contraire*, if we can manage to stow ourselves away unbeknowns, half the battle will be won. If Rosenthall turns in drunk, it 's a purple diamond apiece. If he sits up sober, it may be a bullet instead. We will hope not, Bunny; and all the firing wouldn't be on one side; but it 's on the knees of the gods.'

And so we left it when we shook hands in Piccadilly—not by any means as much later as I could have wished. Raffles would not ask me to his rooms that night. He said he made it a rule to have a long night before playing cricket and—other games. His final word to me was framed on the same principle.

'Mind, only one drink to-night, Bunny. Two at the outside—as you value your life—and mine!'

I remember my abject obedience, and the endless, sleepless night it gave me; and the roofs of the houses opposite standing out at last against the blue-grey London dawn. I wondered whether I should ever see another, and was very hard on myself for that little expedition which I had made on my own wilful account.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening when we took up our position in the garden adjoining that of Reuben Rosenthall; the house itself was shut up, thanks to the outrageous libertine next door, who, by driving away the neighbours, had gone far towards delivering himself into our

hands. Practically secure from surprise on that side, we could watch our house under cover of a wall just high enough to see over, while a fair margin of shrubs in either garden afforded us additional protection. Thus entrenched we had stood an hour, watching a pair of lighted bow-windows with vague shadows flitting continually across the blinds, and listening to the drawing of corks, the clink of glasses, and a gradual crescendo of coarse voices within. Our luck seemed to have deserted us: the owner of the purple diamonds was dining at home and dining at undue length. I thought it was a dinner-party. Raffles differed; in the end he proved right. Wheels grated in the drive, a carriage and pair stood at the steps; there was a stampede from the dining-room, and the loud voices died away, to burst forth presently from the porch.

Let me make our position perfectly clear. We were over the wall, at the side of the house, but a few feet from the dining-room windows. On our right, one angle of the building cut the back lawn in two diagonally; on our left another angle just permitted us to see the jutting steps and the waiting carriage. We saw Rosenthall come out—saw the glimmer of his diamonds before anything. Then came the pugilist; then a lady with a head of hair like a bath sponge; then another, and the party was complete.

Raffles ducked and pulled me down in great excitement.

'The ladies are going with them,' he whispered. 'This is great!'

'That 's better still.'

'The Gardenia!' the millionaire had bawled.

'And that 's best of all,' said Raffles, standing upright as hoofs and wheels crunched through the gates and rattled off at a fine speed.

'Now what?' I whispered, trembling with excitement.

'They'll be clearing away. Yes, here come their shadows. The drawing-room windows open on the lawn. Bunny, it 's the psychological moment. Where 's that mask?'

I produced it with a hand whose trembling I tried in vain to still, and could have died for Raffles when he made no comment on what he could not fail to notice. His own hands were firm and cool as he adjusted my mask for me, and then his own.

'By Jove, old boy,' he whispered cheerily, 'you look about the greatest ruffian I ever saw! These masks alone will down a nigger, if we meet one. But I'm glad I remembered to tell you not to shave. You'll pass for Whitechapel if the worst comes to the worst and you don't forget to talk the lingo. Better sulk like a mule if you're not sure of it, and leave the dialogue to me; but, please our stars, there will be no need. Now, are you ready?'

'Quite.'

'Got your gag?'

'Yes.'

'Shooter?'

'Yes.'

'Then follow me.'

In an instant we were over the wall, in another on the lawn behind the house. There was no moon. The very stars in their courses had veiled themselves for our benefit. I crept at my leader's

heels to some French windows opening upon a shallow verandah. He pushed. They yielded.

'Luck again,' he whispered; 'nothing but luck! Now for a light.'

And the light came!

A good score of electric burners glowed red for the fraction of a second, then rained merciless white beams into our blinded eyes. When we found our sight, four revolvers covered us, and between two of them the colossal frame of Reuben Rosenthall shook with a wheezy laughter from head to foot.

'Good evening, boys,' he hiccoughed. 'Glad to see ye at last! Shift foot or finger, you on the left, though, and you're a dead boy. I mean you, you greaser!' he roared out at Raffles. 'I know you. I've been waitin' for you. I've been watchin' you all this week! Plucky smart you thought yerself, didn't you? One day beggin', next time shammin' tight, and next one o' them old pals from Kimberley what never come when I'm in. But you left the same tracks every day, you buggins, an' the same tracks every night, all round the blessed premises.'

'All right, guv'nor,' drawled Raffles; 'don't excite. It 's a fair cop. We don't sweat to know 'ow you brung it orf. On'y don't you go for to shoot, 'cos we 'aint awmed, s'help me Gord!'

'Ah, you're a knowin' one,' said Rosenthall, fingering his triggers. 'But you've struck a knowin'er.'

'Ho, yuss, we know all abaht thet! Set a thief to catch a thief—ho, yuss.'

My eyes had torn themselves from the round black muzzles, from the accursed diamonds that had been our snare, the pasty pig-face of the over-

fed pugilist, and the flaming cheeks and hook nose of Rosenthall himself. I was looking beyond them at the doorway filled with quivering silk and plush, black faces, white eye-balls, woolly pates. But a sudden silence recalled my attention to the millionaire. And only his nose retained its colour.

'What d'ye mean?' he whispered with a hoarse oath. 'Spit it out, or, by Christmas, I'll drill you!'

'Whort price thet brikewater?' drawled Raffles, coolly.

'Eh?'

Rosenthall's revolvers were describing widening orbits.

'What price thet brikewater—old I. D. B.?'

'Where in hell did you get hold o' that?' asked Rosenthall, with a rattle in his thick neck meant for mirth.

'You may well arst,' says Raffles. 'It 's all over the plice w'ere I come from.'

'Who can have spread such rot?'

'I dunno,' says Raffles; 'arst the gen'leman on yer left; p'raps 'e knows.'

The gentleman on his left had turned livid with emotion. Guilty conscience never declared itself in plainer terms. For a moment his small eyes bulged like currants in the suet of his face; the next, he had pocketed his pistols on a professional instinct, and was upon us with his fists.

'Out o' the light—out o' the light!' yelled Rosenthall in a frenzy.

He was too late. No sooner had the burly pugilist obstructed his fire than Raffles was through the window at a bound; while I, for standing still and saying nothing, was scientifically felled to the floor.

I cannot have been many moments without my senses. When I recovered them there was a great to-do in the garden, but I had the drawing-room to myself. I sat up. Rosenthall and Purvis were rushing about outside, cursing the Kaffirs and nagging at each other.

'Over that wall, I tell yer!'

'I tell you it was this one. Can't you whistle for the police?'

'Police be damned! I've had enough of the blessed police.'

'Then we'd better get back and make sure of the other rotter.'

'Oh, make sure o' yer skin. That 's what you'd better do. Jala, you black hog, if I catch you skulkin' . . .'

I never heard the threat. I was creeping from the drawing-room on my hands and knees, my own revolver swinging by its steel ring from my teeth.

For an instant I thought that the hall also was deserted. I was wrong, and I crept upon a Kaffir on all fours. Poor devil, I could not bring myself to deal him a base blow, but I threatened him most hideously with my revolver, and left the white teeth chattering in his black head as I took the stairs three at a time. Why I went upstairs in that decisive fashion, as though it were my only course, I cannot explain. But garden and ground floor seemed alive with men and I might have done worse.

I turned into the first room I came to. It was a bedroom—empty, though lit up; and never shall I forget how I started as I entered, on encountering the awful villain that was myself at full length in a

pier-glass! Masked, armed, and ragged, I was indeed fit carrion for a bullet or the hangman, and to one or the other I made up my mind. Nevertheless, I hid myself in the wardrobe behind the mirror, and there I stood shivering and cursing my fate, my folly, and Raffles most of all—Raffles first and last—for I daresay half an hour. Then the wardrobe door was flung suddenly open; they had stolen into the room without a sound; and I was hauled downstairs, an ignominious captive.

Gross scenes followed in the hall. The ladies were now upon the stage, and at sight of the desperate criminal they screamed with one accord. In truth I must have given them fair cause, though my mask was now torn away and hid nothing but my left ear. Rosenthall answered their shrieks with a roar for silence; the woman with the bath-sponge hair swore at him shrilly in return; the place became a Babel impossible to describe. I remember wondering how long it would be before the police appeared. Purvis and the ladies were for calling them in and giving me in charge without delay. Rosenthall would not hear of it. He swore that he would shoot man or woman who left his sight. He had had enough of the police. He was not going to have them coming there to spoil sport; he was going to deal with me in his own way. With that he dragged me from all other hands, flung me against a door, and sent a bullet crashing through the wood within an inch of my ear.

'You drunken fool! It'll be murder!' shouted Purvis, getting in the way a second time.

'Wha' do I care? He 's armed, isn't he? I shot him in self-defence. It'll be a warning to

others. Will you stand aside, or d'ye want it yourself?'

'You're drunk,' said Purvis, still between us. 'I saw you take a neat tumblerful since you came in, and it's made you drunk as a fool. Pull yourself together, old man. You ain't a-going to do what you'll be sorry for.'

'Then I won't shoot at him, I'll only shoot roun' an' roun' the beggar. You're quite right, ole feller. Wouldn't hurt him. Great mishtake. Roun' an' roun'. There—like that!'

His freckled paw shot up over Purvis's shoulder, mauve lightning came from his ring, a red flash from his revolver, and shrieks from the women as the reverberations died away. Some splinters lodged in my hair.

Next instant the prize-fighter disarmed him; and I was safe from the devil, but finally doomed to the deep sea. A policeman was in our midst. He had entered through the drawing-room window; he was an officer of few words and creditable promptitude. In a twinkling he had the handcuffs on my wrist, while the pugilist explained the situation, and his patron reviled the force and its representative with impotent malignity. A fine watch they kept; a lot of good they did; coming in when all was over and the whole household might have been murdered in their sleep. The officer only deigned to notice him as he marched me off.

'We know all about you, sir,' said he contemptuously, and he refused the sovereign Purvis proffered. 'You will be seeing me again, sir, at Marylebone.'

'Shall I come now?'

'As you please, sir. I rather think the other gentleman requires you more, and I don't fancy this young man means to give much trouble.'

'Oh, I'm coming quietly,' I said.

And I went.

In silence we traversed perhaps a hundred yards. It must have been midnight. We did not meet a soul. At last I whispered:

'How on earth did you manage it?'

'Purely by luck,' said Raffles. 'I had the luck to get clear away through knowing every brick of those back-garden walls, and the double luck to have these togs with the rest over at Chelsea. The helmet is one of a collection I made up at Oxford; here it goes over this wall, and we'd better carry the coat and belt before we meet a real officer. I got them once for a fancy ball—ostensibly—and thereby hangs a yarn. I always thought they might come in useful a second time. My chief crux to-night was getting rid of the cab that brought me back. I sent him off to Scotland Yard with ten bob and a special message to good old Mackenzie. The whole detective department will be at Rosenthall's in about half an hour. Of course I speculated on our gentleman's hatred of the police—another huge slice of luck. If you'd got away, well and good; if not, I felt he was the man to play with his mouse as long as possible. Yes, Bunny, it 's been more of a costume piece than I intended, and we've come out of it, with a good deal less credit. But, by Jove, we're jolly lucky to have come out of it at all!'

DETECTION WITHOUT CRIME

FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF THE LATE HORACE FISH

By Barry Pain

I. On Green Paper

Most of my friends are acquainted with my hobby—a solution of those mysteries which are to be found in everyday life. Some of them put this differently, and say that I have a disgusting tendency to poke my curious nose into other people's affairs. Some make fun of me. I am not in the least affected either by their ridicule or their condemnation. I am an old man, and one of the few gifts of old age is independent judgement. I have indeed been pleased to find a hobby which provides me with some occupation. It may be that in some cases I have shown a certain amount of ingenuity in obtaining the correct solution of what at first sight seemed extremely puzzling: indeed my worst enemies would admit that this is so. It is also my belief that if they came upon anything which bothered and mystified them, they would bring it to me and see what I could make of it.

The Reverend Septimus Erde had never ridiculed me. He has never ridiculed anybody or anything. He has a serious profession, and he is by nature a very serious man. I am told that his views are

slightly narrow and fanatical, but that is a point upon which I am in no position to speak. I have known Erde for many years, and I knew his father before him. When at eleven o'clock one morning my servant told me that Mr. Erde wished to see me, I did not at once connect it with my peculiar hobby. To tell the truth, I thought he had probably called for a subscription—a thing that he has done before, perhaps too frequently. I therefore crossed the passage into the drawing-room in rather an irritated frame of mind. And when I asked Mr. Erde what I could do for him, it was without the slightest intention of doing it. He is not a bad-looking young man, obviously sincere and straightforward.

'I have called, Mr. Fish,' he said, 'to ask for your kind assistance.'

'Alas,' I said. 'I have so many calls upon me nowadays, that——'

'You misunderstand me. It is true that many charitable enterprises in which I am interested are at present crippled from want of funds, but I had not intended this morning to make any further demands on your generosity in that respect. The fact of the case is that I have come upon a problem which has a peculiar interest for me. You perhaps can help me to solve it.'

This put an entirely different complexion on matters. I was ready and even eager to hear what he had to say.

'For the last few days I have been staying at Aldeburgh. I have been overworked lately, and my medical man strongly advised a short rest and change. Yesterday morning I strolled out beyond the town. A fresh wind was blowing, and a torn

scrap of green paper was blown along to my feet. Some words on it caught my eye, and I picked it up. Here it is.'

He produced from his note-book a scrap of green note-paper. The words written on it were : 'You must take the veil.'

It was easy to see that it was the handwriting of a man, and moreover of an educated man.

'Well,' I said. 'And what else did you find ?'

'I was returning to town that day, and I had very little time before me. I could only find one other scrap of the green paper, and that was some yards away in a furze bush.'

He produced it and handed it to me. The second scrap ran : 'Disregarding their anger entirely.'

'Now, Mr. Fish,' said Erde, 'I need not insult your intelligence by telling you what this means. Some poor girl is being forced into the convent life, contrary to the wishes of her parents, who are naturally angry about it. It is amazing that these things should happen at the present day, but we know they do happen. I feel it to be my duty to prevent this, if possible. But I do not know the name of the girl or the priest who wrote that letter. I do not know where she lives. Can you help me to find out these things, Mr. Fish ? For once you have a chance of turning your undoubted abilities to real account.'

'I will see what can be done,' I said, and rang the bell. In reply to my inquiries I found that the wind on the previous day had been from the north-east, and was still blowing from the same quarter.

'That at any rate is satisfactory,' I said.

'Why ?' asked Mr. Erde.

'Because any other scraps of this letter will have been carried inland, and not out to sea. As they are carried inland, they are probably recoverable. It is only a question of a little time and patience. I shall go down to Aldeburgh at once, and within a week I have no doubt that I shall be able to give you information upon which you can act.'

Erde had done one very sensible thing. He had made a careful and exact note of the point at which he had found those two scraps of green paper, and had also drawn a rough plan.

'You really mean,' he said, 'that you will go down to Aldeburgh and stay there perhaps for days, simply in order to help a poor deluded girl, whose very name you do not know? It does you great credit, Mr. Fish.'

'I'm afraid,' I said, 'that I must put it that I am going down there in order to solve a mystery which fascinates me. My time hangs heavily on my hands, Mr. Erde, and I can assure you that I am very much obliged to you for having provided me with my favourite occupation.'

On arriving at Aldeburgh late that afternoon, I left my luggage at the hotel, engaged a room there, and proceeded at once to the point which Mr. Erde had indicated. I found his plan of great use. I could see no scrap of green paper anywhere, but I found something else, which I thought might be of use to me—a boy scout diligently engaged in making a sketch map.

'Hullo,' I said. 'Are you a scout?'

'Yes, sir,' said the boy distrustfully. The distrust was natural. There was no obvious reason why I should have spoken to him.

'Oh,' I said. 'I have heard about you boy scouts. You are supposed to keep your eyes peeled, aren't you? to keep a sharp look-out for things.'

He admitted grudgingly that this was part of the idea.

'Well now,' I said, 'just for fun let me give you a little test. When did you last see some scraps of green paper?'

'Just about where I am now, on the day before yesterday at three in the afternoon.'

'That 's right,' I said. 'You're a smart boy. Now then, as a test for memory, what did you find written on those scraps of paper?'

'It was a letter torn up. I don't want to read other people's letters, do I?'

That was rather awkward. 'Certainly not,' I said. 'No more do I. But this is an exceptional case. On the recovery of those scraps of green paper depends in all probability the safety or ruin of a girl.'

'I don't like sells,' said the boy.

'It is quite natural that you should think it a sell, but it is not. I am acting in this case for a clergyman, the Reverend Septimus Erde. Here is his card. Here is a rough plan showing exactly where those scraps of paper were to be found. I cannot tell you anything more, but I have shown you enough to show you that the thing is genuine.'

'Let 's have a look at the plan,' said the boy.

He looked at it carefully. 'Yes,' he said, 'that 's right. If those scraps of paper are to be found, I'll get them for you.'

'Good boy,' I said. 'Now the direction of the wind——'

'Oh, I know all about that. I shall allow for that. It has been dry weather, and the grass is short. Those scraps of paper may have gone a long way. Still, I'll do what I can. Where shall I bring them?'

I gave him my name and told him at which hotel I was staying. 'I shall be there for two or three days.'

'I can't be here to-morrow morning,' said the boy. 'But I'll have a look now, and another look to-morrow afternoon. Then if I have not got it, I'll give up.'

'Don't give up, my boy,' I said. 'Try, try, try again. You remember Bruce of Scotland.'

'Yes,' said the boy. 'But I've got lots of other things to do. If I can't find them, there's nothing to stop you going on trying yourself, is there?'

His manner was outwardly polite, but he was a disconcerting boy. However, I felt that he was on his mettle. I had aroused the tracking instinct in him. I felt sure that if he could find any scrap of that letter on green paper, he would bring it to me in triumph.

The next morning I took a look on my own account, and found nothing. In the evening, just after I had finished dinner, I was told that a boy wished to see me. I found my young friend in the hall.

'I've found three bits of the green paper, sir,' said the boy. 'They were three hundred and forty-one yards away from the place where you were looking, and not in the direction you would have thought the wind would have taken them. The wind is a queer thing on broken ground like that. There are eddies and back currents, and——'

'Yes,' I said, 'quite so. Let 's have a look.'

He handed me the scraps of paper one by one. On the first were the words: 'You must depend,' which fitted in with what had gone before, but gave no further information. The second scrap was very small, and contained only two words: 'The smoke.' The use of incense at once occurred to my mind. The third scrap was larger and contained one short sentence. For nearly a minute I read it over and over, and then light broke in on me. Somewhat to the boy's astonishment I burst out laughing.

'That 's all right,' I said. 'You need not hunt for any more. The mystery is cleared up.'

I gave him gingerbeer, which he accepted gladly, and while he was drinking it I told him the whole story. I then gave him half a sovereign, which he accepted reluctantly, saying that he had not done the thing for money.

'No,' I said. 'But what you have found is worth a good deal more than half a sovereign to me, it gives me that feeling of solid satisfaction which is almost priceless.'

I telegraphed to Erde to meet my train next morning, and told him that the mystery was solved. I found him pacing the platform in a state of great perturbation.

'Now then, Mr. Fish,' he said. 'First and foremost give me the name of the girl.'

'There is no girl in the case at all.'

'There must be. You have forgotten the reference to the veil, you know.'

'Not in the least. I have found three scraps of paper, and I will show you the first two.' I did so.

'I must say,' he said, 'they only tend to confirm

one's suspicions. Look at that repeated use of the word "must". The girl must disregard the anger of her parents. She must depend entirely upon the priest. Those words "the smoke" refer clearly to a part of the Romish ceremony. Let me see the third scrap.'

'Wait a minute, Mr. Erde. I'm going to tell you a story. There was a man once who took a house where there was a bee-hive. In the course of time he wished to take the honey, but he did not know how to set about it. He therefore wrote to a friend who had experience of these matters. The friend replied that he must take the lid off the hive, disregarding the anger of the bees, and that he must then take the veil and wrap it carefully round his head. He must depend, however, far more on the smoke, provided, as you know, by a little bellows arrangement that the bee-keeper uses. If you want further proof, here is the third scrap, on which is written: "Tie your trousers tightly round the ankles with a bit of string." A very excellent precaution if you do not want your legs stung.'

'You are a wonderful man, Mr. Fish,' said Erde. But I could not help thinking that he looked rather disappointed.

II. The Face of the Corpse

I was sitting in the club one morning, working out the solution of a cipher advertisement, when old Paget, looking like a discontented chimpanzee, came shuffling up to me.

'Mornin',' he said. 'You're always a good deal

interested in other people's business, Fish, ain't you?'

'Not always. Seldom, in fact. Only when it happens to be interesting.'

'Well, I've got something in your line. I had a chat with Brook, my solicitor, yesterday—wanting to know about a fellow that's taking a house of mine. Brook said he'd make an inquiry and let me know on the telephone. Sure enough, soon after I got home, I was rung up. Voice that I took to be my solicitor's said: "I've made that inquiry for you." So I said: "Thanks very much. What's the result?" And then came the extraordinary thing, Fish. The same voice went on: "The face of the corpse has turned a pinkish colour—much the same as in life."'

'Yes,' I said. 'That promises fairly well. And you led him on, I hope.'

'Sorry to say I didn't. Thing staggered me. I asked what on earth he was talking about. Then he wanted to know to whom he was speaking, and I told him. "Sorry," says the fellow. "Wrong number," and cut himself off.'

'I see,' I said. 'And did you ask the Exchange who had rung you up?'

'Well,' said old Paget, 'I didn't think of it at the moment. Doubt if they could have told me. Besides, it might have been somebody speaking from a public call-office. All I know is that it wasn't my solicitor.'

'There's nothing to go on,' I said.

'Nothing whatever that I can see. Thought it would fox you. Lots of things happening every day, Fish, that you'll never be able to explain. Tragedy somewhere though—you may depend on

it.' And he moved away, shaking his head solemnly.

Not being a detective in a story-book, my methods are so simple as to be almost childish. When I don't know, I ask—a thing apparently that no good detective would ever stoop to. On this occasion there was my authority ready to hand. Dr. Boden was sitting in one corner of the room, reading *The Times*. He is a dapper little man, with an eyeglass, able enough but a little too superior for my taste.

I went over to him and said, with an apology for the queerness of the question: 'I wonder, doctor, if you could tell me why the face of a corpse turned pink.'

'It didn't,' said Dr. Boden. 'It couldn't. The thing 's a physiological impossibility. The face might change colour somewhat from decomposition, but certainly it would not turn pink. Somebody 's been having a game with you, Mr. Fish.'

I knew better. Old Paget is a solid, dreary man, without one spark of humour in him. Compared with Paget, Bradshaw's time-tables are fanciful. There was the possibility that somebody had been having a game with old Paget, but I did not think it at all likely; in that case the joke would have been carried further and there would have been more details.

So I felt as if I had gone down a blind alley and bumped my head against the wall at the farther end. For the time I put old Paget's problem aside, and went back to the advertisement in cipher. The ciphers used in what is sometimes called the agony column, have not as a rule been invented by experts, and are quite easy

to read for any one who has studied the subject. It may be added that they are seldom worth reading. They consist generally of the ecstatic rubbish of separated lovers. It took me ten minutes to read the advertisement on which I was engaged. I transcribed it as follows, in my note-book :

'Thousand from H.-L. Joy. Give month's notice, and rejoin the squatter of Mardel. Boys must try cycling again.'

It seemed that the advertiser had received a thousand pounds, and in consequence somebody was to give up present employment—presumably, from the length of notice, of a menial character—and rejoin a person described as the squatter of Mardel, who might perhaps be the advertiser. But what boys were to begin cycling, and why ?

I could make nothing of it, and I went back to old Paget's problem. As I turned it over in my mind, I thought I saw now a faint gleam of hope. I could not find out who it was that had unintentionally rung Paget up, but there was just a possibility that I might discover the man for whose telephone number Paget's had been mistaken. The figures of Paget's number were 1409. Five and nine have a slight similarity of sound, and if the mistake had been made in the Exchange, it was possible that the man who had been given 1409 had really asked for 1405. I determined to take the chance of it, at any rate, and to find out who was the holder of 1405 at that Exchange.

I rang up 1405 and began speaking as if I had been a business firm : 'We find that your order was dispatched this morning, and you should have received it by now.'

A weary voice answered me: 'Who 's speaking?'

'Lancing and Co., Victoria Street,' I said glibly, taking the first name and address that occurred to my imagination.

'Don't remember order.'

'Surely,' I said. 'To whom are we speaking?'

'To the secretary of the late Mr. Holmes-Larrival.'

'Indeed? Then I fear we have the wrong number. So sorry to have troubled you.'

I hung up the receiver. I found from the directory that 1405 was the number for Holmes-Larrival's private address, not for his business office. I knew something of the man, for he had died but three days before, and I had read his obituary notice. He was a millionaire, an Australian by birth who had been settled in this country for the last twenty years. That obituary notice had come as near to an unfavourable criticism as it very well could. 'Strong in his domestic affections, but merciless in his business dealings,' was a phrase that came back to my mind. There had been a reference, too, to his eccentricity.

Now Holmes-Larrival died in his bed in his own house. Therefore a message relating to the colour of the dead man's face might conceivably have been sent *from* his address, but could hardly have been sent *to* it. This bothered me.

On the other hand it looked to me as if in searching for one thing I had stumbled on another. I had been reminded of Holmes-Larrival, and it seemed likely that the cipher advertisement referred to him. There were his initials. The thousand would be a legacy. It is true the legacies

are not generally announced on the day following the death of the testator, but in this case there might have been some special reason. The word 'squatter' is specially Australian, and Holmes-Larrival was of Australian origin. Probably the advertiser had been a friend of the dead man in his youth; and this would account for the legacy.

Following where the light led me, I looked up Mardel in the big atlas in the reading-room. I could find no place of that name, but I did find that there was a village called Mardel Boys within twenty miles of London—Boys being an obvious corruption of the French *bois*. Here was another step. It showed me that I had transcribed that advertisement wrongly. It should have run: 'Rejoin the squatter of Mardel Boys. Must try cycling again.' I now determined to go to Mardel Boys, and to continue my investigations there.

I ordered sandwiches, a whisky and soda, and the A B C. I lunched hurriedly, and by three that afternoon I was in Mardel Boys.

Mardel Boys must at one time have been as picturesque a village as you would find in Hertfordshire. It is still quite charming, but it is waking up and the builder is busy there. I sought out the house-agent; house-agents have always a large fund of information, and are willing to impart it—the sunnier part of it at least—to prospective tenants or purchasers. I told the agent that I was Mr. C. N. M. Buckley, and that I was anxious to purchase a little place in the neighbourhood. I wanted a good house and a matured garden, and I did not wish to go beyond twelve thousand. I must admit that the only one of these statements

which was at all true was that I did not wish to go beyond twelve thousand.

I went very thoroughly into the question of the house itself. Then I had something to say about other points. The services at the parish church were not too ritualistic, I hoped. Were the residents desirable from the social point of view? I had heard of an Australian who had settled there—for the moment the name had escaped my memory.

The agent thought very hard, but he could not remember any Australian living in the locality. This was disappointing, though he hastened to assure me that there were quite a number of residents who were up to the motor-car standard. But I persevered. Was the local doctor satisfactory?

'Oh yes, sir,' said the agent. 'A very clever man—Dr. Cogswell. He 's attended me and my family many a year.'

'I should have thought there was room for a second man in a growing place like this.'

'Well, as a matter of fact we have a second man—Dr. Orbright, fully qualified. He came and squatted here about two years ago. A very pleasant gentleman, I believe; but, of course, he has very little practice so far.'

At the word 'squatted' I pricked up my ears. 'Squatted?' I said. 'What does that mean?'

'Well, sir, that 's a word I had from Dr. Cogswell. It seems that in the medical profession, when a doctor comes to a place and does not buy a practice, but just puts up his plate and takes his chance, then he is known as a squatter.'

'I see,' I said. And after that my interview

with the house-agent very soon came to an end. I felt that I had struck the right track. Dr. Orbright then was 'the squatter of Mardel Boys', and it was to Dr. Orbright that I next went.

Dr. Orbright lived in a tiny house in a newly erected row. The house was well enough kept, but it was rather poorly and sparsely furnished, and did not suggest opulence. The doctor was a very cheery young man of twenty-six. There was no assumption of professional dignity about him.

I explained that I was Mr. C. N. M. Buckley, and that as a prospective resident in the neighbourhood I wished to know something of its sanitary character. It was a point, I said, on which I would sooner trust a doctor than a house-agent.

He said he would be very happy to tell me anything he could. So he went into questions of soil and subsoil, water-supply, drainage systems, and the death-rate. I displayed the greatest interest in these subjects, and bored myself profoundly. The doctor accepted my proffered guinea under protest, saying it would never have occurred to him to make a charge for that kind of thing.

'Then, doctor,' I said, 'I'm afraid you'll never be a millionaire like your friend Holmes-Larrival.'

The young man looked surprised. 'My friend?' he said. 'I can assure you I always regarded Holmes-Larrival as my enemy.'

'You attended him, I think.'

'I attended Holmes-Larrival only once,' said Dr. Orbright. 'And that was the day after his death.'

It was my turn to be surprised. 'I don't understand,' I said.

'No? I dare say it sounds queer, but it is the case. Yesterday for the first time I attended Holmes-Larrival professionally, and he died the day before.'

As he offered no explanation, I thought I would push the thing a little further. 'Well,' I said, 'stranger though I am to you, I hope you will at any rate let me congratulate you on the nice little legacy you receive from your dead patient.'

'Thank you,' he said, and I fancy he was beginning to be rather annoyed. 'You might possibly have heard of a connection between Holmes-Larrival and myself from local gossip, but I do not see how you come to know about the legacy. Holmes-Larrival's solicitors, carrying out his instructions, told me of it, but I have mentioned it to nobody.'

'Pardon me,' I said. 'You advertised it in a newspaper this morning.'

'But that was a cipher advertisement. I should have thought it impossible for any one to read it without the key.'

'As a man who has made some study of ciphers, I must tell you that your own production was so easy as to be almost childish.'

'At any rate,' he said, 'it was no business of yours. It was a private message to my wife.'

'My dear sir,' I said, 'nothing is any business of mine. I have no business. If you want to send a private message to your wife, it would cost you less and the privacy would be better secured, if you used the penny post.'

'I had my own reasons. However, I know now how you have found out everything. There 's nothing more to be said.'

'But I have found out practically nothing. I do not know why somebody has to try cycling again.'

'Nor am I going to tell you,' said the doctor angrily.

'Nor do I know why the face of the dead man turned pink.'

'That was not mentioned in the advertisement. How you come to know anything about that beats me altogether. But you may be quite certain you will learn nothing about it from me. May I suggest that perhaps you have a train to catch?'

This was really rather rude of him. However, I had a screw to turn, and I now proceeded to turn it. 'Certainly you may. Good-bye, doctor. I won't fail to send you my little book on newspaper ciphers when it comes out, in gratitude for your interesting contribution to it.'

That did it. Before I left, I had promised that his advertisement should not appear in my book, which, by the way, I had never had any intention of writing, and Dr. Orbright had explained everything to me. And when I got the explanation, it was all so simple and obvious that I could have kicked myself for never having thought of it.

I got back to town by six, dressed, and returned to the club to dine. I found old Paget discussing with Dr. Boden the future of the Empire—as to which they did not appear to be hopeful.

'Boden and I dining here,' said Paget, gloomily. 'Care to join us?'

I said, of course, that I should be charmed. It was half-way through dinner that Paget mentioned the incident of the morning.

'Fish is fond of ferreting out things,' he said to Boden. 'But this morning I foxed him. An astonishing thing it was—and, as Fish had to admit, nothing whatever to go on.' He told Boden about the telephone message.

'Yes, Paget,' I said, 'I was quite wrong. As soon as I came to think it over, I saw that there was plenty to go on. I've got the whole thing explained now, though Boden here did mislead me at the start.'

'How?' said Boden sharply, putting up his eyeglass.

'You told me that the face of a corpse could not be turned pink.'

'I did not,' snapped Boden. 'I told you the face of a corpse could not turn pink—a vastly different thing. The one implies natural process, and the other artificial intervention. Left to itself the face of a corpse could not turn pink. But I am not imbecile enough to tell you or anybody else that a surface cannot be painted. I have myself been asked to rouge the face of a corpse; I refused.'

'Well,' said Paget, 'don't get so quarrelsome. I want the story. Go on, Fish.'

'Pure theory, of course,' said Boden.

'No theory at all,' I said. 'It 's a simple record of facts—rather long and dull, I am afraid. About a year and a half ago Dr. Orbright, a young practitioner living at Mardel Boys in Hertfordshire, was out bicycling. At a right-angled corner another bicyclist, who was on the wrong side of the road, ran into him. The doctor had one hand a good deal cut about, and his machine was badly damaged. The other bicyclist, who turned out to

be the Australian millionaire, Holmes-Larrival, got off scot-free. The doctor put in a moderate claim for the damage to his machine, and Holmes-Larrival refused to pay a penny of it. He admitted that he was on the wrong side of the road at the corner, but said that the doctor was equally in the wrong for not ringing his bell. He also intimated that if the claim was pressed he should fight it, and should make it a deucedly expensive business for the doctor. Now, the doctor was a poor man. He had started practice in Mardel Boys speculatively. He had recently married. He could not afford to fight a millionaire, and he dropped the claim. You can hardly blame him. He had not even enough to buy himself another bicycle; and the girl he had married had to go out and earn money as a companion. Holmes-Larrival died three days ago. As soon as he was dead, his solicitor went out to Mardel Boys and saw Dr. Orbright, in accordance with instructions he had had from his client. The doctor was told that Holmes-Larrival was to be buried in his native country. It was therefore necessary that his body should be embalmed or preserved, and by the terms of his will Dr. Orbright was to be asked to undertake this work. The will said that the testator hoped that the doctor would show as much zeal in preserving his body as he had on a former occasion in attempting to destroy it. His first impulse was to refuse; then he reflected that he had not so much work that he could afford to throw any away, especially as there would probably be a good fee hanging to it. It was just as well for him that he did, for Holmes-Larrival had left him a legacy of a thousand pounds conditional on that

acceptance, a fact that was not to be disclosed to him until he had either accepted or refused.'

'Seems to have been a nasty-natured man, this Holmes-thingamy,' said old Paget.

'Fairly so. Well, Orbright went up to town next morning to the undertaker's, where the body had been removed for the purpose, and did what was necessary. I believe it 's a simple matter nowadays, isn't it, Boden ? '

'Oh, yes. They open the radial artery, tie in a vulcanite tube, and inject a solution of formalin. It is generally slightly coloured with carmine, and would have the effect about which you asked me.'

'Not often wanted, I should think,' said Paget.

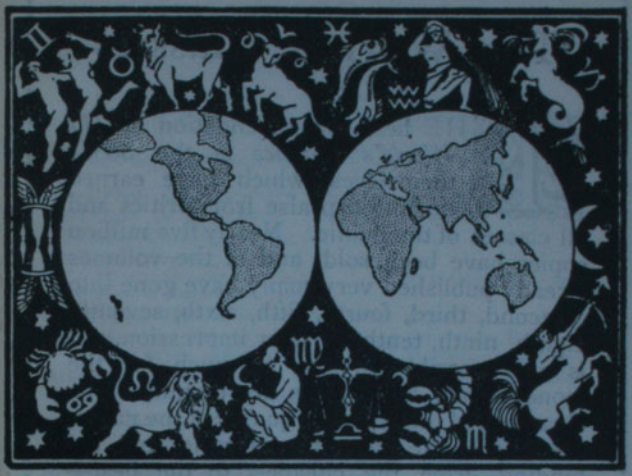
'Frequently,' said Boden. 'Most of the principal undertakers have a man who can do it.'

'Well,' I said, 'the rest of the story is obvious. Mrs. Holmes-Larrival was anxious that there should be no defacement of the corpse, and inquired as to that through the secretary. He rang up the solicitors. They inquired of Orbright, and telephoned the information—as they thought to the secretary. But a mistake was made in the Exchange, and they got 1409, which is Paget's number, instead of 1405, which was Holmes-Larrival's.'

I said nothing about the cipher advertisement. I did not want them to know what a very simple business it had really been. It pleased me to see even Dr. Boden utterly at a loss to say how I had got at the facts.

But a word of further explanation about that advertisement may be given here. Mrs. Orbright had taken a place as companion to an eccentric old lady, a Mrs. Axmund, whose house stood on

the top of a Herefordshire hill and was six miles from the nearest village. By arrangement with a railway company, and also with a boy with a bicycle, Mrs. Axmund managed to get the London morning papers on her breakfast table, three hours before the only post in the day reached her house. By using an advertisement in the paper, Dr. Orbright gained time in conveying his good news. It appeared that there were objections to the sending of a telegram. There would be porterage to pay. Mrs. Axmund always insisted on paying this herself, always grumbled at it, and always expected to be shown the telegram in order that she might demonstrate that it need never have been sent. The joking reference to the cycling explains itself.



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