

Paul Campenhaye

Specialist
in
Criminology

J. S. Fletcher
1918

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Title: Paul Campenhaye, Specialist in Criminology

Date of first publication: 1918

Author: J. S. (Joseph Smith) Fletcher, (1863-1935)

Date first posted: Feb. 25, 2015

Date last updated: Feb. 25, 2015

Faded Page eBook #20150255

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

PAUL
CAMPENHAYE

SPECIALIST IN CRIMINOLOGY

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

Author of "The Secret Cargo,"
"The Amaranth Club," etc.

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON, MELBOURNE AND TORONTO
1918

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PAUL CAMPENHAYE

CHAPTER I. THE FRENCH MAID.

It was the fourth day of October, 19—, and three o'clock in the afternoon. Killingley, my clerk, had just come back from his lunch. I heard him moving about in his room—the first of the three rooms in which I carried on my business in Jermyn Street. As for myself, I was reading a new essay on certain characteristics of Napoleon Bonaparte; it was clever and, in many respects, original, and I had no wish to be disturbed. But just then the outer bell rang.

Killingley came in a moment later.

"A lady wishes to see you, sir," he said.

"In the usual way, Killingley," I said, rising.

Now, I had a habit, during the comparatively short time in which I carried on the business, of taking care to see my clients before they saw me. I have said that I occupied three rooms; the first was used by Killingley as a sort of office, and contained himself, an American roll-top desk, a typewriter, and Killingley's collection of light literature; the second was fitted up as a luxurious waiting-room; the third was my own apartment. And between it and the second was a cunningly-devised and quite secret arrangement by which I, unseen, could take minute stock of any person who called upon me. Often I kept clients waiting impatiently in that room while I watched and studied them; I was all the more ready for them when I admitted them to my presence.

I was at my post of 'vantage when Killingley ushered the lady into the waiting-room. A tall woman of perfect figure and distinguished carriage, she was so closely veiled that I could see nothing whatever of her face, but I learnt much in one minute from her movements. She examined her surroundings as a caged thing might look around its den. Impatiently she turned over and tossed about the newspapers and magazines which lay on the table, impatiently she kept glancing at the door which led to my room. From the quickness of her movements I knew that she was young, impetuous and ardent; from her impatience I knew that she was much agitated.

I stepped to my door and opened it, and was bowing to her before she was

aware of my presence. She passed me quickly with a slight, somewhat condescending nod, and, entering my room, sank into the easy-chair which I placed for her.

"I am at your service, madam," I said quietly. "But perhaps I had better explain that I never undertake any commission until I am made aware of my client's identity."

She sat for a moment in silence, her slender fingers, perfectly gloved, tapping the arms of her chair. Then, suddenly, she lifted one hand, and with a gesture almost imperious, swept aside the thick veil and revealed a face that was as troubled and agitated as it was beautiful, and—famous. I bowed once more, in genuine homage.

"I have the honour to receive the Countess of Langthwaite," I said.

The Countess inclined her head a little and gave me a very keen and critical stare.

"I understand, Mr. Campenhaye, that whatever is said to you is said in the strictest confidence," she began. "Is that so?"

"Whatever is told me by my clients, Lady Langthwaite, is regarded by me as sacred," I answered. "But, in return, I expect my clients to tell me the plain, literal truth, even to the merest detail."

"I—I suppose I had better begin at the beginning," she said. "And since you know who I am, you will know that we—that Lord Langthwaite has a place in Yorkshire."

I nodded.

"I left Langthwaite at nine o'clock this morning on my way to town, and arrived at King's Cross just after one o'clock," she continued. "My maid, Antoinette Marcel, was with me. I left Antoinette in the station—she was to lunch in the refreshment-room. She had with her some smaller luggage, bags, and—my jewel-case.

"I left the hotel at a few minutes to two and crossed to the station," she went on. "In the booking hall I passed a porter who had charge of my trunks. He told me that Antoinette had left the smaller bags with him, and had gone to the refreshment-room. I went there to find her—she was not there. Nor could I find her anywhere about the station."

"Of course, the jewel-case had disappeared with Antoinette," I said. "But please tell me the rest, Lady Langthwaite."

"There is nothing, or scarcely anything, to tell," she said. "Of course, Antoinette had the jewel-case. That is why I came to you. I want to—I must recover it!"

"Naturally!" I remarked. "I suppose you informed the station people and the police at once?"

"No-o," she faltered. "I—I was advised not to do so."

"Now, Lady Langthwaite," I said, settling down to work, "you will bear in mind that you are to tell me everything. And, first of all, who advised you not to mention your loss to the railway authorities and the police?"

"A—a friend," she replied reluctantly.

"Man or woman?" I asked.

"A—a man," she answered, still more reluctantly.

"Who must have had strong reasons for giving such extraordinary advice," I commented. "However, we will leave that for the moment. Now, what did the jewel-case contain?"

At this question the Countess almost wrung her hands, and her beautiful eyes became suffused with unshed tears.

"Oh!" she answered. "It is terrible to think of! It contained five thousand pounds in bank-notes. I don't mind the loss of the money at all. But it also contained all my jewellery—all. And—and the family jewels."

"Not—not the famous Langthwaite pearls!" I almost shouted.

She bent her head, and I thought she was going to cry outright.

"Yes!" she whispered. "Yes!"

"Of course, you have communicated with Lord Langthwaite?" I said. "You would wire to him at once?"

She shook her head, miserably, despairingly.

"No!" she answered. "No, Mr. Campenhaye."

"And why have you not communicated with the Earl, Lady Langthwaite?" I asked.

She made an effort, and at last faced me resolutely.

"Because, Mr. Campenhaye, I was running away from him!" she answered.

It has always been one of my greatest ambitions to be able to preserve an unmoved countenance under any circumstances, and I flatter myself that I usually do so. But I must have betrayed the most intense surprise, not to say utter astonishment, on this occasion, for my beautiful client suddenly turned crimson, and drawing out a cobwebby handkerchief, burst into genuine and abundant tears. I rose from my chair.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Langthwaite," I said gently. "I will leave you for a little while."

I placed a bottle of smelling salts within her reach and went into the next room. And as I stood there, waiting until her ladyship got the better of her emotion, I rapidly memorised all that I knew of her and her husband, and applied my

recollections to the present situation.

William Guy Carter-Johnstone, sixth Earl of Langthwaite, was a pretty well-known man. Tall and clean-shaven, with the face of an ascetic and a pair of the most piercing black eyes I have ever seen, Lord Langthwaite was at the time of which I am writing about forty-eight years of age. It had often been said of him that he was never going to marry, but three years previously he had suddenly taken to wife the daughter of a north-country clergyman. Whether it was a mutual love affair Society was not permitted to know; as the bridegroom was forty-five and the bride scarcely twenty, Society thought not. However that may have been, there was no doubt that the Earl of Langthwaite was passionately fond of his young wife, whom he introduced to the world of fashion with great pride. And this was the lady who sat weeping in my room!

I went back after a decent interval and found Lady Langthwaite composing herself.

"I beg your pardon," she said, dabbing her eyes. "I am very sorry, Mr. Campenhaye."

"We must see what can be done," I said, resuming my seat.

"Now, Lady Langthwaite, let us be business-like. Tell me the truth—all the truth. You said you were running away from your husband. Why were you running away from him?"

"Because—because our tempers are not compatible," she answered with some hesitation.

"I see. And, usually, in these cases, one finds that there is some one with whose temper one's own is compatible," I suggested.

She hung her head, and twisted the damp handkerchief.

"I suppose that is so in your case, Lady Langthwaite?" I said.

She gave me a fluttering glance and bent her head.

"Yes," she murmured.

"And that, I suppose, is the gentleman whom you met at the Great Northern Hotel?" I said.

She nodded, but said nothing.

"Lady Langthwaite," I said, "you will have to tell me his name if I am to help you."

She glanced at me quickly, hesitated, and hung her head again, while her fingers tugged nervously at the handkerchief.

"Captain Molesworth," she said at last.

I betrayed no surprise there, at any rate. But I made a mental contrast between

the worth of Lord Langthwaite and the utter worthlessness of Captain Molesworth, whose reputation was known to me.

"Then, of course, it was Captain Molesworth who sent you to me?" I said.

She nodded an affirmative.

"And counselled you not to tell the police and the railway people?" I continued.

"He said it would not be wise until I had seen you," she answered.

I considered a good many things in a remarkably short space of time, having more on my mind than the mere finding of Mademoiselle Antoinette and the jewel-case.

"Does Captain Molesworth know what was in the jewel-case?" I asked.

She looked at me with some surprise.

"No-o," she answered. "I told him that it contained the bank-notes and my own personal jewellery, but I did not tell him about—about the pearls."

"But you were—or are—running away with Captain Molesworth," I pointed out. "Why bring the family pearls—heirlooms?"

She almost tore the handkerchief at that, and her face expressed something like physical pain.

"Don't torture me, please!" she exclaimed. "What am I to do? What is to be done? I dare not—dare not tell Lord Langthwaite—it would kill me!"

"Dare not tell him—what, Lady Langthwaite? That you have lost the pearls, or that you were running away with Captain Molesworth?" I asked, watching her keenly.

She made no answer to that, but regarded me as if I, and I alone, were the arbiter of her fate.

"I am wondering," I continued, "if we cannot work out a little plan which will save the situation. Can you not go to Lord Langthwaite, invent some little story of a sudden necessity for coming to town, and of bringing the pearls with you for safety? Then we might get the police to work in a search for your maid."

She pondered this proposition for a moment and then shook her head.

"Lord Langthwaite would not believe that Antoinette had stolen the jewel-case," she said. "We had implicit faith in Antoinette—she has been with me ever since—since I was married."

"But Antoinette and the jewel-case are missing," I said. "Now, tell me this—did your maid know that you were running away?"

"No! No!" she answered.

"Did she know the precise contents of the jewel-case?" I asked.

The Countess shook her head.

“No?” I continued. “She would merely think, then, that it contained just the ordinary amount of jewellery with which you travel usually—which would not be much?—that is, in comparison with what really was in the jewel-case?”

“Yes,” she answered.

“Lady Langthwaite,” I said suddenly, a new idea having occurred to me, “where did you get those bank-notes?”

“From the bank at Saxonstowe yesterday,” she answered. “The Saxonstowe and Normanchester bank, where I have an account.”

“Of course, you haven’t the numbers of the notes?” I suggested. “No, I thought not—fortunately, the bankers will have them.”

And I seized a telegram form and wrote out a message.

The message was in Lady Langthwaite’s name, and requested her bankers to wire her at once the numbers of the notes. I went out and sent Killingley off with it; then returned to ask her a few more questions.

“When, Lady Langthwaite, did you mention to Captain Molesworth that you had this money and your personal jewellery in the jewel-case?” I enquired. “Was it before or after you missed it?”

“Oh, as we were walking across to the hotel,” she replied. “I said to him that I hoped Antoinette and the jewel-case would be all right and mentioned what was in it.”

“Didn’t Captain Molesworth think it a dangerous thing to risk valuable property in that way?” I asked.

“No; he said Antoinette was not likely to let anybody rob her.”

“By the by,” I said, “did Antoinette see you with Captain Molesworth?”

“Oh, yes!” she answered. “He met us in the booking hall at King’s Cross.”

“This is rather a delicate question, Lady Langthwaite,” I said, “but it is easily answered. Was this maid of yours in your confidence?”

“No!” she replied promptly. “She knew nothing.”

“And suspected nothing?” I suggested.

“I do not see why she should,” replied Lady Langthwaite.

“During the time you were in the hotel at King’s Cross did Captain Molesworth ever leave you, Lady Langthwaite?” I enquired.

“He left me for a little time while he went to send a telegram,” she replied.

“How long?” I asked.

“About a quarter of an hour,” she said, staring at me. Then suddenly bursting out, she exclaimed, almost angrily. “Why do you ask these questions about Captain Molesworth? What has he got to do with it?”

"Those are questions which you must not ask me, Lady Langthwaite," I answered. "Let us forget that you have asked them. One more, and I have done. You, of course, lunched with Captain Molesworth in a private room at the hotel? Now, after you entered that room, did you leave him alone in it?"

She stared at me more wonderingly than ever.

"Yes, for a few minutes," she answered.

"That was before he went out?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, half peevishly.

I rose from my desk.

"Very good, Lady Langthwaite," I said. "That is all we can do at present. Your object is to recover your jewel-case and to avoid all knowledge of its loss coming to the ears of Lord Langthwaite?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" she exclaimed.

"And yet," I said, "if your original plans had been carried out, Lady Langthwaite, the Earl would have heard of his loss in—less pleasant fashion."

She hung her head at that and said nothing.

"I am to understand, I suppose, that the original plans will now be altered, or postponed——?" I asked, regarding her keenly.

"Oh!" she burst out. "I don't know what to do—I am so wretched, so miserable! Everything has gone wrong. Even if I were to go and tell Lord Langthwaite—I am frightened to death of doing so—he has so often been so very angry with me for allowing Antoinette to take charge of the jewel-case, and only last week I promised that I would never allow it out of my sight."

"Ah!" I said. "I see—I see! Well, now, Lady Langthwaite, be guided by me. Where are your trunks? In the left luggage office at King's Cross? Very good—now, go there, collect them, and drive to some hotel and remain there until you hear from me this evening—and, in the meantime, see no one, not even Captain Molesworth. What hotel will you go to?"

"I will go to Claridge's," she answered. "But—why may I not see Captain Molesworth? He will be anxious to know the result of my interview with you."

"I will inform him of that myself," I replied. "Leave all to me, Lady Langthwaite. Go to Claridge's, and remain in absolute quiet until I call this evening. I hope—and I believe—I shall be able to relieve your anxiety in some way. But you must obey my wishes."

She hesitated a little, but finally promised to do what I wished, and after she had drawn her thick veil about her face, I took her downstairs and put her in a cab for King's Cross. And that done, I went back to await the wire from Saxonstowe, and

to reckon up the precise value of the information I had received from my weak and foolish client.

Captain Molesworth! Well, that gentleman was known to me. I knew nothing of an absolutely criminal nature against him, but I did know that he was on his last legs from a financial point of view, and that the country was getting a bit too hot for him. A friend of mine, engaged in similar pursuits to my own, had told me only a few days before this adventure that Captain Molesworth was very much in Queer Street; and could it be possible that at such a juncture he was going to saddle himself with all the trouble which would necessarily arise from running away with a young peeress, the wife of a famous nobleman? My own opinion was that he was after what ready money the Countess of Langthwaite could get together.

Naturally, I had formed a conclusion while Lady Langthwaite was with me. That conclusion may seem a very obvious one, but obvious conclusions are usually safe ones. I believed that Molesworth had gone off with Antoinette and the jewel-case. It seemed to me that it came to this: he had known that his cousin could carry away with her a considerable sum in cash and in jewels; he had found out that all this wealth was in the jewel-case left with the maid. Leaving Lady Langthwaite in the hotel he had gone back to the station and arranged matters with Mademoiselle Antoinette, who had forthwith taken her departure. Packing his cousin off to me, where he knew she would be engaged for some little time, he had repaired to the Frenchwoman, and they were now, no doubt, on the first stages of a flight.

Such was my theory, and I think most people would have formed it on facts. Obviously, with such a theory, I must seek Captain Molesworth.

But first I wanted the telegram from Saxonstowe.

It came soon after four o'clock. The five thousand pounds had been paid to Lady Langthwaite in fifty notes of one hundred pounds each, the numbers of which were given in the telegram.

I had my own idea as to the precise value of this telegram. I put it into my pocket-book and went off to the Bank of England.

That solemn establishment was already closed, of course; but I had means of entrance to its high places. And within a very short time I discovered that Lady Langthwaite's notes had been exchanged for gold at the West End branch of the Bank of England at ten minutes past three—just about five minutes after the time at which the Countess began to unfold her woes to me in Jermyn Street.

I suddenly saw what I conceived to be the true light on this matter. Molesworth, when he left Lady Langthwaite at the hotel on the pretext of sending a telegram, must have gone straight to Antoinette, procured the jewel-case on some pretext,

abstracted the notes, and returned the jewel-case to the maid. This upset my first theory, but it was obviously more correct, this second one. But if it was—where was Antoinette?

To convince myself that it really was Molesworth who had dealt with the notes I set off to the West End branch, where they had been exchanged for gold, taking with me from Threadneedle Street certain credentials which immediately procured me audience of the agent. His staff was still on hand, and I had no difficulty in getting the information I wanted. The notes had been brought to the bank by a commissionaire, who, assisted by the driver of a taxi-cab, had carried away the gold in a strong leather bag. The clerk who had dealt with the matter gave me a description of the commissionaire, and in less than half an hour I ran him to earth outside a famous restaurant in the St. James's district. And then I found that it was certainly Captain Molesworth who had dealt with the five thousand pounds' worth of notes. He was well known to the commissionaire, whose return from the bank he had awaited at the St. James's Street end of Jermyn Street. A cool customer, I thought, to carry on his operations under the unconscious nose and eyes of his beautiful and much-duped cousin!

A man cannot conveniently carry five thousand pounds in gold about him, much as most of us would cheerfully do so for the mere possession of it. What had Molesworth done with this gold? Why had he been in such haste to change the notes? I learnt from the commissionaire (who was communicative enough when I disclosed my identity) that he had gone off in the very taxi-cab in which the gold had been brought from the bank. And the commissionaire added that he knew the driver of that cab very well by sight, and that he was bound to come back to a stand in St. James's Street, sooner or later.

As luck would have it, the driver came back while the commissionaire and I were talking. Questioned, he made no objection to giving me the information I wanted. He had driven Molesworth to a certain well-known *bureau de change*, had helped him to carry the gold inside, had been paid off, and had left him. How long since was that? Oh, well he had had two fares since. It would be about half-past three, he said, when he set Molesworth down. I glanced at my watch; it was now well past five o'clock.

I told this man to drive me to the *bureau de change*. There I met distinct opposition, a direct rebuff. They showed me, not quite metaphorically either, the door.

I walked out into a by-street, wondering what to do. I felt confident as to what Molesworth had done. He had changed that gold into Continental paper money—

most likely French bank-notes. He would be off to the Continent. But, when, where, and how? He was scarcely likely to go openly from Charing Cross, or Victoria, or any of the London stations, for he would know that sooner or later suspicion must fall upon him. For it seemed to me that the position was now clear—the thief was Molesworth, and the loss of the five thousand pounds was a mere fleabite in comparison with the loss of the famous Langthwaite pearls.

But where was that Frenchwoman—Antoinette? Was she in it, or was she out of it? Well, Molesworth was certainly in it, and I must go for him. I jumped into the car, and bade the driver take me to Claridge's Hotel.

I purposely assumed a very solemn and serious expression of countenance as I was shown into Lady Langthwaite's sitting-room.

As the door was closed behind me she came forward with eager eyes.

"You have heard something!" she exclaimed. "You have discovered something!"

"Yes, Lady Langthwaite," I replied at last. "Yes, I have heard something—and discovered something. Please sit down and hear what I have to say. My news is very serious."

"You have heard of Antoinette?" she said, sinking into an easy-chair and regarding me with a tense expression.

"No," I said, "I have heard nothing of Antoinette, Lady Langthwaite. But I have discovered who abstracted the bank-notes from your jewel-case this afternoon—have discovered it with ridiculous ease."

"Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed. "Who was it?"

I watched her keenly for a few seconds, and then decided to tell her the truth straight out.

"Captain Molesworth," I answered abruptly.

If I had had any doubts as to the Countess of Langthwaite's possession of spirit, I had none now. She turned pale, flushed crimson, turned pale again, and, leaping to her feet, clenched her fists and looked at me as if it would have given her the greatest pleasure to drive a dagger through my heart.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "How dare you! This is unbearable; this is _____"

"Lady Langthwaite," I said quietly, "the bank-notes which you obtained at the Saxonstowe and Normanchester Bank yesterday, and brought in your jewel-case to King's Cross this morning, were exchanged for gold by Captain Molesworth at the West End Branch of the Bank of England at three o'clock this afternoon. That, unpleasant as it may sound, or be, is the truth."

She went paler and paler as I spoke, and once I thought she would have fallen in

a faint; instead, she sat down, clasped her hands tightly together between her knees, and rocked herself to and fro.

“He—he may not have meant ——” she began.

“Don’t try to excuse him, Lady Langthwaite,” I said. “The whole affair was well planned. Now answer me one or two questions. This—this elopement was doubtless arranged while your cousin was staying at Langthwaite?”

She nodded sullenly.

“Did he ask you what money you could bring away with you?” I went on.

“Yes, because he had so little,” she answered. “We meant to realise on my jewels.”

“And—on the pearls?” I suggested.

“No! No!” she exclaimed. “Indeed, no! I was mad to bring them. I meant to send them back.”

“I’m afraid that is too late,” I said, rising. “Now, Lady Langthwaite, let me give you the soundest advice you could possibly hear from anyone. Go and tell your husband everything. Then we can put the police on this man’s track.”

She stood tapping her foot on the hearthrug, and staring at me out of her great, frightened eyes. And I saw the exact moment wherein to play my great card had come.

“My own impression,” I said carelessly, “is that Mademoiselle Antoinette is with—your cousin. Tell Lord Langthwaite the whole truth, and let us set the police to work. They cannot have got far.”

I saw a dull flame creep into her eyes, and her hands clenched themselves.

“Please go away,” she said, in a half-choked voice. “Come back in—in two hours. I will decide on what to do by then.”

She closed the door on me herself, and I heard her lock it.

It seemed to me that that decision could only take one form. With those pearls missing, the earl must be informed of what had happened—his wife must tell him.

I returned to my office as soon as I had dined. Killingley was the most obliging of clerks; he never went away as long as there was a chance of my wanting him. Now, as I entered, he handed me a sealed letter which was addressed in an unfamiliar writing.

“This was brought by special messenger an hour ago, sir,” he said.

I carried the letter into my private room and cut it open. I drew from it a sheet of notepaper destitute of any address—the communication upon it was hastily written in pencil. I glanced first at the end, and saw that the letter was merely initialed. The initials were “G. M.”

“Captain Guy Molesworth,” I said to myself, spreading the sheet out. “Now for some more light—or darkness.”

“DEAR SIR,” ran this precious epistle, “I sent my cousin to you this afternoon in relation to the loss of her jewel-case at King’s Cross Station somewhat earlier. As I don’t wish her to remain in suspense longer than is necessary, I write to you as to what I know of this affair. You will kindly communicate to Lady Langthwaite what I have to say.

“I may as well be brutally frank, and confess that when my cousin told me of the existence of the £5,000 in notes in her jewel-case, I made a very hasty alteration of my plans. It had been my original plan to obtain the £5,000 from her this evening; her remark that the sum was in the jewel-case, left in the maid’s custody, showed me a better way, and also a way which would not involve Lady Langthwaite any further with me.

“On entering the private room at the hotel to lunch, my cousin left me for a few moments. She also left, lying under her handbag, a bunch of keys, one of which I knew was that of the jewel-case. I took the keys, made an excuse to her when she returned, and went back to the station. The maid, who knew me very well, made no objection when I said that her mistress wanted the jewel-case. She handed it over at once, and I carried it to the hotel, possessed myself of the notes, and took the case back to Antoinette. I saw Antoinette then pass into the refreshment-room carrying the case with her.

“When Lady Langthwaite and I went to the station after lunch, we found that Antoinette had disappeared. I immediately saw that it would be very awkward for me to join in any search for her. My own object was attained, and after sending my cousin to you, I set about my own business.

“That business is now finished, and I am off. I may as well tell you that it would be as impossible to track me, or to find me, as to resuscitate Queen Anne. My plans are perfected. I shall never be seen again; I am starting a new life. But I want you to let my cousin know that wherever they may have got to, I did not appropriate her jewels. All I wanted was the £5,000. With that I shall make myself a man again.

“That’s all—except that I hope Antoinette and the jewel-case will come to hand. I understand that it only contained my cousin’s personal adornments—what a catastrophe if the celebrated Langthwaite pearls had

been in it!—G. M.”

I folded this communication into its cover and, having looked at my watch, departed for Claridge's. The two hours stipulated for by Lady Langthwaite had gone by, and I was prepared to give her my final advice.

The letter from Molesworth I regarded as a piece of bluff—the most impudent bluff I had ever known of. Did he really think that I was to be taken in by it?

I was admitted at once to Lady Langthwaite. It seemed to me that she had been through a scene with herself; she was very pale, and her eyes were unnaturally bright. I lost no time in handing her Molesworth's letter. She read it through and handed it back to me without comment.

“Well?” she said.

“Lady Langthwaite,” I replied, “there is only one thing to do. Lord Langthwaite must be informed of all that has happened. You must inform him yourself in your own way. I have no doubt whatever that Molesworth and your maid were in collusion, and that they met after he left you. The police must be employed, and in order that they may be called in, you must tell your husband of what has happened.”

“Then I shall have to tell him everything,” she said, “and that will mean—oh, I don't know what it will mean! I have been a fool—and now——”

“Pardon me,” I said; “but I don't know that everything need be told. It was natural for you to travel to London; it was natural that your cousin should meet you. If he and the maid were in collusion, what better proof of your innocence can you have? And again——”

Before I could proceed further, there came sounds outside the door; a deep voice said, “This room?” the door opened, and a tall man walked in.

The Earl of Langthwaite!

It was said that the Earl had a reputation for cynical humour which was really not ill-natured. He smiled now as he nodded to his astonished wife and looked rather slyly at me.

“Well, my dear,” he said pleasantly, “as I was passing I thought I would call in and ask if you intend staying here or coming round to Berkeley Square. I see, however, that you are engaged with Mr. Campenhaye—I know you by sight, Mr. Campenhaye, as I do by reputation—and I have no doubt it is an important business.”

I bowed to Lord Langthwaite and turned to his wife. She had flushed a little, but she regarded her husband steadily. And with a sudden resolve she came straight to the point.

"William," she said, "I have lost my jewel-case."

The Earl gave a start of surprise.

"Ah!" he exclaimed.

"It is all my fault," she said. "I—I broke my promise to you. I let Antoinette carry it."

"Ah!" again exclaimed the Earl.

"Antoinette has disappeared with it," continued Lady Langthwaite. "And—William—the family pearls were in it."

The Earl had turned his back upon me and his wife, and appeared to be studying a picture on the wall. It seemed to be a long, long time before he faced Lady Langthwaite again.

"You have no doubt suffered greatly because of this?" he said.

She flashed a quick look at him.

"I have been—miserably contrite!" she answered.

I could swear that the Earl's eye twinkled.

"When children say that they are really sorry and have suffered," he said, "the only thing to do is—to forgive them. So we will go home and see if we cannot find Antoinette and the missing jewel-case."

The Countess looked at him quickly. So did I. The Earl chuckled drily.

"The fact is," he said, giving me an arch look, "Antoinette and the jewel-case are at Berkeley Square—safe. You see, I happened to go to King's Cross this afternoon to meet a friend, and I encountered Mademoiselle Antoinette strolling out of the refreshment-room with the jewel-case, and as I remembered your promise, my dear, and my warning, I determined to give you a sharp lesson. So I bundled Antoinette into my motor-car without ceremony. She and the jewel-case are quite in safe keeping. Now put your things on and we will go to them."

The Countess left the room in a great hurry, and the Earl turned to me.

"You can keep secrets, Mr. Campenhaye," he said, "so I'll tell you an interesting one. My wife thinks that the real Langthwaite pearls are in that case. They are not. What is in there is a magnificent imitation set, which only real experts could tell not to be the real ones. I keep that set down at Langthwaite. But the real ones—ah, they are safely locked up in the vaults of the Bank of England."

CHAPTER II.

THE YORKSHIRE MANUFACTURER.

As the little local train wound slowly along the narrow and tortuous valley to which I had hastily travelled down from London in response to an urgent summons received that day at noon, I thought, looking around and above me from the carriage window, that I had rarely found myself amidst wilder surroundings. I was aware that I was penetrating into the heart of the Penine Range at its highest and bleakest point, but I had never until then realised that we possess scenery in England which, under certain circumstances, can justly be termed savage. Although it was yet early autumn, the evening was cold and gloomy; overhead the sky was dull and grey; the treeless, verdureless sides of the hills loomed black and forbidding. Blackness and greyness, indeed, were the note of the scenery through which I was passing; in the valley itself was nothing but grey houses and the high, grey walls of factories and mills; here and there rushed down from the heights above foaming cataracts of water that did their work in some mill dam and emerged, having done it, turgid and discoloured, into the black river whose curves the railway follows. And as we followed it further the valley narrowed until it seemed that we must be presently swallowed up in some cavernous opening of the rocky and mountainous mass which loomed in front.

The train suddenly slackened its slow speed; we rounded a sharp curve and ran into a small station on the smoke-blackened railings of which appeared a board bearing the name Wolverdale. Beyond the railings and across the black river, I saw grey roofs and grey walls and amongst them tall chimneys which poured out thick clouds of dun-coloured smoke as if in tribute to the hills which looked down on them. This, then, was the place to which I had been peremptorily summoned; to me it suggested not crime, perhaps, but certainly the idea of an atmosphere in which the more sordid things of life might well happen.

I had scarcely opened the carriage door before a tall man, slender, slightly-bearded, very well attired in black, appeared before me and extended a hand. Behind him followed a man who seemed from his dress to be a groom, and at a sign from the other took charge of my baggage.

“Mr. Harthwaite?” I said, as I took the offered hand.

“Mr. John Harthwaite,” he responded, as if there were some reason for giving his Christian name. “I am much obliged to you for responding so promptly to my telegram. My motor-car is outside, let my man see to your things. And,” he added,

giving me a side-glance as we walked along the narrow, wood-paved platform, "as to why I brought you down I will tell you in a few minutes—when we are alone."

We made our way through the greyness of the little town in silence; the people were going home from the mills and factories, and the clatter of their wooden clogs made weird noises on the pavements. Then the road turned sharply, running along the side of the great overhanging hills until houses and mills were left behind and before us there was nothing but the hills to be seen. Then came another curve, and high above us, on the hillside, I saw a house, perched on a series of terraces. My companion said a word to his chauffeur; the car stopped.

"If you have no objection, Mr. Campenhaye," said Mr. Harthwaite, "we will walk up to my house through the gardens—the car will have to go some distance round—we have little level ground in this corner of the world."

I made no reply to this but left the car and followed my guide through a wicket-gate which led to a winding path. He ascended this until we came to the first of the terraces; then he paused and turned as if to contemplate the view in the valley beneath us. And he stretched out his hand and pointed to two objects—one, the great mass of a manufactory immediately below; the other, a house on the opposite hillside which, so far as I could see in the dusk, appeared to be the counterpart of the one we were approaching.

"You see that mill, Mr. Campenhaye," he said suddenly. "That is the works of John and James Harthwaite, cotton spinners. And you see the house over there—that is where James Harthwaite lived. I say lived—at present he is lying dead within it. Dead—murdered!"

There was some curious feeling in his voice, and my own sounded strangely commonplace when I spoke.

"I suppose that is why you have brought me here, Mr. Harthwaite?" I said.

"That is why I have brought you here, Mr. Campenhaye," he replied. "I have heard of your abilities, and I have no great faith in the police, however well they are trained. And I want to know who killed my brother."

"Naturally, you do," I said. "I hope I shall be of some use."

He was still staring fixedly at the house on the opposite side of the valley, and for a moment he remained silent, but suddenly he spoke again.

"Will you hear of it now?" he said. "There is still time before dinner, and perhaps I can tell you about it more clearly outside four walls. And it is not a long story."

"Now, by all means," I answered, for I saw that he was wanting to unbosom himself. "I am eager to hear everything and at once."

"Sit down there," he said, pointing to a rustic seat, "and smoke a cigar. I will

smoke one myself—it will be the first since yesterday. Now,” he continued, when he had produced a cigar-case and we had begun to smoke. “I will try to be concise and plain. You must know, Mr. Campenhaye, that my brother James and myself were twins. We were thirty-seven a few days ago, and we never married, and had no intention of marrying. These facts may make it strange to you that we did not live together. But we had different tastes, and when we succeeded to the business on my father’s death, each built himself a house—this is mine; yonder is his. We each had our own hobbies; but we were good and affectionate brothers.”

He paused a moment as if reflecting on his next words.

“One of James’s great hobbies,” he continued, “was exploring these hills and moors which you see about us. He was never tired of them—I suppose he knew them better than any man living. He knew all their ins and outs, their wildest and loneliest places. He knew all the Druidical remains on them, of which there are many; all the burrows, the rocking-stones—everything. He spent as much time as he could spare on these heights—and up there he was killed. Somehow, I always had an idea that he might meet his death in that way. But your main object is to know how he met it. Very well. Four days ago, James set out on a week’s exploration of his favourite country. He was going to wander about after his usual fashion, between here and the Peak district; he knew lonely places, inns, farmsteads, where he could spend his nights. He left his house yonder, as was his custom, before daybreak—to be precise, at half-past two in the morning. I never heard of him again until yesterday—late in the afternoon.”

Again he paused, seeming to reflect.

“And to make things clear,” he resumed, “this is how I heard. About four o’clock yesterday afternoon, a young man, a respectable person, who is a bank clerk in Hallaton, the big town over yonder, walked into our police-office here and said that in crossing High Gap, at the head of the range, across which he had come in returning from a holiday walking tour, he had found the dead body of a gentleman lying in a very lonely place, into which he himself had turned to light his pipe, there being, as usual, a strong wind blowing there. He conducted the police back to the spot. They immediately recognised the body as that of my brother. He had quite evidently been killed by a terrible blow on the back of the head—killed, the doctor says, instantaneously. There were no signs of any struggle. There were no footprints. His watch and chain—valuable—were gone; his purse—in which he always carried some twenty or thirty pounds in gold—was also gone. And, naturally, the police believe that he was murdered for the sake of robbery by some of the rough folk who now and then make their way across this range of hills in summer. But—I don’t.”

He uttered the last two words with such conviction that I started. To me the police theory seemed the correct one; it was one that I myself should have adopted on the *prima facie* evidence.

“You do not?” I said.

“I do not!” he responded, with renewed emphasis. “My brother has wandered about these moors and hills for twenty years and had never known molestation. What is more, he was a strong man, and he always carried a stout stick with him, and if any tramp had assailed him, that tramp would have had the worst of it. No, Mr. Campenhaye, my brother was not murdered for what he had in his pockets—there was some design in his murder. Of that I’m certain.”

“Do you suspect anyone?” I asked.

He rose, and motioned me towards the house above us, in which lights were now twinkling.

“I suspect no one,” he answered. “I wish I did—I should have more peace of mind. But come, you know the main facts now, and it is time you dined.”

Mr. Harthwaite led the way into a house which it was easy to see had been built, equipped and furnished in accordance with the very latest ideas of modern architects and apostles of health and comfort. It was one of those places in which it is impossible for dust to accumulate, wherein labour is saved by ingenious device, and to which air and sunlight have every possible access. Such houses, it is true, lack something of the cosiness and comfort of the old-fashioned ones, yet this was by no means cold with the coldness which so often accompanies the latest developments of scientific housing. There were books and pictures and other matters which made me conclude that whatever James Harthwaite’s hobbies other than pedestrianism had been, his brother was certainly of a literary and artistic nature.

Nothing was said during dinner of the terrible catastrophe which had brought me to Wolverdale; my host talked easily and pleasantly of many matters of interest, and though no other person was present, and I should have excused anything that came from him because of his sorrow, he behaved as if he had no trouble in the world, and as though he was doing his utmost to entertain an expected guest. And when we had gone into his study, where coffee was awaiting us, he turned to me with a meaning look.

“I am expecting the local superintendent of police any minute,” he said, “and I have a pretty good idea that he will bring a certain detective with him whom he spoke of bringing over from Arthford—a man in whom he has great faith. Now, I do not want either of these men to know who you are, Mr. Campenhaye, so I propose to merely mention you as an old friend who is staying with me. Therefore, suppose

you sit still while they are here, listen, and say nothing?"

"Admirable!" I replied. "And exactly what I should wish. Let them talk as much as they please. I should prefer to make my investigations in my own way."

The two police officers, on their arrival, were quite prepared to talk. They agreed in the original theory—that Mr. James Harthwaite had been murdered by some person or persons, who had slept out all night on the moors and had taken him unawares; but so far such persons seemed to have vanished into thin air. The police and the public had been notified of the murder throughout a wide area, but nobody had so far reported anything of any suspicious character; nobody had been spoken of as having displayed money not likely to be theirs; no attempt to pawn or sell the dead man's watch had been heard of.

"But then, you know, Mr. Harthwaite," said the local superintendent, "we've got to remember that, according to the doctor's reckoning, a good four days elapsed between the actual murder and the finding of the body. That may seem strange—but it isn't strange—those rocks, where your poor brother was found, sir, are just off, and only just off, the beaten track, but nobody would turn aside to them. If the young man that found him hadn't wanted to light his pipe just there, and had seen a chance of shelter from the wind, the body might have been there now, Mr. Harthwaite, undiscovered. And as you know, sir, a man could make off across the moors in a dozen different directions, and reach any one of from twelve to twenty good-sized towns, and—vanish."

The detective cleared his throat.

"If there was only the least bit of a clue now!" he said. "The merest bit of a clue. But I've examined the place and the surroundings thoroughly, and I couldn't find as much as a footprint. You know what a dry season it's been, gentlemen, and the grass up there is that firm, wiry mountain stuff—a heavy man makes no more impression on it than a child would. And as the superintendent there says, there was four days' start. Four days!"

They had nothing to tell—nothing, at least, beyond the fact that news of the murder had been spread far and wide, and that the world and his wife had been requested to jog their memories in the endeavour to think of any suspicious character who had been seen coming away from the moor near High Gap on the early morning of a certain day. And from what I heard, there would be nothing more to tell, nothing—just then, at any rate.

My host turned to me when we were alone. His face—a handsome, slightly cynical face—expressed something like boredom.

"You see!" he said, and spread out his hands.

"Well," I replied, "let us give them their due. I don't see that they could say or do any more. There is no clue, and there was a start of four days in the criminal's favour. On the face of things they have done all they could."

He looked at me keenly.

"But—you?" he said meaningly.

"I may go on different lines," I answered. "And before I go on any at all, I want to ask you a few questions. First, had your brother any enemies?"

"I would take my oath that he had not one," he replied with emphasis. "He was universally liked and respected."

"He had no business quarrels—no business enemies?" I asked.

Mr. Harthwaite shrugged his shoulders.

"His business was mine," he said. "I can assure you that we have neither quarrels nor enemies in connection with our business."

"My next question is of a delicate nature," I said. "Had he any secret affairs—whether of love or of anything else?"

"I do not believe that he had any secrets from me of any nature whatever," he answered. "As for love affairs, I am positive that he had none. He devoted himself entirely to three things—the business, his love of wandering about, and a passion for inventions; his spare time at home was given up to invention. Only the night before he left home I was talking to him at the works about an invention which he believed would revolutionise the spinning industry. He was full of it, enthusiastic about it."

"He had no secrets, no enemies, no mysteries?" I said, looking at him keenly in the face.

"None!" he answered.

"Then why," I asked, "why do you believe that there is some secret, some mystery, about his murder, instead of accepting the commonplace, but eminently reasonable, theory of the police that he was waylaid, murdered and robbed, in a lonely place, by some ruffian who has had ample opportunity to make good his escape? I say, why, Mr. Harthwaite?"

He made no immediate answer; instead, he pulled himself up in his chair, and bit his lip. Eventually, he shook his head.

"I cannot explain," he replied. "It is—a feeling. I am sure of what I feel. Perhaps it is—shall we say, instinct? At any rate, I am sure of it, I tell you. He was murdered of design. Design!—not for what he had on him. I—you may think me a fool, Mr. Campenhayne, but how do I know that he isn't impressing this conviction upon me—from—from beyond? Remember—we were twin brothers."

I bowed my head.

"I don't think you a fool, Mr. Harthwaite," I answered gravely. "Far from it. I only wanted you to explain. Now do not let us say any more about the matter until I have something to say to you. All I have to say at present is that I wish to see the scene of your brother's death to-morrow morning as early as possible. And I wish to see it alone—I don't even want a guide if you will tell me the way."

He looked at me for a moment, then rose, and silently motioned me to follow him. He led me outside the house to the end of the uppermost of the terraces. It was a brilliantly moon-lighted night; the road which led up the valley wound away to the gloom of the hills like a silver stream. "Follow the road," he said. "About a mile from here you will come to a gate in a stone wall, close to a ruinous sheep-fold. Pass through the gate and follow a path which is well defined through the heather and the bracken. At the extreme ridge of the hill you will see a mass of grey rock—the path will lead you to within a few yards of it. It was on the side of the rock furthest from you that he was found."

He went back to the house. In the hall I held out my hand.

"Good-night," I said. "Tell your people to take no notice if they hear me leave the house in the early hours of the morning. I mean to be up there at sunrise."

As a matter of fact I was at the heights of High Gap well before the sun rose—to be precise, I was at the mass of rock where James Harthwaite's body was found at five o'clock. In the grey light of the September morning the place was awful in its wildness and loneliness. On every side the heather-clad moors stretched away in sheer desolation—shrouded here and there in clinging mist, here and there rising sharply to some bluff or eminence. As the light grew stronger I began to make out the contour of far-off mountains to the north and south, and to see far down in the valleys where the great manufacturing towns lay beneath their canopies of smoke. But what most impressed me was the silence and solitude of the place. I could picture to myself the dead man, lover of nature that he evidently was from all that I heard of him, coming up here in the early morning, full of the strange and weird charm of the lonely heights, standing for awhile to gaze round him across the vast stretch of unawakened life, and being struck down to death, unawares. In that loneliness, well known to him, he would suspect nothing. And of one thing I quickly convinced myself—the police were right when they said the miscreant could escape in a dozen different directions without fear of detection.

The sun rose with a sudden burst over a long range of hills which rose on the further edge of the moors, and I began to look around me. But I quickly recognised that even systematic examination of the place would yield little of value. The entire surface of the ridge was covered with strong, sturdy heather, and with bracken of an

unusual height. The path by which I had come, by which, too, James Harthwaite had come to his death, was a mere sheep-track through the vegetation; it passed the mass of high rocks at about ten yards distance. I saw no sign that the body had been dragged from the path to the rocks, and I at once came to the conclusion that the dead man had been in the habit of resting at these rocks after the stiff climb from the valley and that he was struck down as he rested. And that argued a further conclusion—that the murderer was some one familiar with his habits.

I was turning away with a casual look round when I suddenly espied at a little distance some object which was shining brightly in the glancing sunlight—not one of the myriad beads of dew on the heather hills and the leaves of the bracken, but something that shone like gold. I had no other thought in my mind as I walked towards it than that it was a scrap of quartz, a fragment of mica lying in the dark soil beneath the fronds of the bracken. But what I found was a small case of leather, oval in shape, the sort of thing in which jewellers place rings between pads of satin; what I had seen shining in the sun's rays was certain gilt lettering on the lid—“*Armstead, Optician, Hallaton.*”

I pressed open the snap lid of the tiny case. Within, packed in a layer of wool padding, lay an artificial eye. It stared at me with an expression that was almost human.

I was as sure as I was that the sun had risen that in the object which I held in the palm of my hand, I had a clue to the true facts of the murder of James Harthwaite. I blessed the sense of advertisement which had made the oculist put his name and address on the little leather case. And then, putting the case in my pocket, I glanced across the moors and the valley to where in the distance I could see the smoke rising from Hallaton's great chimneys, and, without more ado, I hastened down the hillside to Wolverdale.

John Harthwaite was pacing up and down the terrace outside his house when I reached it. He came to me with an air of anxious expectancy.

“Well?” he said. “You have been up there?”

“I have been up there,” I answered. “But don't ask me any questions about it at present. What I want just now are two things—first, breakfast; second, the loan of your motor-car and its driver for an hour or two. After that, we can talk.”

He turned aside—a little disappointedly, I thought—and led the way to the house. “Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes,” he said. “What time would you like this car?”

“How long,” I said, “will it take to run into Hallaton?”

“Three-quarters of an hour,” he replied, looking very much as if he wished to

know why I wished to go to Hallaton.

"Then, half an hour after breakfast is over," I said. "And, by the by, if we have a few minutes to spare before breakfast there is something I want you to do for me. It is to write a letter—which I will dictate."

He led me into his study and sat down at his desk in silence, drawing paper and pen towards him.

"You are, of course, well known in Hallaton, Mr. Harthwaite?" I said. "Everybody, I suppose, knows you?"

"I suppose so," he answered laconically. "They ought to."

"Begin then," I said. "Private and confidential. DEAR SIR,—The bearer of this letter is Mr. Paul Campenhaye, the famous specialist in criminology, who, at my request, is investigating the circumstances of my late brother's death. Be good enough to give him any information he asks of you and to treat the matter as one of strict secrecy. That is all, except for your signature."

"But to whom is this to be delivered?" he asked.

"That, for the present, I won't tell you," I replied. "It is to form my credentials. No one in Hallaton knows me, you know."

He folded the letter into an envelope and handed it to me in silence. We went to breakfast; neither of us talked much as we ate and drank; when the meal was over, I made ready for my ride. Mr. Harthwaite was in the hall when I came down, lounging restlessly about. I motioned him into the study.

"There was a question I thought of this morning," I said. "I ought to have asked it last night. Who was the last person who saw your brother alive? As he rose so early that morning, it would be some servant, I suppose?"

"No," he answered, "he never troubled his servants with his early rising. He carried a Thermos flask, made ready the night before, and some food in his knapsack, and he used to get breakfast at one of the moorland farmhouses. The last person who saw him alive was our chief mechanic, Ollershaw, who went up that night to my brother's house to discuss some drawings of machinery with him, and was with him until midnight."

"I should like to have some conversation with Mr. Ollershaw when I return," I said. "By the by, what was there actually left on your brother's body—I mean personal effects—when he was found?"

"Nothing," he said. "His watch and chain, purse, ring, and pocket-book were all gone. The knapsack was still strapped to his shoulder."

I nodded, and went out to the motor-car which had just run up to the hall door. Mr. Harthwaite followed me out.

"Where shall he drive you?" he asked.

"To the best hotel in Hallaton," I answered.

He gave the driver an order. A moment later we were speeding around the spiral curves which led down to the road in the valley. And then I put the Harthwaite matter out of my mind and gave myself up to contemplating the strange scenes through which we passed until we ran into the grime and greyness of the great manufacturing town and pulled up in the courtyard of an old-fashioned hotel.

"I want you to wait here until I return," I said to the driver. "I may be half an hour. I may be an hour."

Then I went out into the unfamiliar streets, making for a principal thoroughfare which the car had crossed a few minutes previously. I had a sure prescience that the firm I wanted would be found somewhere about the heart of the town, and without troubling to ask anyone for help, I speedily discovered the place—evidently, from its exterior, the shop of a first-rate optician.

An elderly, grave-faced man was behind the counter when I entered, and gave me a courteous bow and an enquiring look.

"Mr. Armstead?" I said.

"The same, sir," he answered, again bowing. "What can I do for you, sir?"

I drew out my own card, and the letter which John Harthwaite had written, and handed them to him in silence. I saw his face change and his eyebrows go up as he read the letter, and he came round the counter and waved me to the half-open door at the back of the shop, at the same time saying a word to an assistant who stood near. The next moment we were closeted together in a small room.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Campenhaye?" he asked, with a little tremor as of anxiety in his voice. "It's not—not, I hope, about poor Mr. James?"

"That, Mr. Armstead, is precisely what it is," I answered. "Now, remember, we speak together in the strictest secrecy?"

"Oh, yes, yes, sir—of course!" he exclaimed. "I understand. But—what can I tell you, Mr. Campenhaye?"

I drew out the little leather-covered case, and held it out to him, open.

"This," I said. "For whom did you make, or to whom did you supply, this artificial eye?"

I thought for an instant that he was going to fall, for he swayed visibly, and his face became very pale. But he steadied himself and took the case from me, his hand trembling visibly.

"My God!" he muttered. "It—it can't be possible! You don't suspect, sir——"

"Never mind what or whom I suspect, Mr. Armstead," I said. "Answer my

question.”

He put the case down on the table and stared at it in wonder. I knew that he already suspected somebody.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “I’ll answer your question. I supplied this artificial eye—this, and a duplicate one for use in case this one was lost, or *vice versa*, as the case might be, you know—to Mr. Ollershaw, who has some important post at Harthwaites’. He lost an eye some years ago, and I had two made for him—one to wear, the other in case, as I have just said. He—oh, my God!—you surely don’t suspect——”

I put the case and its contents back in my pocket and held up my hand.

“Remember what we said about secrecy, Mr. Armstead,” I said. “And—pull yourself together. Now, just tell me what you know of this Ollershaw—what sort of man is he?”

The optician made a strong effort to be calm.

“I know little, sir, except that I supplied him with this, and with his spectacles—he wears tinted glasses—and that he sometimes comes in to buy little matters,” he said. “He’s a quiet, queer sort of fellow—morose, I should say, and with little to say for himself—an inventive genius, Mr. Campenhaye—he’s once or twice done things for me.”

“Ah! an inventor?” I said. “Very well. Now, good morning, Mr. Armstead, and thank you. You will see me again—and in the meantime—silence!”

I hurried back to the hotel, hurried into the car, bade the driver go back as quickly as he could. But by the time we reached John Harthwaite’s house I had assumed as cool and as nonchalant an air as I was capable of at that moment.

“There!” I exclaimed, as Mr. Harthwaite came out to the terrace. “We were not so long, you see, after all. By the by, wouldn’t it be well, now that the car is here, if I went to see the man you spoke of—Ollershaw?”

“I was just going down to the mill myself,” he said. “Get in again, and we’ll ride down. We shall find him there.”

But when we came to the office at the big mill in the valley, Ollershaw was not there—he had gone up to the cottage at which he lodged to fetch something, somebody said.

“We’ll ride up,” said Mr. Harthwaite. “It’s not far out of the village, and if you want to talk to him, you’ll be quieter there. I don’t see that he can tell you anything, though, that I couldn’t. He told me all he knew yesterday.”

I made no answer to that, and we rode on in silence until the car was clear of the village. Then, on the hillside, near the place where the footpath turned up the hillside

towards High Gap I saw a desolate cottage. As we neared it, a man came out into the road before us. He made as if to cross it to another footpath which led to the mill.

“There’s Ollershaw!” exclaimed my companion. “Hi! Ollershaw!”

The man turned, stared, and then came slowly towards us. He was a fellow of about thirty, dressed in a much-worn, much-stained, tweed suit, which he seemed to have thrown upon himself. His chin and mouth were hidden by a curly, unkempt, black beard; his eyes were concealed by smoked spectacles. Above them was a high, white forehead which bulged far too much; above it dense, black hair protruded from beneath an old cricket cap, worn far back on the back of his head. Something in the set of his shoulders, the turn of the lips, suggested a sullen defiance, an indefinable dislike of—what?

“A queer-looking chap, but wonderfully clever,” whispered Mr. Harthwaite. “Ollershaw, I want to speak to you. This gentleman is investigating the circumstances of my brother’s death, and as you were the last to see him alive, he wants to ask you a question or two.”

I got out of the car; the figure before us betrayed in every line a sullen dislike and indifference.

“Just step aside with me a moment, Mr. Ollershaw,” I said, leading him to the side of the road. “I only want to ask you a question or two. You were the last person to see Mr. James Harthwaite alive, weren’t you?”

“So it seems,” he answered gruffly. “We haven’t heard of anybody who saw him after I did.”

“Just so,” I said. “And when did you last see him alive? Was it,” I continued, getting very close to him and putting my fingers in my pocket for a certain object, “was it at his house, or was it on High Gap, where you lost—this?”

And I held out before him his artificial eye.

I knew I had hit the right nail on the head, then. The man made one strange, inarticulate sound, clapped his hand to a certain pocket in his waistcoat, lurched, and collapsed, fainting, in my arms.

“Good God! what’s this?” exclaimed Harthwaite, as he and the driver sprang from the car. “What is it, Campenhaye?”

“It’s only that this is the man who killed your brother,” I answered, as I laid Ollershaw down, and slipped my hand into the inner pocket of his coat. “And here,” I added, as I drew out a tight wad of thin papers, “here’s what he killed him for—the secret of the invention of which you said your brother had spoken the night before his murder. Now, then, let’s bring him round—and let’s be thankful, too, Mr.

Harthwaite, that the fellow was so careless about his clothing that he went about with this hole in his waistcoat pocket. For if it hadn't been for that, he'd have gone as free as the wind!"

CHAPTER III.

THE COVENT GARDEN FRUIT SHOP.

It was two o'clock on a dull day in January. My faithful clerk, Killingley, was out; consequently, when the telephone bell began ringing furiously in the outer office I was obliged to respond to it myself. As I crossed the floor I expressed a firm wish that the call might not necessitate my immediate attendance anywhere, for I was hungry, and was on the point of setting off to the Ritz for lunch. But no man knows what he is going to hear when he picks up the receiver of a telephone.

"This is Mr. Campenhaye," I said.

A voice which seemed a little familiar came along.

"I am Major Valentine. You remember me?" it said.

"Oh, yes, perfectly!" I answered.

"Mr. Campenhaye, will you come round at once—at once—to Vienna Mansions—number fifty-one?" said Major Valentine. "I want your assistance most urgently—a strange affair."

"What is it?" I enquired.

That it was something out of the common I felt assured—Major Valentine's voice was so very agitated.

"I do not know," he answered. "But I fear it is murder—some subtle form of murder. Will you come?"

"At once!" I answered.

Within two minutes I was making my way out of Jermyn Street in a taxi-cab. Granted we had a fairly clear course, we should be at Vienna Mansions (one of those vast, barrack-like blocks of flats which have sprung up between Bloomsbury and Tottenham Court Road) within a quarter of an hour. Meanwhile I refreshed my memory about the man who had called me up so peremptorily. I knew little of Major Valentine. In fact, all that I had known until a few days previously could be put into one sentence—he was a man of good family and of considerable wealth, an officer in one of the Guards' regiments, popular in Society, and of excellent record, and he had once employed me in a delicate case which concerned a brother officer who had got himself into a mess which Major Valentine was anxious to help him out of. That was all—all that was down under his name in the tablets of my memory.

During the past week, however, Major Valentine's name had come before the public in a fashion which had made it somewhat notorious. The newspapers had suddenly announced his engagement to a popular young actress, Miss Hermione

Braye, who had been one of the brightest stars in musical comedy for at least two seasons. The portraits of the Major and the Maid had been in all the illustrated papers, and their approaching marriage had formed a leading topic of conversation.

“Vienna Mansions—Vienna Mansions?” I said to myself as we sped along. “Ah, now I have it! Vienna Mansions is where Miss Hermione Braye lives. I hope she is not murdered.”

But all doubt on that point was set at rest when the taxi put me down at the chief entrance to the flats, where Major Valentine was awaiting me. He hurried me off to the lift.

“It’s most kind of you to come so quickly, Mr. Campenhaye!” he exclaimed. “There are the police here, and some Scotland Yard men, and police surgeons—but I wanted you. I felt that you would be more likely to——”

I stopped him before we reached the lift. He was a big, muscular man, and I had heard of daring deeds of his during the South African War; but he was now trembling and shaken, and heavy beads of sweat were gathered on his forehead—in fact, he showed all signs of intense fear.

“Tell me what has happened?” I said.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “I’ll tell you! It’s Felicie, Miss Braye’s maid, you know. She’s dead—poisoned, I think. Yes, it must have been—poison. Must have been!”

“Take your time, Major,” I said.

He made an effort and pulled himself together.

“I’ll try to tell you,” he said, wiping his forehead. “You see, Miss Braye and her mother live here. They have four servants—cook, parlourmaid, housemaid, and Felicie, who was lady’s maid and Miss Braye’s dresser. This morning Mrs. Braye was out till lunch time; so was Miss Braye, who was shopping with me. According to the other servants, Felicie went into the dining-room, where the table was laid for lunch, about five minutes before Miss Braye and I came in—went in alone. They never heard anything, but we found her dead!”

“Dead!” I exclaimed.

“Stone dead!” he answered. “She had certainly not been dead many minutes—perhaps seconds—but she was gone, poor girl!”

“You were on the spot first, then,” I said. “Did you observe anything?”

“Nothing!” he replied with emphasis. “She just lay on the floor as if she’d suddenly sunk down. There was nothing else to observe.”

It seemed to me that the maid had probably died from heart failure, and I began to wonder why Major Valentine had attributed her death to murder by poison. But that was not the time to question him. I wanted to see things for myself.

"Let me go up," I said.

Miss Braye's flat—a large and commodious one—was a scene of unusual activity. There were several police officials there; there were two doctors; and there was my friend, Inspector Wyemond, from Scotland Yard, who smiled at the sight of me and presently drew me aside. In a quiet corner he tapped me familiarly on the arm.

"This is a case of much ado about nothing, Mr. Campenhaye," he whispered. "I think Major Valentine must have lost his head in sending for us. There seems no doubt that the poor girl died from natural causes—heart failure. Of course, we can't tell until there's been an autopsy, as there will be. But that's what I should say it is—a clear case of heart failure."

I went with him to look at the dead girl, whose body was just about to be removed to the mortuary, and I gathered from the doctors that they shared Wyemond's opinion as to the cause of death. And in a few minutes the body had been removed, the little crowd of officials had gone, and the flat seemed suddenly very quiet. Major Valentine looked at me enquiringly.

"You are wondering if I share their opinions. Major?" I said. "But I have not begun thinking about opinions yet. Take me into the dining-room."

Now that the unwelcome visitors had left the flat and the dead woman's body had been removed, the dining-room looked pretty much as all such rooms do look when people of taste and refinement live in them.

The table, gay with flowers, and shining with silver, was laid for three; on the sideboard were some dishes of fruit. One of these dishes contained a magnificent bunch of large golden-hued grapes; the sight of them, unusual just then, roused some chord of memory in me. Where had I seen grapes just like those, recently? I tried to think, but could not remember; never mind, it would come back, and there was more important business on hand. I turned to Major Valentine.

"I think you said that the maid's body was discovered by you and Miss Braye?" I said.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Miss Braye found it," he answered. "She came in first. I was hanging up my overcoat and hat in the hall there. I heard Miss Braye cry out in alarm and came in."

"Where was the maid lying?" I asked.

"Just where you are now standing," he replied. "You are on the exact spot."

"That is to say, between the table and the sideboard," I said. "You, of course, picked her up?"

"Yes," he answered, with something of a shudder. "I lifted her on to that couch.

She—she was quite warm, but I am sure she was dead then.”

“I think you said the door was shut—that Miss Braye opened it while you were taking off your coat and hat?” I said.

He nodded his reply.

“Are you sufficiently acquainted with the habits of the household to form any opinion as to why the maid came in here and shut the door on herself?” I asked him.

“Well, Mr. Campenhaye,” he answered with some hesitation, “if I am to tell you the truth, it flashed across me that Felicie had possibly entered to get a dram of brandy from the cellaret there in the sideboard.”

“Had you any reason for such a surmise?” I asked.

“Yes, I had,” he answered. “I caught her doing it one day recently. And before anything in that cellaret is touched, I shall insist upon a proper analysis being made.”

“You think some poison may have been introduced into whatever the cellaret contains, eh, Major?” I said. “Let us see what it does contain.”

However, the cellaret contained next to nothing. There was a small decanter of brandy, another of whisky; the glass stoppers had certainly not been removed from either that day. As for the rest, there were some bottles of sparkling hock and some of claret; every bottle was corked and sealed.

I closed the cellaret without comment. The Major regarded me expectantly.

“Now, who is the best person to give me some information as to the dead woman’s movements this morning?” I asked.

“I should say Florence, the parlourmaid,” replied Major Valentine. “I know she was the last to see Felicie alive.”

“Then bring Florence here to me, if you please, Major,” I said. “And leave us alone. I can always get more information out of these people if there is no third person present.”

“Oh, of course, of course!” he answered. “I’ll fetch her.”

“And after that I want to have another talk with you,” I said.

The parlourmaid was a smart and sensible-looking young woman, who had evidently been much upset by the recent tragic occurrence. I asked her to sit down and not to distress herself, and told her that I merely wished to ask her a few questions about the events of the morning.

“I think you were the last person to see Felicie alive?” I said. “Just tell me when that was.”

“It was from five to ten minutes before Miss Braye and Major Valentine came in, sir,” she answered. “Leastways, a very little time before. I saw her come in here and close the door. The next I heard was Miss Braye’s call for help.”

"Do you know why Felicie came in here?" I asked.

"No, sir, I don't know," the girl said. "But, then, she often came in here. It might be to fetch something, or to bring something."

"Just so," I said. "But in that case, she would scarcely have shut the door upon herself. You are sure there was no one in this room when she entered it?"

The girl stared at me in astonishment.

"I'm certain there wasn't, sir," she exclaimed. "I'd only just left it after laying the table for lunch. Besides, nobody could have come into the flat unless I'd let them in—that is, except Mrs. and Miss Bray with their keys. And this morning I only answered the door twice."

"Who came?" I asked her.

"Nobody came, sir," she replied, "at least, nobody to come in. One was a telegram for Major Valentine; the other was a fruiterer's boy with those grapes."

"Where was he from?" I said.

"I don't know, sir," replied Florence, staring at me as if she considered the question foolish. "I never even glanced at him. I just took the grapes and arranged them on the stand."

"I see," said I. "All right, that will do, thank you. Just ask Major Valentine to come to me."

When the girl had left the room, I went over to the sideboard and picked up the great bunch of amber-tinted grapes by the stem. Looking it over minutely, I saw that an under tendril had been snapped off by somebody's fingers—the ragged edges were still wet. I put the bunch back. Once again a chord of memory was struck. Where, recently, quite recently—within the last twenty-four hours—had I seen grapes likes those—yes, like that very identical bunch? Where?

Major Valentine came in—to find me in a brown study.

"Well?" he said anxiously.

I came out of my meditation with a start.

"Major," I said, "I do not want—and there is no need—to intrude myself upon Miss Braye or upon her mother. But will you be kind enough to go to them and ask them—particularly—if either of them bought or ordered, or know anything whatever about those grapes? I say—particularly."

Major Valentine had no sooner left the room than I suddenly remembered where and when I had seen grapes similar to those at which I was gazing. Only the previous afternoon I had had business in Covent Garden; arriving too early for my appointment, I had spent a few minutes in looking at the fruit and flowers in the centre arcade. And in one shop I had noticed a basket which contained some

remarkably fine grapes, almost golden in hue, and over them a boldly-written placard: "Muscats from Alexandria."

"That's it!" I said to myself. "That's where I saw them. Now, I wonder how many of them there are on the market?"

Major Valentine came back. He glanced at me and then at the grapes.

"Neither Mrs. nor Miss Braye ordered those grapes," he said. "In fact, they know nothing about them. They didn't even know they were in the house. I suppose they have been overlooked in the confusion."

"The parlourmaid took them in not very long before you and Miss Braye returned," I said. "But she does not know who sent them. Naturally, she thought that they had been ordered, and she did not even glance at the boy who brought them."

"You attach some importance to them?" he said, looking a little surprised.

I motioned to him to take a seat, and I took one myself.

"Before I say anything on that point, Major," I said, "I want to ask you a few questions. And I must remind you first of my great principle in dealing with all my clients. I told you of it, you will remember, when you came to me two years ago. I expect the fullest confidence and no reservations."

He looked at me a little nervously, but he inclined his head.

"I will answer any question put to me, Mr. Campenhaye," he said. "I will make no reservation."

"Thank you," said I. "Well, now, how soon after you found this girl dead was it that you telephoned to me?"

"Within twenty minutes," he answered.

"Tell me briefly exactly what you did after the discovery," I continued; "that is, up to the time of telephoning to me."

"Well," he said, "when we saw that we could not resuscitate Felicie I telephoned for a doctor. Then I telephoned to Tottenham Court Road police-station for the police. Presently I sent for you."

"I quite understand your sending for a doctor," I said. "That is what everybody does in such circumstances. But I do not understand your sending for the police. That is what one does not do in such circumstances—as a rule. Now, Major Valentine, is it not the fact that as soon as you discovered that the maid was dead you suspected foul play?"

"Yes," he murmured. "Yes, that's true."

"Murder, in fact?" I said.

He nodded his head, and began to tug at his big moustache.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "Murder!"

"Am I wrong then in supposing that what was really in your mind was this: that the maid was an innocent victim, and that the intended victim was—Miss Braye?" I said.

He glanced at me quickly, and I saw that my supposition was correct. That was what was on his mind—and there was more, much more, behind it.

"Yes, you're quite right there," he said nervously. "Quite right, Mr. Campenhay, quite right; though how you thought of it I'm hanged if I know."

"I'm afraid you might easily be hanged, Major," I said. "Now, then, answer me straight out—who is the other woman?"

This direct question made him jump to his feet, turn very red, and stare at me as if I were something superhuman.

"The—other—woman!" he exclaimed. "The——"

"Shall I tell you what really is in your mind, Major Valentine?" I said, interrupting him. "What is there is the consciousness that there is another woman whom you may or may not have jilted in favour of Miss Braye; but who, at any rate, has threatened to be revenged on Miss Braye for getting you. Come, now?"

He sank limply into the seat and stared at me still more.

"Yes, that's true also," he said; "quite true."

I leaned back in my chair.

"Now, Major, you had better tell me all about it," I said. "And remember my first principle—no reservations."

"Oh, I'll make a clean breast," he replied. "The fact is, Mr. Campenhay—you know what life is—I have been alarmed since my engagement to Miss Braye because of some dire threats made against both of us by a certain lady who thinks that she has a claim upon me."

"Just so," said I. "Her name?"

The Major looked at me somewhat sheepishly.

"Olympia Bianchi," he murmured, with a covert glance at the door.

"What, the Italian dancer?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he muttered, "exactly. For some reason or other Signorina Bianchi thinks that I have treated her badly, and as soon as my engagement to Miss Braye was announced, she favoured me with a letter in which she swore that the marriage should never take place. Since then I have had two more, still more threatening, and _____"

"You have been frightened," I said, "badly frightened!"

"Well, I have," he admitted. "Those Italian women are such—such devils. And they are adepts at poison, you know. I thought that the Bianchi might—might be up

to all sorts of games—eh? Poison the wine, you know, or——”

“Or the brandy, or the whisky,” I said rising. “Very good. Now, Major Valentine, don’t say a word of what we have talked about to a soul. And, to be practical, look in that cupboard and find me an empty biscuit-box. There is one? That’s good! Now, you may be mystified; but, you see, I put these grapes—which are muscats from Alexandria—in the box, and I now proceed to seal the box—thus. And now, Major Valentine, I am going, and you are to regard your lips as sealed, too, until you hear from me on the telephone, either here or at your chambers, or at your club, this evening.”

Then I went off, carrying the biscuit-box and its contents with me.

When I got out of Vienna Mansions I repaired in the first place to the house of a famous analytical chemist, who was a personal friend of mine, and, in the second, to the police surgeon who would make one of those present at the post-mortem examination on the body of the dead girl. With the great analyst I left the grapes; to the police surgeon I made a certain request. And these things done, I set off to Covent Garden.

I was by this time quite certain that the French maid had been poisoned, and that the poison had been conveyed in the grapes; I was just as certain that the poison was not intended for her but for her mistress. It seemed to me that matters were becoming very clear. The poisoned grapes arrived at the flat a little before lunch, and were taken in by the parlourmaid, who immediately arranged them on the sideboard; she was no doubt well accustomed to seeing little presents of this nature arrive for Miss Braye. Then Felicie came upon the scene—very probably bent upon the errand which Major Valentine had suggested. Felicie saw the magnificent bunch of grapes; Felicie was tempted. She snapped off a few grapes from amongst the thickest part of the bunch and ate them. And then Felicie died—died as swiftly and as surely as people do die when they are poisoned by a very subtle poisoner. There had been no bungling about it; it was the work of a master hand. One moment, nay, one second, Felicie had been alive—in the course of the next Felicie was dead.

And now the question was—Who sent the grapes? Certainly Major Valentine was quite right in saying that Italian women have a reputation for being adepts at poisoning, and it was obvious that he thought the Bianchi meant to carry out her dire threats of vengeance. But, personally, I was not greatly inclined to that theory. I had had the pleasure of meeting the Signorina Bianchi two or three times in private life, and, queen of the terpsichorean art as she certainly was while on the stage, she did not strike me as being remarkably clever or brilliant when off it; she was, in fact, a very good average specimen of her countrywomen, with abundant capacities of love

and hate, but not, I thought, of cunning, which would amount to skill. Now, whoever had poisoned those grapes had done so in a highly skilful, not to say extremely scientific, manner.

However, there was no good to be done by speculating overmuch on that point just then. My object in going to Covent Garden was to find out, if possible, what quantity of these particular grapes had been on the market on the previous day; my own impression, from what I recollected of the price, was that the supply could only have been limited. It would narrow down the limits of the field of enquiry if I found this particular out; the next thing to do would be to hit on the particular shop from which the grapes were sold and to endeavour to run down the purchaser. That they had been delivered from any shop direct, I did not believe for a moment; my own theory was that the poisoner had given them to some boy, picked up in the neighbourhood of Vienna Mansions, and had then disappeared.

I made two or three inquiries in Covent Garden before I reached the shop in which I myself had noticed the muscats from Alexandria only the previous day, and I speedily learnt that the supply of those particular grapes had been very limited. Going on to the shop itself and glancing into the window to see who was within it, I was suddenly brought face to face with a remarkable object. Hanging from the central rail of the window was a large sheet of paper, on the upper portion of which some hand had printed the word "Found" in very large, rough letters. Also dependent from the rail, and backed by the white paper, hung a medallion about the size of a half-crown, and set in gold. I drew nearer to examine it, and found myself gazing at a beautifully-painted miniature of one of my old masters, the late Dr. Allison, who had been well known to me in my student days at University College.

There was nothing on the sheet of paper beyond the word "Found," and it needed no great amount of intuition to come to the conclusion that the medallion had been picked up in the shop. I went inside, fully intending to ask some information about the portrait, simply because I had known Dr. Allison; but first I attended to my own business, which was to find out about the grape supply of the previous day. And suddenly I was face to face with a new situation, nothing surprising, as anyone who has followed my profession is well aware.

"No, they were very scarce, very scarce indeed, those muscats were yesterday," said the shopman. Then he added, with a nod and a smile: "It was the lady as I sold my little lot to as dropped that portrait what I've hung up in the window. I thought she'd have been in for it before now. It's mounted in real gold, is that—at least, I take it to be real gold."

He reached into the window for the medallion portrait, unhooked it, and placed

it in my hand. I turned it over; on the back was an inscription:

“Honorina, from her Father.”

“Oh, yes! this is solid gold,” I said, handing it back. “I suppose it’s quite safe in your window?”

“As the Bank of England,” he said, replacing his find. “You see, the lady’ll no doubt come looking about at all the places she’d been to, and when she sees it in the window she’ll jump for joy. I know it was her as bought the muscats, ’cause I noticed it on a chain as she wore round her neck. Found it lyn’ in one of them baskets when I was closing last night.”

I went out of the shop, certain that I had lighted upon a clue. I had been sure—sure to the point of absolute assurance—that the grapes which I had seen on Miss Braye’s sideboard were those which I had noticed and admired in this very window the day before. I was convinced now that the woman who had bought them was the poisoner—if my poison theory proved to be correct. And—my old friend and master, Dr. Allison, had in his time been the leading expert on toxicology. What mystery was this? What had Honorina, who was obviously his daughter, to do with Miss Braye and Major Valentine?

I got on to the telephone at once. Major Valentine was still at Vienna Mansions. Within twenty minutes he joined me under the church clock in Covent Garden, and I gave him some instructions.

“Just walk down the right-hand side of the arcade, Major,” I said. “You will come to a shop in the middle of which a medallion portrait is hanging. Take a good look at it, and then come back to me.”

He returned in a minute or two, looking surprised.

“Do you recognise the portrait?” I asked him.

“Certainly!” he answered. “It’s a miniature of my late uncle and godfather, old Dr. Allison. What’s more, I know to whom it belongs. It belongs to his daughter. I’d have gone in and told the shop-people so, but you asked me to come back to you at once.”

This took me aback. Now the circle was narrowing! But what was I yet to hear from Major Valentine?

“Belongs to the late Dr. Allison’s daughter, eh?” I said. “Is—is her name Honorina?”

The Major stared at me in surprise.

“Yes,” he answered. “Yes, her name is Honorina. But——”

I drew Major Valentine a little out of the crowd of pedestrians.

“Listen!” I said. “The woman who dropped that medallion in the shop where you

have just seen it is the woman who sent the muscats to Miss Braye!"

That I was yet to learn more from Major Valentine I was assured by the effect of this announcement. He turned white to his lips, and, big and strong man though he was, he staggered a little, and put out his right hand as if to find some support.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I—I was engaged to Honoria Allison!"

Now I was coming to it! I clutched his arm and moved him away round the corner into King Street.

"Now, Major," I said quietly, "you remember our compact. No reservations! Come, now, let me hear all about it. When did you—for I am pretty certain it was you—break off this engagement?"

"About—about a month ago!" he muttered.

"Why did you break it off?" I went on. "Why?"

The Major made an effort and pulled himself together, but it was plain that he had suffered a great shock and a great surprise.

"Because she was such an awfully jealous woman!" he exclaimed. "I began to see that I shouldn't have a moment's freedom or liberty. She was so very exacting, and——"

"Just so," said I. "That's enough just now, Major. By the by, I think I have heard that Miss Allison used to help her father in his very interesting experiments in poisons?"

The Major, who was mopping his forehead as we walked along the street, nodded vehemently.

"Yes, yes, she did!" he answered. "And she experiments still; she's kept the old man's laboratory on. My God! Campenhave, you don't think she did this—you don't?"

"That is exactly what I do think then, Major Valentine!" I replied. "What else can I think? You tell me that you have jilted this lady—you tell me that she is of an exceedingly jealous temperament. Jealousy and revenge usually go hand in hand. I naturally conclude that she inclined to revenge. Then you tell me that she is an expert on poison—and I am already aware that she sent the grapes to Vienna Mansions. It will not take much to convince a jury of her guilt, I think."

"A jury?" he gasped. "Oh, I say, will it come to that?"

"Most likely," said I. "But, come, it's no use hanging about here. You had better come with me, Major."

I got him into a taxi-cab at the top of Bedford Street and bade the driver take us to the place where I had asked the police surgeon to meet me. He was rather late in turning up; when he arrived he looked somewhat mystified. He glanced dubiously at

my companion.

"You can speak freely before Major Valentine," I said. "In a certain sense, he is as much interested in the case as we are. Now, what is the result of the autopsy?"

"Well," he replied, shaking his head, "there's no manifest proof of any cause of death! The organs were sound and healthy—in fact, it's a mystery."

"No trace of poison?" I asked.

"No immediate sign," he answered. "Of course, Dr. Inverkeith will make further search; but he says he doesn't expect to find any trace. Frankly, the three of us are mystified."

"One question, then, before we go," I said. "Had the girl been eating grapes?"

He nodded, and looked at me as if he would have liked to question me, but I said "Good-night," and took Major Valentine away. Outside I tapped him on the arm.

"I am beginning to think that the poisoner is a person of an almost diabolical ingenuity, Major," I said. "You had better prepare yourself for all sorts of eventualities."

The Major groaned heavily.

"This is awful!" he said. "It's the worst corner I've ever been in. Where are we going now?"

I took him to the house of my friend, the famous analyst. The great man had us shown at once into his presence. He was obviously in a seventh heaven of delight.

He began to talk rapidly as soon as I had managed to make him understand who Major Valentine was. Even then he was not particularly concerned about the Major or about Felicie's death—his mind, like that of your true investigator, was running on a new discovery.

"I say, I say, Campenhaye!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "I have had a most exciting afternoon with those grapes! By gad, I haven't enjoyed myself so much for ages! My dear fellow, those grapes are charged with the most subtle poison I have ever come across!"

"Just so," said I. "Well, and what is the poison?"

The great man threw up his hands.

"Oh, my dear Campenhaye!" he exclaimed. "I wish I knew! I have tried every test I have at my disposal, but I have not been able to find out what it is. But I will go on—I will go on! But as to its effects—oh, my God! I always have some live stock here, as you know, for experiments. Well, I threw one of your beautiful grapes to a dog who would snatch at anything; he just lay down and died in exactly thirty seconds. Then I drew off the juice of another grape and injected it into a rabbit; he

died in precisely seventeen seconds. Since then——”

“For God’s sake, sir, stop!” exclaimed Major Valentine. “Campenhay, let’s get out—let me, at any rate, get out of this. I can’t stand it!”

I made a hurried and whispered communication to the analyst and took the Major away. But once outside the house I spoke plainly and perhaps a little sternly.

“Now, Major Valentine,” I said, “there is only one thing to do now. You must go to your cousin. And I shall go with you.”

He flinched for a moment, and then threw up his head.

“I’d rather face a crowd of niggers on the rant!” he said. “But you’re quite right, Campenhay.”

Miss Allison lived in South Kensington—all the way there the Major kept silence. When at last the taxi-cab drew up before a big, gloomy house he groaned again; the events of the day were certainly not being pleasant for Major Valentine.

It seemed a long time before anybody answered the bell. There came a woman who was obviously a caretaker. Was Miss Allison at home? No, Miss Allison wasn’t at home, nor likely to be, seeing as she’d gone to foreign parts for the rest of the winter. When had she gone? Why, that very day as ever was—leastways, she, the caretaker, had come in about noon, and she was gone then.

Major Valentine heaved a great sigh of relief as we went away.

“Thank God!” he said. “I—I hope I shall never hear of her again!”

That pious hope has so far been fulfilled. For the authorities, not being able to find any trace of poison, arranged a verdict that allayed all suspicion as to the cause of Felicie’s death, and my friend, the famous analyst, at my request, held his tongue. He, too, was baffled. Only one person in the world knows the secret, and she has disappeared, utterly and entirely, and will never speak. But every year some hand lays a cross of white flowers on the dead woman’s grave; my own idea is that this action is the expression of a strange atonement.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IRISH MAIL.

The afternoon boat from Kingstown to Holyhead was furnished that day with a bigger complement of passengers than usual. It was the day after the wind-up of Punchestown Races, and a goodly proportion of English sporting visitors were returning. A good many had already gone by the early morning boat; those who had lingered in Dublin until noon were chiefly of the leisured class, to whom a few hours' difference in travelling is of no importance. I myself, having had business to transact at a country house near Kingstown, had motored out from the Shelbourne Hotel before noon, and I was on the boat when the train from Westland Row came alongside Kingstown Pier. Leaning over the rail, I lazily regarded the passengers bound for England—they were chiefly sporting folk of degree, varying from peers to fashionable jockeys. There were Society leaders, well known at Newmarket and Ascot; bookmakers, whom you would find at Tattersall's; trainers, who were in evidence on an English racecourse on Wednesday, and at Chantilly or Longchamps the following Sunday; there was also the evidence of that curious, indefinite element which seems to drift wherever horse-racing is going on. And amongst all these people, as they streamed over the gangway and distributed themselves about the steamer, I recognised the tall figure and good-humoured, indolent, slightly-bored face of his Grace the Duke of Craye.

The Duke of Craye, as every one knows who knows him, is something of a character. He is immensely rich, he is an unusually good and popular landlord, he is a statesman and a sportsman, and he communicates the idea of being the laziest and most easy-going man in Europe. He has been known to yawn in the middle of an important speech in the House of Lords, and to nod, if not actually to fall asleep, in the stand at Epsom when one of his own horses was running in the Derby—wherever he is seen, he always looks as if he declined to be hurried or flurried. His imperturbability is celebrated; nothing can ruffle or disturb him, and the probability is that if his man woke him in the middle of the night, with news of an earthquake in Berkeley Square, he would ask to have further information supplied with his morning cup of tea, and go instantly to sleep again.

So far as I could see, the Duke, who was attired in his usual inconspicuous, not to say almost shabby fashion—a suit of tweeds and much-worn overcoat—was unattended. He was carrying a bag or valise, which, from its ancient appearance, had no doubt been in his possession since his schooldays at Eton, and he took it and

himself below as soon as he stepped aboard. Folks of much less degree were travelling with great fuss and many servants; the Duke of Craye loved to go about unobtrusively, being, in fact, a great lover of his own personal liberty. He hated the trammels and conventions of high rank, and he was never so happy as when he was down at Craye, and could chat easily and unaffectedly with one of his tenant-farmers. I myself had had some experience of his simple manners, for he had once employed me to get a certain young relative of his out of a scrape, and I had been obliged to interview him personally several times.

In a few minutes after the train from Dublin had come alongside we were off, and as soon as we were clear of the harbour I went down to the saloon for luncheon. And at the foot of the stairway I came face to face with the Duke of Craye, and, for at least once in his life, his Grace looked somewhat disturbed out of his usual phlegmatic condition. In short, he looked as if something had upset him.

The Duke recognised me in the same moment in which I encountered him, and it seemed to me that his expression changed to one of relief. At any rate, he smiled quietly and he held out his hand.

"Ah, Campenhaye!" he said. "This is odd, but I was just thinking of you."

"I am proud to be remembered in your Grace's thoughts," I said.

"Oh, well, I thought of you because something has occurred which made me reflect that you might be useful," he remarked in his usual off-hand way. "Look here!—have you got a minute to spare?"

"As many as your Grace desires," I replied.

"Come along here, then—I've got a cabin somewhere," he said. "Not that I want it, or mean to use it, but these people seem to think that a duke must needs have separate accommodation, and be put in a sort of cattle-pen. Here we are—walk in, Campenhaye. Now, look here," continued his Grace, when we were inside the private cabin and had the door closed on us. "Look here—I've been robbed."

"Robbed?" I exclaimed. "When—where?"

"Just now—since I came on board," he answered. "In fact, within this last few minutes. An old pocket-book, Campenhaye; but it contains about fifteen hundred pounds in banknotes."

"Will your Grace give me the details?" I said.

"Details!" he exclaimed. "There aren't any! When I came aboard, I went into the lavatory along there outside to wash my hands. I took off this overcoat, and hung it on a peg—the pocket-book was in the inside breast-pocket. When I put the overcoat on again—the pocket-book was gone."

"Are you really sure it was there?" I asked.

"I'm certain it was there," replied the Duke with some emphasis. "I had it at Westland Row when I took my ticket; I got a ten-pound note out of it then. Just before I got out of the train here at the pier I slipped the ticket inside the elastic band of the pocket-book. I know it was there when I hung my overcoat up, because I saw it protruding above the top of the pocket."

"And when did your Grace miss it?" I inquired.

"As soon as I left the lavatory," he answered. "I meant to transfer it then to my coat pocket, and felt for it. But it had gone. Somebody had collared it while I was washing my hands."

"Were there many others in the lavatory at the time?" I asked. "And would your Grace recognise them again?"

"There were other men in there," said the Duke reflectively. "Yes, I think there may have been six or seven men in at the time. I don't know that I could recognise them. I didn't take any particular notice of them."

"Has your Grace the numbers of the notes?" I asked.

But his Grace shook his head. No, he had not the numbers of the notes, and he did not remember when he received them. It was his habit, he said, to carry a considerable sum in banknotes.

"There's a thief on board," he grumbled. "No doubt, he saw me pull out the pocket-book at Westland Row, and he followed me. It would be the easiest thing in the world to abstract the pocket-book when my back was turned. Of course, it's my own fault. However, I thought I'd tell you, Campenhaye. And now I'm off to get some lunch. Are you coming?"

"Not until I've had a look round," I replied. "I shall see your Grace later in the afternoon."

While the Duke of Craye lounged off in his usual leisurely fashion in the direction of the dining-saloon, I began an indefinite inspection of the boat. I wanted to make myself acquainted with the folk it carried. It was only too likely that Punchestown Races, and the gaities attendant upon that classic event, should attract some of the light-fingered gentry, and I felt quite sure that if any one of them had seen the Duke pull out a wad of bank notes in paying for his ticket, a brave attempt to secure that wad would certainly have been made. And obviously it had been made, and successfully made, and the thief must be on board.

I, naturally, had something of an acquaintanceship with some of the best known of the swell crooks of London, and I wanted to see if I could recognise any of them amongst my fellow-passengers. I might, and I might not; I probably should not, but I was going to attempt it. And, as luck would have it, I had no sooner set foot on

deck than I met Barney Flint.

Now, Barney Flint was a gentleman who had a history, a deeply interesting history, which was well known to me. In his younger days Barney had been associated with, and the leading spirit of, a particularly smart gang of London sharpers, who accomplished some very clever deeds, and managed to keep clear of the police. Master Barney—who, needless to say, was not known by that name in those days—was remarkably adroit; but, like all very clever people, he went a little too far in his cleverness, and at last he was laid by the heels. He received a smart sentence, and when he had duly served it he was a changed man.

Some said Barney had been converted, but the fact was that Barney had had time to reflect and to weigh things up. He changed his name and he changed his profession; he blossomed out as a bookmaker. What is more, he quickly became known as a straight man. And at the time of which I am writing Barney Flint had several years of straight conduct behind him, and the naughtiness of his youth were matters of the past. But some people knew of them, and I was one of those people.

Barney knew me and I knew him, and we understood each other. He regarded me with an observant eye as I approached him where he stood in a quiet place, smoking a cigar. He was a little, clean-shaven, sharp-eyed fellow, who was generally taken for a music-hall artist.

“Hallo, Mr. Campenhaye!” said he. “How are you, sir?”

“Hungry, Barney,” I replied, “hungry. But I want a word with you before I lunch. Look here now; I’ve done you more than one good turn, do me one.”

“Anything you like,” said he. “Give it a name.”

“The Duke of Craye is on board,” said I.

“I saw his Grace ten minutes since,” said Barney.

“And he has been robbed,” I continued.

Barney nodded, and flicked the ash off his cigar.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” he observed calmly. “I saw his Grace take his ticket at Westland Row Station, and he pulled out a lot of notes, and handled them as if they were tissue paper. Somebody’s spotted that, and followed him.”

“Just so,” said I. “You haven’t seen any gentlemen of fortune about—eh, Barney?”

Barney shook his head, which was in a white hat.

“Well, and I have not, Mr. Campenhaye,” he answered. “No, I haven’t seen a single one. That is, one that I know. But, lord love you, sir, there’s plenty that I don’t know! Why, I’ve been robbed myself before to-day! Oh, yes!”

“Well, keep your eyes open, Barney, will you?” I said. “And if you see anybody,

just put me up to it, eh?"

"All right, Mr. Campenhay," replied Barney. "I'll just stroll about, finish this cigar, and go downstairs for lunch. See you later."

I left Barney and continued my own peregrinations. A quarter of an hour afterwards I entered the saloon. Most of the passengers had already satisfied their hunger and were clearing out, and there was now plenty of room. The Duke of Craye sat munching cheese and celery at a far table. He caught sight of me, and beckoned me to a seat at his side.

"I've recognised one of the men who was in the lavatory when I was washing my hands, Campenhay," he said, when the steward had taken my order and we were alone. "There he is—the man in the corner over there, the dark man in the Homburg hat."

I looked across the saloon in the direction indicated, and immediately recognised a man in whom I was just then much interested, whom, in fact, I had been over to Ireland to see. He was a Captain Mardyke, who had a small patrimony on the edge of the Wicklow Mountains and a comfortable flat in Mayfair, and the London flat saw a good deal more of him than the Irish demesne did. I had called on him at Ballinaphoca just before noon that very day, and had spent half an hour with him, and he had given me no indication of his intention of proceeding to England there and then.

Yet here he was on the same boat as myself, lunching away with all the ease in the world, in spite of the fact that he had gone through a pretty bad time with me. For I had had business relations with Captain Mardyke, and they were not of a pleasant sort—at any rate, so far as he was concerned.

"Yes, I remember seeing that man," repeated the Duke. "I remember his uncommonly dark complexion."

"Oh, I know that gentleman!" I answered carelessly. "He's a sort of Irish squireen—a Captain Mardyke. He's on the reserve of officers—used to be in the Wildshire Light Infantry."

"Well, his is the only face that I have any recollection of," said the Duke lugubriously. "I don't suppose I shall ever see those bank-notes again. And I don't mind much about the bank-notes, Campenhay; but I'd had that pocket-book ever since I went to school—it was a present from my nurse. Of course, it's all my own stupid fault; I always was careless."

I made no answer to this ducal observation. I just then became aware of the entry of little Barney Flint, who, after a look round, took a seat at the next table to that which was occupied by Captain Mardyke and a friend to whom he was

chatting. And Barney summoned a steward with a flick of his finger, and, whatever his thoughts may have been, became apparently absorbed in the question of lunch.

The Duke presently drank off the last mouthful of the bottled ale which he had been consuming, and remarking that he was going to smoke a pipe on deck, went off in his heavy, leisurely way. As for me, I took my time over my lunch and, having nothing else to do, amused myself by watching Captain Mardyke, concerning whom I had indulged certain theories since my interview with him that morning. He had finished his lunch by that time, and he was giving some instructions to a steward which seemed to amuse the man who sat by him. The steward went away—ten minutes later he came back with a small square parcel, which he handed to Mardyke, who, regarding his companion with a smile, bestowed it in the pocket of a light raincoat which lay on the seat at his side. Then the two rose and left the saloon.

Presently, I, too, left. In going, I went up to Barney Flint's table and leaned over it. Barney spoke before I could say a word:

“You're going through to Euston, of course?” he said. “Now, I might want to see you on the train, Mr. Campenhaye. Be in the first-class dining car at eight o'clock. Understand?”

I did not quite understand, but I nodded assent.

We were a good way past the Kish lightship when I went on deck again; the Wicklow Mountains, on the one hand, and the Hill of Howth, on the other, were fading in the grey distance, and the wind, having been steadily freshening all the morning, the sea was beginning to get decidedly choppy. There were, accordingly, few people on deck, for most had gone to lie down in their cabins and berths. I saw nothing of the Duke of Craye, but behind one of the awnings which the sailors had put up, Captain Mardyke and his companion were comfortably ensconced, smoking cigars. I sought out a similar refuge for myself, and, leaning back in a deck-chair, prepared to take things easily until we ran into Holyhead Harbour. And as I sat there, I thought over the business which had brought me to Ireland.

That business, as I have already said, was connected with Captain Mardyke. The fact was that that gallant officer, in addition to being a pretty well-known man about town, was not altogether unconnected with certain fashionable gaming-clubs, the doings at which were not above suspicion, and there was a strong belief in certain quarters that he sometimes played the part of rook to young gentlemen who were gullible enough to figure in the rôle of pigeon. And the real truth as to my business with him was that he held a certain amount of paper which had been signed by a sprig of nobility, who now insisted that he had never had proper value or consideration for it. There is no need to go more fully into that matter here—it is

quite another story—but a great deal that was very serious depended upon that paper being recovered from its holder, and I had been sent over to Ireland to endeavour to recover it at a reasonable figure. And I had seen Captain Mardyke that very morning, and I had failed to effect any settlement with him. He was adamant.

Now, I had made it my business to find out all that I could about Mardyke, and I was astonished that he did not close with the really generous offer which I had been empowered to make him by the foolish young gentleman's friends. I knew that Mardyke's little estate in Wicklow was mortgaged to the value of the last penny, and that there was imminent danger of the mortgagees foreclosing; I also knew that he was in debt in London. The sum which I had been instructed to offer him in cash was a considerable sum—at any rate, to a man who was being hard pressed for ready money—and I wondered that he did not take it. It was quite true that, if he liked to hold out, he would doubtless get the full value of the papers which he held, but he would not get it for at least three years, whereas, if he had closed with my offer, I was empowered to pay him there and then. His firmness had made me think that there must be somebody behind him—probably some firm of London moneylenders. At any rate, he had been impervious to the cheque which I had shown him, filled up and signed. He wanted his full pound of flesh.

We were nearing Holyhead, and I was gazing at the Anglesey coast line, when Captain Mardyke suddenly approached and dropped into a chair next to mine.

"A word with you, Mr. Campenhaye," he said. "I have changed my mind somewhat since we conversed this morning. I then told you that I would not take a penny less than eighteen thousand."

"And I told you," I said, "that my clients will not go beyond ten thousand."

"Quite so," said he. "But, as I said, I have changed my mind. I am willing to meet you."

"Will you take ten thousand?" I suggested.

"Not at all!" he answered sharply. "I said I am willing to meet you. We must both concede something. I will take fourteen thousand—cash."

"In other words," said I, "you want to split the difference?"

"Just so," said he, "that's only fair. You go up—I come down. Quite a fair proposition."

"It's one that I can't agree to, Captain Mardyke," said I. "I have already told you that my powers do not go beyond ten thousand pounds. If you'll take it, the cheque's in my pocket-book."

"No," he answered, "fourteen thousand. I'll give your clients until ten o'clock on

the day after to-morrow; if they won't agree to my terms by that time, I shall let it be known in other quarters—you know what I mean, Mr. Campenhaye—that I hold this paper, and how it was got. That's my price—fourteen thousand.”

I made no answer, and he rose, turned on his heel and went away. The boat ran into the smooth water of Holyhead Harbour.

The train which was to carry us to Euston was one of unusual length, because of the unwonted number of passengers, and there was a good deal of bustle and confusion amongst people scurrying about to get comfortable seats. I was engineering my way to the neighbourhood of the first-class dining saloon when I felt a hand on my arm, and turned to meet the Duke of Craye, who was lugging his weather-beaten valise along. Amidst all the noise and bustle he was as cool, as imperturbable, and as bored-looking as ever.

“Come with me, Campenhaye,” he said. “I've got a reserved compartment somewhere, and I daresay it will be big enough for two. Seen or heard anything?” he continued, when we had found the compartment and settled ourselves. “I expect not, eh? Don't see how you could.”

We were alone, and the Duke was a man of the strictest honour and the sternest rectitude. I told him of my meeting with Barney Flint, and of that gentleman's cryptic remarks to me just after lunch on the boat.

The Duke woke out of his usual half-somnolent state and betrayed an interest that was very nearly keen. His eyes lighted up and almost sparkled.

“That's interesting—and amusing!” he said. “Illustrates the wisdom of the old adage, ‘Set a ——,’ you know.”

“Mr. Flint, however, is now a highly respectable gentleman,” I remarked. “He has gone very straight indeed since his first unfortunate—accident.”

“Won't have forgotten his ancient wisdom all the same,” said his Grace with a chuckle. “You think he had some motive in his head, Campenhaye?”

“I don't think Barney Flint would give me mysterious messages for nothing,” I answered. “He has probably seen somebody or noticed something; he is an uncommonly keen-eyed and very observant little man.”

“It would be good fun to have one's property restored in that way,” mused the Duke. “Quite an original way, I think.”

Then he picked up a sporting magazine and began to read, while I turned to the English newspapers, and presently we set off on our long run to London.

Nothing happened until nearly eight o'clock, when the Duke awoke from one of his characteristic naps and suggested that we should dine. We accordingly repaired to the table which he had reserved, and we had only just taken our places at it when

I became aware that, at a little distance, another table was occupied by Barney Flint, Captain Mardyke, and the man with whom I had seen Mardyke on the boat. They were all evidently on good terms with each other, and were laughing and talking joyously.

Barney Flint took no notice of me. The three men were dining in advance of the Duke and myself; they were busied, indeed, with coffee and liqueurs when we were consuming our soup. Presently they all left the restaurant-car together. But a moment or two later Barney Flint came strolling back, went to the table which he had just left, as if he were looking for something, and returning up the aisle of the car, slipped a folded note into my hand. Without a word or look he was gone.

The transfer of the bit of paper from Barney's hand to mine had been so quickly and quietly made that my companion had not seen it. And while he was busied with his roast mutton, I smoothed out the note on my knee, and made myself acquainted with its contents. It was well that I have accustomed myself at not showing surprise at anything, for the little bookmaker's communication was startling.

"I know where those notes are," Barney Flint had scribbled on what was obviously a leaf torn out of an account-book, "and I'm keeping an eye on them. When you and the great man have dined, stroll along to the second car behind the restaurant. You'll find me in a first-class with the two men you saw me with just now, playing cards. I'll ask you in. After that you must take your cue from me."

I read this message twice, and then, with an explanatory word as to how I had come by it, passed it across the table to the Duke. When he had mastered its contents, he glanced eagerly at me.

"Of course we'll go?" he said. "It promises—an adventure."

"It might be an unpleasant one," I observed. "I don't know whether your Grace ought——"

"Oh, nonsense, Campenhaye!" he broke in quickly. "I'm going. The note has excited my curiosity."

I took the note from him and tore it into infinitesimal fragments.

"Very well," I said. "As your Grace pleases. I have no doubt that Barney Flint will provide us with entertainment. But if what I am beginning to suspect proves right, we may have a lively five minutes—even in the circumscribed quarter of an express railway train."

The Duke of Craye did not suffer Barney's communication to hurry him. He

sipped his coffee and his liqueur at his usual rate of doing anything—slowly. He gave me a cigar out of his own case, and began to smoke one himself as if he meant to make it last an hour. But at length he pulled his big frame out of his seat.

“Well, shall we stroll along?” he remarked nonchalantly. “May as well. You go first, Campenhayes.”

I led the way along the dimly-lighted corridors, swaying to and fro with the motion of the express, which was now running at top speed. There were several men lounging about the corridors, for the train was very full, and the night was warm and close. A great many compartments had been reserved, and the doors of most of them were closed. But the door of that in which Barney Flint sat with his two companions was open, and as we reached it Barney hailed us with a shout. He was just in the act of dealing out cards upon a patent travelling-table, and he flung down the cards at sight of me.

“Hi, Camp, old sport!” he exclaimed, “come in and take a hand, and bring your friend in, too; I’ll sit quiet for a while.” Then, as we passed in, he started, and his comical face assumed a look of horror. “Blessed if it isn’t the Duke!” he murmured. “Beg pardon for speaking so familiarly, your Grace, but——”

“Oh, all right, all right!” said the Duke. “Pleased to meet a friend of Mr. Campenhayes’s. Don’t let me interrupt——”

By a swift movement Barney Flint, who was always as agile as a monkey, screwed his way past us, and closed the door of the compartment. At the same moment his hand went up to the rail on which light articles were stowed, and it fell on a raincoat which I recognised as that which I had seen in Captain Mardyke’s possession in the dining-room on the boat; and I also saw Mardyke half rise from his seat, as if to make for Flint. But the Duke and I were between him and Flint—and we were both big men.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Barney Flint, “there’s a little business to be done, and we’d best do it quickly. Mr. Campenhayes, keep your eye on the gentlemen in the corner there. Your Grace lost a pocket-book this morning, I think—with bank-notes in it, I believe, to the tune of fifteen-hundred?”

Barney had firm hold of the raincoat by this time, and Mardyke’s face had grown livid. He sprang to his feet with a snarl, and made as if he would spring at the little bookmaker.

“Drop that coat!” he growled.

Barney drew back. His right hand slid into the outer pocket of the raincoat, and drew out the square parcel which I had seen the steward hand to Mardyke on the boat. It was loosely tied about with white string, and Barney, conscious that the

Duke and myself were guarding him, proceeded to untie the string and to unwrap the brown paper.

“Drop nothing, mister!” he retorted coolly. “Now, gentlemen, this innocent-looking little parcel seems to contain the toothsome dainty—a bit dry—known as ham sandwiches. Ham sandwiches are here certainly—a couple of layers of ’em—and between them reposes, a bit greasy, but intact—your Grace’s banknotes!”

I shall never forget the silence which followed this dramatic exposure—a silence which seemed to have a fitting accompaniment in the monotonous, steady rumble of the whirring wheels of the express. The man who had been playing cards with Mardyke and Barney gave Mardyke one searching look, and then turned away from him with contempt. As for Mardyke himself, he seemed to shrivel up in his corner, and his dark face became the colour of wet paste. But he darted one glance at Barney Flint, which, if glances could kill, would have slain that sharp-witted gentleman on the spot.

“Damn you!” he snarled. “I’ll pay you out yet!”

Barney laughed. In the midst of his laughter the Duke spoke, and his voice had lost all its indolence. There was something in it which was very hard and cold and terrible. He fixed Mardyke with one look.

“Well, who are you?” he asked.

Before Mardyke could answer I had drawn the Duke a little aside, and in a few words had told him—more than Mardyke would ever have told. And Mardyke sat in his corner and watched us, and I never saw any wretch in the dock, waiting to hear his doom, tremble as he trembled when the Duke at last turned to him.

“Ah!” said the Duke. “Well, I think we can deal with this matter here. Now you, sir—first of all you will hand over to Mr. Campenhaye all those papers and signatures he wants of you, and you will accept whatever Lord Sheddlecombe’s guardians think proper to give you. Do that at once.”

Mardyke, white to the very lips, pulled out some papers from a despatch-box and handed them to me. I looked them over, and signified to the Duke that they were correct. The Duke turned to the culprit again.

“Very good,” said he. “I know Lord Sheddlecombe’s guardians, and I shall advise them to give you just what you are legally entitled to—which is very little. Now for myself, I shall not give you in charge to-night, but first thing to-morrow morning you will resign your commission. If you have not done that by noon to-morrow, you had better blow out your brains!”

Then he stalked out of the compartment, and I followed him, and Barney Flint picked up his small impedimenta and followed me. And the other man followed

Barney, and Mardyke was left alone.

His Grace the Duke of Craye never spoke until, we reached Euston, and there he bade me good-night. But before he stepped into his motor-brougham he took Barney Flint aside and talked earnestly to him. When the Duke had gone, Barney came up to me.

“Blessed if I ever knew such a rum ’un as his Grace is!” said Barney. “Look here! He forced me to take five hundred of that oof—wouldn’t hear of no denial. And what do you think’s troubling him, Mr. Campenhaye?”

“Well?” I asked.

“The loss of that old pocket-book, which Mardyke, no doubt, threw away when he planked the notes in that packet of sandwiches,” replied Barney. “Says his old nurse gave it to him when he was a nipper. Lord, what a sentimental world this is!”

CHAPTER V.

THE TOBACCO-BOX.

When I set out for Leycaster that morning, I had no idea in my mind as to the reason which had made my old friend, Danthorpe, send for me so suddenly and hurriedly, conveying his message in four single words: "Come here at once." But Danthorpe was not only town clerk and a solicitor of standing at Leycaster, but a sharp man of the world, who never wasted time or money of his own, and was certainly not likely to waste mine, and so I obeyed his summons and thought no more of it until I reached the quaint old town by the sea, whereat I had sometimes visited him on pleasure. And as soon as I caught sight of his face on the station, I knew that Danthorpe had something in hand to which he thought it worth while to draw my professional attention.

"Come straight to the Castle Hotel, Campenhaye," he said, taking my arm. "I've ordered lunch in a private room. There is a mystery waiting for you here which seems to me about as queer a one as I ever encountered. I say 'seems'; it may be that you will think little of it. Anyway, it will give the people of this place plenty to talk of for at least the proverbial nine days—perhaps longer."

I thought as I looked around me at the familiar sights and scenes of Leycaster that it could never require much to stir the folk of so quiet a town. Leycaster, as all people know who have visited it, is one of the most ancient, as it is also one of the most picturesque, boroughs in the country. It is old, and worn, and grey—as grey as the waters of the North Sea which beat against its cliffs and headlands. It is built on a bold promontory; the Norman tower of its ruined castle may be seen for a wide stretch over land and sea; it has an ancient church, and queer streets and alleys; the houses in its market-place are of bygone centuries; there is scarcely anything modern in it; it has a small sea trade; it has a herring-fishery; but the tourist and tripper leave it alone. Every year a few artists set up their easels in its nooks and corners; a few people who love quiet and the smell of the sea visit it, but for all other purposes it is still out of the world. Leycaster is, in short, what the old topographers call a decayed town. But even in such a place things can happen.

Danthorpe is a wise man. He refused to say a word of business until we had luncheon. But as soon as we had come to the coffee and the cigars, he drew his chair closer to mine.

"Now then, Campenhaye," he said, "we'll start out on this affair. You are sufficiently acquainted with the geography of Leycaster to remember our castle?

Very well. Last night, about dusk, a woman, who lives in one of the cottages in Outer Ward, was passing through the castle grounds and came across the body of a man, which lay at the foot of Siward's Tower. She immediately fetched assistance from the lodge. The body was warm, but the man was dead. There was no mystery as to how he met his death. You have been up Siward's Tower with me more than once, and you will no doubt remember that here and there, all the way to the top, there are ancient embrasures, or openings, fenced in by low railings. According to our Castle Committee, these railings are constantly tested, and should be absolutely safe; but it is impossible to deny the fact that the dead man evidently leaned on one of the upper ones, that it gave way with his weight, and that he was precipitated some sixty or seventy feet to the path below."

"You are sure the railing gave way? You are sure he did not throw himself over?" I asked, mentally making notes of all that Danthorpe told me.

"There is no doubt that the railing gave way. The upper rail was broken completely out of its socket, and the wood was rotten," replied Danthorpe. "If the man was leaning heavily upon it, as he no doubt was, looking at the view over the bay and the harbour, he would have no chance at all. Our Castle Committee, or their subordinates, will get into hot water over this, I assure you. However, that is another matter. Let us go on. The man was removed to the mortuary. I myself saw him a few minutes later. The doctor said he had been killed instantaneously. He was a good-looking, gentlemanly-appeared man of, say, forty-five, well but quietly dressed, with good linen, good boots, clean-shaven, slightly grey of hair. He would have passed for a professional man—doctor, lawyer, anything of that sort. But on examining his clothing there was nothing whatever upon him to show who he was."

Danthorpe paused, and looked at me in a fashion which was significant of his astonishment. I only nodded, and bade him to continue.

"Nothing whatever upon him!" he repeated. "Not a —— But I'll tell you exactly what there was on him. There was a pocket-handkerchief, unmarked. There was a cigar-case, containing six or seven cigars of very good quality. There was a silver matchbox. There was a pocket-knife. There was a gold watch, with a gold chain attached. In one pocket of the trousers there was a leather purse, containing twenty-three pounds in gold; in the other, some loose silver. There was not a mark upon linen or clothing to show to whom they belonged, or where they had been bought or made. The only other thing upon the body was—this."

Here Danthorpe produced something wrapped in tissue paper, and, laying it on the table, placed his hand on it.

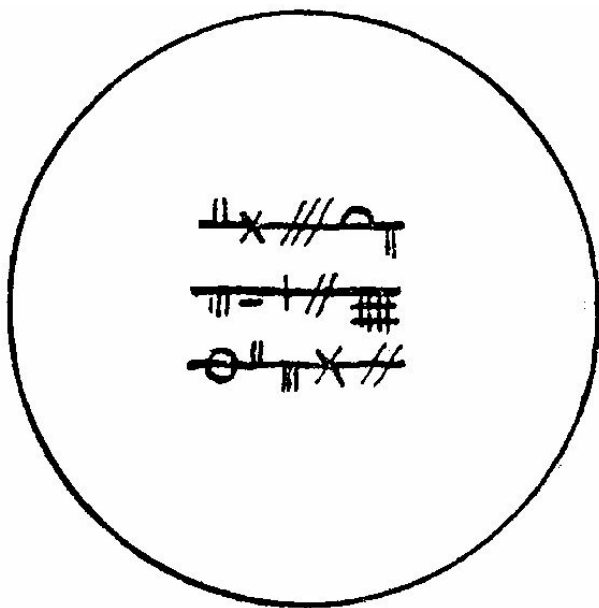
"I'll tell you about this later," he said. "It's this that I've really brought you down

to see, Campenhay. But first let me finish about the dead man. Of course, we wanted to find out who he was. In a little place like this that was easily done. We soon discovered that he arrived here—from London, remember, though it seems of no importance—at half-past five yesterday afternoon. He carried a small suit-case, and walked straight to his hotel and booked a room in the name of John Smith. He had some dinner prepared for him at once, and as soon as he had eaten it, he strolled out. The lodge-keeper admitted him to the castle, and saw him wandering about. After that he was never seen until the woman found him dead. Now, upon finding this out, we examined the suit-case, and an overcoat which had been taken up to his room. This search was as unproductive of result as the first. We found no papers, letters or visiting-cards. None of the linen was marked; there was absolutely nothing to reveal the man's identity. Who he is, why he came here, is a mystery. But there is something here, Campenhay, which I want you to look at."

He slowly tore away the wrappings of tissue paper from the object which he had produced, and at last revealed an old silver tobacco-box, rounded to comfortably fit into a pocket, and evidently of considerable age, being worn and of great smoothness all over its surface.

"You see what this is?" said Danthorpe. "An old tobacco-box of solid silver. Now open it, and look inside the lid."

The lid of the box opened by the pressure of a spring. The interior was as brightly polished as the exterior. And on the lid, scratched into the silver by some sharp instrument, was a sort of drawing or diagram, the meaning of which it was at first sight impossible to understand. It was nothing but a series or collection of tiny lines, mere scratches, but they were deeply indented in the silver, and they appeared to have some sequence or order, and therefore possibly some significance. And without remark, I took out my notebook and made an accurate reproduction of them.



“Now, what on earth do you make those scratches out to be?” said Danthorpe. “Are they signs, symbols, hieroglyphics, or what are they? Are they accidental, are they a mere whim, or are they there of set purpose? Does a man make marks in a good silver tobacco-box like that for nothing? And there’s another thing. Does a man——”

“My dear fellow,” I exclaimed, interrupting him, “don’t tax my brains too much. Although I have some fame as a specialist in crime investigation, I am not able to answer more than one question at a time. Now, I have only attempted to solve one question so far, about these mysterious remarks, which may be signs, symbols, hieroglyphics; but I have solved it to my own satisfaction, and I don’t think I am wrong.”

“Well, and what’s that?” asked Danthorpe.

“Merely that these were scratched or cut into the inside of this tobacco-box lid a good many years ago,” I said. “I can see that with the naked eye. Perhaps you can’t. Now you will see what I mean. The edge, the lip, of every scratch is quite smooth.”

“Yes, I see that,” he said, having examined the inside of the lid. “But—what do you think they mean?”

“Ah, that’s a big question! Perhaps nothing, perhaps a great deal,” said I. “However, leave that matter for a moment. Tell me, what are the police doing towards getting this man identified?”

“The usual thing,” answered Danthorpe. “A complete description, of course, and

a photograph. We had him photographed this morning, and we are sending copies out to the principal papers and police headquarters.”

“Very good. Now, let us take this box to the photographer’s and have copies made of these markings,” I said. “These copies shall be sent out in the same way, with a note appended, in which we will ask any person who can explain them or throw any light upon them to communicate with you, Danthorpe. And after that you can take me to see the dead man, on the mere chance of my recognising him—a very, very mere chance, I’m afraid.”

“I suppose somebody will recognise him,” said Danthorpe. “It seems a most extraordinary thing that a man should come to a strange town without so much as a letter in his pocket.”

That was precisely why I thought there might be the veriest off-chance of my knowing the man. He might be one of the better sort of the criminal class, who, bent on some enterprise or other, had taken care that in the event of arrest no immediate means of identification should be found upon him. It was certainly unusual that a well-dressed man, with money in his pockets, should be devoid of even a visiting-card; it looked as if everything of that sort had been purposely got rid of. And as I, in my professional capacity, had come across a vast number of strange characters, there was the possibility that I might recognise this mysterious stranger.

But when I came to see the dead man I did not know him at all—I knew that I had never seen him. And so there was nothing to be done until the circulation of the description and the photographs produced some result. It was impossible that they should produce none—the man was sure to be known by somebody. When that somebody came forward, we should no doubt learn the object of his visit to Leycaster.

Danthorpe and I were sitting in his study that night, smoking a final cigar before going to bed, when his parlourmaid came in to say that a Mr. Pentiman particularly desired a few minutes’ conversation with him. He bade the girl show Mr. Pentiman in at once.

“An old and much respected tradesman of the town—a jeweller,” said Danthorpe, turning to me as he rose and moved towards the door. “I wonder what he wants at this hour? Ah, come in, Mr. Pentiman! Glad to see you,” he continued, meeting and welcoming an old-fashioned, elderly-looking man, who entered bowing and smiling. “This is my friend, Mr. Campenhaye, of London, Mr. Pentiman. Mr. Campenhaye, one of our most honoured townsmen.”

The old gentleman bowed and smiled again, and dropped into the easy-chair which Danthorpe pushed forward.

"You'll think it strange that I should call at this hour, Mr. Danthorpe," he said; "but the fact is I have had my curiosity aroused. I've been talking to the police superintendent at the club, sir, and he has been telling me about the silver tobacco-box which was found on the poor man who fell out of Siward's Tower yesterday."

Danthorpe glanced sharply at me.

"Oh," he said, "what about it, Mr. Pentiman?"

"Well, little except that he described it, Mr. Danthorpe, and said that it was in your possession," replied the old gentleman. "And—the fact is, sir, I dropped in on my way home to ask if you would allow me to look at that tobacco-box."

Danthorpe turned to a locked drawer in the desk by which he was standing.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Pentiman," he replied. "Here it is."

He handed the small parcel over to the old man, and we both watched him curiously as he took off the tissue-paper wrappings. His wrinkled old face lighted up, and his eyes twinkled as he examined the silver box, and finally pressed the spring which released the inset lid, and looked inside.

"Ay, ay!" he said, more to himself than to us. "Ay, I thought it might be so—I thought it might!"

"What is it that you thought might be so, Mr. Pentiman?" asked Danthorpe. "You are referring to that box, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, I am," replied the old gentleman. "When the superintendent described it to me, I began to wonder if it might be a silver tobacco-box of which I know something. It seemed to be a thousand to one—ay, a million to one—against its being so. But—it is."

"You mean to say that you know that box?" exclaimed Danthorpe half incredulously.

"I know it, sir. It was once mine. The truth is, Mr. Danthorpe," continued Mr. Pentiman, looking at the Town Clerk with a smile, "the truth is, I gave this box, as a little acknowledgment of a service rendered, to James Meadows."

Danthorpe's face showed his astonishment.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Are—are you certain?"

"I'm as absolutely certain as I am of my own existence, sir," replied the old man. "I've no doubt of it. See, there's my private mark and number, just inside the curved rim. Oh, yes, that's the box. But——" He paused and looked critically at the markings within the lid, and he shook his head. "When I gave this box to James Meadows," he went on, "those queer marks were not there. I wonder what they mean?"

"When did you give that box to Meadows?" asked Danthorpe, who was

evidently much impressed.

"About a year, sir, before the—the unfortunate affair," answered Mr. Pentiman.

"Did you ever see it afterwards?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I did. As I say, I wanted to give Meadows a little acknowledgment, and I had this box in hand—it's an old eighteenth-century box, Mr. Danthorpe."

"I wonder how it came into this unknown man's possession?" said Danthorpe.

"That seems strange, sir," said the old man. "But I've known many strange things. We don't know who this man is. Meadows may have given it to him. Meadows may have sold it, and the man picked it up in some second-hand shop. But there's one thing certain, Mr. Danthorpe—that's the box I gave James Meadows ten years ago."

Then Mr. Pentiman went away, and Danthorpe saw him out, and came back to me with a greatly puzzled countenance.

"Campenhaye," he said, pulling his chair towards mine, "that's one of the most extraordinary things I have ever known. The mystery of this affair, Campenhaye, is in this box. You heard the old gentleman speak of James Meadows?"

"I did. Who is, or was, James Meadows?"

"A man who made history in this town before you knew it. He was manager of the Leycaster Bank. And just about ten years ago—not quite so much—he got ten years' penal servitude for embezzlement. That's who James Meadows was!"

"Then in that case," I said, "James Meadows is at large again."

Danthorpe considered matters.

"Yes, that's so," he replied. "I can't remember the exact dates off-hand, but, of course, I have the full details at the office. But Meadows would certainly be released some little time ago."

"Is there no one in the town who knows anything of him?" I asked. "Has he no friends or relations here?"

"No," replied Danthorpe. "He wasn't a Leycaster man. He came here from somewhere in the Midlands. He was then about thirty, and he had been here fifteen years when what old Pentiman calls the unfortunate affair happened. Meadows was one of those men who steadily build up a character for probity and then suddenly rob the very people who trust him implicitly. There wasn't a man in the town who had a higher reputation. Yet he robbed the bank of over fifty thousand pounds. And what's more, the bank recovered nothing, and Meadows obstinately refused to give any information as to what he had done with the missing funds. It was commonly believed at the time that he had been hard hit on the Stock Exchange, but it was

impossible to get a word out of him. It was by mere chance that he was detected, and if that mere chance hadn't come off, Meadows would probably have got clean away with more of the bank's property. And the bank was not the only loser."

"Townsppeople, eh?" I suggested.

"Only to a slight extent; he had certainly realised on some securities which had been entrusted to him," answered Danthorpe. "No; a very queer matter happened, Campenhaye. I think I've shown you the Earl of Lowthorpe's place, haven't I?"

"Oh, yes, I remember it very well," I answered.

"Seven or eight miles out. Yes; but I'm sure I never told you about the affair of the diamonds," said Danthorpe. "It was this—some little time before Meadows was found out, there was the annual County Ball held there, and Lord and Lady Lowthorpe were to be present. Now, the Lowthorpes belong to the poorer order of the peerage; but there are some very fine heirlooms in the family, including diamonds which are worth at least twenty thousand pounds. These diamonds were usually kept at a London bank. Lady Lowthorpe wanted to wear them at our ball. Lord Lowthorpe, who was then getting old and fidgety, had them brought down from London; but he was so nervous about them that on their arrival he deposited them with Meadows, at the bank, here, and insisted on Lady Lowthorpe's putting them on before the ball, and taking them off, after the ball, at the Castle Hotel. He said it was not safe to drive to and from Lowthorpe on a winter night with such valuable property. And when Lady Lowthorpe divested herself of the diamonds at the hotel when the ball was over, the old earl carried them off himself, to hand over to Meadows at the bank, Meadows having specially arranged to sit up for his lordship. And, very unfortunately, the earl was allowed to go alone."

"Why unfortunately?"

"As events turned out, it was very unfortunate. The countess got into her furs, and waited his return. He had only to go across the market place and round the corner; but he was so long away that at last she sent the footman to find him. He was found a little time after, lying in the street, unconscious."

"Violence?"

"There was no violence. It was a seizure—a fit of some sort. He was carried back to the Castle Hotel, and doctors were sent for. While they were busied with the patient, nobody, of course, thought of anything else. Before morning the earl died, never having recovered consciousness. And the news of his death quickly spreading about the town, Meadows came hurrying to the Castle Hotel to ask for the countess. He wanted to know if the diamonds were safe. Because, said he, although he had sat up until four o'clock for him, the earl had never come, and he

had formed the conclusion that the earl and countess were staying the night at the hotel, and had the diamonds in their own keeping. On rising, Meadows said, he had been informed of the events of the night, and so he had hastened to her ladyship.”

Danthorpe paused for a moment, and looked at me as if he wondered what I thought. I motioned him to continue.

“Well, of course, there was a fine to-do,” he said. “Meadows did no rowing, swearing, nor protesting; he merely said quietly and positively that the old earl had most certainly not brought the diamonds back to him; if he had done so, he said, he should have given him a receipt for them. And there was no receipt upon the earl’s body. And as nobody at that time doubted the probity of Meadows, the theory gained ground that some one had seen the earl fall in a fit, and had robbed him. And this theory was all the more strengthened by the fact that, a day or two later, the case in which the diamonds had been kept was found—empty, and the patent lock forced—on the side of the railway, about a mile out of the town. From that day to this, Campenhay, those diamonds have never been heard of.”

“Just so,” I said. “Now, what about the people who suspected Meadows? Some people must have suspected him.”

Danthorpe shook his head.

“I don’t think a soul suspected him at the time,” he answered. “You see, he hadn’t been found out. But when the embezzlement came to light, people began to talk. It suddenly struck some of us that it was a strange thing that Meadows didn’t step across to the hotel when the earl was so late in calling. Then it came out that before Meadows saw the countess he had heard all about the events of the night from one of the doctors, and knew that the earl had never recovered consciousness from the moment of his seizure. How does the thing strike you, Campenhay?”

“The thing strikes me as being very simple,” I said. “The earl gave the diamonds to Meadows. He took no receipt for them. When Meadows heard the news from the doctor he saw that nothing could prove that the diamonds had been handed to him. He had nothing to do but to appropriate them. He threw the case away. That’s how it strikes me, Danthorpe.”

“Well, and I daresay that’s correct. But,” continued Danthorpe, as we both rose, “those diamonds have never been heard of since. Meadows got his ten years for the other affair, and wherever he may be now——”

He finished with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, implying that Meadows had probably taken himself off to the Antipodes, or to some inaccessible island in the Pacific.

“Nobody’ll ever hear of Jim Meadows again,” he added, as we lighted our

candles.

"But we'll find out to-morrow when he was discharged from Portland, at any rate," I said.

That, of course, was easily done. After looking over certain records at Danthorpe's office, I wired to Portland, and within two hours received the news I wanted. James Meadows had earned the full amount of remission. He had been discharged from Portland just five weeks since. Of course, the convict prison authorities knew nothing as to his whereabouts; all they knew was that he had left them for London.

We progressed no further in the elucidation of the mystery of the dead man on that, the second day after my summons to Leycaster. The inquest was opened at the Coroner's Court that day, and was adjourned after the available evidence had been taken. That evening, photographs of the deceased began to appear in some of the London and provincial evening newspapers; next morning they appeared all over England, and side by side with these were printed reproductions of the extraordinary marks which had been discovered within the lid of the tobacco-box. And by breakfast time on that morning, Danthorpe received a wire from Portland saying that a warder was just setting off for Leycaster and would see the body of the unknown man, requesting that it might not be interred until he had seen it. The telegram added that the photograph printed in the papers was believed at Portland to be that of a man recently discharged from there.

The warder arrived at Leycaster at five o'clock that afternoon. Danthorpe and myself were present, together with the police superintendent and an inspector, when he was shown the body. Not a little to our surprise he identified it at once.

"Yes," he said, "this is the man we thought of. And if you have examined him carefully, you will know that he has a brown birth-mark just above his right elbow and has lost the first and second joints of the third finger of his left hand."

That was correct. And when we had left the mortuary the warder told us who the man was, or, at any rate, all they knew of him at Portland. Charles Lewes, forty-five; sentenced at the Criminal Court to five years' penal servitude for some offence in connection with a forged cheque; had been released from Portland a month ago.

"Which means," observed Danthorpe, "that he got his liberty just about the same time that Meadows got his?"

"Yes, that would be so," said the warder; "there would not be a week's difference between the release of one and that of the other, anyway."

Did he know whether Meadows—whom he knew quite well—and Lewes were acquainted while at Portland? Well, he had no particular remembrance that they

were, but it was more than likely. It was also quite likely that they knew they were to be released about the same time, and could make arrangements to meet in London or elsewhere.

Danthorpe and I left the warder to be entertained by the police, and went home. In the hall we were met by the parlourmaid, who presented her master with a card.

"The gentleman is in the library, sir," she said.

Danthorpe passed the card to me. I gave one glance at it: Professor Craig-Johnstone, St. Fridolin's College, Cambridge.

The same thought instantly occurred to Danthorpe and myself: this visit had to do with the queer marks on the lid of the tobacco-box. I, in fact, was sure of it, for though I had never met him, I knew Professor Craig-Johnstone by name and reputation. I drew Danthorpe aside as we walked towards the door of the library.

"I know who this man is," I said. "He's the greatest living authority on palæography and epigraphy. And he's come to tell you what those marks mean."

Danthorpe looked his astonishment.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Well, come along, let's hear what he's got to say."

Professor Craig-Johnstone sat in an easy-chair in a thoughtful attitude. In appearance he was not exactly what one would expect a very learned man to be—that is to say, he was neither old nor snuffy, nor careless of his dress. On the contrary, he was a good-looking person, with a clean-shaven face, clad in an irreproachably cut suit of grey tweed; he looked, in short, a country gentleman, or a well-to-do tourist, and his manners were pleasant and easy. And when the preliminary introduction had been gone through, he sat down and chattered to us in quite a friendly and informal fashion.

"I came down to see you, Mr. Danthorpe," he said, "because of the diagram which you caused to be published in this morning's newspapers. Now, before I say anything further, will you let me see the tobacco-box on which these marks are cut, or scratched?"

Danthorpe at once produced the box, and Professor Craig-Johnstone examined it with evident interest.

"Yes," he said. "Now, you, gentlemen, do not know what this marking is?"

We shook our heads.

"Very well; I am here to tell you. It is a rude, but I should say, a quite accurate drawing of an inscription written on some stone or slab in Ogham. If you do not know what Ogham is, I must explain. It is one of the earliest known forms of writing upon stone. Without troubling you with details, I may point out that it has as its basis a main, or medial line; the characters you see, branch off from, or transect, that line.

Now, this Ogham writing was practised in these islands more than two thousand years ago; there are many examples of it in Ireland, there are a few—very few—in England, and they are on this coast. Without doubt, gentlemen, this diagram, incised roughly on the lid of this silver box, is a drawing of an Ogham inscription on some stone. I will stake my professional reputation upon it.”

Danthorpe and I looked at each other. I think the same notion, or ghost of a notion, rose up within our minds at that moment. And Danthorpe turned to his visitor.

“You say, professor, that the known stones on which this writing is found in England are all on this East Coast?” he said.

“Yes. And they are very, very few in number; and of those that are known, some are questionable,” replied Professor Craig-Johnstone. “But—there may be others. Wherever there were many ancient settlements, communities, previous to, say, the first Roman occupation, there may be others. Now, this district is a very ancient one. It is one which I have long desired to inspect, but up to now I have never had a chance of coming here. But—this writing. I may tell you, gentlemen, that I have read all the facts relating to the death of the man upon whose body this box was found, and I have formed a theory. Shall I tell you what it is? Remember, I am neither lawyer nor expert in crime. Mine is—a layman’s theory.”

“Tell it, by all means,” said Danthorpe. “I can assure you, we can only be too glad to hear it.”

“Well, it is this. The unknown man came here to find something which is concealed. The key to the place of concealment is in this rude drawing. The place of concealment is in all likelihood beneath, or close to, some stone or slab on which the original of the drawing is sculptured. All he had to do was to find that stone or slab. The probability is that it is one of several stones bearing similar marks. He would know the one he wanted by comparing it with this diagram. And,” continued the professor with enthusiasm, “it seems to me that, if you know of any ancient place hereabouts—the ruins of an old religious house, old churchyard, or similar remnant of antiquity, you had better search thoroughly and see if you cannot find a stone which bears marks corresponding to these.”

Again Danthorpe and I glanced at each other. We were beginning to see things. And from glancing at each other we glanced at the door.

“If you will excuse Mr. Campenhaye and myself for a moment, professor,” said Danthorpe, “we will just consult on a matter which seems, to my mind, to bear on your theory, and on which I am inclined to ask your advice.”

The professor bowed, and Danthorpe and I went out and into the next room.

“Campenhaye,” said Danthorpe, “what do you think of that? It seems to me that

this chap has hit the right nail on the head. That diagram shows where Meadows hid the Lowthorpe diamonds.”

“It seems very like it,” I replied. “Uncommonly like it.”

“Very well. The thing is—shall I tell our visitor the story of the diamonds?”

“Why?”

“Because it seems to me that you and I, not being experts, nor archaeologists, nor antiquarians, might search these parts for a year and a day without coming across that stone. He is an expert; he knows what he is talking about, and he would be of the greatest help. Come, shall we take him into our confidence?”

I reflected for a moment. A noted professor—a Cambridge man—a man of substance and reputation. Why not?

“Yes,” I said. “I think we may.”

We returned to the library, and found Professor Craig-Johnstone inspecting a map of the town and neighbourhood which hung on the wall. Danthorpe produced cigars, and some of his famous brown sherry, and, sitting down again, we put the visitor in possession of the whole story of Meadows, the Lowthorpe diamonds, and of Charles Lewes.

The Professor was a model listener. He never interrupted with a question or a remark, but his keen eyes showed that he took in every point. And at the end of the story he nodded his head with an expressive gesture.

“Oh, of course, the affair is plain,” he said. “Meadows, when he appropriated the diamonds, was running the chance of detection on the other matter of embezzlement every day. He accordingly ‘planted’ the diamonds as quickly as he could, and, without a doubt, under a stone bearing these marks, and one of many stones similarly marked. Foreseeing that it might be some time before he could recover them, he hastily scratched a rough drawing of the markings of that particular stone on the inside of his silver tobacco-box. Soon afterwards, as you say, he was sent to prison. In prison he made the acquaintance of Lewes. They were released about the same time. Meadows dare not come down here, where he would have been recognised. He sent Lewes. Or Meadows may be dead and have left the secret to Lewes. What is sure, is that Lewes had the tobacco-box in his possession, and that here he came. The matter, gentlemen, is clear. And there is now only one thing to be done.”

“And what is that?” asked Danthorpe eagerly.

“Why, to think of the place in this neighbourhood where such stones as these are likely to be found,” replied the Professor with an indulgent smile. “As I said, I am an absolute stranger, and know nothing of the district. But you——”

"I am not much versed in antiquities," said Danthorpe; "but while you have been talking I have been thinking of the place called Old Leycaster."

"And what is that?"

Danthorpe took down the map, and pointed to a spit of land which runs out into the sea, about a mile and a half south of the town.

"The most forlorn and desolate spot in existence," he said. "You see these marks on this triangular bit of coast? Well, that is Old Leycaster. What it is, is a collection of heaps of ruinous masonry, and that sort of thing. Once there was an old church, or a monk's cell, or something of that sort there. Now I come to think of it, I have only once been there—for no townsfolk ever go—there are stones within and without the ruins which are very ancient. The whole place is so desolate, so overgrown with bramble and bush and weed that——"

The Professor held up a forefinger.

"My dear sir," he said in a hushed whisper, "this is probably the very place. It was most likely the first landing-place of the folk from overseas who subsequently founded your ancient borough. It should be examined. Now, as the Long Vacation is with us, I am master of my time. Shall I be of any use to you? Say, to-morrow."

"The greatest," responded Danthorpe. "And I am infinitely obliged to you. Let's arrange matters."

So we arranged that the three of us should go out to Old Leycaster next morning, to make an examination of the ruins. Nothing was to be said to the police; we were to keep the matter to ourselves until we had made a thorough investigation, which it was best to conduct privately.

Danthorpe begged his visitor to stay to dinner, but the Professor declined. He had ordered his dinner at the Castle Hotel; afterwards he was going to drive out to a village a few miles off, where he wished to renew acquaintance with an old college friend whom he had not seen for some years. But he would be in readiness for us at the hotel at precisely eleven o'clock next morning. And on that understanding we parted, and Danthorpe was much excited during the rest of the evening over the prospects of the morrow.

We were both at the Castle Hotel at the appointed hour; Professor Craig-Johnstone, however, was not there. In fact, said Mrs. Cooke, the landlady, he had not been there since dinner-time the previous evening. He had booked a room, it was true, but he had mentioned to her that he was going out to see a friend at the village of which he had spoken to us, and might possibly spend the night there. We concluded that he was a little late, and we waited, but he had not returned at noon, nor at one o'clock. And Danthorpe began to pull a long face, and I began to grow

suspicious, and eventually, having swallowed a glass of sherry and a sandwich, we left, and with a mutual understanding, walked off to Old Leycaster.

Danthorpe was very silent. I understood his silence—I myself was silent. It seemed to me that we had been somewhat premature in revealing so many secrets to a complete stranger, even though he was a famous man. And I had an uncomfortable idea that we were going to solve more secrets than one.

Old Leycaster proved to be one of the most desolate spots I have ever seen—a mere collection of grey, time-worn walls and stones, on a spit of forlorn marshland, over which the sea-birds were calling in their most mournful fashion. But amidst the desolation of what was certainly the ruined shell of some old building of the most hoary antiquity, we found several stones and slabs on which were just traceable the outlines of the Ogham writing—and beneath one of them was a small excavation which had been freshly carried out. And in it was a letter addressed to Messrs. Danthorpe and Campenhaye.

It was a letter of the most consummate impertinence: its audacity was colossal. But here it is:

“GENTLEMEN,—I have found what, after our conversation of last night, I felt sure I should find. Accordingly, I am off! You will never see me again. I am obliged to you for your help. When I saw the diagram in the papers, I immediately formed the theory of which I told you, and I set out for Leycaster. But I was wise enough to know that, unaided, I might spend days in searching for a place where Ogham writing was likely to be found, or in getting information as to valuable missing property. And so I boldly called upon you at once, and you did me an inestimable benefit by telling me all you knew. Your information about the diamonds, and your suggestion about Old Leycaster, supplied the missing links in my chain. I always was a good hand at theorising. *This* theory was—an inspiration!

“I am not Professor Craig-Johnstone, though I am interested in his subjects. Never mind who I am. I was once an honest man. And I am still, as I have shown to you, a scholar, and

“A MAN OF BRAINS.”

Danthorpe looked at me long and sadly.

“It strikes me, Campenhaye,” he said at last, “that our visitor of last night was, in his way, a genius. And the question is—what is to be done now?”

But for once in my life I had no answer ready. The Man of Brains had bowled

me out first ball!

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DUQUESNE.

There was nothing much to occupy my attention at the office that June afternoon, and I was just thinking of spending the rest of it at Lord's, where a particularly interesting match was in progress between Middlesex and Yorkshire, when my clerk brought in a telegram, the wording of which caused me to make an immediate alteration in my plans. The phraseology of that message was somewhat old-fashioned; I smiled as I read it:

“The Duke of Saxonstowe presents his compliments to Mr. Paul Campenhaye, and will be greatly obliged if Mr. Campenhaye will come to Saxonstowe by the 3.15 train from Marylebone, as he wishes to consult him on an affair of the most serious and urgent importance. The Duke will meet Mr. Campenhaye at Elmford Station, at 5.30, unless Mr. Campenhaye replies to this message in the negative.”

To seize a telegraph form and dash off an affirmative answer was the work of a moment; to get out a portmanteau which I always kept at the office, packed ready for any emergency, the task of another; within five minutes I was off to the Great Central Railway, and at the time when I might have been in the pavilion at Lord's, was rushing through the London suburbs towards the North. I had leisure to wonder a little why I was being summoned in such haste.

Oddly enough, the Duke of Saxonstowe—Henry John Domfreville, twenty-first Duke of Saxonstowe, and holder of at least half a dozen titles, of Saxonstowe Park, in Nottinghamshire, 175, Berkeley Square, in London, and Domfreville Castle, in Scotland—was one of the very few English great peers with whom I was not even acquainted by sight. That was probably because his Grace was very young, and had been little known or seen about town. There was no need, however, for me to turn up the “Debrett” which I always carried in my hand-bag—it was my business to know all about the members of the peerage. The Duke of Saxonstowe, I therefore reminded myself, was at that time twenty-four years of age. He had been educated at Eton and at Christ Church, Oxford. After leaving Oxford with a more than usually good degree, he had travelled a great deal in North and South America. He was understood to be studious and reserved; no one had ever heard of him in connection with either the ladies of the chorus or the gentlemen of the money-lending profession.

If he was not a multi-millionaire, he was, at any rate, very rich; and if he had no very great reputation as a sportsman, he was making one as a collector of books and pictures. I was prepared, therefore, to meet a young gentleman who was inclined to the passive rather than to the active side of life.

However, when I left the train—specially stopped for my benefit—at the little roadside station of Elmford, I found myself greeted by what most people would call the beau-ideal of a youthful country squire. The duke was a sandy-haired, fresh-coloured, tallish young man, dressed in a well-worn tweed suit, an old cap, and stout boots; he carried an ash-plant stick, and was attended by two business-like fox-terriers. His hand was as big and strong as a blacksmith's, and his smile ready and kindly. But I saw at once that he was greatly troubled in mind about something, and that he would be uncommonly glad to make me his father-confessor.

"It is awfully good of you to come down at such short notice, Mr. Campenhaye," said his Grace, gripping my hand. "I'm much obliged to you. Now, as it's such a delightful evening, and there's lots of time before dinner, perhaps you won't mind if we walk home across the park? Then—then I can talk to you quietly. There's a dog-cart outside for your luggage," he added. "Can you manage a two-mile walk?"

I laughingly replied that I was equal to a ten-mile walk if he wished it, and we presently crossed the road and, passing through a small lodge, entered a park which spread away as far as the eye could reach, and was remarkable at first sight for its ancient oaks and spreading beeches, beneath which a vast quantity of deer and cattle moved slowly in the afternoon sunshine. Far away in the remote distance, I caught a glimpse of high gables; that, I supposed to be the house. It was a fair and eminently English prospect, and one to be proud of.

"Mr. Campenhaye," said the duke, as we set out across the park, "I have heard of you as a man in whom the fullest confidence can be reposed. That is why I sent for you. I am face to face with a very great trouble."

"If your Grace will be good enough to confide in me," I said, "I think you will not regret it. Let me hear everything. That is the only stipulation I make with all my clients."

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "Yes, of course, I shall tell you everything. Let me begin at the beginning. I may as well say, Mr. Campenhaye, that I have no great love for London in spring and summer, and that I prefer this to anything London can give me. That is why I am here during the season. But I am not a hermit, and now and then I gather small parties of friends round me. I have just had one such party staying with me, and out of that the trouble has arisen. I must give you the names of the

people. There was, and is, my aunt, Lady Louisa Ashe, who has acted as hostess; then Professor Ridsdale, of Oxford, and his wife; then Colonel Polkard, with whom I was travelling last year in Patagonia; my cousin, Horace Dalrymple—he and I were at school and college together—and my friends, Mrs. Duquesne and Miss Manning.”

I noticed that he gave me some indication of who or what all the members of this house-party were, with the exception of the last-named two ladies; I also observed that he spoke their names with some hesitation.

“And who,” I asked, “are Mrs. Duquesne and Miss Manning?”

Before replying he drew out a cigar-case and offered it to me. He took out a cigar himself when I had got one, and as he lighted it I saw that his fingers trembled a little.

“Mrs. Duquesne,” he answered, “is the widow of Stephen Duquesne, the famous Orientalist. I knew them well before his death.”

“I have heard of him,” said I. “How old is Mrs. Duquesne?”

“I should think about twenty-seven,” he replied; “but really I do not know.”

“And Miss Manning is——” I enquired.

“The daughter of my old tutor at Oxford, now dead,” he answered. “She is only a girl—nineteen.”

“Proceed, if your Grace pleases,” I said.

“I suppose I had better go straight to the heart of the matter now,” he said, with evident reluctance. “Well, Mrs. Duquesne is the possessor of some famous jewels which her husband collected in the East. Amongst them is a very fine opal, set in diamonds, in a ring. I had often seen it; none of my guests had, because Mrs. Duquesne never wears it, believing it to be unlucky. One night—ten days ago, to be precise—I happened to mention it at dinner; later on, Mrs. Duquesne showed it to all of us. The next afternoon she came to me and told me that the ring had been stolen from her jewel-case. She had placed it in its usual place, in her maid’s presence, on retiring the previous night; having occasion to look in the jewel-case next day, she found that it had disappeared.”

I made no comment, and the duke, having walked a little way in silence, resumed his story.

“I dare say you have had this sort of thing brought before your notice a good many times, Mr. Campenhaye,” he said. “I never had until then, and I was very much upset. I did not know what to do. Before I could do anything, Mrs. Duquesne took action. She communicated that very night with the authorities of Scotland Yard.”

“Ah!” I said, “sending them, no doubt, a full description of the ring.”

"Just so," replied the duke, looking at me as if he were a little surprised that I should think of that. "She did; and the result was that the Scotland Yard people found that the ring had been pledged that very morning, at half-past ten o'clock, with a firm named Leiter & Nott, who are, I understand, very well-known pawnbrokers in London."

"Quite so," I said. "And by whom had the ring been pledged?"

We were just then in a very lonely part of the park, but the duke looked around him and lowered his voice, as if he were afraid of even the red deer hearing what he was about to say.

"It had been pledged," he replied, "by Arthur Manning—the brother of Miss Manning, of whom I have spoken. And—I am to tell you the whole ugly truth, Mr. Campenhaye—it had been sent to Arthur Manning by his sister, by registered post, the previous night, from our local post office. There, Mr. Campenhaye, that is the truth—and my trouble!"

I stopped and regarded him searchingly. He met my gaze with steady, grief-stricken eyes.

"Why," I said at last, "why is it your Grace's particular trouble?"

He threw out one hand with an instinctive gesture and his face flushed. "Why?" he exclaimed. "Why, because I love Miss Manning with my whole heart, and unless she is cleared of this I shall never know a moment's happiness in life! That's why, Mr. Campenhaye, that's why?"

The duke was so obviously moved that I refrained from asking him more at the moment. We walked some little distance in silence; at last he resumed the subject himself.

"I had better finish the wretched story up to this present time, Mr. Campenhaye," he said. "The officer who had been placed in charge of the matter by the Scotland Yard authorities communicated at once with Arthur Manning, who is a subaltern in one of the Guards regiments, and in consequence of this they both came down to Saxonstowe immediately to see Miss Manning. Now, I beg you to observe, Mr. Campenhaye, that both Manning and his sister have been most candid, most straightforward, most anxious to keep nothing back. They have told all they could. Their story is this: A few days before the disappearance of the opal ring, Arthur Manning—who is only a boy—lost more money at cards than he could afford to pay, for he and his sister are by no means well off. He was very much upset about this, and he wrote to Stella—to Miss Manning. Miss Manning possesses a valuable diamond ring—which was quite recently left to her by a distant relative. Anxious to help her brother out of his difficulties, she sent him this ring, and told him to raise

sufficient money on it to pay his debts. Arthur Manning received, not that ring, but Mrs. Duquesne's ring——”

“Pardon me,” I said, interrupting him. “Did Mr. Manning know that his sister's ring was set with diamonds?”

“No,” replied the duke, “he did not; more's the pity! He knew that a valuable ring had been bequeathed to his sister, but did not know whether it was of diamonds, pearls, or what. In her letter to him, Miss Manning merely said that she sent him Mrs. Trevarthen's ring, and begged him to pledge it in such a way that he and she could redeem it between them. He, finding an opal ring in the registered packet which his sister sent him, naturally concluded that it was the ring to which she referred.”

“Quite so,” said I. “Your Grace has more to tell me yet?”

“Yes,” he replied, with a sigh, “there is more. All this came out before my aunt, Lady Louisa Ashe, and Mrs. Duquesne. I am sorry to say that Mrs. Duquesne took a very strong line. She immediately accused Miss Manning of having stolen her ring. It then turned out that Mrs. Duquesne had been conducting some investigations on her own part, and that she had found that one of the maids had seen Miss Manning enter Mrs. Duquesne's room during the afternoon on which the ring was stolen. At that time Mrs. Duquesne and the other ladies of the house-party were all on the lawn, playing croquet. She had also discovered that Miss Manning had taken the trouble to walk to Saxonstowe village to register her packet; our usual plan with such things is to hand them to the postman, who calls at six o'clock. And Mrs. Duquesne was, I am sorry to say, indignant, and perhaps somewhat unreasonable.”

“What followed?” I asked.

The duke shook his head sorrowfully.

“What I should like to forget,” he answered, “and what I want you to clear up. Miss Manning—who had acknowledged that she went into Mrs. Duquesne's room to fetch a book which had been promised to her, and stayed there several minutes because she could not readily find it—protested that the ring which she sent to her brother was her own. Mrs. Duquesne thereupon dared her to produce the case in which Miss Manning usually kept the ring—dared her, I mean, to send for it there and then, and open it before us without previous interference from herself. Miss Manning accepted this challenge at once.”

“Readily? Without demur?” I asked.

“With the utmost readiness, with the greatest alacrity!” replied the duke. “At her special request, I fetched her jewel-case myself, and opened it with a key which she handed to me. ‘It is impossible that the ring which Mrs. Trevarthen left me should be

there,' she said, 'because I posted it to Arthur myself.' But on opening the case, Mrs. Trevarthen's ring was there!"

"Just so," said I. "Now, what did Miss Manning say or do?"

"She was naturally much distressed," he answered. "She protested most emphatically that she had placed Mrs. Trevarthen's ring in a cardboard box packed with cotton wool, and had sent it with a covering letter to her brother. How it came about that it was found in her own jewel-case, and that Mrs. Duquesne's ring was delivered to Arthur Manning, she could not explain. And that, Mr. Campenhaye, is all. Do you see any gleam of light; do you?"

"Patience! Patience!" I said. "It is early yet. I suppose Mrs. Duquesne did not give Miss Manning in charge?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the duke. "No, indeed! The man from Scotland Yard went back to London, and Arthur Manning took his sister to the vicarage at Saxonstowe—the vicar and his wife are old friends of the family. They are both there now—Arthur has got short leave."

"And nothing has happened to enlighten you?" I said.

"Nothing," he replied dolefully. "Nothing! That is why I wired for you, Mr. Campenhaye. Something must be done. It is impossible that Stella Manning could have done this thing—impossible! I have wondered?"

"Yes?" I said encouragingly.

"I have wondered if by any possible chance the rings could have become exchanged the night that Mrs. Duquesne exhibited hers?" he said. "It seems hardly likely, seeing that one was an opal ring, the other a diamond. And yet I cannot think of any other theory—and——"

"Oh, we may have half a dozen theories yet!" I said, smiling. "Now, I want your Grace to tell me a few things before we reach the house. The Mannings are at Saxonstowe Vicarage, where I will call upon them this evening. Where is Mrs. Duquesne?"

"She is still here," answered the duke, glancing towards the house, which was by now in sight.

"Oh!" I said. "And the rest of the house-party?"

"My aunt, of course is still here," he said. "But the Ridsdales and Colonel Folkard are gone. My cousin, Mr. Dalrymple, is here yet."

"Now for some questions of a more personal nature," I said. "Your Grace has treated me with your confidence as regards your affection for Miss Manning. That, I suppose, is quite a secret matter?"

"Oh, quite, quite!" he replied hurriedly.

"Yet your liking for Miss Manning may have been made evident," I remarked. "Women are naturally very sharp-eyed and sharp-eared in those matters. Now, I want to ask your Grace frankly—do you think Mrs. Duquesne has a prejudice against Miss Manning?"

The duke stopped and stared at me hard. I recognised then that he was a very simple-minded young man, and quite guileless.

"But why should she, Mr. Campenhaye?" he asked.

I shook my head and smiled.

"Mrs. Duquesne is a young and doubtless a charming woman," I said.

"She is certainly charming—and beautiful," he acknowledged. "And, of course, she is young."

"Mrs. Duquesne may aspire to the rank of a duchess?" I said.

The duke flushed as hotly as any schoolgirl.

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaimed. "I—I do not think—surely you do not mean to suggest, Mr. Campenhaye, that——"

"I don't mean to suggest anything at present," I answered, and as we were just then entering the gardens, I began to talk about the cultivation of roses, and endeavoured to take my companion's thoughts away from the theft of the ring. On that matter I had already formed what I called a possible theory, of which I was going to say nothing—just then, at any rate.

The duke himself took me to the rooms which had been prepared for me, and later presented me to his aunt. Lady Louisa Ashe was a well-preserved lady of between fifty and sixty, who was palpably dubious as to how she ought to treat me—whether as a superior policeman or a professor of legerdemain. Finding that I was quite an ordinary person, who moved and spoke like all other persons, she became easier in her manner and gave me a cup of tea.

"Oh, I didn't tell you that Helena had flown!" she suddenly exclaimed, turning to the duke.

"Helena! Flown?" he said. "Where and when?"

"A telegram came for her soon after you set off to meet Mr. Campenhaye," replied Lady Louisa. "Somebody wanted her that instant in town. So she looked out the trains and motored to Nottingham. She was sorry to go off so hurriedly."

"Hum!" said the duke. "Lady Louisa is speaking of Mrs. Duquesne," he added, turning to me. "It's a pity she has gone so suddenly. By the by, that is a photograph of her—a very good one."

But I had already seen it. And I had some notion that the flight of Mrs. Duquesne from the ducal roof was not unconnected with the fact of my arrival, for I

had recognised the photograph as that of a lady with whom I was acquainted. *Only—I did not know her as Mrs. Duquesne.*

There was very little to do at Saxonstowe Park in respect to the theft of Mrs. Duquesne's opal ring. While the daylight lasted, I examined the room from which the ring had been taken, and had a conversation with the maid who had seen Miss Manning enter it in Mrs. Duquesne's absence. There was not much to be gained from her or from staring at the room; I was much more interested in the thought of interviewing Miss Manning and her brother. And after dinner the duke took me across the park by a short cut which led to the vicarage garden. There he left me, thinking it best that I should see the young people by themselves; but it needed little observation to see that he would have been very glad to enter the vicarage with me.

The duke had previously sent over a note to advise Miss Manning and her brother of my coming, and I was at once taken to them in the vicar's study, which the good man had kindly given up for our conference. I had never had any thought of the young lady as a guilty party; if I had, any such thought would have been dispelled as soon as I set eyes on her. She was a handsome, healthy, English girl, with clear, honest eyes, a firm grip of the hand, and a ready confidence which was almost childish—about as likely to steal other women's fallals as she was to write a book on Greek verbs. As for the brother, he was the typical subaltern, reminiscent yet of Sandhurst, and trying hard to give himself the bearing and firmness of a man. They both looked very troubled and very shy, and were evidently awestruck at the notion of interviewing and being interviewed by the great Paul Campenhaye—who was not quite so clever, perhaps, as they thought him.

"Now, Miss Manning," I said in my cheeriest manner, as soon as we had all sat down, "the first thing for you to do is for you to keep up your spirits. I have heard all about this business, and, of course, I am sure you did not take Mrs. Duquesne's ring. Equally, of course, the Duke of Saxonstowe doesn't think so, either, and never did."

The girl's face flushed, and I saw a very suspicious moisture start into her eyes. The boy flushed, too, and his lips were compressed for a moment.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "This is a terrible business, though, and we both feel it awfully. And it's all my fault—if I hadn't been such an ass I should never had got Stella into this mess. However, I've sworn I'll never touch a card again as long as I live."

"Well, that's a good resolution, anyway," I said, smiling. "Now, I want to ask you both some simple questions, and I hope you both have good memories. Miss Manning, I'll begin with you. You received your brother's letter, telling you of his

little difficulties, on the morning of the seventh June?"

"Yes, it was the seventh," she answered.

"And, naturally, you immediately began to consider ways and means of helping him, and as a result decided to send him the diamond ring, which had been bequeathed to you by Mrs. Trevarthen?" said I.

"Yes," she replied.

"Now, I want you to tell me exactly what you did about sending that ring," I continued. "I don't suppose I am far wrong in thinking that you set about it soon after breakfast?"

"No, you are not at all wrong," she answered, smiling. "I went to my room almost immediately after breakfast. I wrote to Arthur, telling him that I was enclosing the ring; that I was quite sure he could easily raise the money he needed on it, and asking him to do it in such a way that we could redeem it. Then I put the ring in a small cardboard box in which I had placed a layer of cotton wool, folded the letter round the box, and put box and letter into a registered envelope which I happened to have in my writing-case. That was all."

"All up to that point," said I. "Then I suppose you addressed the envelope? Well, what did you do with it, then?"

"I placed it in the drawer of my writing-table," she replied.

"Did you lock the drawer?" I asked.

She shook her head rather guiltily.

"No," she answered. "I didn't."

"Well, what did you do after that?" I asked. "How did you spend the rest of the morning—for instance, up to lunch?"

"I was playing golf the whole morning with the duke," she replied.

"What were the other ladies of the house-party doing—so far as you know?" I enquired.

"I don't know," she answered. "Lady Louisa used to write letters in the mornings; Mrs. Wridsdale usually read or worked on the lawn; Mrs. Duquesne used to spend a good deal of time on the lake. Sometimes we played croquet with Professor Wridsdale."

"Now, what time did you see your registered packet again?" I said.

"Very soon after tea," she replied. "That would be about half-past five. I went upstairs to get it, intending to take it to Saxonstowe myself."

"Was it where you had placed it? Did it look as if it had been tampered with?" I inquired.

"It was exactly where I had left it, lying on a glove-box, and I saw nothing to

show that it had been tampered with," she replied.

"So you went straight off and registered it?" said I.

She nodded her assent and waited to hear my next question.

"Where did you leave your keys while you were playing golf that morning, Miss Manning?" I asked.

She smiled and looked rather guilty.

"I'm afraid I have a bad habit of leaving my keys about," she said. "I daresay I left them on the writing-table or on the dressing-table that morning—I cannot be sure."

"Quite so," said I. "Then the probability is that you did. Now, Mr. Manning, a question or two with you. When you received the registered letter, did you notice anything to make you think it had been tampered with?"

"Oh, no!" he answered. "I noticed nothing."

"What did you do with the registered envelope and the cardboard box in which the ring was enclosed?" I asked.

"Threw them in my waste-paper basket," he replied.

"That's equivalent to saying they're lost, then," I said. "And I'm sorry, for I should have liked to carefully examine them."

His face brightened suddenly.

"By Jove, you can do that, sir!" he exclaimed. "The basket had not been emptied when I got leave and came away, and I know nobody's been in my room since, because I have the key. I'm going to town by the first train in the morning, Mr. Campenhave, and I'll find both envelope and box, and send them to you."

"Thanks," I said, "but you needn't. I am going to town myself by the midnight mail, and I will call on you—Wellington Barracks, I think?—at noon to-morrow. Now, Mr. Manning, until I come keep a jealous eye on that waste-paper basket. Don't let your servant remove it; don't touch it yourself. Leave it for me to examine. Now, I am going. The next time I see you, Miss Manning, which will, I hope, be within twenty-four hours—I trust to tell you that I have solved the mystery."

I thought those two young people would have wrung my hand off as I said good-night to them. I walked across the park thinking of my schemes for the morrow, and was still developing them when I walked into the house. There a quiet domestic scene met my eyes. Lady Louisa was steadily progressing through a game of Patience, the duke was reading the *Fortnightly Review*, Dalrymple, a sporty young gentleman who had quietly eaten a very big dinner, was asleep in a deep chair with the *Field* on his knees. The duke looked up and smiled—and I think he half winked.

"Perhaps you can offer professional consolation to my aunt, Mr. Campenhayne," he said. "She has lost something."

"I hope nothing of value, Lady Louisa?" I said.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" answered Lady Louisa, a little testily. "Dear me, duke, why do you make such a fuss about it?"

"Why, my dear aunt," said the duke, "you've been turning half the house upside down about it!"

"Then it must be of value," I remarked.

Lady Louisa looked annoyed.

"No, no!" she said. "Merely a little trinket—an amulet which I wore on a platinum chain. No value at all—but it was a keepsake. It's really of no consequence—no consequence!"

So I sat down, merely remarking to myself that if Lady Louisa Ashe had known as much of the world as I did, she would have been aware that everything is of great consequence.

I was in town again by three o'clock in the morning, and I went to bed for exactly four hours. At eight o'clock I was at the corner of a certain small but fashionable street on the north of Hyde Park, and was greeting my faithful clerk, Killingley, to whom I had sent a long telegram of instructions in my private cypher from Saxonstowe Park soon after my arrival there.

"Well, Killingley?" said I.

"We have kept a strict observance on the house since the receipt of your wire, sir," replied Killingley, reeling off his report with his usual automatic-like precision. "The lady went out at seven last night, dined at the Ritz, went on to the Haymarket Theatre, and drove straight home from there. She has not been out since."

"Very good, Killingley," said I. "Remain here until I return."

Proceeding to the house which had been indicated to me by the Duke of Saxonstowe as Mrs. Duquesne's town address, I rang the bell, and handed to the sleepy-looking footman, who seemed much astonished and disgusted to see me, a note in which I informed Mrs. Duquesne that it was necessary that I should see her at once, and asking her to name her own time within the next two hours. As I had anticipated, I had not long to wait. Ere many minutes a smart French maid tripped downstairs into the hall.

"Madame will see monsieur at precisely nine o'clock," she announced, regarding me closely.

"Tell madame that I will wait upon her at that hour," I replied, and went away to dismiss Killingley and take a walk in the park. There was no need to keep Mrs.

Duquesne under observation; I knew that, having made an appointment with me, she would keep it. It would not have paid her to do otherwise.

At one minute after nine I was in Mrs. Duquesne's boudoir, and Mrs. Duquesne herself was confronting me in a wonderful morning-gown. She was a very beautiful woman, but her expression just then was not quite pleasant to look at—she looked as hard as steel, and utterly defiant.

"I had an idea that you would visit me after your visit to Saxonstowe, Mr. Paul Campenhaye," she said. "I knew what conclusion anybody of your acumen and skill would come to, and I judged that the duke would send you to me to ask for mercy. And so I may as well tell you that I shall have none—I am going to take out a warrant this morning. That is what I came to town for."

I could scarcely believe my ears. What did the woman mean? My objects and intentions in visiting her were of a very different nature to what she was thinking of. Then I suddenly conceived the notion that she was trying to bluff me. I smiled.

"We seem to be at cross-purposes, Mrs.—. But how am I to call you?" I said.

"My name, Mr. Campenhaye, is Mrs. Duquesne," she answered. "If I chose to spend a few weeks at Monte Carlo under another name, and to become unfortunately and unavoidably involved in a matter into which you were brought _____,"

"Professionally," I said. "Professionally."

"That has nothing to do with this matter," she concluded. "I am Mrs. Duquesne. Perhaps," she continued suddenly, "perhaps you think I left Saxonstowe because you were coming there?"

"I think it extremely likely," I answered.

She burst into ironical laughter. I watched her in silence. She suddenly became cold and hard again.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked.

I had to speak then, to show my hand, to draw my sword.

"Mrs. Duquesne," I said, "I do not think I should like to be obliged to tell the Duke of Saxonstowe what my own belief is respecting the exact share which the lady whom I knew as Madame de St. Croix had in the Monte Carlo affair."

She looked at me defiantly.

"There you are wrong," she said. "You would like to tell the duke. If you spoke the truth—and I wish you would—what you really mean is that you think I should not like the matter raked up. Well, perhaps I shouldn't. But what has that got to do with the fact that Stella Manning stole my ring, and deserves to be punished like any

other thief?"

Now, I knew a little more—perhaps a good deal more than Mrs. Duquesne was aware about the Monte Carlo matter, and for that reason I was not going to mince my words, having my knowledge in reserve. Accordingly, I put on my severest air.

"Mrs. Duquesne," I said, "I do not believe that Miss Manning stole your ring. I believe that you, anxious to prejudice the Duke of Saxonstowe against Miss Manning, opened the packet addressed to her brother, substituted your ring for hers, and placed hers in its usual place. You did this because with your unusually sharp eyes you had seen that the young and fascinating Duke of Saxonstowe was deeply in love with Miss Manning."

She turned white to the lips, but she stared at me with eyes in which there was more surprise than fear.

"You—believe—that?" she said. "You?"

"Yes, I do believe it," I answered. "It was a clever trick, but you gave yourself away when you told the Scotland Yard people to make immediate inquiry of the leading London pawnbrokers. You had read Miss Manning's letter to her brother, and you knew that he was to pledge the ring. So by your knowledge you made certain of the whereabouts of your property, and at the same time you struck your rival a deadly blow."

She stared at me in silence. Her lips twitched, and I could not tell whether she was going to burst into more ironical laughter or into tears. Suddenly she moved to the door.

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Duquesne?" I asked.

"I am going to have that warrant taken out," she answered, with a look which only a vindictive woman could give. "Whether Stella Manning stole my ring or not, all the evidence is that she did. She shall be arrested, anyway."

Now was the time to play my big card. I stopped Mrs. Duquesne with a gesture, and going up to her whispered a few words into her ear which made her start back against the wall with staring eyes and trembling hands. She was terrified, and she showed it.

"You understand," I said significantly. "One more step of yours in this matter, and the Monte Carlo business will be reopened. You know best what that will mean."

Then I left her, still white and trembling, and set off for the Wellington Barracks to call on Arthur Manning.

The young officer had only just arrived at his quarters, and the room in which I found him looked as if it would greatly profit by a thorough sweeping and dusting. He himself was keeping watch over the waste-paper basket, which I saw at the first

glance to be full of odds and ends of all sorts.

"No one has touched anything, Mr. Campenhaye," he said, as we shook hands. "There's the basket, just as I left it."

"Very good," said I. "Now, tell me, where were you standing or sitting when you received and opened your sister's registered packet, and what did you do?"

"I was sitting here!" he answered, indicating an easy-chair by the hearth. "I opened the envelope, drew out and read the letter, took the ring from the cardboard box, and threw box and envelope into the basket here."

"All right," I said; "now I'll examine the contents of the basket here."

"I have to go across to the orderly room for a few minutes," he remarked. "I shall not be long."

Drawing off my gloves, I proceeded to examine the odds and ends one by one. There were torn-up letters, tradesmen's bills, circulars, catalogues; at last I came across the registered envelope, addressed in a pretty, feminine handwriting. Near it lay the cardboard box, which, it appeared, had originally contained curling pins. And close by me a thickish wad of cotton wool; that, of course, in which the ring had been enclosed.

Now, my object in securing the envelope and the cardboard box was to subject both to microscopic investigation. I did not want the cotton-wool; nevertheless, I picked it up. And suddenly I saw something hanging to it, the mere sight of which made me jump to my feet with a sharp exclamation, which was caught by Arthur Manning, who was just then re-entering the room.

"What is it?" he said, staring at me, no doubt seeing that I looked excited. "Found anything, Mr. Campenhaye?"

"Never mind," said I, hastily smuggling what I had found into my trousers pocket. "Hum!—well, I have finished with your waste-paper basket. Now, are you staying in town, or returning to Saxonstowe?"

"Returning to Saxonstowe," he answered. "I have arranged more leave. Of course, I must be with my sister until this affair is cleared up."

"Then we will go down together by the next train," I said.

We were at Elmford station in the middle of the afternoon. I set out across the park; young Manning went off to the vicarage, where I asked him to remain with his sister until I came over for them. I said nothing to him of what was going to happen, but I think he guessed that I had discovered something in Miss Manning's favour.

The Duke of Saxonstowe was out when I reached the house; he had motored to some adjacent town on business. But Lady Louisa was at home, and I asked to see her, and in due course was ushered into her sanctum. I do not think she was

particularly pleased to know that I had returned, or to be asked for; ladies of her temperament are always doubtful of people who live by their brains—or, as they term it, wits.

“Oh, I had no idea that you would return so soon!” she said. “The duke is away for the afternoon.”

“So I have recently been informed,” I replied. “But I did not wish to see his Grace—at least, not just now. I returned specially from town to see you, Lady Louisa.”

Lady Louisa’s colour rose; she looked at me speculatively, perhaps a little haughtily. After all, she was still regarding me as no more than a superior sort of detective officer.

“Oh!” she said. “But—really, I don’t know why you want to see me, Mr.—er—Campenhaye.”

“No,” I said. “Well, you see, Lady Louisa, I am one of those men who deal in strange reasons for their doings. I wanted to see you in reference to the amulet which you and the duke spoke of last night—the amulet which you recently lost.”

“You don’t mean to say you have found it!” she exclaimed.

“The amulet is a very small opal, set in curious old gold work,” I said, watching her narrowly.

“Yes, yes!” she said.

“I have found it, Lady Louisa,” I said.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “How clever of you! But where?—I suppose somewhere in the house or about the grounds. I always feared that I should lose it from that chain.”

I am afraid that it was a desire to impress her, and to introduce a little theatrical effect that made me walk across to the door, open it a little way, glance outside, close it carefully, and then address her in low tones.

“Lady Louisa,” I said gravely, “I went specially to town last night to examine the cardboard box in which Mrs. Duquesne’s opal ring was forwarded to Mr. Arthur Manning. The box had been thrown away, but it had never been touched. The cotton-wool wrapping was in it. And here is the identical cotton-wool, and attached to it is—your once lost amulet.”

The blow came so unexpectedly, so suddenly, that it might have been a physical one. Lady Louisa gasped, fell back; her blanched face proclaimed her agitation and her guilt. She stared at me as if I were something possessed of the power of seeing through stone.

“Now, Lady Louisa,” said I, “the thing is very plain. When you worked out, and

carried out this wicked plot, this amulet, unnoticed by you, slipped amongst the folds of the cotton wool, and you, all unsuspectingly, packed it up with the ring. Am I right in believing you guilty? Ah! of course, Lady Louisa, I am an extremely inquisitive man—why did you do this?”

She glared angrily at me for a moment, but she knew that I had the whip-hand, and at last she answered my straightforward question.

“I didn’t want the duke to marry the Manning girl,” she muttered. “I wanted him to marry one of my own girls—his cousins. And I knew that Helena Duquesne would make a row—she hates Stella Manning! And so——”

“I quite understand,” I said, and bowed myself out of the room.

When I left Saxonstowe Park next day the Duke of Saxonstowe and Stella Manning were engaged to be married, and I had an invitation to the wedding. I did not think much about that just then; I had to see Mrs. Duquesne. And when I found myself alone with her, I went straight to the point.

“Mrs. Duquesne,” I said, “I have come to ask your pardon. I accused you yesterday of being the author of what we will call the ring mystery. I have discovered that you are absolutely and entirely innocent. I humbly beg your pardon.”

Mrs. Duquesne eyed me keenly.

“Of course, you know who did it?” she remarked coolly.

“Oh, of course I do!” said I.

“Not Stella Manning?” she said.

“Most certainly not Miss Manning,” I replied. Then, after an interval of silence, I added softly: “Miss Manning is to be married to the Duke of Saxonstowe very shortly.”

Mrs. Duquesne turned away from me and picked up her fancy-work.

“Good-day!” she said. “You can find your way out.” I found it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE ON HARDRESS HEAD.

That the most desperate adventures of our lives are those into which we are plunged without warning is, I fancy, the belief of all men in whose careers adventure has played a considerable part. There are times when a man is prepared for adventure of the supremely dangerous sort, and as often as not those times yield nothing very exciting; there are others when he is expecting nothing but the ordinary, and suddenly finds himself confronted by a situation that will try his nerve to the last degree of endurance. Certainly, the most desperate situation I ever found myself in, during my career as a specialist in criminology, was forced upon me as suddenly as a lightning flash breaks out of a summer sky. At one moment I was wrapped in a confident security, the next I was facing death.

It was in the late summer of 19— that I had occasion to travel down to the North of England in connection with a certain notorious blackmailing case. My business obliged me to remain overnight in a small seaside resort, Greyscale, the one place of any size (and it was no more than a village) on Wearcombe Bay, an inlet of the Irish Sea, which has a reputation for its sudden and violent storms.

The season at Greyscale was over; it had been a particularly wet and unfriendly summer, and in the little hotel to which I betook myself there was no other guest. And as it was barely five o'clock when I arrived within its doors, I decided, rather than wait for dinner, to have an old-fashioned, north-country high tea, and afterwards, the September evening then promising to turn out finely, to explore the neighbourhood as well as I could while the light lasted. Over an excellent cold ham I asked the waiter what there was of special interest in the vicinity. He shrugged his shoulders.

"No old ruins—castles, churches, eh?" I asked.

"Nothing nearer than Burton Abbey, and that's twenty miles off, sir," he answered. "No, sir, there's nothing to see here; and nothing to do, either," he added with another shrug.

"What do the people do who come here, then?" I asked.

"There are only two sorts do come here, sir," he answered. "One's invalids and the other's children. The children play on the beach, and the invalids go driving to the Head."

"The Head? What's that?" I enquired.

He turned, pointing out of the coffee-room window to where a great, black,

frowning promontory jutted out into the sea at the northern arm of the bay. It was shaped like a whale, and there was something in its appearance that was sinister and forbidding. It looked strangely mysterious.

"Hardress Head, sir," said the waiter. "Parties is very fond of driving up there. Splendid views from the top, sir. They do say as how you can see the Welsh mountains from there. I ain't never seen them myself, but I've seen the Isle of Man."

There was a solitary fly standing in front of the hotel when I went out, and I got into it and told its driver to take me up to the Head. The road lay along the northern shore of the bay, and at first was flanked by the usual rows of seaside houses and villas. But before we had gone a mile it became solitary enough, and I begun to realise that before Greyscale had sprung into existence, Wearcombe Bay, on that side, at any rate, must have been a veritable wilderness.

Now and then we passed a fisherman's cottage; then we came to a wide-spreading marsh, at the foot of the promontory, on which there was not even a hut to be seen; the promontory itself, seen at close quarters, looked wilder, gloomier, more sinister than ever. I have, however, a strong liking for the wild, and I began to be fascinated by this vast mass of earth-clad rock, which lay between land and sea like some mighty survival of the long-dead ages, silently watching for its prey.

There was a winding road up the promontory at the end of the houseless marsh, and at its foot my driver dismounted, and began the ascent, walking at the side of his horse. The horse was a poor, nearly worn-out animal; I soon recognised that I could walk thirty miles while it staggered up ten. And so I sprang out of the ramshackle conveyance, told the man I would walk, and drew out some loose silver wherewith to pay him. He looked at me in some surprise.

"Don't you want me to come up to the top and wait, sir?" he asked.

"No, thank you," I answered. "I shall walk back. I want a walk."

He stared at me again, and then looked up at the sky.

"This is a queer part of the world for storms, sir," he said. "I'm thinking there may be one to-night. And it'll be dark soon, and the Head's a wild, queer place. You'd better let me wait."

Now, the evening was as fair as an evening in the first week of September well could be, and I saw no sign of any storm. And so I dropped some silver into his hand and moved off.

"All right, my man," I said. "I don't want you any more. I shall walk back."

And I strode away up the winding road, and at the next turn saw the decrepit horse picking its slow way down to the marshland and Greyscale. I was glad then to be free of it and its driver, but——

I was very soon on the summit of the Head, and at once rewarded for my journey. On that summit, the resemblance to a whale was more striking than ever. It was a long, whale-backed expanse of wiry turf, with here and there a patch of purple heather and a cluster of grey, rain-worn rocks; here and there, too, I saw sheep of the mountain sort, thin and shy; in one place was a cairn of stones. But of any sign of human life or habitation there was nothing. And of that I was glad. What I wanted was the wildness, the solitude of it all; and I had it in plenty. All around lay the sea north and south I could make out where lay the little towns along the coast; north-west I saw the range of the Lake mountains; south-east, the long, rounded outlines of the Penine Range. And, in front, over a belt of shining gold, the sun was sinking in the distance in which lay Ireland and the Atlantic.

I remained rambling about the Head for a long time after the sun was set. I wandered along the edges on both sides, and found that they were precipitous, going down by sheer straight falls of cliff to the sea-lapped beach below. But a road, fairly well made, and in good repair, ran straight across the turf and the heather to the extreme point; and after a time I followed it, desirous of seeing all that I could before the daylight went. And when I came to the end of this road I found that the Head was not, after all, without human habitation.

Instead of dropping to the sea precipitously, the western extremity of the great promontory shelved gradually downwards, and in a crescent-shaped cove just beneath the point to which I had come I saw a house of grey stone, standing with grey stone walls upon a plateau of green lawn. It was a square-built house; and when I looked more closely at it I was struck by the fact that its occupants had made no attempt to surround it with garden or shrubbery, or even to plant near it any of those hardy trees which one associates with the coast. It was just a solid, substantial habitation, and it suggested a curious feeling of isolation and solitude. On its lawn there was not even that usual ornament of such places, a flagstaff; nor was there a sign of life about it.

I went a little distance down the face of the point—went down, indeed, until I was within a few yards of the wall of this solitary house. And it was then that, without the slightest warning, the whole face of the evening changed, and that, literally within a moment, I found myself in one of those storms for which Wearcombe Bay is famous. Whence or how it came I do not know. What I do know is that with incredible swiftiness the twilight became darkness, the sea assumed the colour of ink, a sudden hurricane sprang up which twisted me round as if I had been a piece of straw, and everything seemed to be filled and maddeningly alive with the screams and screeches of a million demons. And then, just as suddenly, down

came the rain with all the force of a tornado in the tropics.

I had nothing with me in the shape of overwear but a light summer coat, which I had carried over my arm, and without hesitation I dashed open the gate of the house, and ran helter-skelter towards the only shelter I could think of. I had come to the conclusion, in looking at it, that the house was empty; for there was no sign of smoke issuing from the chimneys and no glimmer of light in the windows. But I had noticed that over the front door there was a portico, and for this I made and was thankful to reach it. Already the light overcoat which I had hastily slipped on was soaked through.

The storm hurtled and screamed around that portico with a force and fury that was truly hellish. I stood partly protected, at any rate, and looked out upon the sea, which was now lashed and beaten into a rage as fierce as that of the wind above it. I should scarcely have thought that a man could have made himself heard by shouting in that pandemonium, but suddenly I heard a soft, silky voice at my very ear:

“Will you be pleased to walk in and shelter, sir?”

I turned as if I had been shot, and found myself confronting a gigantic, full-blooded negro, clothed in immaculate evening dress.

I was so much astonished, so utterly taken aback, at the sight of this unexpected figure that I seemed to lose all power of speech, and for a moment could only stand stupidly staring at the man. He smiled, showing a set of magnificent teeth, and bent down to me from his great height.

“My mistress says, will you walk in and shelter, sir?” he repeated. “This storm is likely to continue some time, sir.”

Then my wits came back to me. This was evidently the butler.

“Oh, thank you!” I said, stepping within the door which he held open. “It is very kind of your mistress.”

The negro bowed and smiled again, and, closing the outer door, led me across the hall to another, which he opened with another bow.

“Please to be seated, sir,” he said. “If you will allow me, I will dry your overcoat, sir.”

I gave him the coat and entered the room. It was a small, snugly-furnished apartment, evidently a breakfast-parlour, and from the window there was a view of the bay which I had not seen from the Head. But the storm was now at its height, and everything outside was a tempest of blackness. I turned from the window to the cheery fire which burnt in the open grate. It struck me as being strange that within this house, which had looked so cold and desolate from without, there should be warmth and human life, and I wondered who the black man’s mistress was that she

should elect to live in such a lonely and deserted spot. And, while I was wondering, I heard the door quietly opened, and I turned from warming my chilled hands to see a lady enter the room, and advance towards me with a stately bow. And as soon as I saw her, I had a curious but quite vague impression that somewhere, a long time ago, I had seen her before.

She was a woman of nearly middle-age, and in her time she had been very beautiful; and she was still very handsome in a regal and commanding fashion. There were streaks of grey in her dark hair, and many lines of bygone passions and emotions on her cheek and brow, but she was a woman to look at and to wonder about, and the flash of her eye was as keen as that of a hawk's.

She smiled very graciously as she entered the room, but I had an instinctive feeling that she could look lightnings if her mood inclined her, and that she was of an imperious temper. And once more I found myself wondering if I had ever seen her before, and, if so, where.

"I am afraid you are fairly caught in one of our famous storms," she said pleasantly, as she stopped half-way across the room, and, resting one shapely hand on the table, looked at me with a curiously steady and penetrating glance. "They come on very suddenly."

"So I perceive," I answered. "I was warned, but foolishly gave no heed to the warning. It is very kind of you to give me shelter," I continued. "I ran for your porch, believing the house to be empty."

She nodded and, turning to the window, drew aside the curtain and looked out on the storm-tossed bay.

"No," she said, "this house is never empty, though I daresay it looks so from the outside. I suppose you were exploring the Head?"

"I had been walking about it," I replied. "I am obliged to remain overnight in Greyscale, and as there was nothing to see there I set out for—this."

"And this will last for some time," she said. "We who live around the bay know these storms. Some of them are over very quickly; some last for hours. This is one of the lasting sort. They are always worst, and longest, when they come on with such startling suddenness. So," she continued, turning from the window, "you are a prisoner, for, at any rate, an hour or two; and as I was just about to dine, may I offer you some dinner to while away the time?"

This was said with such ready and genuine hospitality that I could only bow as ready an acceptance.

"You are most kind," I replied. "I—I really believe that I am hungry."

She smiled and moved to the door, which she had left open.

"I will send for you in a few minutes," she said, and sailed out.

Left alone, I again looked around the room. This was certainly an adventure—to be caught in a storm on a lonely and wild headland of the Irish Sea, to find a comfortable house and a hostess of gracious and distinguished manners, and to be asked to dine. But any man who has led the strange life that I have led is always ready for surprises, and I congratulated myself that I was within four walls, warm and dry, instead of huddling under some rock, half-starved to death, or trudging across that storm-swept promontory soaked to the skin.

Within a few minutes the negro appeared and conducted me to another room, wherein was a table laid for two. It was a small, cosy room, furnished with a sort of simple luxury, and there was no light in it but the shaded candles on the dinner-table. I had a general impression of pictures and books and old china as I took my seat opposite my hostess near the cheery hearth; I had a clearer one of spotless linen, shining silver, and delicate glassware. And in that room there was nothing to be heard of the storm that raged without.

There were three things that I remember to this day about that dinner, to which I had been invited so unexpectedly. First, that, though simple, it was exquisitely, perfectly cooked. Second, that it was served swiftly, silently, by the giant negro, who was the deftest hand at his work that I have ever encountered. And third, that my hostess proved herself a most agreeable and fascinating one, a ready and clever conversationalist on all the topics of the day, showing herself thoroughly conversant with the more important social and political questions which were then to the front. But as we were sipping some coffee, which was equal to anything I have ever tasted in the Near East, she gave me a surprise. We were speaking of some event that had recently happened in London, and I asked her if she had witnessed it. She flashed a quick look, accompanied by a strange smile, across the table.

"I have not been in London for ten years," she said. "Indeed, with the exception of my going about in my yacht in the bay there, and in the Channel, I have never been off this Head for ten years. All my knowledge of the outside world is got from newspapers—or by hearsay."

I scarcely knew what reply to make to this. I daresay my glance at her smartly-gowned figure showed my surprise. She laughed softly and looked across the room. The negro, who in spite of his enormous bulk, moved about with the lightness of a fairy, came forward with a decanter.

"Still," she said, "we are not quite out of the world. I can always ask a guest to eat good food and drink good wine. I have been out of things so much, though, that I scarcely know whether gentlemen still drink port after dinner. If they do, let me ask

you to drink my health in some that my grandfather laid down in 1842. I have had a bottle decanted in your honour.”

I bowed my acknowledgments; the negro filled my glass. He was passing round the table to his mistress, when she suddenly stopped him.

“I have no port glass,” she said quietly, looking down at her cover.

The man turned to the sideboard, which was hidden in the shadows at the side of the room, and I heard a tinkle of glass. He came back and helped my hostess to wine out of what looked to be the same decanter from which he had served me. I knew, when too late, that in that moment, so cleverly contrived, he had changed the decanters, and that what he gave her, was not what he had given me.

She took her glass by its slender stem, delicately poised it in her slim fingers, and bent to me graciously across the table, the rosy glow from the shaded candles gleaming on the purple of the wine.

“To your health, my guest!” she said.

I entered into her mood.

“To your health, my hostess!” I answered.

“No heel-taps!” said she.

“No heel-taps!” said I.

She raised her glass with a daring smile and drained it. I followed her example.

It was the last thing that I remember except that I have some vague and misty recollection of hearing a woman’s mocking laughter as I slipped away into a sea of black, surging waters that drew me down into their very depths.

I do not know how long it was before I regained consciousness. Slowly, as a man wakes from the more stupefying forms of sleep, I woke and stirred and looked around me; and, although I was only partially conscious, my brain reeled at what I saw, and I closed my eyes, again sick with fear. But within the moment, my will had asserted itself, and I opened them again, and looked steadily at my surroundings.

I found myself lying on a sort of truckle or camp bed, in a room which was more like a cell in a prison than an apartment in a private house. The walls were of cement; the window was of dull glass and heavily barred, only one half of it was above ground level. In one corner of the place there was a washstand; close by it was a plain, wooden stool. On a shelf were two or three simple drinking utensils; ranged alongside them were a Bible and some commonplace works of fiction. Whether this was a prison cell or not, it was plain that it either was, or was meant to resemble, one, and under any other circumstances I should have smiled at the resemblance. I could almost smell the prison atmosphere.

But I myself? I was clad in an old, much-worn suit of yellow tweed, a

knickerbocker suit, finished off with rough stockings. My own underclothing and all linen had disappeared; beneath the old suit was nothing but a coarse shirt of grey flannel. And I was in chains!

The chains were ingeniously contrived. They were light, but they were of steel. I could move my hands; I could help myself in many ways, but I was securely fastened to a staple in the wall at the side of the bed; and though I could reach the washstand and the stool, and the shelf on which the books stood, I could not reach the lower end of the room or cell. And there was the door, and in one of its upper panels there had been newly-cut a round peep-hole, over which, on the outside, hung a disc or movable panel. Truly, a prison cell!

I sat up presently, clanking my fetters, and tried to think quietly. I was trapped—that much was certain. But by whom? And again it was borne in upon me that somewhere—somewhere—I had met that woman before. But where? I dropped my head—heavy and confused still from the drug which I had swallowed—in my hands, and tried to think, to recollect, to get some grip on facts, to——

“Well, Mr. Paul Campenhaye, so at last we meet again!”

I turned sharply. A man had noiselessly entered the room, and was standing at the door, looking at me with a smile which made the blood run cold within me. And behind him stood—the woman!

I remembered everything when I saw those two together. And I know what I had to deal with, and I recognised that my chances of getting out of that house alive were very small. In fact, I gave myself up for lost. And yet, in that moment, my will reasserted itself, and I felt no fear but rather a desire to deal with the situation as if I still had an equal chance in its possibilities.

“You know me?” said the man.

I nodded my head carelessly.

“I know you. The last time I saw you was in the dock at the Old Bailey,” I replied.

“Where you had brought me, after tracking me down mercilessly,” he said, with a flash of his eye that boded no good to me.

“I did my duty,” I said. “And I should do it again.”

“What duty was it of yours?” he asked fiercely. “You were not of the police. You took it up as what you call yourself—an expert in criminology—and you hunted me like vermin until you had trapped me.”

“It was at the request of the family of one of your victims, as you are aware,” I answered, “and you richly deserved the ten years’ penal servitude you got, Mr. Vansittart, or Captain Molyneux, or whatever you now call yourself.”

He came nearer, and for a moment I thought he was going to strike me.

"Anyway, we have trapped you," he said sullenly. "I little thought when I happened to catch sight of you in Greyscale this afternoon that we should have the pleasure of entertaining you. But there you are. You don't know how rejoiced my wife and I were when we saw you approaching this house. And you see how, while she played hostess, I made your apartment ready!"

"Don't be a fool, man!" I said. "You know as well as I do that you can't keep me here. There will be a search——"

They both laughed scornfully.

"You fell over the rocks during the storm," said the man. "You will never be seen again. That's literally true, Campenhaye."

"So you mean to murder me?" I said.

"We mean to give you a taste of what you gave me," he answered. "You shall have practical knowledge of imprisonment. When we are tired of you—well, then, probably, we shall put you out of the way very quietly."

"You are bringing more trouble on yourself," I said. "This will be found out!"

"It will not be found out," he replied with quiet assurance. "There are three of us in this house—my wife, myself, and our devoted servant. We shall say, if we are asked about you, that we saw you blown over the cliffs, and we shall be believed. We are much respected here as a quiet couple,——living a retired life and having no interest in anything but ourselves, our books, and our yacht. None will doubt our word. You are dead, Campenhaye. This room is sound-proof, and you are as far from civilisation and man as if you were in one of the old oubliettes of the Bastille. You will have a lot of time to reflect upon what you have brought me to."

I looked steadily at the two of them. There was no pity in either face, especially in the woman's. And I remembered, then, how on the trial of the man on a particularly infamous charge—made all the worse because of his social position—she had sat at the Old Bailey watching me with hatred in her face. No; I should find no mercy, now that I had fallen by mere chance into their hands. But I was not going to show the white feather.

"We shall see," I said.

Then they went away and left me to silence. Into that place there never came even the sound of the sea beneath the cliffs, nor the crying of the curlews as they flew over the headlands. It was, in truth, as silent as the grave.

When I look back upon the days that followed I can scarcely realise them; they are, at this distance of time, as a nightmare. They came and went with a regularity and a sameness that began to be maddening; if I had not had a daily expectation of

release, I think I should have lost my reason. But I cherished that expectation; it seemed to me impossible that I should be kept a prisoner. And yet, when a fortnight had gone by—I kept account of the time by scratching marks on the wall—I began to feel that the boast of my gaolers might be a true one, and that I should never have my liberty again. And one day he and the woman came down with mocking smiles on their faces, and he threw me a copy of a London newspaper.

“There, Campenhaye,” he said, with a sneer, “didn’t I tell you that you were dead? There’s your obituary notice, my man; you may read it.”

I read what there was to read with a dull consciousness that it might just as well have been literally true. It set forth that Mr. Paul Campenhaye, the famous expert in criminology, about whose disappearance there had been so much uneasiness, had doubtless been lost in a storm which raged in Wearcombe Bay on the night of September 5th. Mr. Campenhaye had gone to Greyscale on business and in the evening of the day in question had been driven up to the Head. In the storm that followed, two residents of the Head, Mr. and Mrs. Verinder, much respected in the district, and their butler, had seen a man blown over the cliffs at the place called Dead Man’s Gap, and there seems to be little doubt that this was Mr. Campenhaye. The body had probably been washed out to sea, and had not yet been recovered.

“So you’re dead, you see, Mr. Campenhaye,” said Vansittart, or Molyneux, or Verinder, whichever was his real name. “Dead as Moses! No one will ever look for you here. You’re safe—safe as I was in the place you sent me to. And if you feel lonely—well, you’re not any lonelier than my wife was here for ten years, waiting for me, you cur!”

“Why don’t you kill me, and have done with it?” I asked.

“We will kill you whenever you like; there’s no hurry,” he answered calmly. “You haven’t had your gruel yet. I want you to feel what I felt.”

Then he asked me with a brutal laugh if I had any complaints. And the woman bade me be sure and read the Bible every day.

They added to the torture of my confinement by enforcing idleness upon me. The negro brought my food, which was carefully contrived to resemble prison fare. At first I tried to talk with him, hoping that I might eventually bribe him. But he was stolid and forbidding; it was plain that he was in truth a devoted servant, and therefore hated me. And once, when almost driven desperate, I offered him a thousand pounds to effect my release, he struck me heavily over the mouth. And after that I never spoke to him again. Indeed, I began to take refuge in silence. The man and woman came every day to gloat over me; eventually I took no heed of them.

“Don’t sulk, Campenhaye,” said the man one morning, “that’s the way towards madness. I nearly went mad that way when you put me away. Don’t you try it: be cheerful. Perhaps we shall kill you very soon. But not to-day—to-day we’re going out in the yacht. It will be delightful out on the open sea, to think of you fastened up here with your skilly and your thoughts and your conscience. Don’t you wish you’d never tracked me down, Campenhaye?”

There came a morning when no one came near me. I have already said that my prison was as silent as a grave; all that day I never heard a sound. Night came and I was still left alone; for twenty-four hours I had not touched food. And the next morning came, and after it came noon and then night, and my gaolers still made no appearance. I began then to suspect that they were going to starve me to death; and I think I went mad at the thought, and tried to break my chains. But that night went by, and another morning came and the pains of starvation were beginning to get acute.

I got the idea, then, that they were watching my agonies through the spy-hole in the door, and I suppose I lost all self-control, for I burst into shoutings and denunciations. I must have lost consciousness after that, for I suddenly came to myself to find two men bending over me, while a third was busied with my fetters. In one of them I recognised the police superintendent at Greyscale, with whom my business had been when I came down there. Horror-stricken enough he and the others looked. And one of them put brandy to my lips.

“Why, Mr. Campenhaye, how on earth came you here?” asked the police superintendent. “We thought you were all drowned!”

“I was trapped,” I answered, when I could speak. “The people of the house and their man—the black man—where are they?”

The men standing round looked at each other.

“That’s just why we came here,” said the police superintendent. “They’re drowned, Mr. Campenhaye, all three. The yacht capsized off Greyscale two days ago. This gentleman is their solicitor. But you don’t mean to say that they treated you like this?”

At that moment I made no answer.

They took me to the little hotel in Greyscale, and there I was nursed back to strength. But during the time I remained there I never looked in the direction of the black and sinister promontory in which I had been immured in a living grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE.

It was a somewhat dull and featureless afternoon in October that my clerk, Killingley, an individual who had the rare faculty of never wasting words, though he was naturally inclined to volubility, came into my private office with a small armful of the early editions of the evening newspapers, all folded and heavily marked with blue pencil, and laying them on my desk, put a forefinger on the topmost blue mark, and retired without a word. I knew that Killingley never wasted my time; I accordingly picked up what he had brought me and began to read. In this way, and within the space of the next half-hour, I made myself acquainted with what I will call the surface facts—the plain, obvious features, of the affair which centred around a bottle of dry champagne.

For some time previous to this October which I have just mentioned (to be quite precise, for a period of three years), there had resided in a flat in the best part of Shaftesbury Avenue, a gentleman who was known to the agents, the caretaker, and to the tradesfolk as Mr. Charles Becker. He was a man of apparently thirty-five years of age; a tall, well-built, good-looking man; a little inclined to stoutness, as if from love of good living; a man of ready and pleasant manner, well liked by all with whom he came in contact. The various rooms of his flat—a much more commodious one than is usually required by a bachelor—were furnished with a comfort which was closely akin to luxury; he possessed fine pictures, quantities of books, and a miniature grand piano. But from all that was seen of him by his neighbours it would appear that Mr. Becker had luxurious tastes; he was invariably well and carefully dressed in the height of fashion; he was known to possess a rare discernment in the matter of food and wine and tobacco. And during the three years of his residence in Shaftesbury Avenue, all who met him considered him to be a man of considerable means.

According to such information as the newspaper people had been able to obtain, with a view to elucidating the mystery which had led them to publish special editions, nobody knew anything of Mr. Becker's business or profession. He appeared to be absolute master of his own time, but it was also believed that he went into the city every day, if only for an hour or two. He was a member of two West-End clubs of semi-Bohemian nature, but nobody knew much of him at either of them, except that he was a pleasant, good-natured, rather quiet clubmate. In short, up to the time of the publication of the special edition to which I have just referred, Mr. Becker's

history was of the negative order—a little was known of it.

Now, why did the newspapers publish special editions in relation to this Mr. Charles Becker, of No.—, Shaftesbury Avenue, on this particular day of October, 191-? For a simple reason. At eight o'clock this morning Mr. Becker was found lying dead on the floor of his sitting-room. What was more, it was very evident that he had been murdered.

There was no great amount of mystery about the obvious facts of Mr. Becker's murder. According to custom, William Felton, a man who acted as valet and servant to Mr. Becker, but who slept away from the premises, entered his employer's flat at eight o'clock that morning, and was at once surprised to see that the electric light was turned full on in the sitting-room, the door of which stood wide open. Walking within this apartment, Felton was horrified to see Mr. Becker lying in a crumpled-up attitude on the floor between the centre table and the sideboard. A single glance, a mere bending over the body, showed him that life was extinct; he immediately summoned the police, and fetched a doctor from a neighbouring flat.

Now, very fortunately, one of the police first on the scene was a man who had the excellent gift of close observation, and knew to a certain extent the meaning and significance of what he saw; he was, moreover, able to tell the newspaper people what he saw. And what he saw was this: The apartment was furnished after the conventional fashion of an ordinary dining-room. There were easy-chairs, occasional chairs, a sofa, side-tables, small odds and ends of furniture. Upon one of the chairs lay the dead man's cloak, hat, gloves. There were no signs of any scuffle or disturbance; all seemed in order. Upon the centre-table stood a box of cigars with the lid thrown back; near it was an ashtray in which lay a cigar which had evidently been lighted only a little time before being placed there; the ash on it was about half an inch long. Also, upon the table stood a full-sized bottle of champagne of a well-known brand, uncorked.

There was no doubt as to the immediate circumstances of Mr. Becker's death. The body lay between the centre table and the sideboard. One door of the cellaret in the sideboard was open; it was evident that the dead man was taking two champagne glasses from it when he was struck down; one glass, indeed, he had taken, and it lay broken underneath his body. Also, underneath his body was a cigar—crushed, of course. But it, like the cigar on the table, had been smoked to the extent of about half an inch.

So much for the things on the surface, the obvious things, some of which, however, many people, perhaps most people, would not have seen. But how was Mr. Becker killed? That question was speedily settled by the doctors—the doctor

whom Felton had fetched in, and a surgeon who came with the police. He had been killed by a heavy blow on the back of the head, which had fractured the skull in a fashion that would cause instantaneous unconsciousness and produce death within a very short time. And without doubt he had been struck as he bent down to the cellaret to take out the champagne glasses, or, rather, just when he had withdrawn one of them. He had pitched forward on to his knees, losing his cigar, smashing the glass, and had crumpled up in a heap. The medical men thought that he had been dead some hours at the time of their examination; they thought that he might have been unconscious for an hour before death occurred.

In all these cases people—the people on the spot—began to theorise. The folk there—the superior police—concluded that Mr. Becker had been struck down by some man who had accompanied him to his flat, and who was presumably armed with a formidable life-preserver. This, they considered, was the man whose partially consumed cigar lay on the ashtray. But—what was the murderer's motive? It was certainly not robbery. In the dead man's pocket a considerable sum in notes and gold was found; he was wearing valuable rings; a valuable watch. There were expensive articles of jewellery in his bedroom; there was more money in a drawer of his writing-table. The entire flat was in perfect order; nothing had been touched, nothing disarranged. On the face of things, it seemed that the miscreant, whoever he was, had killed Mr. Becker, walked quickly out, and disappeared.

What puzzled the police—according to the newspapers—and the newspaper men—according to their own accounts—was the fact that it was abundantly evident that when the assault took place the assailed and the assailant were about to—presumably—pledge each other in champagne. There stood the bottle; there lay the pliers in readiness for twisting off the wire which confined its cork; the dead man had been struck down—killed—in the very act of getting out the glasses. Who, then, could the murderer be who could seize such a moment for striking such a blow? What was his motive? What—but it was much more pertinent to realise that he had not left in that room the slightest clue to his identity. There was nothing. It was he, no doubt, who had placed the recently-lighted cigar in the ashtray. But you cannot find finger-prints on the wrapping of a cigar. Diligent enquiry of folk who lived in neighbouring flats, of people who might have chanced to be about the entrance hall at midnight, had failed to produce any information. Nobody had seen Mr. Becker enter his flat in company with anyone, and nobody had seen anyone leave it. The only information forthcoming at all up to the time of the special editions was that Mr. Becker spent the evening from eight o'clock until ten minutes to eleven at the Discretion Club, and left there alone.

Such were the surface facts—up to then. I had just mastered them, after reading all the newspapers, when Killingley entered in his usual quiet fashion, and advanced to my side.

“M. Gourgand wishes to see you, sir,” he said. “He says you know him.”

I threw all the newspapers into a wastepaper basket as I nodded assent. I had a premonition that I was going to hear something about the Becker case at first hand.

“Bring him in, Killingley,” I answered.

There walked into my private room, at Killingley’s invitation, a little Frenchman, one Monsieur Leon Gourgand, whom I knew as the proprietor of a very quiet and select restaurant, café, or private hotel, where the cuisine was just about twice as good as you find in much more pretentious establishments, and who had a select clientèle of his own, no member of which was minded to advertise him. M. Gourgand’s establishment, in fact, was of a special nature; there were few such left in London, and those who know of them are not keen about making their whereabouts known, lest fine cooking and absolute retirement should be driven from the face of the town. I was one of M. Gourgand’s customers—a fairly occasional one; I had, moreover, once acted for him in a very difficult and delicate case—a case of honour—and had at that time seen much of him. We were, therefore, no strangers. Accordingly, I welcomed M. Gourgand as an old friend, installed him in the particularly comfortable chair which I kept for my clients, and handed him the cigarettes. And as he sat down and accepted a cigarette I noticed that from one of the pockets of his smart black overcoat there protruded a copy of one of the newspapers which I had just thrown aside.

“Well, Monsieur Gourgand,” I said, “and what can I do for you to-day?”

Monsieur Gourgand looked round him with eyes large with enquiry.

“We are alone?” he whispered. “Safe from observation?”

“As safe, monsieur,” I answered, “as if we were victims of a *lettre de cachet* and safely bestowed in some oubliette of the never-to-be-forgotten Bastille. You may say or do anything you like in this room—nobody but myself can either see or hear you.”

Monsieur Gourgand once more inspected his surroundings—the door, the walls, the window, the ceiling. Then, with a deep sigh of assurance, he leaned nearer to me, drew out a newspaper from his pocket, laid it before me, tapped a certain headline with his fat forefinger, and said with a glance full of meaning:

“Eh, well, then, monsieur, I—I, Gourgand—I can tell you something of this affair here!”

I had expected that—it was, as I said before, a premonition—but I was not

going to say so. I affected interest in the newspaper.

"Oh!" I said presently. "The affair of Shaftesbury Avenue, eh? But I am not engaged in that, Monsieur Gourgand. You should go to the police."

Monsieur Gourgand waved the fingers of both hands before his nose, and made a grimace.

"No!" he said in his most nasal tones. "It is precisely because I do not wish to go to the police that I come to you, monsieur. You are secret, you are dependable—you are my good friend."

"I hope I am all those, Monsieur Gourgand," I responded. "Well, then?"

Monsieur Gourgand once more tapped the newspaper.

"I knew Becker," he said. "He was a more or less regular patron of mine. He had an excellent taste and discernment; also, he had ideas and a soul. What an end! However, Monsieur Campenhaye, that is not the point."

"Let us approach it, then," I suggested.

Monsieur Gourgand waved his cigarette.

"I saw Becker last night," he said. "It says there in this paper that he was at the Discretion Club last night until nearly eleven. Very good. It was a little before eight that he came to me and took me aside. 'Gourgand,' says he, 'I have important affairs to transact with a friend, a lady, to-night; I wish to entertain her to a little supper in a private apartment. I suggest your little cabinet on the first floor. And,' he continued, 'you can give me the key of your side door; it is an affair of the greatest secrecy, Gourgand, and the lady wishes not to be seen. I desire that the supper be ready laid, and all in order, when we arrive at eleven o'clock—there will be no need for attendance. I rely on your discretion, my friend, Gourgand,' he says. And so, of course, Monsieur Campenhaye——"

Monsieur Gourgand concluded with an expressive gesture of his hands.

"And so, of course, you humoured him?" I said.

"He was an excellent customer, and free-handed with his money," replied Monsieur Gourgand. "Well, then, we settled the details of the little supper, which was to be simple, but of a rare delicacy. It was to be placed on the table at precisely eleven o'clock; Mr. Becker and his friend were to enter at one minute past that hour to enjoy complete privacy. And for the wine, Monsieur Campenhaye, there were to be a white wine and red—of the very best—and a bottle of——"

Monsieur Gourgand paused and tapped the newspaper. His eyes flashed.

"A bottle of dry champagne of this rare vintage specified here, monsieur—here!" he said, with emphasis. "It is this very bottle, mentioned here in the newspaper as having been found on Becker's table, that I placed in my little cabinet for him last

night—I swear it! Yes, monsieur!”

“One bottle of a particular brand of champagne is very much like another bottle, Monsieur Gourgand,” I remarked.

“Listen, then, monsieur! Mr. Becker concluded his arrangements. I prepare the little cabinet myself. I lay the table; at the precise hour I serve the little supper and make myself invisible. But I am not so far away that I do not know what is going on. Mr. Becker returns to the promised moment; he and his companion enter the room; I catch a brief glimpse of them as they do so.”

“You saw the lady, then?” I asked.

“I saw a lady, heavily veiled, who appeared to be young, graceful,” replied Monsieur Gourgand conscientiously. “More I did not see. But now! They remain in the little cabinet scarcely more than twenty minutes—then I hear them depart! I hear the private door into the side street close; I go to where I can look out; I see Mr. Becker and his companion walking away down the street. I think it is strange, and I hurry to the little cabinet. Figure to yourself, Monsieur Campenhaye, scarcely have they eaten! There was a veritable creation—a triumph!—in a chafing-dish—they had trifled with it—trifled, monsieur! And there was—but no matter! And they had but tasted the white wine—the red remained unopened. But, monsieur, the bottle of dry champagne had—vanished!”

“Ah!” said I.

“Vanished, monsieur, disappeared, gone!” exclaimed Monsieur Gourgand. “Becker had taken it with him. Now, Monsieur Campenhaye, do you believe me that this bottle which the police found on his table was that which I served up to him last night, and which he carried off unopened?”

“It certainly seems like it, Monsieur Gourgand,” I answered. “Let me see, now—how long would it take for Becker to walk from your place to his flat?”

“A few minutes—six, eight,” replied Monsieur Gourgand.

“Then it would seem that this meeting was adjourned from your private room to his,” I said, “and that he took the bottle of champagne away with him, reflecting that he had none at home. It would be an interesting thing to search his rooms and see if that is so.”

Monsieur Gourgand nodded, then shrugged his shoulders.

“But that is not the point, monsieur,” he said. “I have no wish to go to the police; I dislike the police in any country; they are officious; they ask questions; they poke long noses into everything; they waste my time; so I come to you as a man of discretion, a man who can, as I, Gourgand, am well aware, since you acted for me before, who can keep counsel. Let us approach the point, Monsieur Campenhaye.”

"I am waiting for the first prick of it, Monsieur Gourgand," I responded.

My visitor thrust his hand into some mysterious pocket and drew out an envelope. He held it up as if it had been some holy relic; his face became solemn.

"Behold, then!" he said in deep tones. "That which is inside this"—here he broke the seal—"I found in my little cabinet. A small matter, Monsieur Campenhaye—a lady's handkerchief, of the most delicate."

And he drew out of the envelope what looked—and was—a mere scrap of unsubstantial lace. A faint, scarcely perceptible odour of some unusual scent clung about it, fragile, delicate as itself.

"That, monsieur, crushed into a little ball, lay beneath the table at the place where, presumably, the lady had sat," continued Monsieur Gourgand. "I placed it in my private desk, having then, of course, no notion of what was about to happen to Becker. But as soon as I heard of this affair in Shaftesbury Avenue, I took it out and placed it in this envelope, and I came to you. For it seems to me, monsieur——"

"Speak out, Monsieur Gourgand," I said.

"It seems to me that there may be a clue in it," he concluded. "It is a small thing, and yet——"

He ended with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. I made no answer to him just then; I was examining with interest the little handkerchief.

And suddenly I forgot Monsieur Gourgand, and the dead man Becker, and everything but one fact. In a corner of the delicate thing which I was fingering I saw and stared intently at a tiny bit of embroidery which represented—a butterfly!

I repeat—I forgot Monsieur Gourgand. I even forgot that I was sitting at my own desk, in my own private room. The truth was I had a vision. I was in a crowded theatre—one of those modern variety theatres which have superseded the old-fashioned music-halls. There was hushed excitement, there was music that suggested a springtide day amidst deep woods. And on the stage was a dainty and delicate figure, sylph-like in its slimness, elusive, a seeming creature of the artificial surroundings and suggested atmosphere, a mere girl, and yet a dancer of European fame—La Papillon.

Poor Butterfly!

I came out of that vision with a sudden start, and turned to my visitor.

"Monsieur Gourgand; you want my advice?"

"That is why I came to you, Monsieur Campenhaye. Of a surety—yes!"

"Then keep your own counsel. Say nothing. Leave this little article with me. Let all remembrance of last night and of Becker be buried very deep in your breast until you see me. I shall call on you—it may be before night."

Monsieur Gourgand picked up his neatly folded umbrella and his hat. He wagged a forefinger before his lips.

"I am dumb, monsieur," he said. And as if to emphasise the fact, he shook hands in silence and went away. I rang the bell which summoned my clerk, who was an invaluable person in many ways, and possessed a very, very comfortable knowledge of what was what and who was who in the great world of London.

"Killingley," I said, "you are always *au fait* with all theatrical and musical matters. What is the real name of the French dancer who has been appearing at the Megathesium under the stage name of La Papillon? You have seen her, of course?"

Killingley answered promptly.

"Mademoiselle Odette de Contanges."

"Odette de Contanges, of course. And no doubt, you know, Killingley, where mademoiselle has her habitation in London, where she can be found, eh?"

Killingley rubbed his chin.

"She's had a suite at the Carlton," he answered. "But her engagement finished on Saturday night, and I expect she's gone back to Paris. I haven't heard of it, though."

"All right, Killingley," I said, picking up my hat. "I will walk round and see. I have a little business with Mademoiselle de Contanges."

It was only a mere step from my office in Jermyn Street to the Carlton Hotel, but I thought much as I made it. I have always had a habit of jumping straight at a conclusion, and I felt as sure as assurance can be that the cobwebby bit of stuff which I carried in my pocket-book was the property of La Papillon, otherwise Odette de Contanges. If that were so, it was she who had accompanied Mr. Charles Becker to the private cabinet at Monsieur Gourgand's restaurant, who had gone away with him and, therefore, might be able to throw some light on the mystery surrounding his death; it might even be that she knew how that death came about. Clearly I must see Mademoiselle de Contanges.

But although mademoiselle had not yet left London, although she was at home, there, in her suite of apartments at the hotel, to see her in private was not as easy a matter as it had been to see her in public. This was no case of throwing down half a guinea at the wicket of a box-office. I sent up my private card and was denied admittance; mademoiselle was seeing no one, no one at all; she was leaving for Paris by the evening train, and was very busy packing. Then I sent up a note: would she give me but a few moments on urgent business? Down to me came a maid: no pert, flighty, young person, but a Frenchwoman who was rapidly approaching middle age, and whose black eyes took stock of me in thorough fashion. She spread out her hands, but spoke in excellent English.

"But it is impossible, sir!" she said. "We leave to-night—we are up to the eyes in packing—mademoiselle can receive no one."

"You can at least hand your mistress a note?" I suggested. "I will write it." And I sat down and scribbled a few words on the back of one of my professional cards, which I then fastened up in an envelope. "Give that to mademoiselle and say I wait," I said.

Five minutes later the maid showed me into a big boudoir, and the presence of the dancer, whose name was famous in half a dozen capitals. Seen under these circumstances, stripped of all the atmosphere and glamour of the stage, she looked nothing more than a mere slip of a girl, and a frightened, anxious, nervous girl at that. Her great eyes, fixed upon me with a great apprehension as I entered, had deep shadows under them; her pretty face was worn and haggard; I knew after one glance at her that little sleep had been hers since the previous day. And as soon as I was sure that the door was closed upon us (and I had noted with satisfaction that it was a double one), I hastened to speak reassuringly to her.

"Do not be afraid," I said, "I am here for your own good."

She looked steadily at me from behind the table at which she stood. Then she inclined her head and glanced at my card, which she had crumpled up in her palm in a strenuous grasp.

"You are a detective?" she said, in a hushed voice.

"No!" I made haste to answer. "I am nothing of the sort, mademoiselle. I am a specialist in criminology. But sometimes matters come in my way by accident. This has come in my way by accident. Perhaps it is well for you that it has. Let me explain. I take it that you have read of the affair in Shaftesbury Avenue, mademoiselle?"

It was mere idleness to ask her the question, for there, opened on the table, was a copy of the newspaper in which the fullest account of the affair was given. Watching her closely, I saw her eyelids quiver, and a ripple of something more around the muscles of her mouth. Her throat rose and fell; instead of answering my question, she inclined her head.

"Just so," I said. "Mademoiselle, let us come to business. Last night you supped with Mr. Becker in a private room at the Café Gourmand."

She started away from the table on which she was leaning when I said that, and again the look of fear and anxiety came into her eyes, accentuated. I lifted a hand and lowered my voice.

"Once more, mademoiselle, do not be afraid," I said. "Will you not sit down and listen to me?"

She stood staring at me for a full minute; then she slid into an easy-chair and, clasping her hands on her knees, looked at me as if she believed I could read every thought in her mind.

"You supped—or made pretence to sup—with Becker in a private room at Gourgand's," I continued, taking a chair opposite to her, and keeping my voice at a level of little more than a whisper, "and after remaining with him there twenty minutes you went away with him. In fact, mademoiselle"—here, of set purpose, I discharged a bolt at a venture—"in fact, you accompanied him to his flat."

I saw at once that I had been right in my surmise. She was staring at me now as if fascinated; I knew that I had stated a plain fact. And I made haste to follow up the advantage.

"Now, mademoiselle, trust me! I am not a detective; I have nothing to do with the police; I am what I told you I was. I believe there is some mystery in this affair. I believe that you may have come into danger through your association with it. Trust me and I will help you. Tell me, straight out, do you know who killed Becker?"

She was twisting and intertwining her fingers now, and her head dropped lower and lower over them. Suddenly she spoke—a mere whisper:

"Yes, monsieur, I know!"

"Then trust me further, mademoiselle, and tell me! We are alone."

Just as suddenly as she had spoken, she looked up, and I saw a quick flash of resolution in her eyes. She faced me bravely.

"It was I, monsieur. I killed him!" she said quietly.

I heard myself gasp. This was an announcement I had not anticipated; it had never even been in my thoughts. What had been in my thoughts was a suspicion that she might possibly have been in collusion with the actual slayer of Becker, and that there might have been a quarrel of which she was a witness, and that she might have left some man with Becker, who subsequently killed him. But that she herself had struck the blow had never occurred to me, and I was so astonished that I sat back in my chair and stared at her in silence. She, too, was silent; staring at me. But it was I who first found a word.

"You!" I exclaimed.

"I—monsieur—I," she said, as quietly as before. "But, I did not mean to kill him; I meant to strike him. Listen, monsieur," she continued, suddenly laying her hand on my knee with an almost child-like appeal. "I will tell you—I have heard of you before; you once did a service to my friend, Madame Leviquae, and I know you are to be trusted. I will tell you the truth. He was a bad, wicked man, that!"

A look of indescribable hatred and loathing came into her face; it had not cleared

away when she went on.

"Years ago, monsieur, when I was a mere girl, I was guilty of a foolish indiscretion," she continued. "It is useless to go into its history now, but this man Becker became aware of it; more, he became possessed of a few letters—only three in all—of mine. For the past three years, since I have had so much money, he had steadily blackmailed me on the strength of his knowledge—I have paid him large sums. And recently he found out that on the termination of my engagement I was going home—to be married."

She seemed to be on the point of breaking down then, but again came the flash of the eye which I had noticed before, and she went steadily on:

"Then he decided to make a grand, a final coup, monsieur. He demanded a great sum for the three letters, a sum which would practically absorb all my profits on this engagement. It was shameful, it was cruel; yet he had me in his power, and I negotiated with him. And eventually it was arranged that I should meet him last night near the place you have just mentioned, and that we should conclude matters. I met him; we went to the private room to which you have referred. I did not wish to eat or drink with him; he insisted, and I made some show of trifling with the supper, all the time entreating him to come to business. Then, although I firmly believed him to be lying, he said he had not the letters with him, that I should have to accompany him to his flat to get them. I insisted then that we should go at once; I would brook no denial. He grumbled; I became the more insistent. Then he put a bottle of champagne which stood on the supper-table in the pocket of his cloak and we left. Oh, monsieur, how did you even find out that I had been there? For I was so thickly veiled!"

"Never mind that just now," I answered. "Pray continue."

"Well, I accompanied him to his flat," she said. "He appeared ill at ease; he fidgeted. He lighted a cigar; he put it down; he forgot all about it; he lighted another. Then he swore that before we did any business, I should drink with him; we should pledge each other. He had set the champagne on the table; he knelt down to get glasses out of his chiffonier; but, as he was then occupied, monsieur, as he was withdrawing a glass, he made a cruel, a cynical, an insulting remark about my—my approaching marriage. And before I was aware of what I was doing, I snatched up the bottle of champagne and crashed it down upon his head, and he fell just as—as if he were dead!"

"Ah!" I murmured, "the bottle of champagne! That's another thing I had not thought of. But proceed, mademoiselle."

"But he was not dead, Monsieur Campenhaye, for he breathed," she continued.

“And then I saw my chance. And he had lied to me, for the three letters were in the breast-pocket of his coat. I took them; I left him where he was; I hurried away and came home here, and burnt the letters; and not until noon to-day did I hear that he was dead. I did not mean to kill him. Monsieur Campenhaye, what shall I do?”

I remained silent for some time, thinking. I had no doubt whatever that I had heard the truth. And in my own heart I rejoiced that the world was rid of at least one specimen of a particularly verminous type. I rose at last and drew out the tiny handkerchief with its embroidered butterfly, and handed it over to Mademoiselle de Contanges.

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “continue your packing—make your journey. Let what happened last night be dead to you. Never speak of it to anyone, not even your husband, unless you tell him, at your discretion, in years to come. And rest assured—you are safe.”

I said good-bye to her then, and repaired to Monsieur Gourgand, who at once conducted me into his private room. I slapped him on the shoulder.

“My friend Gourgand,” said I. “You are a man of a great judgment and of a ripe wisdom. Therefore, you will do exactly what I tell you to do, will you not?”

“I have sufficient confidence in Monsieur Campenhaye to do whatever he wishes,” he replied.

“It is good, friend Gourgand,” I said, slapping his shoulder again. “So you will at once and for ever forget that you ever served up a supper in your private cabinet last night; you will forget that you found anything there; you will forget all that you said to me this afternoon. You understand? In effect, you have forgotten already.”

Monsieur Gourgand spread out his hands.

“It is as monsieur says,” he said solemnly. “I have already forgotten. Oh, yes, then I remember nothing!”

Wherefore it is that the police have never found out who it was that killed Mr. Charles Becker.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SETTLING DAY.

It seemed to me (perhaps because I was but half-awake) that there was something peculiarly sinister in the sudden ring of the telephone bell which sounded at my bedside, sharply and insistently, in the gloom of that December morning. Incidentally, as I pulled myself up to answer it, I glanced at the clock on my mantelpiece, and noticed that it was already past nine. Then I remembered that I had not got to bed until a long way past midnight, and must have slept much more soundly than I usually did. I felt a sense of comfortable reflection in remembering that, so far as I knew, I had nothing particular to do that morning, and, for the moment, I yawned, and stretched my arms.

The telephone bell rang again. I picked up the receiver.

"Yes?" I said.

A voice which I recognised at once as that of a man, a barrister, of my acquaintance who lived in chambers in the Temple, came through. It sounded hurried, agitated.

"That you, Campenhaye? This is me—Cotherstone. I say—can you come here—my chambers—at once? Just now?"

"I'm not yet out of bed. Will an hour do?"

"No, I want you at once—at once, you understand? Something very serious has happened. I want you here before the police are fetched. Do hurry up!"

"Very well. But what is it?"

"I don't know. Come quick!"

"I'll be with you inside twenty minutes," I answered.

I was living at that time in rooms in Whitehall Court. It took but little time to make a remarkably hurried and primitive toilet, to descend the lift, to hail the first taxi-cab I saw: within a quarter of an hour from hanging up the receiver I was running up the stairs of the old house in King's Bench Walk in which Cotherstone lived in modest bachelor fashion. Half-way I met Cotherstone himself, and behind him I saw the frightened face of a man who plainly belonged to the class from which college scouts, superior caretakers, and single gentlemen's gentlemen naturally spring. And if his face wore a frightened expression, Cotherstone's was an anxious and puzzled one.

"That's right," he said, with an obvious sigh of relief, as I ran up. "Here, come into my room a minute—you come too, Grimes. Look here, Campenhaye, I sent for

you because I wanted you to have a look into this before we send for the police—they'll have to be sent for, without doubt."

"Give me a clear idea of what you're driving at," I said.

"All right. There's a man lying dead in the chambers across there. Old Taplin. Stone dead!"

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Practised at the Chancery Bar. Retired, recluse sort of chap, always. I was on little more than speaking terms with him. Oh, he's quite dead!"

"Why have you sent for me, Cotherstone?" I asked quietly.

"Because—because I think there's something queer. And as soon as Grimes here fetched me across and I saw—it—I thought of you, and of your reputation as a specialist in criminology, you know, and I thought I'd like you to see things, to look at things, just as they really are, you know, before we sent for the police."

"But—why?" I repeated.

Cotherstone gave me a queer look which, somehow, seemed to take in the man who stood, silent, watchful, still frightened-looking, near the door.

"Come and see for yourself," answered Cotherstone.

There was a door across the landing on which appeared a single name painted in white letters on the drab background—Mr. C. B. Taplin. Grimes opened it with a key, which he had carried in his hand; opened another behind it; led us through an outer room into an inner one. There the wick of a tall standard lamp was just flickering out; in what illumination it afforded, and in the pale, fog-laden light which came in between hastily-opened curtains, I saw the dead man.

You might have fancied from a first glance—yes, and from a second!—that he was not dead, but asleep. He sat in a comfortable easy-chair, drawn up to the hearth, on which there still lingered the last faint glow of a wood log; his attitude was that of a man who had dropped into his favourite seat, and unconsciously relapsed into a nap. At his side, within convenient reach, stood a small table whereon was set a decanter of whisky, a syphon of mineral water, and a glass, the contents of which had been scarcely touched. At his feet, on the hearthrug, lay a silver-mounted briar pipe and a copy of the current issue of the *Fortnightly Review*; they, it was evident, had dropped from his hands, just as if they had dropped as he sank into slumber. I motioned Grimes to draw back the curtains to their full extent, and I went nearer and looked more closely at the still figure in the easy-chair. I found myself regarding a man of apparently fifty to fifty-five years of age; his hair had already assumed a silver-grey tint, and lent distinction and dignity to handsome features of the true legal type. He was a tallish man, slenderly built; and I noticed his well-shaped hands and

the small feet, in their silk socks and patent leather slippers. He was in evening dress. On the opposite side of the hearth, thrown carelessly over the back of another easy chair, was an overcoat, a white muffler, gloves, a cloth cap; tilted up against the fender was a pair of dress boots. It seemed evident that he had come into his rooms, thrown off his outer things, got into his slippers, mixed himself a drink, lighted his pipe, sat down to read, and had—died.

I said as much to the two men who stood by. But Cotherstone fidgeted.

“He always struck me as being a sound, strong man, Taplin,” he said. “Didn’t you consider him so, Grimes?”

“I always looked upon Mr. Taplin as being an uncommon healthy gentleman, sir,” answered the man. “He was quite well when he went out to dinner last night, sir.”

“Yes, and I met him crossing Fountain Court on his way to dine,” remarked Cotherstone. “He was all right then.”

“That doesn’t prove that he hasn’t died from purely natural causes,” I said. “It may be—heart-failure. I see nothing for it but to send for the police and a doctor, Cotherstone. What about his relations—friends?”

“All that I know is that he has a cousin, Dr. Francis Taplin, who lives in Wimpole Street,” replied Cotherstone. “I’ve met him—here.”

“Dr. Taplin was in here yesterday, sir,” said Grimes. “Come in soon after Mr. Charles had gone across to the Courts, and followed him there, sir.”

“Well, my dear fellow, telephone to this cousin at once,” I said. “And send Grimes out for the police. I can do nothing.”

Cotherstone muttered something to the man, who thereupon left the room. I looked at Cotherstone; it appeared to me that he seemed to be experiencing some sense of dissatisfaction.

“There’s really nothing to do,” I added. “Except that.”

Cotherstone walked towards the door. He hesitated as he got near it, turned, and looked at the dead man.

“I—I don’t believe that was a natural death,” he said. “He was a very sound and healthy man. I think—all the same, there aren’t any signs of any foul play, are there, Campenhaye?”

“I see none. But if you are so anxious about the matter, get his cousin, the doctor, here. There will, of course, have to be a post-mortem examination. Something may be learnt from that. He may, for instance, have been poisoned. Nothing’s been touched in this room, I suppose?”

“Nothing. Grimes came up here as usual before nine, expecting to find Taplin in bed—that’s his bedroom there—and found—this. Then he rushed to me, and I

thought of you; thought that you might see something that the police wouldn't see. You don't. Well—I'll telephone to Francis Taplin."

I remained in the dead man's chambers with Cotherstone until the police came, bringing with them a police surgeon. They were shortly followed by Dr. Taplin, who was evidently greatly surprised, and immediately remarked that he should have believed his cousin the last man in the world to be liable to a sudden seizure, adding that he had seen him in the Law Courts only the previous afternoon, and that he then seemed to be in the best of health. He and the police surgeon made a hasty examination of the body and gave it as their opinion that death had occurred some six or seven hours previously—namely, about two or three o'clock in the morning. And then the police, in their own way, began to take note of the surroundings, carefully removing the decanter of whisky, the syphon, and the contents of the glass. And before removing the body, they investigated the pockets of the garments, laying out what they found there in order upon a centre table. To this part of the proceedings I gave particular attention; it seemed to me that from them I might obtain some clue as to where the dead man had passed the last evening of his life.

There was little that was out of the ordinary in the various articles which were taken from the clothing. A dress-watch of an old-fashioned type; a gold pencil-case; a gold-mounted cigar-cutter; a curious old silk-mesh purse, containing several sovereigns and half-sovereigns; some loose silver; a gold cigar-case; these were things that one might reasonably expect to find on a well-to-do man. The only articles found which were at all exceptional were an empty glass phial which had apparently contained digestive tablets and bore on its label the name of a well-known firm of manufacturing chemists, and, in the left-hand pocket of the trousers, a quantity, some twenty or thirty, of little brass discs, coloured red, black and yellow, and ornamented on one side with curious, engraved arabesques.

I looked at these small discs with considerable curiosity, wondering what they were. They were uniform in size, and rather smaller than a sixpenny-piece; they were beautifully finished, and I felt sure that the arabesque work on them was Moorish. Yet they were not coins. What then, were they? And why was the dead man carrying them in his pocket?

Standing there between those busied around the body and the table on which the various articles taken from it had been laid out, I conceived a sudden idea about the little brass discs. And, knowing very well that the police had not counted them, and being aware that they were paying no attention to my doings, I appropriated one of each colour and dexterously slipped the three into my pocket.

There was, of course, the usual coroner's inquest in the matter of Charles

Taplin's death. There were no sensational facts brought forward. According to the evidence of his cousin, of Cotherstone, of Grimes, of one or two professional friends who knew him, he was a man of very quiet and sober habits, of regular life. There seemed to be no reason why he himself should put an end to his life; no reason why anybody should wish to put an end to it. Nevertheless, I soon saw that there was a suspicion afoot that this was a case of either suicide or murder. And the inquest was adjourned until certain pathological experts could give the result of their thorough investigation of the viscera.

My own impression was that Taplin had died a natural death, and I said so to Cotherstone as we came away from the coroner's court. But Cotherstone shook his head.

"No," he said. "I believe there was foul play, I do!"

"And upon what do you found your belief, Cotherstone?" I asked, perhaps a little cynically. "I suppose you have some grounds."

"None," he answered. "None. It's an—an intuition."

"I'm afraid intuitions don't go for much in these matters," I said. "Come—where would your intuition be if these experts tell you that there isn't the slightest trace of poison in the organs they've taken away?"

Cotherstone shook his head again.

"I don't care," he replied. "It's my conviction there was foul play. I felt, thought it from the first. That was why I sent for you. And you don't seem to find anything out of the common in the affair."

Now, in plain truth, I did find something out of the common in the affair, but I was not going to confess as much to Cotherstone—just then, at any rate. Ever since I had appropriated them from the little heap on the table of the dead man's room, I had been asking myself what those little black, red, and yellow discs of engraved brass were, and what they were doing in Taplin's pocket in what you might call some quantity. I had formulated several theories about them: there was only one which seemed to me to be good. I took these things to be counters which were in use at some house where cards were played a good deal—or at a gaming establishment. Quietly, unobtrusively, I had been trying to gain some knowledge of Charles Taplin's habits. But all I could learn was that he lived a very quiet, methodical life. He had resided in rooms attached to his chambers in King's Bench Walk for some years; the man Grimes and his wife had attended to his simple wants. He was in court all day as a rule; he always dined out, five nights out of the seven at his club: he was known at his club as a very quiet and retiring man. Grimes said that, with rare exceptions, he was always at home by half-past eleven, drank one glass of whisky, smoked a pipe,

and read a little before retiring at midnight. This did not seem the sort of man who would frequent those secret gambling houses of which the West End of London possesses not a few.

It was at this juncture that I thought of Tregarthen. Tregarthen—he is dead now, killed in a big-game shoot in Uganda—was as much a man of mystery as he was a well-known man about town. Tall, unusually handsome, one of the very best-dressed men in London, rich, of excellent manners and address, always welcomed wherever he went, nobody seemed to know anything much about him. He was believed to have some business in the city—the sort of business that one spends an hour a day over—he lived in one of the most charming sets of rooms in the Albany; he belonged to a couple of the best clubs. Yet no one knew him well—the fact was, he did not allow anyone to know him well. But somehow he had acquired a reputation—that of being the best informed man in town concerning the life of that strange and mysterious underworld which lies beneath the surface froth of London society. I do not know how he acquired that reputation; but it was his, and it clung, increasingly, about him.

I had had some business relations with Tregarthen, and we had taken a sort of fancy to each other—once or twice he had dined with me; once or twice I had dined with him. And now I asked him to a quiet dinner at my rooms, and as we afterwards sat over our coffee I produced the black, red and yellow discs and, without preface, held them out to him, exposed on the open palm of my hand.

“Tregarthen,” I said, “have you ever seen anything like these things before?”

I knew at once that he had. His usual languid insouciance vanished on the instant; he startled visibly, a look of almost incredible surprise came over his face.

“Good God, Campenhave!” he exclaimed. “Where—where did you get those?”

And he looked at me with a suddenly-aroused, keenly speculative interest, as if I had just returned from, say, the North Pole, or some other place to which men do not usually penetrate.

“Whether I answer your question, Tregarthen,” I replied, “depends on whether you answer some questions of mine. At any rate, you recognise these bits of brass?”

“Certainly I do,” he replied, resuming his nonchalance. “I do! What I am astonished at, is—seeing them in your possession.”

“What are they?” I asked bluntly.

“Oh, I can tell you that. They are counters, used at a certain private gambling hell, here in town.”

“I thought as much. Where is it? Who keeps it? Who goes there? Those are the questions I want you to answer, Tregarthen. It is—between ourselves.”

He nodded.

“Just so. But first—between ourselves—where did you get those things?”

Remembering that the people at New Scotland Yard had some twenty or twenty-five more of the counters in their possession, amongst the late Charles Taplin’s effects, I made no difficulty about telling Tregarthen the truth. He listened in silence, nodding his head now and then.

“Yes,” he said, when I had finished my story. “It is quite plain to me that your man had been there—to this place I spoke of, you know. Well, I myself was there on the night you speak of—I was there from eleven o’clock until one. But, of course, if he had been known to me previously, I should not have recognised him.”

“Why?”

“Because all the people—men and women—who frequent that place wear masks and dominoes, and don’t waste time in unnecessary conversation. I shouldn’t know you.”

I considered matters; meanwhile putting the counters away.

“Tregarthen,” I said, coming to him from the desk in which I had locked them up. “I want to visit this place.”

“Impossible!” he answered.

“Nonsense!” said I. “If Taplin gets into it, I can get into it. You can get me in.”

He looked at me doubtfully.

“What’s your object, Campenhaye?” he asked.

“At present, mere curiosity,” I replied.

“Then—are you willing to pay for your curiosity?”

“To a reasonable amount—yes.”

Tregarthen selected and lighted a second cigar, and for a few moments smoked as if in deep thought.

“Well, I know I can speak freely to you,” he said. “This place, Campenhaye, is the most secret and the most exclusive gambling hell in London—perhaps in Europe. It is run, kept, whatever you like to call it, by a man who is known to the world—at least, to a small section of it—as a rich and benevolent old gentleman who possesses a marvellous collection of books and a fine gallery of pictures. He is a character, that man—he has Spanish, Moorish, and gipsy blood in him—and his name—the one I know him by, at any rate—is Mendoba.”

“Continue,” I said.

“I can introduce you,” he went on slowly. “You will have to pay a hundred guineas entrance fee, and everybody is expected to play. And play is—high. It is very high. This is not an ordinary gambling hell, and things are not done in an

ordinary way. Those counters, now. The yellow represents five; the red ten; the black twenty-five pounds: there are others of much higher value. I have seen fifty thousand pounds lost—and won—in a night there—yes, in an hour.”

“I happen to be pretty well off just now,” I said. “Besides, whenever I do engage in games of chance, I am most extraordinarily lucky. The probability is that I shall come away from Mr. Mendoba’s with stuffed pockets.”

“You will have abundant opportunity of stuffing them,” he remarked. “Or, of emptying them. Very well, then. Now, when?”

“As soon as possible.”

“To-morrow night, then,” he said. “We will meet at the Odalium at eleven. All right. But, Campenhay,” he added, giving me a searching look, “why, really, do you wish to visit this house?”

I shook my head.

“Frankly, Tregarthen, I am at present conscious of but one idea,” I said. “I want—I don’t quite know why—to see the place where Taplin seems to have spent the last hours of his life. And—I suppose it springs from professional instinct—I daresay that I have some notion that I may there get some light on the mystery of his death.”

Tregarthen smiled.

“I daresay you will find sufficient of the mysterious at Mendoba’s,” he remarked. “Very well—to-morrow night. And that, by the by, is a racing night.”

“A racing night?” I said questioningly.

“Never mind—you will find out what that means,” he answered. “Again, by the by, don’t produce those counters there.”

“The counters are under lock and key,” I said. And, when Tregarthen had left, I added to myself:

“Until they are wanted.”

It was a certain street which lies between Park Lane and Berkeley Square to which Tregarthen conducted me just after eleven o’clock on the following night. He walked round from our club—the Odalium—in Piccadilly; he wanted, he said, to give me some particulars of what I was to expect.

“I have already spoken of you to Mendoba,” he said, as we strolled leisurely along (Tregarthen was one of those men who insist on leisureliness in everything). “So there will be no difficulty about your admission. One thing Mendoba insists upon—while his clients conceal their identity from each other by masks and dominoes, he himself must know each. Of course, he knew who and what you are.”

“And made no objection?”

“None. You can pursue your own path—he is indifferent to what his clients do,

so long as they keep within his rules.”

“How does he know that I don’t want to expose him and his place?” I suggested.

“Because I gave him my word that you didn’t,” replied Tregarthen coolly. “In fact, as he is a man to be trusted, I told him the truth. Don’t start, my dear fellow—Mendoba knows a thousand secrets. And he keeps them.”

I had full confidence in Tregarthen, so I accepted matters.

“All right,” I said. “Well, what are we going to do? You said something about this being a race night?”

“Yes. Sometimes *trente-et-quarante* is played; sometimes *rouge-et-noir*. But now and then—as to-night—there is a form of *petits chevaux*, which appears to have a particular fascination for the women. I have gone thoroughly into it; as these things go, it is a perfectly straight business. The mechanical arrangements are highly ingenious; they are also above suspicion. I have convinced myself—as you may, if you care to take the trouble—that it is impossible to arrange for the success of any particular horse of the twelve which run. Here the element of pure chance is paramount.”

“You back a horse?”

“You can do which you like. You can turn bookmaker, and give the odds. Or you can back your fancy. Some people prefer one thing; some the other. And—remember this—all the ordinary rules of a racecourse are followed. You can bet for cash, or you can book your bets, and, as they do on the real turf, settle up on the next Monday—at Mendoba’s, of course.”

“They trust each other as far as that?”

“All Mendoba’s clients are people of means with a very big M,” answered Tregarthen sententiously. “He takes care of that. But—here we are. There is nothing for you to do but follow me, for I paid your entrance-fee this afternoon when I called on Mendoba.”

The house which we entered was one of those modern palaces which have recently sprung up in this quarter of the town, and the first glimpse of its interior revealed the elegance which was in keeping with the promise of the fine architecture without. In the outer and inner halls there were several men-servants, in a rich but sober-hued livery; they bowed respectfully to my companion as he led me through their ranks and up a wide staircase to where a tall, elderly man, clad in immaculate evening dress, and wearing the ribbon of some foreign order across his breast, stood as if to receive visitors.

“Mendoba,” whispered Tregarthen.

I treated myself to a keen look at the keeper of the gambling-hell, as we ascended the staircase, and at once recognised him as a man whom I had seen driving and riding in the park. He was of commanding presence, dark-skinned, silver-haired and bearded; his keen eyes, prominent nose, and pose of head and body denoted a man of power and energy. He gave me a polite bow and smile, and stretched out a hand which was extraordinarily supple.

“You wish to go in at once?” he said, addressing Tregarthen. “Yes—I have given instructions.” He turned to me graciously. “I hope you will amuse yourself,” he whispered with another smile.

Tregarthen led me along a narrow picture gallery, heavily carpeted, dimly lighted. At its further end, two men, muscular and hefty fellows, wearing the livery which we had seen downstairs, stood near the door. Their manner was all alert politeness, but I felt that both gave me a searching inspection as I advanced under my companion’s ægis. The door opened; we stepped into another thickly-carpeted corridor, in which the light was still more subdued. And presently Tregarthen drew me aside into an open doorway, switched on an electric light, and revealed a small dressing-room. On the wall hung a number of black masks and of dominos—the latter of black, red, yellow, green, and half a dozen other colours.

“Make your choice, Campenhaye,” he said with one of his sardonic laughs. “Personally, I don’t believe overmuch in this masquerading business, but it lends an air of mystery to the proceedings, and pleases some of the customers, especially the women. Got what you like?”

I selected a mask of black velvet and a black and white domino; certainly, these simple things made a difference.

“Come on, then,” said Tregarthen. “Keep your eyes open. But we’re early.”

Traversing the rest of the corridor, we passed through a heavy divided portière into a salon, all the light in which was deftly thrown upon a long oval table covered with green cloth and fitted up like a racecourse, except that stands and paddocks were absent. But there were starting posts and winning-posts and number-boards, and the imaginary furlongs and the “distance” were marked off, and there, drawn up at an imitation starting-gate, were the horses, each with its jockey and its separate colours. Tregarthen drew me aside as we entered.

“I told you this was absolutely above suspicion,” he said. “I don’t know how it’s done, but I do know that it’s a pure and simple toss up as to which horse wins. Just to amuse myself I once went in for an elaborate study of the results—to see if any particular horse had a run of luck. I got no information out of it—you never know what will win. It’s the biggest gamble I’ve ever seen. And, naturally, it appeals to

people who are born gamblers, and who would bet, if they'd nothing else to do, on the odd or even number of the next taxi-cab that came along. Now let's have a look round until the bell rings for the first race."

We strolled around the room. Except in the immediate vicinity of the mimic racecourse, everything was in a half-light, but certain things were made out easily. In one alcove, presided over by the liveried servants, was a buffet on which were set out dainty sandwiches, the rarest fruit, choice sweetmeats, wines, spirits, coffee; in another, a highly-respectable gentleman in immaculate evening dress sat behind a grille to sell counters, give change, and to cash cheques. In the recesses were luxurious fauteuils; on the walls magnificent pictures; if this was a hell, it was certainly an elegantly-appointed one. And from the murmurs of well-bred voices, from the occasional flashing of diamonds on white necks and in dainty ears, from the glitter of rings on slender fingers, I judged that those who frequented Señor Mendoba's rooms were folk of as elegant and luxurious tastes as their present surroundings.

Tregarthen and I shared a pint bottle of champagne at the buffet as a preliminary to our proceedings; when we had finished it, the room had filled up; by that time there must have been quite fifty people present. And suddenly a silvery bell rang, and everybody began to wake into activity. And just as on a real racecourse, those who elected to play the part of bookmakers began to invite custom and to call the odds. Above the babel of voices one, a merry, yet mocking, voice made itself insistent.

"Come to the old firm, ladies and gentlemen!" it shouted. "Don't forget the old firm in the Yellow Hat, and Black Mask, and the Red Domino! Cash or credit—credit or cash! Two to one on the field—two to one on the fee-yuld!"

Amidst a cackle of laughter which this evoked, I turned to look at the person from whom this appeal, strikingly reminiscent of suburban race-meeting, proceeded. Standing near the imitation starting-gate was a man dressed in the fashion indicated—a high, bell-shaped yellow hat, a black silk mask which concealed every feature of his face save his eyes, the point of his nose, and his lips, and a domino of brilliant red, which enveloped him from neck to ankle. He waved an elegantly-bound note-book, in one hand, a gold-mounted pencil in the other, and from the way in which my fellow masqueraders crowded about him, he seemed to be a favourite.

"Of course you don't know who that man is?" I asked of Tregarthen.

"No more than you do," he answered. "All I know is that he never tires of the game. You'd better have a flutter with him. Pick your beast—every horse carries its name printed across its jockey's shoulders."

I gave a careless look at the twelve little horses and saw one labelled Diabolo. I approached the queer figure in the brilliant domino; he had mounted himself on a

stool, and was just then booking a bet with a lady whose velvet mask was topped by a wealth of beautiful auburn hair, in which there was a seductive shimmer of pearls. And, as he raised his right hand to scribble in his little book, I saw that he had lost nearly the whole of its index finger; it was gone from just beneath the main joint, and the man wrote with his second digit and his thumb.

I drew back into the shade. Where had I seen that maimed hand before? For I had seen it, and recently; I had particularly noted the seamed lines where the flesh had been sewn across the stump. But when—where? Then with a quick leaping memory I got it. Francis Taplin, the doctor, Charles Taplin's cousin! I had stood by while he examined the dead body in those quiet chambers in King's Bench Walk, and had noticed that he had lost the index finger of his right hand, and wondered how. And—I was sure that he and the Old Firm were one and the same person, for the curious white seams in the stump had fascinated me as his fingers moved the dead man's clothing. The same person!—then, what——

“Aren't you going to have a flutter?” asked Tregarthen at my shoulder.

I approached the Old Firm.

“What price Diabolo?” I enquired jocularly.

“Diabolo is two to one—to you, sir,” he replied in the same spirit.

“Fifty, then,” said I.

“Cash or book, sir?” he enquired.

“Book.”

“One hundred pounds to fifty, Diabolo,” he said, opening his book. “What's your club number?”

Tregarthen had presented me with a little silver badge on which was engraved a letter and a number: X 23; I mentioned letter and number to the Old Firm, and he mentioned his own—S 21. We scribbled the bet in our books, and I turned to the mimic racecourse, round which everybody was congregated. But I was not thinking of the horses; all my thoughts were on that maimed hand behind me.

I do not know how the machinery of the little horses was manipulated, but the starting of them was scrupulously fair. Some of the ladies—any of them who happened to be near the head of the table—plunged their hands into a bag in which there were a number of differently-coloured counters; she who drew out the black one then pressed a button at the edge of the course and the small steeds moved off. Round and round the white rails they went, the fortunes of the race varying as in the real thing, and the excitement growing with each round. And Diabolo won by a length.

“Didn't I tell you I was a lucky man?” I said to Tregarthen.

I backed a horse named Bingo for the next race, doubling my stake. And Bingo, metaphorically, cantered home. Tregarthen, who had lost on both races, grinned.

“Sheer luck, isn’t it?” he said.

“I shall win again,” I remarked. “See if I don’t.”

“Not you—you’ll go down this time,” he laughed.

“Well, I’m winning three hundred,” I said. “And I’ll have it all on Bucephalus there, if our friend will give me two to one again.”

Our friend was only too pleased to do so: he could not believe that I could spot the winner three times running. So I stood to win six hundred on Bucephalus. And Bucephalus won—easily.

There were other people beginning to take an interest in me, and my doings by that time; the eyes that stared at me through the slits in the masks plainly showed that their owners believed me to possess a rare gift of luck.

“Do tell me which you are going to back this time,” whispered a very pleading and pretty voice—the voice of a slim somebody in a turquoise-blue domino. “I never find a winner, and I lose all my money. Please tell me.”

I threw a careless glance at the steeds.

“Back Diomedes,” I whispered. “Diomedes will win.”

And I, too, invested my six hundred on Diomedes.

“Now, you’ll go down,” said Tregarthen. “Hope you do!”

But Diomedes won—by a short head. And the Old Firm laughed queerly, as I turned to him.

“Witchcraft!” he said. “Never mind—you’ll come a cropper, X 23, before the day dawns!”

“I won’t stop, as long as you’ll give me the odds,” I said, and I turned to examine the names of the horses.

To cut a long story short, I was winning nearly ten thousand pounds when the proceedings came to an end. And when the Old Firm, Tregarthen and I, with two or three more men, including Mendoba, who had appeared during the night, went to the buffet for a final drink, and I was being congratulated and chaffed about my extraordinary luck, I made the Old Firm a sporting offer. It was nothing less than to throw a single cast of the dice for double or quits. One of the masqueraders uttered an involuntary exclamation—it was evident that he thought me a fool. But in the eyes of the Old Firm I saw a sudden gleam; I also saw his lips tighten. He was lifting a glass to his mouth, and he arrested its progress as if his arm had suddenly become paralysed.

“One throw,” I repeated. “And—double or quits.”

He raised the glass with an effort, and drained its contents at a gulp.

“Done!” he said.

There was of course dice ready to hand. The salon had cleared of all but ourselves, Tregarthen, Mendoba, and three or four others, one a woman. We gathered round a small table which somebody pushed forward. We tossed a sovereign for first throw; he won the toss. And he threw—nine. It seemed to me that I heard him catch his breath as he did so. But I took the box and threw a six and a five—eleven.

The Old Firm laughed.

“Monday, then, X 23!” he said in the jocular tone which had marked him during the whole of the night. “You’re the devil himself for luck.”

I left Tregarthen at the corner of Mount Street and walked home in the early morning air—it was, I remember, very sharp and frosty. I thought a good deal on my way—always about that maimed hand; about Charles Taplin; about the fact that he had those counters in his pockets; about many things.

On my desk I found a confidential letter from one of the two eminent experts who had been conducting the post-mortem examination. He and I were old schoolfellows, and he had promised to tell me privately what he and the other great man had found out. I tore the envelope open eagerly. There were but a few lines, hastily scribbled inside. The experts had come to the conclusion that Charles Taplin had died swiftly and suddenly as the result of swallowing some poison which had acted instantaneously—but what that poison was they did not know, and could not say.

I went round to my friend, the medical expert, as soon as I had breakfasted next morning, taking his house on the way to my offices in Jermyn Street. I was fortunate in catching him before he set out for his hospital, and knowing how valuable his time was, I went straight to the point.

“So you think Charles Taplin was poisoned?” I began.

“Certain of it,” he replied.

“And yet you can’t say by what particular poison?”

“No, that’s flat. We can’t.”

“No traces of poison?”

“No traces of any poison that we are familiar with. But there are poisons in existence of which we don’t know anything—anything!”

“What makes you think he was poisoned? Might it not have been a natural death?”

“It wasn’t a natural death. He swallowed something which caused instantaneous

heart failure. Call it stoppage, paralysis, collapse of the heart, anything you like—that's what happened. Our impression is that something was swallowed in his first drink from the glass of whisky and soda which stood by his side, almost unconsumed, as you will remember."

"Well, weren't there any traces in what remained?"

"None. We analysed what was left in the glass, in the decanter, and in the syphon by every test we could think of. We found nothing. But we are convinced that the man was poisoned, and that the poison used was some subtle drug of which we in this part of the world as yet know nothing at all."

"You think such poisons are existent?"

"Of course they are! Some of the Eastern nations have knowledge of poisons to which we can't pretend. So have—or had—the gipsies. So have some of the savage tribes of Africa to which civilisation has not yet penetrated. All we can do is to test for poisons of which we're cognisant—we can't say or do anything about a poison of which we're absolutely ignorant."

"You'll tell all that at the adjourned inquest, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course! And a lot of people won't believe us. But I'm dead sure of what I say—the man was poisoned."

I went away, reckoning things up. This was Saturday morning. The adjourned inquest was fixed for Tuesday. And Monday was settling day at Mendoba's, and the Old Firm—who was, I had no doubt, Francis Taplin—was liable to me for nearly twenty thousand pounds.

By this time I had formed a theory and conceived a plan. And to carry out the plan I decided to employ help in the shape of my clerk, Killingley, whom I had good reason to consider one of the very smartest and most reliable young men in London. And after I consulted a medical directory and had made from it a half-sheet of memoranda, I rang for Killingley and gave him his instructions. They were brief. From then until I issued further orders he was to keep an eye on Dr. Taplin, no matter where he went. He was to lay out whatever money he liked; to get what assistance he liked; to do anything he liked, but Dr. Taplin was never to be out of his vision or reach.

When Killingley went out of my private room I felt as if I had locked Dr. Taplin up in my private safe. For I knew Killingley. He was a veritable leech, a bulldog, a limpet; once let him get hold of anything, and he would never let go.

I waited in Jermyn Street until Killingley rang me up from a call-office in the neighbourhood of Cavendish Square, and said, "All right—I've got him," which meant, in plain English, that he had made himself acquainted with Dr. Taplin's

identity, and then I went down to the Temple, and found Cotherstone. To him I communicated the news which I had received from my friend the medical expert. Cotherstone sniffed—a habit of his which indicated a certain supercilious contempt for other people's mental abilities.

"Of course!" he said. "Didn't I tell you from the very first that there was foul play!"

"Hang your high-and-mightiness!" said I with a laugh. "Tell me two things, which are of much more importance at the moment; that is, if you can."

"Well?" he asked. "What?"

"First—was Charles Taplin a wealthy man?"

"I should say he was a well-to-do man; perhaps, a very well-to-do man. He had a very good practice at the Chancery Bar, and he was a man of simple life and tastes."

"Second—have you any idea who gets his money?"

"Well," answered Cotherstone slowly. "I don't suppose it matters if I tell you. I happen to know, because I witnessed the will, not so long ago, and Taplin told me to read it. He left everything to Francis Taplin. And I remember that he remarked to me that his cousin was the only relation he had in the world, as far as he knew."

"So it was greatly to Francis's benefit that Charles should die," I remarked meaningly.

Cotherstone started.

"What are you driving at, Campenhaye?" he asked. "You aren't surely suggesting that——"

Then I told Cotherstone everything. His face grew more and more astonished as I went on; by the time I had finished I saw that he was filled with the same suspicion that had seized upon me.

"What's your theory?" he asked abruptly.

"That it was in Francis Taplin's interest to get rid of his cousin," I answered. "But as to the precise why and wherefore, I'm not sure. Not, perhaps, for the mere inheriting of his estate."

"Not?" exclaimed Cotherstone.

"Remember!" I said, lifting a finger. "Remember! Charles Taplin was not the white hen you thought him. He was a frequenter of Mendoba's highly gilt hell. There's more in this than one would think, Cotherstone."

"What are you going to do?" he asked after a pause. "Say nothing at the inquest?"

"I hope to say—or do—something before that," I replied. "I think that there will

be developments, possibly on Monday night—settling day.”

Until the Monday night I waited. During the time of waiting I received regular reports from the faithful and watchful Killingley. There appeared to be nothing very remarkable about Dr. Francis Taplin’s daily life, as observed by my clerk. Patients came to him; he went to see patients. On the Saturday evening he was at one of the ultra-respectable clubs; and the Sunday evening he dined at the Ritz in the company of a young and very beautiful woman. And on the next day Dr. Taplin resumed his usual round of duties.

I went to Señor Mendoba’s house alone that Monday night, for I had not seen Tregarthen since we had walked out of it at three o’clock in the morning of the previous Saturday. But I had not been long there when Tregarthen came in and joined me.

“Looking out for the Old Firm?” he said with one of his sarcastic grins. “Let’s see—you’ve twenty thousand to draw, eh?”

“Nineteen thousand, six hundred pounds, precisely,” I answered.

He laughed, half-jestingly.

“Old Firm will have to fork out pretty heavily, then,” he remarked. “I fancy you were not the only successful punter. There are others here who have pleasant reading in their bits of books: they followed your selections.”

He was right there. There was, for example, the slim and slender beauty (at least, I suppose she was beautiful) who had asked me for a tip; she seemed in high glee, and stealing up to me, said sweetly that she hoped I should be as lucky at trente-et-quarante (for which the tables were spread) as I had been with the little horses.

“I’ve three thousand to draw when Old Firm comes,” she said. “Do let me sit by you, or I shall be sure to lose every penny of it before the night’s over—I nearly always do.”

But Old Firm was late in making his appearance. He was not in evidence at half-past eleven, nor at twelve, nor at half-past twelve.

It was a few minutes after the half-hour had struck that the famous raid took place which afforded such splendid copy for the noon editions of next day’s newspapers. It was sprung upon a roomful of absorbed people with startling abruptness. All I knew was that the salon suddenly seemed to be filled with plain-clothes men; that a number of the guests, men, threw off masks and dominos and seized upon fellow-guests; that there was pandemonium of screams, curses, expostulations, and that I myself, having managed to draw aside the inspector in charge, revealed my identity by divesting my face and figure of their concealment.

The inspector gasped.

"You, Mr. Campenhaye?" he exclaimed. "Good God! what are you doing here?"

"Pretty much what you're doing here," I answered. "I'm after a certain individual."

"And we're after several individuals," he said. "You haven't any idea where the grey-bearded man who calls himself Mendoba is?"

"I haven't seen him to-night," I replied. "He hasn't shown up. Of course, I may go."

"Oh, of course! Slip off quietly. Most of our people know you—if they don't, show them that card."

I made my way out with little difficulty. Much to my astonishment Tregarthen joined me as I gained the entrance-hall. There were a couple of Scotland Yard men at the front door who knew me and passed me out; to my surprise, they nodded familiarly to my companion, who replied with a whispered jest. Outside I looked at him with a new interest.

"Ho, ho!" I said. "So you're also known to the police, my friend?"

"Seems like it," he answered nonchalantly. "Egad, but that was a surprise, all the same, Campenhaye! I hadn't expected——"

At that moment a man whom I recognised as one of Killingley's most trusted satellites plucked my sleeve, and pushed a twisted scrap of paper into my hand. I unfolded and read a hastily scribbled note:

"Come at once to Wimpole Street—awaiting you.—K."

To take Tregarthen by the arm and hurry him to the nearest taxi-cab was the work of a moment; a hurried dash through streets and squares brought us to a point near Francis Taplin's house. I pulled up the chauffeur and we descended and went along on foot, and presently met Cartwright, a man whom I occasionally employed, and in whom Killingley had a profound belief. He hurried up, evidently full of news.

"Mr. Killingley, sir, has followed our man," he said hastily; "he left the house, carrying a travelling bag, about ten minutes ago, and Mr. Killingley had reason to think he was for Charing Cross. He said, would you follow him there?"

"Come on, Tregarthen," I said, wheeling my companion round towards a taxi-cab that was just behind us plying for hire. "Anything else, Cartwright?"

"Well, there's this, sir. Just after our man had set off, and Mr. Killingley had started after him, a cab came up at a big speed, and a man jumped out and ran into

the house. He stayed there a few minutes, came out, got into the cab again, and went down the street—he'd pass you, sir."

"What sort of man?" I asked.

"Tall, elderly, grey beard—fine-looking man, sir."

I pushed Tregarthen into the taxi-cab, followed him, and bade the driver go to Charing Cross as quickly as possible.

"That's Mendoba," I said, as we moved off. "Mendoba! He's after Taplin."

"Seems so," answered Tregarthen lazily. "Well, it's Mendoba that I want, Campenhayne. The fact is, I'm of your own profession—in a certain fashion. I've a commission to get Mendoba, and it's cost me these years of time and somebody else several thousands of pounds to cultivate the scoundrel, for he is that. And I was just about near the end of everything—such carefully-laid, delicately contrived plans! And I meant to bring it off next week, and now that police raid has spoilt all, I'm afraid. What luck!"

I was too much surprised by this revelation to make any reply just then; besides, my thoughts were elsewhere.

"I shouldn't be surprised if Mendoba and Taplin were in league," I said. "A hundred to one that was Mendoba that Cartwright described just now."

"It's likely," answered Tregarthen. "Um! I wish I'd cultivated Old Firm or Taplin rather more. I wonder what we shall find next!"

What we found next was an excited crowd jostling and clamouring round a certain section of the Dover train at Charing Cross. From it Killingley presently emerged, wriggling his way out like an eel, breathless, yet cool as a cucumber. And all around him and us were murmurs and exclamations, and all to one effect—something about a man being dead, shot, murdered.

"It's our man," said Killingley, pulling me aside. "It's Taplin! I've had a look through the carriage window. He's dead, right enough, and shot. It was this way—I followed him down here, and on to the platform, after he'd booked for Paris. But inside the barrier he got ahead, and I was held back by a crush. Then I saw a big man, grey-bearded, that I saw call at Taplin's on Saturday, force his way through, and go down the platform, and soon after that a shot was heard, and then there were cries about a passenger being found dead—and it's Taplin, as I say. There's a Yard man at the carriage door that you know, sir—Beeverstone—get up to him, and he'll let you see."

Tregarthen and myself, making use of our height and weight, pushed our way through the crowd to the door of the compartment. And Beeverstone recognised us, and presently when the officials had dispersed the crowd, preparatory to detaching

and removing the carriage, we were admitted.

That Francis Taplin lay before us, dead, there was no doubt. We recognised him and his maimed hand at once.

“But do you know anything of this?” asked Beeverstone grimly. “This was thrown on the opposite seat.”

And he held up to us something that proved to be an elegantly-made wig and patriarchal beard, and we both knew then that Señor Mendoba must be a past-master in the art of making-up.

“Quick work!” observed Beeverstone. “Must have followed his man in here, shot him at once, thrown off his wig and beard—all in one piece, you see—and cleared out through that door. Nice job for you gents to find him, and for us, too!”

So there was an end of Francis Taplin, of whose mysterious doings we never found out more than that he had been living a very double—in fact, a very triple—life, and that he doubtless used certain special knowledge of poisons which he had acquired during a long residence in India, to make away with his cousin, and further that it was he who had supplied the police authorities with particulars of what was going on at Mendoba’s, and facilities for making the raid. As for Mendoba, the story of how I helped to bring that extraordinary villain to an account, is one that requires—as all such stories do—its own very particular chapter to itself.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAGICIAN OF CANNON STREET.

My reason for going down to Cannon Street at all that morning was not connected in any way with crimes and mysteries—I had no idea of either in my mind when I stepped out of the Underground at the Mansion House Station. I was on a much pleasanter errand than the solving of problems arising from crimes; the fact was, that, having matrimony in view, I was busy in reconstructing and remodelling a beautiful old Jacobean house which I had just bought, away out in a Surrey village, and I had been recommended by my architect to visit a man in Budge Row who had some good scheme or idea about patent flooring. I had meant to have a leisurely half-hour's chat with him, but as luck would have it, I was not in Budge Row for the space of five minutes, and I went out of it, not only in a state of hurried precipitation, but also in one of considerable surprise. And in spite of the hurry and the surprise I had wit enough to gather that I was in for an affair.

It was raining that morning—a November morning. I thought as I turned into Budge Row from Cannon Street that the City (a quarter of the town rarely visited by me) looked infinitely miserable under rain. There was slop on the roofs, and slop in the streets; it was one of those days on which the sight of an umbrella suggests thoughts of infinite wretchedness, and men turn up the collars of their coats out of sheer sympathy with the weather. In the narrow confines of Budge Row there were few people about; it a little surprised me, therefore, to see at the corner one of those individuals who are known as “gazers,” which term, I may explain to the uninitiated, means those street merchants who stand in the gutters supporting small trays on which are set out cheap mechanical toys, usually sold at the price of a penny. This particular gazer rather attracted my attention; he was a tall, well-built fellow, arrayed in a multiplicity of old, odd-coloured garments, finished off by a tattered waterproof cape; he was lame of one leg, and supported himself by a crutch; there was a scar that looked very like an old sword-cut, on one cheek, and his right eye was obsessed by a black patch. On his tray he displayed a number of small metal tigers: you pressed a spring and the tiger's eyes glared and his tail waved; it seemed to me that the sudden lighting-up of the yellow eyes was the only sign of warmth in that wind-swept street. The vendor cried at intervals in a hoarse, fog-spoilt voice:

“The real Royal Indian Tiger from Bengal! One penny!” And as I passed him he muttered thickly: “Buy a tiger, captain—just the same as your honour's shot in the jungle—all alive, captain!”

I suppose it flatters every civilian to be accused of relationship with the Army; anyhow, having one handy in my ticket pocket, I dropped a shilling on the gazer's tray as I walked by. He picked it up, spat on it, and thanked me with an eloquent look which was almost a wink, and fell to crying his wares still more raucously and loudly.

Where the ancient church of Saint Anthony, patron saint of the good grocers of London, once stood in Budge Row, shrining the bones of many estimable citizens who in their time were aldermen and sheriffs of our proud city, there are now certain of those modern abominations called chambers, wherein a man may as easily lose himself as a mouse might in entering a thickly-populated rabbit-warren. The man I wanted to see had his place of business in one of these barrack-like buildings, and my first proceeding, on discovering the set of chambers which I wanted, was to read the names on the list of tenants that was posted up at the door. This occupied some time; there appeared to be some dozens of floors and scores of separate offices. And, as I stood in the entry, my hands behind me, reading steadily down one side of the list, preparatory to going methodically up the other, I felt something thrust into my fingers, and turning sharply round, saw an urchin throw me a backward grin as he darted into the street and vanished in a neighbouring entry.

I glanced at what this impudent gamin had thrust into my hand. A scrap of paper—creased, damp. Nevertheless, I opened it, on principle, having long before made it a strict rule of life to attend to the smallest details in a day's adventures. There were words hastily scribbled on that bit of paper; they ran thus:

“For God's sake, Campenhaye, get out of that doorway and away from this street, *quick!* But come, see me at my rooms at four o'clock, and if you still have him, bring that clerk of yours with you. Now scoot—and look neither right nor left.
—TREGARTHEN.”

I obeyed this command to the letter: I did not even wait to fold up the paper. Crushing it in my hand, I shot hurriedly out of the doorway, up the street, and into a taxi-cab which happened to be passing. Not until I was west of St. Paul's did I begin to ask myself what had really happened.

Tregarthen!—I had not seen Tregarthen for three years—not since soon after the affair of the Taplin mystery. He and I, working independently of the police, had tried to find Mendoba, the murderer of Dr. Francis Taplin; like the police, we had failed to do so. Then I had turned to other matters, and Tregarthen had gone away somewhere and I had not heard of him since; he was always a strangely mysterious person, and so I had not been surprised at his silence. But here he was in London

again—and I knew his peculiar handwriting well enough—and yet I had not seen him at any of his usual haunts—which were also mine—nor heard of his return.

“This is an affair!” I informed myself. “Tregarthen is back. Tregarthen is up to something. Tregarthen is watching somebody. That somebody has something to do with those chambers in Budge Row. Perhaps if I had looked up I should have seen Tregarthen’s striking face confronting me from one of the opposite windows. However, I have done as I was told. Now, Tregarthen wants to see me. Also, which is possibly more important—he wants to see Killingley. I think—I am disposed to think—that this means that Tregarthen will be glad of a little professional assistance.”

I found that astute young gentleman, my clerk Killingley, improving his knowledge of men and things by a studious reading of the *Sporting Times*. I introduced the matter in hand to him at once.

“Killingley, you remember Mr. Tregarthen?”

Killingley’s sharp eyes gleamed intelligent affirmation.

“Case of Taplin and Mendoba,” he replied. “Yes, sir.”

“Mr. Tregarthen is back in town. He wants to see me at his rooms in the Albany at four o’clock.”

Killingley laid one hand on my diary; the other on his fountain-pen.

“Also,” I added, “he desires to see you.”

“Same time and place, sir?” asked Killingley, making notes.

“Same time and place,” I answered. “We’ll go together.”

So, four o’clock found my clerk and myself in Tregarthen’s eminently comfortable parlour in his excellent rooms. He had not come in, but everything betokened his immediate arrival. There was a bright, warm fire; there was tea laid out for three; there was a soft-footed man-servant ready to do service whenever he was wanted. And suddenly there was a sound of footsteps in the little hall, and the door opened and Tregarthen entered, and stripping off a big ulster presented to my astonished eyes the face and figure—minus the eye-patch and the crutch—of the tiger-selling gazer of Budge Row.

I was for the moment too much surprised to speak, for it had never entered my head that Tregarthen was the man to whom I had given a shilling, much less that it was from that man that the note came. And Tregarthen saw my surprise, and laughed as he went across to a sideboard and helped himself to a stiff glass of whiskey.

“Ugh!” he exclaimed, shivering a little. “That’s about the coldest job I ever took on, Campenhaye. I’m chilled through. Well, and how are you? But wait until I’ve got these rags off and changed into something clean, and then we’ll talk. I’ve had a stiff day of it—and I don’t know that I’ve done much good, either. But perhaps you and

Killingley can help.”

Then, leaving us still mystified, he disappeared, to come back in ten minutes in a comfortable tweed suit, brisk and bustling.

“Now, we’ll talk, over a cup of tea,” he said, as his man brought in a steaming kettle. “Well, how’ve you been going on and what’s doing, eh?”

“A more fitting topic will be—what are you doing?” I answered. “Why this disguise? Why expose yourself to the whistling winds and sorry sleet of Budge Row, on as vile a day as ever I remember? Also—which is somewhat pertinent—why hurry me away from my business there?”

Tregarthen helped himself to hot buttered muffin and took a generous mouthful.

“I don’t know what your business was,” he said, nonchalantly; “but I’m jolly well certain it wasn’t as important as mine—which your distinguished presence in that place might have interfered with. You’re known, my boy—you’re known!”

“To about one person in each twenty-five thousand of the numerous millions in this city,” I retorted. “And that’s a high estimate.”

“You’re known well enough to, at any rate, one man who might have gone in and out of that entry in which you were standing,” he said calmly. “And I didn’t want that man to see you there.”

“And who’s he, pray?” I asked.

Tregarthen took a hearty gulp of tea and looked over the rim of his cup at Killingley and myself with eyes that seemed to be sizing us up.

“You remember the Francis Taplin case?” he said suddenly. “Yes, well, it’s Mendoba that I’m after.”

“What—again?” I exclaimed.

“Again? Well, now, I’ve been after him ever since, and for a long time before that,” replied Tregarthen. “But call it again, if you like. Certainly, it’s a new trail.”

“And Mendoba’s here in London?” I asked, greatly surprised.

“I believe he’s in Budge Row,” he answered. “But—so far, I haven’t seen him. And—I want to see him. Yes—I want to see that man pretty badly, Campenhave. So—you and Killingley must help me.”

I glanced at Killingley, who was steadily devoting himself to tea and plum cake, and keeping his eyes fixed on our host.

“All right,” I said. “But before Killingley and I start out to help people, we like to know what it’s all about. Eh?”

“I’m going to tell you,” answered Tregarthen. “That’s what I got you here for—I don’t know that you’ll be much use, Campenhave, but I believe Killingley might be. You’re known—he isn’t.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” I said. “Killingley is a person of importance. Half the swell crooks in town know him.”

“But Mendoba doesn’t, and he knows Mendoba,” said Tregarthen quickly. Killingley cleared his jaws of plum cake.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said. “I saw Mr. Mendoba with a beard and a wig. If you consult your memory you will find that Mr. Mendoba left wig and beard behind him in the railway carriage at Charing Cross after he had blown out Dr. Taplin’s brains.”

“That’s so,” agreed Tregarthen. “All the same, I think you’ll be useful—I remember you. Well, you see it’s this way, Campenhaye. I’ve just come back from the States. Never mind, just now, what my business there was—I may tell you about it when we’ve more leisure. But suffice it to say that while I was in New York I rendered a highly important service to a well-known business man who had the grace to be properly grateful. And, one night, having dined me very, very well at the Knickerbocker Club, he not only grew still more grateful but extremely confidential.”

“‘Look here,’ said he, ‘I guess you know a good many of the secrets of the secret side of London life?’

“‘Some,’ said I. ‘But not all by a long way.’

“‘I guess not,’ he said with a wink. ‘And I daresay I know one or two that you don’t know—just as you’ll know a good many that I never even heard of.’

“‘I should think so,’ said I. For I knew, d’you see, Campenhaye, that he was on this side a good deal and knew his way about. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘that’s more than likely both ways.’

“‘D’you ever go in for a flutter in stocks?’ he asked, eyeing me keenly.

“‘I have done so when I’d money that I wasn’t particular about losing,’ I answered.

“‘All the same, you’d rather it came back to you with more sticking to it?’ he remarked.

“‘Naturally,’ I replied. ‘I should.’

“‘We were in a quiet corner, and there was no one near, but he edged himself closer, looking round as men do when they’ve something remarkably confidential to tell you.

“‘Did you ever hear of the Magician of Cannon Street?’ said he, with another keen look.

“‘Never,’ I answered. ‘Who’s he?’

“‘He laughed at that.

“‘Heaven knows!’ he replied. ‘Re-incarnation of Confucius or Socrates, or of old Abe Lincoln—anyhow, he’s a wise man, magic or no magic.’

“‘And what does he do?’ I asked.

“‘Ah! that’s it!’ he said. ‘I guess you’re aware that most of the big bugs in the money world are uncommonly superstitious?’

“‘No, I didn’t, but I knew that sportsmen—that is to say, racing-men—are,’ I answered.

“‘Same thing,’ said he. ‘Well, sir, it’s a fact that this fellow who’s known as the Magician of Cannon Street to a very, very select coterie of moneyed men who love to speculate, is a swell hand at telling his clients what their luck’s likely to be. That’s a fact—I’ve proved it.’

“‘What does he exactly do?’ I asked. ‘Gaze into crystals, or consult the stars, or read your palm, or what?’

“‘No hanky-panky,’ he answered. ‘It’s all done without ornament. Supposing you’re thinking of doing this, that, or the other, you go to him and tell him your schemes. He tells you whether you’re to go in or not. That’s all.’

“‘And do you mean to say that the chap’s always right?’ I exclaimed. ‘If he is, it’s a big order.’

“‘No, he isn’t always right,’ he answered. ‘But he’s a winner five times out of six—or, maybe, nine times out of ten. You see,’ he added, poking his finger into my ribs, ‘you see, I’ve tried him, and I know some other men who’ve also tried him.’

“‘Well, now, I know, Campenhaye, as I daresay you know, that there is this sort of thing going on in town here. I know of two remarkably astute city financiers who never undertake any serious deal until they’ve consulted some sybil or siren who hangs out in mysteriously lighted and heavily scented rooms off New Bond Street; but I’d never heard of this Cannon Street prophet, and I said so again.

“‘Just so,’ said my New York friend. ‘I knew you hadn’t—he deals with a very, very select coterie. Now, look here, as you’ve done me a real good turn, I’ll do you one. I’ll give you an introduction to this man—and if ever you’re thinking of doing anything important go to him for advice—and for a tip.’

“‘Oh!’ I said. ‘So he gives tips, does he? A sharp observer of the markets, eh?’

“‘Put it at that,’ said he. ‘But you take my introduction—you’ll never regret it.’

“‘Well, I never refuse anything on principle—and I said I was much obliged to him, and what was this magician’s name, and where did he sit in his particular cave or cell, or whatever it was?

“‘There’s no hanky-panky,’ he answered. ‘No magic circles, and no yellow robes, and no fool’s caps—all’s plain business. The address is Contango Chambers, Budge Row, Cannon Street, London, England, and the man’s name is plain Mister Morton. And—here’s the letter of introduction.’

“And with that he furtively slipped into my hand a ring, once more looking round as if to make sure that he wasn’t observed. And, humouring him, though I didn’t see that it was in any way necessary, I, too, stole a furtive glance at what he had given me. And I saw then, Campenhay, my boy, that what he really had given me was a clue to the whereabouts of our precious friend, Mendoba!”

Killingley and I were by this time too much interested to be ready with words, and Tregarthen smiled triumphantly, and went on:

“To Mendoba!” he repeated. “The very man I wanted! Now, then, what was this clue? You won’t remember, Campenhay, because you only saw him twice, that Mendoba wore a very curious ring—a signet ring, on the shield of which was a device which I have never seen before. But here’s the ring which my New York friend presented to me—to save explanations, I may as well say that it is, in reality, a duplicate of that worn by Mendoba. There are, I found out, a certain number of these duplicates in existence, and each forms a passport to the presence of the Magician of Cannon Street.”

I took the ring which Tregarthen handed to me, and Killingley and I carefully examined it. It was a plain gold ring, having on its upper rim a circular shield on which was deeply engraved a curious arabesque device. Tregarthen indicated that with the tip of his finger.

“I told you,” he said, “that Mendoba has Spanish, Moorish, and Arab blood in him—I believe that this device has something to do with his family. Anyway, I’ll stake all I’ve got that this is an exact duplicate of the ring which Mendoba wore when I knew him. And I believe that the Magician of Cannon Street is—Mendoba.”

“Well?” I said, not yet quite sure of what Tregarthen was after. “And what then?”

“I only landed at Plymouth yesterday morning,” he continued. “Naturally, I wanted to find out all I could about my man as soon as possible. I knew that it would be of no use to present myself at Budge Row, because I should have had to go in the attire and semblance of a man of probity and standing, and this sword-cut on my cheek would instantly have been recognised by Mendoba—if Mendoba is the Magician. So I adopted the disguise in which you saw me—it’s one that I’ve found very useful more than once in the city—old, crippled soldier, you know, and the black patch over the eye partly hides and also draws attention away from the scar. I went down there early this morning; my object was to keep a strict watch on the entrance to Contango Chambers in the hope of seeing Mendoba enter or leave. Well, I saw you, Campenhay, and drove you off, for I knew that Mendoba would recognise you at once if he caught half a glimpse of you. Also, I saw one or two famous financial magnates who were doubtless on their way to consult the Magician.

But I never saw Mendoba—that is, I never saw anybody whom I should have believed to be Mendoba. And there's where a difficulty comes in. For you see, Campenhaye, I never saw Mendoba except when he wore that disguise of grey wig and beard which he discarded in the railway carriage at Charing Cross after he'd blown out Francis Taplin's brains. Eh?"

"Just so," I said. "How would you know Mendoba if you saw him?"

"I'd know enough to be certain if I could have him in this room or in his room for two minutes," he answered. "But now, here's the point. Somebody's got to gain access to the Magician. I can't—neither can you. But—what about Killingley? You told me, Campenhaye, that Killingley is an adept in the art of making up. Why not disguise him as——"

But I had been thinking pretty hard while Tregarthen was speaking. And now I interrupted him.

"No," I said. "Give me the ring, and I'll see this magician chap myself. I, too, am an adept at disguise—I taught Killingley all he knows. I'll engage that Mendoba doesn't know me—unless he's an extraordinarily clever man and a very cute observer. Remember, he scarcely ever saw me at that gambling-hell of his, and, when he did, it was in a half-light."

Tregarthen hesitated.

"Mendoba is remarkably cute," he said, "and as to his ability, I reckon he's one of the most able men I've ever had to do with. I was amazed when he so far lost his head as to revenge himself on Taplin as he did—I suppose his southern blood got the better of him. But, do you really think that you'd better tackle the job, seeing that he has seen you? It's my impression that if Mendoba ever took stock of anybody he'd remember their every eyelash for fifty years."

"I'll engage that I could present myself to you this very evening and that you wouldn't know me," I answered. "You can trust me, if you like."

And Killingley spoke for the first time.

"Leave it to the guv'nor, sir," he said. "I fancy myself a bit in that line, but he's far beyond me."

Tregarthen handed over the ring again.

"All right," he said. "Now, then, let's settle the details."

When Tregarthen and I had fixed matters up, my duty was a very simple one. I was to present myself, made up according to my own liking, at Contango Chambers next morning at eleven o'clock, and to exhibit the ring as credentials, and to ask for Mr. Morton. Tregarthen carefully posted me as to what I was to do and say on being admitted to the presence of the Magician of Cannon Street: the rest was left to

me. As to Tregarthen himself, he was to resume his rôle of gazer; Killingley was to act as I judged best.

And so all that being settled, Killingley and I left our host and walked away together, and as we stepped out of the Albany into Piccadilly I asked my companion what he thought of this adventure. For Killingley was a great hand at thinking, and he had been unusually silent during the recent conversation.

“What I think, sir,” he answered, “is, that this man, if he is Mendoba, will be a stiff customer to tackle.”

“That goes without saying, Killingley,” I said. “He will.”

“You’ll go armed, of course?” he continued.

“I shall.”

“All the same,” he went on, “I don’t believe much in that, sir. A revolver isn’t much use nowadays—it’s clumsy and out of date. I think I had better keep an eye on you. How do you propose to go, sir?”

We discussed that point. The result of our discussion was that after an early dinner Killingley and I spent the first part of the evening in concocting and arranging my disguise. And as I am a great believer in details and in rehearsal, I made myself up with infinite care and precision as a middle-aged man of an eminently but quietly and unobtrusively prosperous appearance, slightly inclined to stoutness (I am normally spare, not to say slender), slightly grizzled as to moustache and hair (I am normally clean-shaven, and my hair is of distinctly raven hue), and much bronzed as if from close acquaintance with the southern sun. When all was finished and I was clothed in the fine linen and purple of a moneyed magnate (I always possess a very considerable and exhaustive wardrobe in order to be prepared to cope with any emergency), Killingley uttered words of admiration.

“You were right in saying that Mr. Tregarthen wouldn’t know you, sir,” he exclaimed. “He wouldn’t.”

“Just to test things, we’ll give him the chance,” I said. “He’ll be at the Odeon Club to-night. I’ll drive round there, and send in my name as a former American acquaintance.”

From a heap which lay in a bowl on my desk I picked out an old visiting-card that bore the name Colonel Charlton P. Lysters, and armed with it, drove round to the Odeon. There were two or three other men in the visitors’ waiting-room; when Tregarthen entered, turning Colonel Lyster’s card on his fingers, he stared helplessly at each. I stepped forward with outstretched hand.

“I guess you’ve forgotten me, Mr. Tregarthen,” I said. “We met way back in ninety-five, in Denver.”

He was plainly nonplussed, and he took my hand with a very limp response to my vigorous shake.

"I—I really don't remember," he said, staring at me steadily and scrutinisingly. "I can't recall——"

"Let me jog your memory," I said, and I took him by the arm and led him a little aside. "But only," I continued, relapsing into my natural voice, "only to the extent of reminding you that Killingley and I drank tea with you this afternoon."

Tregarthen started back, staring still more.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Well, that's fine, old chap. You'll keep that up in the morning?"

"Of course," I replied. "But—we'll have to rely on more than this, I reckon."

"Well, if the man's Mendoba, he'll not recognise you, anyway," he said. "And that's the main thing, at first."

It was not a man, Mendoba, or Morton, or any other, that I encountered when I walked into a quietly but well-furnished little outer office in Contango Chambers next morning. I gained a general impression of a bright fire shining on a thick and warm-coloured Turkey carpet, of an easy-chair or two, a good picture or so, and of a young lady who sat at an elegant desk which was not furnished with a typewriting machine. She was stylishly attired; she had nothing of the usual girl clerk in her appearance; but her eyes, bright and penetrating, sized me up shrewdly as she advanced to the pretence for a counter which fenced me off from her and the rest of the room. She looked an enquiry.

"Mr. Morton?" I said.

And, following out instructions, I gave the young lady a look as enquiring as her own, and at the same time laid my ungloved left hand on the little counter and thus exhibited the curiously marked signet ring.

The Magician's unconventional janitor slightly inclined her head. Without verbal reply she turned and vanished through a door on the left of the room. Without delay she reappeared, silently admitted me within the counter, and opened another door on the right.

"Mr. Morton will come to you in a few moments," she said as she motioned me to enter. "Please be seated."

Then she closed the door upon me and left me alone. I looked round. The room was a tiny apartment; a small table in the middle of the floor was furnished with a plain morocco writing-pad, a gold-mounted inkstand, a bundle of quill pens, all new; on either side of the table were set two elbow-chairs. The walls were panelled in dark wood, unrelieved by any picture or ornament; the floor was covered by a thick

carpet in which one's feet sank with a sense of luxury; the one window of the place was filled with old painted glass. The place was an ideal cabinet in which to discuss extremely confidential business. And it was sound-proof. I was close to the heart of the city, just above one of its busiest thoroughfares along which rolled a perpetual tide of heavy traffic. But I could not hear a sound; the silence in that small room was deeper than any silence I ever knew; its deepness seemed to be accentuated by the gentle murmur of a fire which burnt brightly in the grate behind me.

I sat down in one of the elbow-chairs (there were but two seats in the room) and waited. The silence became, if possible, deeper; the murmur of the fire grew monotonous. And I suddenly conceived the idea that I was being watched.

That feeling of being alone, in a strange place, and of being silently looked at, inspected, taken stock of, from some coign of vantage of which one knows nothing, is one of the most trying experiences, one of the most severe nerve-tests, which a human being can go through. It makes you feel that you are at somebody's or at something's mercy. You cannot move a finger or wink an eye without the consciousness that it is being seen and noted by a watchful observer who is stationed you know not where. It is an uncanny, a weird feeling—like all such feelings, it grows upon you. In this case the feeling grew upon me. I suppose I am naturally highly-strung; certainly my nerves began to feel the strain of sitting there under this conviction. In cases where I am face to face with either danger or difficulty they come readily to the scratch and are as strong as iron and dependable as steel; if any man stared at me I should give him as long and as steady a stare as he gave me. But to sit alone, feeling until you reached the point of absolute certainty that *an eye* is on you, and that you do not know where that eye is—this is enough to disconcert even the strongest nerved man, and in this instance it disconcerted me. For the effect of such a feeling is to force you to a state of absolute quietude lest you should betray something in your face or your attitude, and that is wearing. And in this case I did not care to think that I was being watched at all.

I kept quiet, my eyes fixed on the morocco writing-case. I was thinking. I was endeavouring to summon up some notion of what I expected Mendoba (if this was the man) to be like. I had only seen him twice, and for a mere moment on each occasion, at the gambling-hell; he then presented himself as a tall, well-built man, a very little inclined to stoutness, with grey hair, a full grey beard, who wore slightly smoked spectacles. But I knew that he had discarded beard and wig in the train at Charing Cross when he shot Francis Taplin. What was he like then, when they were removed? I had nothing to go by but his height and figure, and they——

The door suddenly opened, and as suddenly closed. I turned to see a young

gentleman, irreproachably garbed after the fashion of that aristocracy of the City which is particular in matters of raiment. And as I looked at him, gaining a general impression of his personality and appearance, a curious doubt and feeling of difficulty fell on me. Could this Mr. Morton—if the young gentleman was Mr. Morton—be one and the same person with the Mendoba of the gambling-hell?

I took a closer look at him as he came forward. He was tall and of a spare but athletic figure, which was well set off by his beautifully cut and shaped morning coat. He was a handsome young man—my first glance at him had showed me an olive-complexioned skin; black, smooth hair, scrupulously arranged; a pair of black, penetrating eyes. Those eyes fixed themselves upon me as we exchanged bows. He waved a slim, white hand in the direction of the chair from which I had risen at his entrance.

“Mr. Morton?” I said interrogatively.

He bowed again; again motioned me to my chair, and taking that on the other side of the table, leaned his elbows upon it, put his fingers together, rested his chin upon their tips, and continued to regard me with attention. Something in his eyes disconcerted me; they were so steady, so penetrating, so very cold and inflexible (these, I think, are the terms I should use), that I began to feel uncomfortable. Only once did they move from my face; that was to glance for the fraction of a second at the ring on my finger. After that they never left mine. And—whether I would or no—I was *compelled* to keep mine upon them. I say compelled deliberately—there is no other word for it.

There was a momentary silence, after my *vis-à-vis* had taken his seat. Then he said—using a formal tone:

“You wish to consult me?”

“Under advice,” I answered. “The advice of the man from whom I procured this.”

I was about to say “ring,” but he waved a finger carelessly.

“Just so. My preliminary fee, as he no doubt informed you, is five hundred guineas in cash. Afterwards, you pay me ten per cent. on the profit of the deal which you propose to make—that is, if I advise you to make it.”

I had been coached for all this, and I drew out the amount of money for which he asked. I handed him five one-hundred pound Bank of England notes and five five-pound notes, and he placed them on the morocco writing-case.

“What do you wish me to advise you about?” he asked.

I was prepared for that, too. But I wanted to fence with him a little. And for that I was also prepared. All the same, I began to wish that he would not stare at me so

persistently with those coal-black eyes!

"You are famous for a remarkable gift of insight?" I remarked, with what was doubtless a feeble attempt at a smile.

"I possess a gift of insight, coupled with some financial knowledge," he replied.

"A remarkably astute and deep-seated knowledge," I said.

"Call it so, if you will. You wish to engage in some financial operation?"

"I do. That is why I am here."

"Of a considerable nature, of course? Otherwise you would certainly not be here. What is it?"

"What it is," I said, "will be best explained by my asking you a simple question. What place will Russia occupy as a political and financial power two years hence?"

He inclined his head slightly, but his eyes were still fixed on mine, and I was unpleasantly conscious of their power.

"Two years hence," he answered quietly, "Russia will be at war with Japan. And Russia will be beaten. Does that answer your question?"

Now, as events proved, he was right in this prophecy. I do not pretend to know how he came to prognosticate matters so successfully; I only know that what he foretold came to pass within the time specified. But at that time I personally knew of no reason why Russia and Japan should so soon go to war, so I displayed a little incredulity.

"You are sure of that?" I asked.

"I never say anything unless I am sure of it," he answered. "What I say in this matter, will be."

I made pretence of hesitation.

"This is a big question to me," I said. "I had the intention of making most important investments in Russia, which would be seriously prejudiced in the event of that country going to war within the next six years, especially if, as you prophesy, she suffered defeat. Is it within your province to give me ground for your expectations?"

"Most certainly," he answered. His eyes appeared to draw my own more compellingly than ever. Their expression deepened to one of intense concentration: unconsciously I edged my elbow-chair nearer to the table. "Most certainly," he repeated. "Now, attend to me."

What I am going to state or confess may sound incredible to all people save those who understand and have seen something of the effects of suggestive influence. But it is the plain truth—and like all plain truths it can be put into a very few words.

And the plain truth is this: I have no knowledge whatever of what further took place between me and the young man of the remarkable eyes. From the moment that

he told me to attend to him until another moment of which I am presently going to speak, my mind was a blank.

Whether a man can be rightly called unconscious who walks, talks, eats, transacts business, has conversation, rational and coherent, with other folk, and who is not aware that he has done any of these things, is a question which I shall leave the experts to decide. It is quite certain that before noon of one day and eight o'clock of the next I walked, talked, ate and drank, smoked and behaved myself as a rational man does, and was quite unaware of the fact. I have since conversed with several people who met me during that period; they all agreed that they saw nothing in me that was not absolutely normal and ordinary.

But the truth is that I passed out of one state of consciousness about noon on one day, seated in that snug room in Contango Chambers in Budge Row, and woke up to another state of equal—perhaps sharper, more alert—consciousness at eight o'clock the next morning in a bedroom of the Royal York Hotel at Brighton.

It was a beautiful, sharp, winter morning; the clear light that flooded my bedroom awoke me. I opened my eyes. . . .

There are few things in the ordinary way of life that can frighten a man so much as waking suddenly in a strange room wherein he certainly does not expect to find himself. I was frightened. I shut my eyes as soon as I had opened them. But in that momentary opening I had seen that I was in the bedroom of an hotel, and I had remembered the interview of yesterday. Again I heard the compelling voice of the man with the equally compelling eyes.

“Attend to me!”

But—what since then?

I sprang out of bed, and made for the window I jerked up the blinds and looked out. Instantly I recognised the Old Steine. The tramcars were running on the road beneath; early birds were walking across the gardens. So I was in Brighton. But—how did I come there?

I turned from the window, and looked around me. It was quite evident that when I left town I had known what I was doing. There was a suit-case, there were toilet articles, duly set out; a winter dressing-gown lay ready to hand. And—yes, of course, this was the room which I usually occupied when I visited Brighton, as I often did. But—once more—how did I come to be in it?

I remember everything of my recent doings up to the point where the Magician of Cannon Street bade me attend to him: after that I remembered nothing. And, naturally, the only word I could think of, the conventional word, often meaningless, but by no means so in my case, sprang to my lips:

“Hypnotised!”

That, of course, must be the explanation—I was a victim to hypnotic suggestion. The man of Contango Chambers had driven my own will clean away from me with those devilish eyes of his and had substituted impulses of his own for his own purpose. What purpose? Obviously to get me out of the way, while he got himself out of the way. And so, there were precious hours—twenty of them—lost, and—where was he?

I have always prided myself on being pretty smart about tackling emergencies and difficulties. I recognised that the only thing to do in this case was to get a quick move on in the direction of London. I glanced at my watch and saw that it was precisely five minutes past eight. Now, I know that Killingley never presented himself at my office until ten o’clock, and it was accordingly useless to telephone to him there; I also knew that there was no telephone at the cottage at Hampstead where he lived with his mother and sister. Well, I would endeavour to be in town before half the morning had passed, and I started to take measures. I summoned a certain manservant, and gave him sharp orders.

“Send me some coffee, and some hot toast here at once,” I said. “Order for me the best and quickest motor-car you can get in Brighton, with a thoroughly good chauffeur. Let him be round here with the car as quickly as he can. There’s only one word for it—hurry!”

The man knew me and my ways, and he shot off in a way that satisfied me. I dressed as rapidly as ever I had performed that operation in my life, swallowed the toast and the coffee, and was down in the hall and ready for the car within twenty minutes of giving my orders.

“Car’ll be here in a minute, sir,” said my factotum.

Turning to the office to pay my bill, I caught sight of a pile of morning papers which had just come in. I picked one up mechanically, and opening it, ran my eye over the headlines of the middle pages. And then, for the second time that morning, I jumped with amazement. For there, in great, staring black letters I read:

THE MURDER OF DR. TAPLIN.

REMARKABLE ARREST IN LONDON.

“Car, sir!” said a voice behind me.

I forgot that the newspaper was the property of the hotel. I have confused recollections that I crumpled it up in my hand, leaped into, or was bundled into, the automobile, that I gave the chauffeur a peremptory command, and that Brighton

faded away behind me.

The car was speeding away northwards between Batham and Pangdean before I woke to the fact that I was holding the newspaper crushed up in my hand. Then I spread its creases out and read what appeared beneath those staring headlines. There was not much to be read, but what there was made me think harder than before.

“The murder of Dr. Francis Taplin, of Wimpole Street, which took place at Charing Cross Railway Station two years ago, under highly sensational circumstances, the murderer killing his victim and making his escape just as a boat train was about to start, was recalled yesterday afternoon, when the police, acting on information, quietly effected at Charing Cross the arrest of a man who is alleged to have committed the crime.

“The man in question had booked a ticket for Paris, and had already taken his seat in a first-class smoking compartment when he was arrested by plain-clothes officers, who acted in such swift and unobtrusive fashion that their prisoner was removed from both train and station without any excitement or commotion being aroused.

“Great reticence is being shown by the police authorities, but it is understood that they derived their information from private sources, and that they have full confidence that they not only hold the murderer of Dr. Francis Taplin, but that the prisoner is also a person who was wanted at the time of the murder in connection with the keeping of a private gaming-house in the West End, and who effected a clever escape when it was raided by the police. It is rumoured that he is a foreigner of great ability who is an adept at skilfully disguising himself, and that he has of late been engaged in various questionable transactions in the City. He is expected to be brought up at Bow Street at noon to-day.”

I dropped the newspaper on the opposite seat as I leaned back in the swiftly-speeding car.

“That’s Killingley!” I said. “Killingley’s done the trick. But how?”

We turned into Jermyn Street well before eleven o’clock. I dashed straight upstairs to my office—to find Killingley and Tregarthen closeted together. And I saw at one glance that neither had been to bed. Further, I saw that Killingley was in a state of high concern; he so far lost his usual sang-froid, indeed, as to rush forward,

and shake my hand violently. After which he relapsed into his usual normal condition.

"If one may ask a plain question, Campenhave," said Tregarthen, who had watched this little scene with amused eyes, "we should like to know where you come from? Killingley and I have spent most of our time since yesterday afternoon in searching high and low for you."

"I have just come from Brighton," I answered. "But—as to how I got to Brighton, frankly, I don't know. But—you may laugh, if you like—I believe that magician chap put me under hypnotic suggestion."

Tregarthen, however, did not laugh. He turned to Killingley.

"Tell him," he said. "It will perhaps make things clear."

"There's not such a lot to tell you, sir," responded Killingley, turning to me. "You know that, as we had arranged, I kept a watch on the hall door of those chambers in Budge Row. I saw you enter. About half an hour later I saw you come out. You came out in company with a tall, dark young gentlemen. And when I saw him, I was certain we'd got Mendoba."

"You were!" I exclaimed. "Why?"

"Because, sir, when I watched Taplin's house in Wimpole Street that night of the murder I saw Mendoba, and you will remember, though he was then disguised in his grey beard and wig and smoked glasses," answered Killingley. "True, sir, I only saw him for a minute or so, but I noticed a certain peculiarity which I didn't forget. He has a curious action of his left leg, something like a mild case of string-halt in a horse, sir."

"Good for you, Killingley," said I. "Well?"

"Well, sir, and so had this man who came out of Contango Chambers with you. But after I had seen that, I gave my attention to you."

"Why to me?"

"Because you appeared to be on such friendly terms with him. You walked together down the street, passed Mr. Tregarthen, there, to whom you threw a shilling, and then turned up towards the Mansion House—you were arm in arm by that time, and more friendly than ever. You went across to Lombard Street, and there the two of you went into your bank, sir."

Like a flash my hand went to my breast-pocket to find a cheque-book which I always carried there. Killingley smiled.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "You cashed a pretty heavy cheque there, and you evidently handed over the proceeds to Mendoba; but we found them on him, and they're safe. But let me go on, sir. I waited safely outside. The man—and he is Mendoba, or that's one of his names—came out alone—you didn't re-appear. Then

I remembered that there are two entrances to that bank, and I thought that you must have left by the other. Then—what was I to do? I decided to follow the man—I felt sure that he didn't know me: at any rate, I couldn't think of any reason why he should. And so I kept him in view. And he didn't go back to that office. Instead, he set off west. He rode to some chambers in Mayfair—I followed him. I followed him later to Charing Cross, where he went in company of a handbag and a rug. I was close behind him when he booked for Paris. But, meantime, I'd managed to send to the Yard, and as he set out for the 2.20 I had him taken. And—that's all, sir," concluded Killingley, "and I'm glad you're safe."

"But, is he our man?" I said, turning to Tregarthen. "Is he—Mendoba?"

"He's my man," answered Tregarthen grimly. "I've seen him. Oh! he's the man we knew as Mendoba right enough. We'll go along to Bow Street presently, and you shall have another look at him—under safe conditions. I say, Campenhaye, that's an unfortunate accomplishment of yours. I didn't know you were subject to influence."

"Neither did I," I growled. "However, you know I'm retiring. But this Mendoba _____"

Just then a sharp rap came at the outer door, and Killingley, going to open it, admitted a New Scotland Yard man who was very well known to us. He smiled sardonically when he saw Tregarthen and myself.

"Well, there's an end of that," he said. "There'll be little more to hear about that chap, I'm thinking."

"You don't mean to say he's escaped?" exclaimed Tregarthen.

"Escaped hanging," said the other coolly. "He's dead—suicide. They think he'd concealed something in a hollow tooth—it's a favourite dodge with some of the dare-devil lot. Did it an hour ago. They want you, Mr. Tregarthen—they think you might clear something up. Can you come now?"

And Tregarthen went, and Killingley and I went with him. But there was little that he could clear up, and we have never known to this day what the real identity of the man was, who, but for that fatal twist of character which inclined him to crime, might have been a Napoleon to whom no Waterloo need have come!

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Paul Campenhaye, Specialist in Criminology* by J. S. (Joseph Smith) Fletcher]