

THE CRIMES CLUB

A RECORD OF SECRET INVESTIGATIONS
INTO SOME AMAZING CRIMES, MOSTLY
WITHHELD FROM THE PUBLIC

RECORDED BY

WILLIAM LE QUEUX

AUTHOR OF

"BLACKMAILED," "HUSHED UP," ETC.

THE POPULAR LIBRARY

32 BLOOMSBURY STREET

LONDON, W.C.1

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Crimes Club

Date of first publication: 1927

Author: William Le Queux (1864-1927)

Date first posted: Jan. 9, 2015

Date last updated: Aug. 28, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20150116

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpcanada.net>

THE CRIMES CLUB

A RECORD OF SECRET INVESTIGATIONS
INTO SOME AMAZING CRIMES, MOSTLY
WITHHELD FROM THE PUBLIC

RECORDED BY
WILLIAM LE QUEUX

AUTHOR OF
"BLACKMAILED," "HUSHED UP," ETC.

THE POPULAR LIBRARY
32 BLOOMSBURY STREET
LONDON, W.C.1

The Crimes Club

A RECORD OF SECRET INVESTIGATIONS
INTO SOME AMAZING CRIMES, MOSTLY
WITHHELD FROM THE PUBLIC

RECORDED BY

William Le Queux

AUTHOR OF
"BLACKMAILED," "HUSHED UP," ETC.
THE POPULAR LIBRARY
32 BLOOMSBURY STREET
LONDON, W.C. 1

All the names mentioned in this story are those of purely fictitious persons

Made and printed in Great Britain by Lowe & Brydone Printers Ltd., London, N.W. 1

The Crimes Club

Table of Contents

[CASE NUMBER ONE: THE GOLDEN GRASSHOPPER](#)
[CASE NUMBER TWO: THE PURPLE DEATH](#)
[CASE NUMBER THREE: THE MAN WITH THE SQUINT](#)
[CASE NUMBER FOUR: THE ROGUE OF THE RUE ROYALE](#)
[CASE NUMBER FIVE: THE CROOKED SOU](#)
[CASE NUMBER SIX: THE CLOCHE HAT](#)
[CASE NUMBER SEVEN: THE AFFAIR OF THE ORANGE](#)
[CASE NUMBER EIGHT: THE HOUSE OF EVIL](#)
[CASE NUMBER NINE: A SECRET OF THE UNDERWORLD](#)
[CASE NUMBER TEN: THE ELUSIVE CLUE](#)
[CASE NUMBER ELEVEN: THE GUINEA PIG'S TAIL](#)
[CASE NUMBER TWELVE: THE GREAT THAMES MYSTERY](#)

CASE NUMBER ONE

THE GOLDEN GRASSHOPPER

"So the affair as it stands is a complete enigma!"

It was the Baron who spoke. The elegant, brown-bearded, rather sallow-faced Frenchman glanced around at the nine persons sitting at a large, round table in a private room with locked doors at the Café de L'Univers, an unpretentious little place, in the Rue St. Antoine, in Paris.

Upon the table were coffee and liqueurs, for the usual monthly dinner of the Crimes Club was being held, and one of its members, Monsieur Lucien Dubosq, a slim, dark-eyed, bearded, elegant man, who was Chef de la Sûreté, had just related an extraordinary story.

The others had listened intently, and the Baron had made the remark when Dubosq had finished.

The assembly was a curious one.

The membership of the club, formed for the study of the psychology of crime, was confined to ten, and that night all were present. They were Professor Ernest Lemelletier, grave, lantern-jawed, with iron-grey hair and moustache, who was the most eminent medico-legalist in France, and who, it will be recollected, distinguished himself in the Landru case; Dr. Henri Plaud, an upright, sparse man of seventy with white hair and beard, who was a well-known toxicologist and Senator of Vaucluse; Maître Jean Tessier, a dark-eyed, round-faced man, who, though not yet of middle-age, had already distinguished himself as a lawyer and Deputy for the Yonne; Maurice Jacquinet, a slim, rather effeminate, fair-haired journalist, whose speciality was the investigation of crime mysteries for the great Paris newspaper *Le Journal*; the Baron Edouard d'Antenac, a podgy, over-fed man-about-town, who had spoken; M. Gustave Delcros, a wizened little man, who had been Minister of Marine in the Briand Cabinet; a fair-haired, clean-shaven English inventor of wireless television, named Gordon Latimer; and two ladies, one a pretty, dark-haired Parisienne of twenty-two, Mademoiselle Fernande Buisse, who followed the profession of lady journalist; and a stout, rather handsome woman of forty-five, Madame Léontine Van Hecke, who acted as secretary to the club which, however, had no president--all members being equal.

The Crimes Club was a secret organization to which no outsider was ever admitted under any pretext, while its proceedings were never mentioned in the newspapers.

Besides studying crime, its unique purpose was to assist the police of France, or of any other country, to unravel the mysteries that baffled them. In certain bewildering cases the club had met with marked success, but the one which the Chief of the Paris detective police had placed before them for their consideration was, as the Baron had remarked, a complete enigma, which they began at once to discuss in detail.

Briefly put, the French police had been approached by the Swiss police at Berne for help in a mysterious case that had occurred in the Bernese Oberland, near the foot of the Jungfrau. A young clerk named Frank MacBean, engaged in the Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh, had gone to Switzerland for his summer holiday and had stayed at Interlaken, where his *fiancée*, a Swiss girl, Mariette Raeber, lived. Naturally, they went for excursions together up to Grindelwald, along by the lakes to Brienz, Thun, and other places, when one day they went off together by train up the dark, magnificent valley to Lauterbrunnen. There they changed trains, and ascended to the Jungfrau, where they spent the day. According to the Swiss girl's story, when they descended

again in the evening to take the train back to Interlaken, he left her in the train at Scheidegg to go and take a photograph, saying that he would return in a few moments.

She waited until, without warning, the train went off. She tried to get out, but dare not jump, so she was taken down to Lauterbrunnen. There she awaited her *fiancé* until the last train; but he did not arrive. So she returned to Interlaken alone. She never saw him again, for he vanished, and every effort to trace him had failed.

"What about the books at the bank?" asked the lawyer Tessier.

"Examination has been made, and all accounts are in order," replied the Chief of Police. "He was known to have upon him only two fifty-franc Swiss notes, a few centimes, and a gold signet-ring. That was all. His camera was found in a wood near the road, about a mile down the Lütchine, a broad and swift mountain torrent."

"Deep?" asked the shrewd journalist, Jacquinot, greatly interested.

"No; shallow, but very swift. It runs over small boulders--glacier water from the Eiger Mountain," was Dubosq's reply.

A discussion followed, in which each of the ten gave his or her opinion, the general feeling being that the young man, having grown tired of the girl, had simply disappeared. The police of Europe daily receive hundreds of reports of friends who have disappeared, but in most cases the effacement is intentional, husbands leaving wives, and vice versa.

The Baron's views differed from those of the others.

"If the pair were in love with each other, why should the young fellow disappear?" he queried. "It might be accident, or foul play. I suspect the latter; and I, for one, will go to Switzerland," said the stout, over-fed man, who was an expert in criminal investigation.

"I will go with you," volunteered Jacquinot, who, as a journalist, saw a great story in the affair.

"I also will go," said the pretty young lady journalist, Fernande Buysse. "I want to question the Swiss girl, for I have a theory."

When an investigation was undertaken by the Crimes Club it was left to the two or three volunteers to carry it out, while the others were at all times ready to assist, either in making inquiries or watching suspected persons.

Therefore a week later the adventurous trio arrived at the Hôtel du Lac, in Interlaken, as ordinary visitors, without disclosing to anybody the object of their visit. They found the local police and newspaper correspondents busy and intense excitement in the town regarding the young Scotsman's disappearance. He had been staying at the Hôtel du Lac, the most popular hotel in the Bernese Oberland, therefore on the day following their arrival, the Baron made some casual inquiries of the genial proprietor, Mr. Walter Haller--Herr Walter as he is called by his English guests.

"It was simply an accident," said the latter. "When he did not return I telephoned to the Jungfrauoch, the upper end of the mountain railway, and with the aid of the railway officials we traced him down as far as Wengen. He had left the train at Scheidegg and started to walk down the Wengernalp, and to those in a small inn which he passed his manner seemed very peculiar. The theory held by our police and by the lawyer engaged in the affair is that in crossing a little bridge over the Lütchine, not far from Lauterbrunnen, he stumbled in the dark and fell into the roaring torrent. Among the boulders he soon became battered, and his body was carried down to the Lake of Brienz, where among the boulders at the estuary--which are ever shifting on account

of the strong currents--his remains are still held down in the bed of the lake. The same thing happened to a peasant of Lauterbrunnen a few years ago."

"Then you think that it was an accident?" asked the Baron.

"Everyone is agreed," replied the courtly hôteier. "Of course, I know nothing about the investigation of crime, but that is the general opinion."

After dinner the stout, bullet-headed Baron d'Antenac, with the alert Jacquinet and Mademoiselle, strolled out along the principal boulevard, the Höheweg, where one side is lined by colossal hotels, while the other lies open to the giant snow-capped mountain, the Jungfrau, which raised its lofty, white crest in the bright moonlight.

As they walked towards the gay Kursaal all three were agreed that accident was out of the question. It was either a case of self-effacement or of foul play. Mademoiselle was certain of the latter. As usual they were working independently of the police and, concealing their identity, worked upon novel and entirely different lines.

On that day, as a matter of fact, the English inventor, Gordon Latimer, whose services the Baron had invoked, was in Edinburgh making secret inquiries regarding the missing man.

Mademoiselle Fernande, ever chic and dressed in the latest mode, kept her theory to herself, and resorted to a clever ruse. She discovered that MacBean's *fiancée* had been a governess in a family living in Findhorn Place, in Edinburgh, where he had met her. Therefore, she called at the house of the girl's mother in the Bahnhof Strasse, and under pretext of having also been a governess in Edinburgh, had an interview with her.

As they sat together in the small, but cosily-furnished room which looked out over the broad, fertile meadows of the valley towards the Lake of Thun, she apologised for calling, and said in French, which Fräulein Raeber understood:

"I have read in the papers of the unfortunate disappearance of your friend, Mr. MacBean. He was my own friend, as well as yours. I often saw him before you met him, and I knew afterwards that he loved you."

The girl looked straight at her visitor. At first she waxed indignant, but next moment the tone of Mademoiselle's voice softened her.

"Yes," she said. "He told me he loved me--and I believed him."

"And you still believe that what he told you was really true?" asked Mademoiselle with a strange look.

"Yes," she said, after a slight hesitation.

"Ah! You are not quite sure," exclaimed the young French girl. "It is well that it is so, because--well, now that he is dead I will reveal the truth to you--much as it must pain you. *He was engaged to marry me!*"

"You?" shrieked the fair-haired Swiss girl excitedly. "You? You lie! He loved me--and was to marry me in October."

"And he was to marry me in that same month," Mademoiselle said, quite calmly.

"But he will not. He'll marry----" and she broke off short. "I mean he cannot, because he is dead."

Mademoiselle Fernande fixed her dark eyes upon the girl. Her ruse was succeeding.

"Are you quite certain that poor Frank is dead?" she asked.

"Absolutely. It is now twelve days since he left me at Scheidegg. No doubt he fell into the torrent and his body was carried away to the lake during the night," she replied brokenly. "If he lived, he would certainly return to me."

"There is a suspicion that you had quarrelled," Mademoiselle said.

The girl gave her a swift look of antagonism.

"We did not--we have never quarrelled," she protested strongly.

"Why are you so certain that Mr. MacBean met with an accident?" asked Mademoiselle Fernande. "Might not his death be due to foul play?"

"He had no enemies. Besides, he had nothing upon him of value."

"His camera was found in the wood quite a long way from the torrent," Fernande pointed out, a fact which the Swiss police had not overlooked, even though they had arrived at the conclusion that the young Scotsman had met with an accident.

"He may have passed through the wood before he reached the torrent," the girl Raeber replied.

"It is hardly likely he would discard it--eh?" Mademoiselle argued.

Half an hour later, when she rejoined her companions at the Hôtel du Lac, she described her interview with the bereaved *fiancée*, and added:

"That girl knows more about the affair than she will admit. She made a slip which she quickly corrected. The missing man is alive. Whether he has disappeared intentionally, or whether he is held in the hands of his enemies is a point we must investigate and establish."

"In that case we will continue to carry out the inquiry independently, and in our own way," said Jacquinot. "Let us begin by going over the same ground as the missing man, and continue to the spot where he was last seen."

"Excellent," said the Baron. "We'll go to-morrow by rail to the Jungfrauoch and follow the way he took."

Early next morning the three left Interlaken, the train taking them beside the roaring torrent up the wild, dark valley to Lauterbrunnen, where they changed carriages into the mountain railway, which climbed up the Wengernalp through the little Alpine resort of Wengen, up to Scheidegg on the plateau, and thence by the most wonderful railway in the world, that which runs to the region of eternal snow two thousand feet below the summit of the Jungfrau.

The experience of looking out upon the wide snowy slopes, the great green glaciers with their yawning crevasses in the ice, and the stupendous view of the mountain peaks beyond was most enjoyable. But it carried them no further towards the solution of the problem.

The conclusion formed by Fernande was not, however, shared by the others. The Baron now accepted the theory of the police, that the disappearance had been accidental, while Jacquinot, a thin-faced young man with a keen sense of humour, was of opinion that he and the girl had quarrelled, and that he had simply returned to Scotland.

On leaving the train at Scheidegg the three walked down the steep mountain path to Wengen with wonderful views on either side, and then, still down, to Lauterbrunnen, where they took the winding road beside the foaming waters of the Lütschine torrent to the dark pine-wood where the camera had been found.

They spent nearly two hours searching that part of the wood, but discovered nothing which might lead to any clue except that not far from where the camera had been found the Baron picked up

the end of a cigarette. Upon it was the mark of a well-known English brand, from which it would appear that young MacBean had halted there and smoked, and then, when moving on, forgot his camera. But, as Maurice Jacquinet pointed out, that particular brand of English cigarette was sold in a number of shops in Interlaken, therefore it was no proof that an Englishman had been there.

They walked back to the road which led to Interlaken, past a little inn where, late at night, the young man was said to have been seen to pass, and came to the narrow bridge where it was believed that he had slipped over in the darkness into the boiling torrent below.

"Nothing will convince me that he is dead!" declared Mademoiselle, as she walked between the two men.

"Then you will have to prove that he is alive," remarked the Baron. "But how?"

"We must first establish a motive for his disappearance," replied the shrewd young Frenchwoman. "Having done that, we must follow it up by close investigation. The police at first suspected murder, but now believe it to be accidental. I don't agree with either theory."

"Well, what can the motive have been, except, perhaps, he and the girl had words, and in order to punish her he has pretended suicide?"

"Not at all," declared Jacquinet. "If he had pretended suicide he would have left his hat and coat, or something, on the river bank. But nothing was found except his camera. It certainly is not a case of pretended suicide."

"Then what is it?" demanded the girl.

"It is for us to unravel the mystery."

They had walked through the dark, mysterious valley to the village of Zweilütschinen, and thence took train back to Interlaken, with its two great lakes surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

Meanwhile the fourth member of the Crimes Club, the young inventor Latimer, was in Edinburgh pursuing his investigations. Quietly and methodically he was delving into the past of MacBean, whom everyone had regarded as a young man of exemplary conduct. The manager of the bank, while deploring the young fellow's death, made it plain that he was honourable, moral, and thrifty, for he had in the bank savings to the extent of over six hundred pounds. His father, a retired naval captain, and his mother, who lived at Queensferry, spoke of their missing son in the highest terms. Indeed, Latimer, after nearly a fortnight, was about to give up the case and return to Paris when the affair took a most unexpected and sensational turn.

Latimer called upon Captain MacBean one morning to wish him good-bye, when he found him in a state of great agitation and excitement.

"I--I've received this by post this morning!" he gasped. "Look!" He placed upon the table a small, stout wooden box about five inches long, two inches wide, and three inches deep, which he opened.

Latimer gave vent to a loud exclamation of horror when he saw what it contained--a dark, shrivelled human finger, severed at the base, and bearing a man's gold signet-ring!

"It is my son's!" cried the distressed father, tears streaming down his cheeks. "I gave him the ring on his last birthday. My wife is away in Glasgow. I--I dare not tell her. It would kill her!"

By this an entirely different complexion was placed upon the affair. What did it portend?

"This has been sent to you, Captain MacBean, as some sign. Do you recognise what it means?" asked Latimer.

"It can only mean one thing--that he is dead! And yet, he had no enemy in the world to my knowledge."

"The sign certainly seems to portend that your poor son has met with foul play."

Then, after a pause, the young radio-inventor said:

"I wonder if you would allow me to have possession of it for a week. I want to make some further investigation."

"Certainly," was the father's reply. "Take the terrible thing! It is too horrible and ghastly for me to have in my possession. Take it and destroy it; who can have sent it, I wonder?"

"That, I and my friends will endeavour to discover. For that reason I want it."

So that same afternoon Gordon Latimer left the Waverley Station in Edinburgh direct for Switzerland, bearing the tiny box with its gruesome contents.

Two days later he joined the trio at Interlaken, where in secret, he exhibited the contents of the anonymous little box. All there were aghast at the sight of the shrivelled finger, with the heavy gold signet-ring engraved with the crest of the MacBeans. But the paper wrapping around the box was of greater interest. They examined it minutely. The box had apparently been posted in Switzerland, but the postmark was blurred. The handwriting of the address was typically English, a woman's bold handwriting, full of character.

The Baron took the wrappings to an official in the Interlaken post-office who at once deciphered the postmark to be that of the town of Thun, at the opposite end of the lake.

Was it possible that the murderers of young MacBean lived in that town?

Later, when the four members of the Club were discussing the gruesome object, the journalist, Jacquinot, remarked:

"I wonder why it has been sent to the dead man's father? It is some sign which possibly he recognises, but will not reveal. Perhaps an enemy of his has killed his son, and he sends that ghastly object to prove that he had had his revenge, well knowing that MacBean dare not accuse him, lest he should make some damning revelation."

"The father is greatly distressed. He is not going to tell his wife," Latimer remarked.

"Ah, for some obvious reason!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Fernande.

Again they examined the severed finger. Doubt was expressed whether it was actually that of Frank MacBean, but it was noticed that the ring, fitting tightly, had caused quite a ridge in the flesh.

"Ugh! It's horrible!" Fernande declared, as she touched it. "The work of either someone with a fiendish revenge, or it is actually a terrible sign to MacBean's father which he recognises and fears to acknowledge."

"You think that some enemy of the young man's father has killed the son?" asked the Baron of Mademoiselle.

"My theory remains the same--that clearly MacBean is still alive, held prisoner somewhere with some motive that we fail to establish." Then she added: "We are not very brilliant members of the Club, are we? Plaud and Lemelletier will sneer at us. So will Dubosq."

"I had a letter from the latter four days ago," said Latimer. "He asked me to see Sandy Mackay of the Edinburgh police upon another matter--an insurance fraud. I did so, and reported to him."

Next day another idea occurred to Mademoiselle Fernande. Taking the little box, she called upon the girl Raeber and showed her its gruesome contents.

"Why--that is his ring--his finger! Ugh!" she gasped breathlessly, staring at it in horror. "Where did you get it?"

Mademoiselle told her, whereupon she reeled and fell fainting.

Fernande was puzzled. The effect which sight of it had upon the girl was unexpected, for it did not fall in with the theory she held.

When, after a short time, the girl recovered, she asked again to see the ring which she examined closely. Then, quite calmly, she said:

"Yes. It is most mysterious! It has evidently been sent anonymously to his father as proof of his death and mutilation. Who, I wonder, was his enemy?"

"That is what my friends are endeavouring to discover. Have you any suspicion--the slightest suspicion which might furnish us with a clue?" asked the pretty French girl.

"No. I have no knowledge of any enemy," was Mariette Raeber's reply, but she spoke in a tone which filled her questioner with considerable suspicion.

After a month, a fourth meeting of the Crimes Club was held at their headquarters in Paris at which all the members were present. After dinner the doors were locked, and the Baron reported upon the Mountain Mystery, as the newspapers called it.

Having related the details already here described, he took up the wrappings which were around the box, and said:

"There is much mystery surrounding this package. We have, by dint of analysis and with the aid of experts in paper-making, established the fact that this piece of paper is English, not Swiss. The string is English, made by a firm at Oldham, and, further, the box itself was impregnated with some deadly, but subtle drug, for a few hours after the missing man's father received it and opened it, he was seized by a sudden and mysterious illness which the doctors believed to be due to acute poisoning. For a fortnight he lay hovering between life and death, and is only just now out of danger. Again, while I myself was handling the box soon after it was brought to us, I was seized by a curious feeling, and almost collapsed. Therefore, it is evident that whoever sent this box to Captain MacBean intended to wreak some terrible revenge, by bringing death upon him by a most secret and devilish method. Therefore, if the young man has met with foul play, it is at the hands of enemies of his father. They sent the severed finger as proof of their triumph. That, ladies and gentlemen, is as far as we have been able to proceed up to the present."

A long and critical discussion followed, each point being dealt with by experts. Professor Lemelletier told the club that the amputation of the finger had been done by a skilled hand. Dr. Henri Plaud dealt with the theory of poison upon the box, and described two deadly substances that might have been used, but which would be harmless to anyone unless they had abrasions on their fingers, while Maître Tessier, the great lawyer, discussed the various motives which might have induced Captain MacBean's enemies to seize and murder his son.

The Baron further pointed out that while the packet might have been posted from the little town of Thun and bore Swiss stamps, it was a curious fact that the Captain was surcharged eightpence from the West Central district office in London.

"The question arises whether the packet was posted in Switzerland, or whether in London. The Thun postmark is simply a smudge, although a Swiss postal official recognised it as the obliterating mark of Thun," he went on. "We have to remember, too, that though the box is of German make, yet the wrappings and string are English, hence it seems possible that the box was posted in London, without pre-payment. You ask how that could be done? Easily. The box is sufficiently small to be dropped into any of the large post boxes at the chief offices, and would then be conveyed as a letter and surcharged."

This theory was accepted in place of any better one and, after a consultation lasting until two o'clock in the morning, it was decided to continue the investigations and unravel the mystery.

The Swiss police, in ignorance of the mystery of the signet-ring about which Captain MacBean had said nothing to anybody, because of his wife's mental condition, had long ago dismissed the affair as a fatal accident as, indeed, had everyone in the Bernese Oberland. The Crimes Club were, however, far from satisfied. Their habit was to take up cases which had baffled the police who, in turn, had set the public mind at rest.

To obtain any further clue of value in the case in question seemed an utterly forlorn hope. Maurice Jacquinet, the journalist, who had become quite well known in Interlaken, returned there, and again putting up at the Hôtel du Lac, set about watching Mariette Raeber. As his assistant he employed a young Swiss named Stutz, who kept an ever-watchful eye upon the girl's movements. But there was nothing suspicious about them, though her altitude was not that of a girl sorrowing for her lover. Indeed, she was seen at the Casino and at several local dances, where she apparently enjoyed herself.

Suddenly the affair assumed yet another and astounding phase. Mariette Raeber was missing from her home.

Her mother reported that she had gone out about one o'clock one day to meet a girl friend of hers named Rochs and go by the steamer up the Lake of Thun. But she had not returned. The girl Rochs declared that the appointment was only a pretence, as she had never promised to meet her. The crew of the lake steamer recollected her on board alone, but she had left at a little lake-side village called Gunten, a popular resort of the people of Thun. With what object?

The Swiss police ascertained that in the shady garden of the hotel which adjoins the landing-stage, she had sat for some ten minutes, until a car arrived and she joined a round-faced man of forty, who drove her off. That was the last seen or heard of her. The affair was now a complete mystery.

A special meeting of the Crimes Club was held in Paris when the whole puzzle was reviewed, and, further, a decision was arrived at.

A week after Mariette's disappearance, her mother received a typewritten message posted in Brussels and bearing no signature, as follows:

"To search for Mariette is useless. She will not be found until the mystery of Frank MacBean's death is solved."

The mother in great distress showed it to Fernande, who had again returned to Interlaken for a few days, and afterwards gave it over to the Swiss police. As soon as this message was known, the Baron d'Antenac took train from Paris to Brussels, the doctor, Plaud, accompanying him. There they held consultation with the Brussels police, who, in turn, strove to discover the missing girl, all, however, to no purpose. Meanwhile, Dubosq, the Chef de la Sûreté of Paris, ordered inquiries to be made all over France regarding her, just as he had done in the case of young

MacBean.

The problem was rendered the more inscrutable by the news which Gordon Latimer received from Captain MacBean to the effect that a mysterious explosion had occurred at night in his house, which afterwards had taken fire, he having had a very narrow escape from death. It was, no doubt, a case of incendiarism. A second attempt had been made upon the life of the father of the missing man.

This caused the Crimes Club to redouble its efforts to solve the mystery, which had become a complete enigma with many ramifications. Jacquinot and Fernande returned from Interlaken, and the only member of the club absent from Paris was Maître Jean Tessier.

No further development occurred until nearly six weeks later. Lemelletier, pale and rather impatient, was one day shown into the private room of Monsieur Dubosq, at the Prefecture of Police in Paris. The dark-bearded Chef de la Sûreté greeted him warmly, but when he read a brief letter which the Professor handed him, he sat speechless and open-mouthed, in surprise.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed when he had recovered from his astonishment. "To-day is Thursday. We must act at once." And he glanced hurriedly at his watch. Then he took up his telephone and asked to be put on to the Prefect of Police at Boulogne-sur-Mer.

A few moments later his bell rang, and he gave some hurried instructions.

"Now we must await events," he remarked to the Professor. "The club should meet to-morrow night, if it can be arranged."

"I will see that the meeting is called," replied the other. "We will all be present." And he walked out, smiling with self-satisfaction.

On the following night at the large round table in the private room in the Café de l'Univers there assembled the secret council of ten. Dinner was over, and only coffee and liqueurs remained on the table when Dubosq rose, and said:

"I have to announce that, having received information from a certain member of the club, I have caused the arrest of two Chinese named Wou-fang and Le-K'an, on their arrival at Boulogne from Switzerland in connection with the Interlaken mystery. Those members engaged upon the independent inquiries held divers theories, one being that the girl Raeber knew more of her lover's disappearance than she cared to tell. For that reason our fellow-member, Maître Tessier, succeeded in enticing her from her home to Brussels, by means of a message purporting to come from young MacBean. At Brussels she was given comfortable quarters, but was made to understand that she would be held in bondage there until she revealed all she knew concerning her lover's disappearance. For weeks she remained obdurate, apparently fearing lest she might bring trouble upon him, though it was plain that she knew the truth. The Baron, Maître Tessier, Mademoiselle Fernande, and our friend Jacquinot, all interviewed her--Mademoiselle Fernande being her companion in her imprisonment--but she refused to say a word, until at last, she was told of the two dastardly attempts upon Captain MacBean's life. Then her lips became unsealed." He paused briefly, and, looking around the table, added: "I will now produce Mademoiselle Raeber and her lover, and they shall tell you their remarkable stories."

Jacquinot, at a sign from him, rose and unlocked the door. It was a dramatic moment when he conducted the pair to two chairs which Tessier drew forward for them.

Both were well dressed, but pale, wan and nervous.

Dubosq's first words were congratulatory, whereupon MacBean thanked them all for their untiring efforts on his behalf.

"I was the victim of a cunning plot formed by the enemies of my father for purposes of revenge," he said, in a rather low voice. "When I left the train at Scheidegg to take a photograph, I walked behind the station to obtain a view of the Eiger Mountain. A man who had travelled down from the Jungfrau with us also got out with his camera and began to chat about photography. In the meantime the train went off with Mariette. He was annoyed, as I was, that we had lost the train, but we started to walk down to Wengen, for we had an hour to wait for the next train. My companion was a charming, much travelled man, and at an hotel near the station at Wengen we had a drink together, when he suggested that we should walk still farther, right down to Lauterbrunnen, where we could take the train to Interlaken. I recollect arriving at Lauterbrunnen station, where in a state of collapse, owing to some drug in the drink, I believe, I had to be assisted into a closed car that was waiting, and after that I knew no more until consciousness slowly returned, and I found myself in a small *châlet* on the side of a mountain, with the window and door securely fastened. My gaolers were two evil-looking Chinese who, though they treated me kindly, pretended not to understand any language but their own.

"I quickly realised that I had fallen into a trap. I at once feared Mariette would believe that I had committed suicide, because of a foolish story I had told her two days before in order to test her love for me--a fictitious story that I had embezzled a large sum of money at the bank, and asked her what I should do if it were discovered. She had believed me. I grew frantic at thoughts of her agony of mind, and because of the close confinement, but I managed at length to send a note to her through a young goatherd who frequently passed the house, telling her of my whereabouts. Naturally, she pretended to assume that I was dead, in order to prevent any search being made for me. My captors had taken good care to leave my camera in the wood, so that it would point to either accident or suicide. As the long days passed my utter loneliness nearly drove me mad, for I had only a dog as companion and no exercise was allowed me. My small window looked up out upon a pasture where cows grazed, and beyond was a distant mountain. The motive of my capture was a complete puzzle until the elder of the Chinese, Wou-fang, told me that a powerful secret society of Canton, the sign of which is a golden grasshopper, and which had many murders to its discredit, had sworn to be revenged upon my father because, while in command of a gunboat during an insurrection, he had ordered the bombardment of a small town inhabited by Chinese. They had sent word to my father that I had fallen captive at their hands, and that they would submit me to all the terrible tortures known to the Chinese if he refused to make ample recompense to those injured by the gun-fire.

"Naturally, my father did not take it seriously, fully believing the police theory that I had fallen into the torrent. But when they took my ring from my finger and sent it to him upon a dead finger obtained from a hospital student who had it for dissection, he realised the extreme seriousness of the affair, and that the two agents of the Golden Grasshopper were intent on taking his life, as well as mine.

"Thanks to Mariette and to you all, I have been saved from the hideous tortures and ignominious end in store for me," he added. "She herself will tell you what occurred."

Rather shyly, the pretty, fair-haired Swiss girl said in her faulty French:

"All along I believed Frank to be a thief, as he foolishly told me he was. Therefore I did all I could to support the theory of accidental death, even when I was shown the severed finger. One day I received a message purporting to come from him, telling me to meet a friend of his at Gunten, who would accompany me to him as he wanted to see me in secret. Judge my surprise when I found myself captive in the hands of three women at a house outside Brussels. The man who met me was, I now know, *Maître Jean Tessier*; the plot was one formed by him in order to worm from me where my lover was concealed. Many days went by, and I remained mute until I

was told of the two attempts made upon the life of Frank's father, and how, if I divulged the secret, I should be the means of the culprit's punishment. So, somewhat reluctantly, I told all I knew, with the result that I was released. Frank was found in a lonely house on the mountainside near Grindelwald and released, while the two Chinamen fled towards London, being, however, arrested at Boulogne."

Champagne was soon afterwards brought, and the Council of Ten filled their glasses and drank to the future happiness of the young couple, the evening ending with great enthusiasm and conviviality.

Three months later Mariette was married to Frank in Edinburgh, where in the same week in the same city the two narrow-eyed Celestials were each sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for the attempted murder of Captain MacBean.

Thus ended the activity in Europe of the agents of The Golden Grasshopper.

CASE NUMBER TWO THE PURPLE DEATH

Around the big round table in the upper room of the Café de l'Univers the Crimes Club was holding its usual monthly meeting. All of the ten members, each of a different profession and each expert in his own walk of life, were present.

The *café noir* and liqueurs had been set, and the door locked, for no one was allowed at their secret deliberations, and no new member was admitted until death created a vacancy. The secretary, the stout Madame Léontine van Hecke, suddenly addressed her companions in French, saying:

"Gentlemen, M. Dubosq wishes to consult you. I ask your attention, if you please."

Lucien Dubosq, smart in his dinner-jacket and wearing the coveted red rosette of the Legion of Honour in his lapel, rose, and after apologising for troubling the club, explained a problem which the English and French detective service had both failed to solve.

He said that in the interests of justice a very strange and mysterious affair was being hushed up by both Scotland Yard and the French police, a mystery upon which no light could be thrown, therefore he would briefly place the facts before the members for discussion, decision, and action.

On September 22nd, at four o'clock in the afternoon, two well-dressed men, one dark, half-bald and clean-shaven, about fifty-five years of age, and the other, a younger man in his early thirties, with fair, well-brushed hair and of a somewhat effeminate type, strolled along the beach road leading from the cinema to the fish market in the old town of Hastings, where the brown-sailed fishing smacks were lying ready to go out. There were still many London trippers about, and at a beach stall the two men bought some bananas, and, throwing themselves upon the shingle, ate them and smoked cigarettes. They conversed in low tones, evidently holding a consultation, the younger man differing from his companion.

Presently the younger man, having grown calm, drew his wallet from his pocket and, taking out something, handed it to his friend, who examined it. Then the other clapped his knee in satisfaction and returned it to his friend, who carefully replaced it in his pocket-book. Both laughed heartily, then rose, and walking back to the town, entered the Bodega, where a young, fair-haired girl of twenty-two awaited them, and they had a drink together. The girl was extremely well-dressed and had shingled hair. She wore a dark kid glove on her left hand, which apparently had some deformity.

All this was witnessed by Henry Hayes, an employee of the Hastings Corporation, whose duty was surveillance upon the beach fronting the old town, with its broken sea-wall and fishing harbour. He had noticed the rather unusual movements of the two well-dressed men, for such men did not usually eat bananas upon the beach. For that reason he noted their clothes. The elder man wore in his dark knotted cravat a beautiful cornflower-blue sapphire pin which had attracted Hayes as being very pretty.

When the men had entered the Bodega just as it had opened for its evening trade, Hayes relaxed his surveillance, for he had little to do, the trippers being orderly at that end of the town, which was the reverse to that stretch of beach between the Queen's Hotel and Hastings Pier.

That was the last seen of the two visitors to Hastings alive.

Thirty-four hours later, at three o'clock in the morning, the cross-Channel mail steamer, *Isle of Thanet*, when half-way between Dover and Calais, sounded her siren against a big sailing boat not showing the regulation lights. There was half a gale blowing, and the sails being set, she came straight across the bows of the *Isle of Thanet*, much to the anger of Captain Evans, who sounded his siren again and was compelled to alter his course sharply, avoiding a collision only by a few yards.

In the darkness he saw that it was a fishing smack, but there was no light nor any sign of life aboard. He drew up at risk of trouble at Calais Maritime over his delay, and so manœuvred his steamer as to follow the derelict.

Coming up alongside of her, he took up his megaphone and shouted to her skipper, first in French, then in Spanish, English, and Italian. But the fishing smack, tossing upon the heaving waters, made no sign.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted. "Where the devil are you going?" But again there was no response.

Realising that such a vessel adrift in the Channel without lights was a great danger to shipping, he at once sent off a boat's crew to board her, and stood by awaiting his men's report. The boat's crew had a difficult time in getting aboard in such a sea, but they managed to scramble up while Captain Evans turned on his searchlight to watch.

Most of the passengers were below because of the heavy gale blowing. Presently the second officer, named Richard Hardwick, who had gone with the party, came up and, waving his arms just as a heavy sea struck the smack, yelled to the Captain:

"There's something wrong here, sir! We'll sail her into Calais and see you there."

"What's wrong?" inquired Evans deeply through his megaphone.

"We can't tell yet, sir," was his officer's reply. Then Captain Evans waved farewell and continued on his course, knowing that he would delay the Paris mail by half an hour or even more.

Meanwhile Hardwick, the officer of the *Isle of Thanet*, had ordered the lights to be relit, the sails altered, and a course set for Calais, he having the flashing harbour light to steer by.

"Funny, ain't it, sir!" remarked Williams, the man at the helm, obeying Hardwick's orders as they followed in the wake of the brilliantly-lit cross-Channel steamer. "Can you make it out?"

"No, I can't, Williams," was the officer's reply. "Keep her a point more westward." And then as the steersman altered the smack's course, another big sea struck her and she rose proudly from the trough. The night was not over-dark, but the moon was obscured by swift drifting clouds as it so often is in the Channel. Ever and anon, the stormy clouds parted and the moon shone in a long silver streak upon the wind-swept waters.

"The fellow for'ard looks like a gentleman," Williams remarked, just as another of his fellow-sailors passed along, a ghostly figure in the half light. "'E's been done in, no doubt. I wonder 'ow?"

"Who knows? There will be an inquiry into the derelict when we get into Calais," replied Hardwick. "The man's dead and we can't bring him to life. The only thing is to leave everything as it was--as I have given strict orders--and let the police solve the mystery of to-night's affair. It's beyond me, I admit, and--well--it gets on one's nerves. It is all so uncanny--three of them!"

"Yes, sir, I agree. But where is the crew? They've disappeared. They'll know something of 'em in Hastings, no doubt."

"Of course they will. But, as you say--where is the crew? Three dead men aboard--and nobody else!"

The fishing boat marked "CH. 38" upon her sails, which had sailed the Channel for fifteen years, and was well known to every fisherman between the North Foreland and Portland Bill, rose and fell, labouring heavily in the gale, the angry seas breaking over her every now and then, while the mail boat quickly out-distanced her in making for Calais harbour.

Two or three times the *Isle of Thanet* signalled dot-and-dash lights to the derelict, giving orders as to what Hardwick should do when entering the port.

Meanwhile Hardwick, who had spent his life on the Channel ferry, had all he could do to keep the brown-sailed old boat upon her course. The trawl was up--recently up, for fish, seaweed, and débris from it lay scattered about the swimming deck. But who had hauled it? Certainly not the three men now aboard. The fishing crew had apparently suddenly disappeared, leaving the vessel to drift without lights, a serious menace to shipping. Indeed, as showing the strict watch kept upon the Channel waters, two tramp steamers, which had passed it an hour before, had reported it to the wireless station at Niton, in the Isle of Wight, as a dangerous derelict. This notice to mariners had, in turn, been transmitted to the Admiralty, who, a quarter of an hour later, had sent out a C.Q. message--which is the code-signal asking everyone to listen as all ships were warned of their danger.

Through the stormy waters the battered old fishing smack laboured on for a further two hours, until at last, they were under the green and red lights which marked the entrance to Calais harbour, and a dexterous turn of the wheel from Williams brought her into calm water where, after much manœuvring, the boat was at last brought into the fishing port and tied up to the quay.

At once two French police agents, in hooded cloaks, boarded her, the Prefect of Police having already been notified by Captain Evans on the arrival of the *Isle of Thanet*. Evans and a plain-clothes policeman accompanied them.

"Well, Hardwick, what's wrong here?" asked the Captain in his sharp, brusque way.

"I can't tell, sir. But you can see for yourself," was his officer's reply.

Examination of the dirty, dismal little vessel showed an amazing state of things.

In the bows lay the body of a fair-haired young man in a cheap tweed suit. He lay curled up, his features distorted, his eyes bulging, and his countenance a curious bright purple; while down below in the small cabin lit by a single swinging oil lamp there were the remains of a rough supper upon the table, and dregs of red wine in enamelled cups. Lying on the floor were two other men, dead from no apparent cause. None of the trio were seafaring men, but the faces of all three were horribly distorted, their hands open instead of being clenched, and their faces bright purple. Yet there was no trace of the crew of four or five which such a vessel would carry.

In the cabin were signs of a violent quarrel. Some broken plates lay upon the floor, but they might have been swept off the table by the pitching of the boat when the trawl was down.

The police began a thorough search of the dead men's clothing, finding absolutely nothing to serve as a clue. But their investigations proved that the young man who was found in the bows of the boat was not a man at all, but a girl of about twenty-two or three with fair, close-cropped hair!

The curious discovery was at once reported by telephone to the Chief of Police of Calais, who, with his chief inspector, a well-known detective named Dufour, arrived on board. The bodies of all three were searched. The elder man, who was half-bald, wore in his cravat a cornflower

sapphire pin set with four diamonds, and had in his pocket the return half of a first-class ticket from London Bridge to Hastings. The inside pocket of his jacket had been torn almost out, and his face had been bruised on the left jaw either through somebody striking him with their fist, or, perhaps, in falling.

The girl attired as a man seemed a lady. Upon her arm was a solid gold slave-bangle worth at least fifty pounds, while around her neck, beneath her man's shirt, she wore a thin gold chain from which was suspended a circle of emerald-green stone which was afterwards identified as chrysoprase. In her trousers pocket was a twenty-franc gold piece, evidently a souvenir. But upon her was no mark of violence except a slight discoloration of the thumbnail on the right hand. The glove, on being removed from the left hand, showed it to be withered and looking almost like the hand of a skeleton, the thin skin upon the bones being white as marble.

The third man appeared to be aged about thirty. He wore sea-boots like his two companions, but upon his dead countenance was a look of inexpressible horror, as though he had faced some terrible shock at the moment of his death. His clothes were well-made, and upon him was found two pounds in Treasury notes and fifty francs in French bank notes. The palm of his open right hand was cut and had bled.

Beyond that all was mystery. Where was the crew of the fishing boat "CH. 38"?

The French police at once became active and telephoned a brief report of the discovery to Scotland Yard, and they, in turn, telephoned to the Hastings police asking them to at once make inquiry as to the owner of the "CH. 38," and what had become of the missing crew.

Soon a strange state of affairs became revealed. The boat belonged to a fishing company which had its headquarters at Grimsby and owned boats sailing from Brixham, Yarmouth, and elsewhere. The skipper's name was Ben Benham, a man recently from Grimsby, as were the three hands. The original crew of the vessel had been transferred to Grimsby, Benham and his men taking their place. They had only been out on four previous trips, but what had happened to them that night was a complete mystery.

The Hastings police, assisted by two expert officers from Scotland Yard, made every inquiry, but all fruitless. The Calais police had done the same, and inquiries had been made at all the ports of the Pas-de-Calais, but without avail.

Thus the problem put before the club by Monsieur Dubosq was an extremely complex one. Who were the two men and the girl dressed as a man? Why were they on board the fishing boat? Where were the crew? What was the motive of their journey? What had occurred during the fatal voyage? were some of the problems.

"Have photographs of the dead persons been taken?" asked Maurice Jacquinot.

"Yes. I have the photographs here," replied the Chef de la Sûreté. And he handed round three unmounted photographs which had been taken of the dead persons in the position in which they were found.

Each member gazed at them in turn as they were passed round the table. But the member most interested was the elderly, white-bearded Dr. Henri Plaud. He examined and re-examined them very minutely through his large round spectacles, and pursing his lips slightly, passed them to the podgy Baron d'Antenac, who sat at his right hand.

A discussion followed lasting over two hours, in which Gustave Delcros, Gordon Latimer, and the pretty dark-haired Parisienne, Fernande Buysse, took part. The latter, who had been so successful in the case of "The Golden Grasshopper," was eager and enthusiastic. She suggested

that the members of the club should unite at once and make independent inquiries.

This course was adopted, and it was decided that the direction of the investigation should be left in the hands of the white-bearded Doctor Plaud, while Gordon Latimer, spruce and active, being English, should go to Hastings at once, accompanied by Mademoiselle Fernande and the young journalist Maurice Jacquinot.

The judicial inquiry held by the French authorities at Calais revealed nothing, so it was decided that the affair should be kept out of the newspapers in order not to alarm anyone who held secret knowledge of what had happened. The bodies of the unknown victims were duly buried, and the case left in the hands of the Crimes Club.

On the 20th December, Gordon Latimer and Fernande Buysse, who, with others, had been pursuing active inquiries in Hastings, Folkestone, Calais, London, Paris, and elsewhere for nearly three months, were sitting together in a low-pitched, underground room where dancing and drinking were being indulged in, a den in Greek Street, Soho, which was one of the most disreputable spots in London's underworld. Gordon had gone there alone and had stood drinks to two or three girls of the usual type which haunt such places. Then he had pretended to "pick up" Fernande, the smart young French girl with whom he was now seated, and who had in the past few weeks become a nightly habituée there.

They were drinking Russian tea, and as she raised her glass, she whispered in French:

"That's the girl--in the cinnamon frock, with reddish hair!"

The girl she indicated was about twenty-five, rather refined, delicate-looking and well-dressed. By her free manner, her painted lips, and her careless laughter it was plain that she was one of similar type to the other girls who frequented the place, some of them of the worst character. The fair-haired young man she was dancing with at the moment was known as "Jimmy the Painter," and was, indeed, one of the several cat burglars who, from time to time, arouse great alarm among London householders.

Latimer looked at the girl, and asked:

"Are you quite sure?"

"I'm never sure of anything," laughed the chic French girl. "Only from what she's let out, I feel sure she knows something about the stuff. Shall I ask her across to sit with us?"

"No. I'll come here alone to-morrow night," he said, and they sat drinking their tea, smoking cigarettes, and afterwards danced together.

Molly was the name by which the girl whom Fernande had pointed out was known. Such girls have no surnames. They change them too often when the police are following them. She laughed across to Fernande with whom she had become acquainted, and then glanced inquisitively at her companion, as though summing him up, perhaps, as a pigeon to be plucked--which was exactly what Latimer desired.

By their combined efforts, the five members of the Crimes Club had, in a way, been successful. They had discovered Henry Hayes, the employee of the Hastings Corporation, who had identified the photographs of the two men and the girl found upon the fishing boat as the pair whom he had seen eating bananas on the beach and afterwards meeting the girl in the Bodega. That was all. How they came to be on board the boat, or how or for what reason the girl had been transformed into a man, was an absolute enigma.

Old Dr. Plaud, as director of the investigations, had, by his unerring instinct, transferred his

sphere of inquiry to London, and there Latimer and Fernande, with the astute journalist, Jacquinot, and M. Delcros had gone to work in a careful, methodical and scientific manner, always keeping in mind that whenever a great crime is committed, there is always a woman in the case.

But what was the crime? What had happened in mid-Channel on that fateful September night? The foreigner can always learn more in London's cosmopolitan underworld than the Englishman, as every London detective will tell you. The cosmopolitan criminal looks upon every Englishman as a "nark," or policeman's "nose" or informer. Hence the foreign detective in London always has an easier task if he knows the haunts of crooks and becomes a habitué.

This is what Plaud had pointed out, and his suggestion had been at once adopted.

Indeed, the sprightly Fernande and her dancing had become quite a feature of that den known to the West End criminal as "Old Jacob's." To that cellar, or series of cellars, with their boarded, white-painted walls, with crude Futuristic designs upon them, many visitors to London were enticed to spend a "merry evening," and left there minus their wallet, or doped and taken to some den even more foul. The police knew "Old Jacob's" well, and Jacob himself, once a solicitor but now a wily old criminal who had spent some years in Dartmoor for appropriating his clients' money, always took ample precautions, and when raided, the place was found to belong to somebody else who was duly fined, and "Old Jacob" next day removed to another underground den.

At "The Yard" it was always declared that at "Jacob's" there congregated the most dangerous crowd of criminals in London.

All efforts of Plaud and his companions had failed to establish the identity of the two strangers who had arrived on that September evening in Hastings, who had met the girl and given her a glass of wine, and who later had been discovered dead upon the derelict in mid-Channel.

The Crimes Club had held three meetings in Paris at which progress had been reported and the matter had been discussed, but it seemed after three months that the whole organisation of experts was up against a blank wall. On the other hand, it was argued that the crew of four men of the fishing boat could not have all disappeared--unless they had been drowned, which was not likely. Besides, the ship's lights had been deliberately extinguished, which gave colour to the theory that the three had been murdered and the boat abandoned. In addition, one of the small boats was missing, though it had not been sighted. It might have escaped to either the French or English coast in the darkness.

The clue which the shrewd young French lady journalist was following--the public being in ignorance of the highly sensational discovery--was only a slender one. In the course of the long investigations in which Jacquinot had been most active, it was found that a person, somewhat resembling the man who wore the sapphire in his cravat, was known in the dregs of the London underworld as an expert thief named Orlando Martin, who had a dozen or so *aliases*. He had never been in trouble apparently, neither had his companion, for the finger-prints of the dead hands taken by the Calais police did not correspond with any of the hundreds of thousands of records filed at Scotland Yard.

In such circumstances, with failure after failure to record, and with Dr. Plaud openly pessimistic as regards finding any solution to the mystery, Gordon Latimer, dressed in a dinner-jacket, lounged into "Jacob's" on the following night, and was soon in conversation with the neat-ankled girl, Molly. They sat together, drank coffee and cointreau, and watched the dancing, he pretending to live in Cornwall, and up from Truro on a holiday. He told her that he was a motor dealer, and having unexpectedly sold half a dozen cars he had determined to take a holiday in

London.

The girl soon saw that he was an easy victim to her charms. Indeed, he promised to meet her and take her out to lunch next day, which he did. For the following three days he was mostly in her company and constantly spending money upon her, but at night they always danced at "Old Jacob's," where twice they met Fernande alone, and she joined them.

One evening, in consequence of a telegram he had received from Paris regarding yet another discovery, Gordon resolved to make a bold endeavour to learn something, for if what Fernande suspected were true, then Molly might be able to supply the key to the enigma.

They left "Jacob's" at three o'clock in the morning, and he had offered to see her in a taxi as far as her flat at Baron's Court, out by West Kensington.

While in the taxi he suddenly took her hand, and said:

"Molly, you are dense. Haven't you recognised me?"

"Recognised you?" she cried, starting suddenly. "What do you mean?"

"You take me for a mug. You don't recognise Bert Davies--Sugar's friend!"

"Bert Davies!" gasped the girl. "Are you really Bert--his best pal?"

"I am. I came out of the Scrubbs a month ago and went over to Paris to find Maisie. But I can't find Sugar anywhere. Where is he? I know he was deeply in love with you. He told me so lots of times. I hope he isn't doing time?"

The shrewd girl, whose wits were sharpened by the criminal life she led, was silent for a few moments. Teddy Candy, known in the London underworld by the sobriquet of "Sugar," and with whom she was in love, had often spoken of his intimate friend, an expert blackmailer named Bertie Davies who was in prison owing to a little slip he had made.

"You aren't a nark, are you?" asked the girl cautiously.

"Certainly not. Maisie knows me. So does Dick Dale. Sugar used to wear a blue sapphire tie-pin that he pinched from a young Italian prince one night, didn't he?"

"Dick is doing time--shot at a copper in Kingsland and got it in the neck from the Recorder."

"I'm sorry. Dickie's one of the best. Recollect the Humber Street affair--a nasty business--but Dickie helped Teddy, didn't he?"

"Yes. It was a narrow shave for all of us. I don't like guns. But we got nearly two thousand apiece."

"But what about Sugar? Where can I find him?" asked her good-looking companion.

"I don't know--and that's a fact," she replied, with a regretful air. "I haven't seen him or heard of him since September."

"Perhaps he's doing time?"

"Oh, no. He's disappeared."

"How?"

"I don't know," the girl replied. "He and Tony Donald had a big thing on hand--a bit of bank business, he told me. One day in September he left me after lunching at the Trocadero, and I haven't seen him since. Tony's missing, too!"

"Was Sugar ever about with a big, thick-set man with a beard, a rough, rather deep-voiced, unkempt fellow, who looked like a sailor?"

"The man who came up from Hastings, you mean--eh? Sugar told me he was one of us, and they were doing business together."

"Is that all he told you?" asked Latimer.

"What are you so inquisitive for, young man?" asked the girl pertly. "What business is it of yours--eh? I took you for a mug, but you certainly aren't one," she laughed. The cab had stopped outside her door, and seeing this, she said: "Come in and have a drink before you go back."

Latimer, delighted with the information he had obtained, accepted the girl's invitation and ascended to the third floor, to a little three-roomed flat cosily furnished, where he sat down and took the whisky and soda she poured out for him.

Ten minutes later she went below and paid the taxi driver, telling him that her friend was remaining, but the actual fact was that Gordon Latimer was at that moment lying senseless upon the floor heavily drugged.

"You're a nark, you damned swine!" she cried on returning, kicking his inanimate body savagely. "And you'll be sorry for your inquisitiveness. You are no friend of Sugar's or of Ben Benham's either!"

She went to the telephone and rang up somebody named Joe, urging him to come at once.

Half an hour later an ill-dressed, ill-conditioned man of forty with a sinister, criminal face arrived, and to him she told the story.

The man knit his heavy brows and was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"If he really knows something about Sugar he might possibly help us. Don't do anything rash. It may be better for us if he is alive, than if he died. We'll let him recover and loosen his tongue," added the ex-convict. "There's certain to be somebody with him, and he may have been watched here. So there's no time to lose. Give him the stuff that brings them round," he urged.

She passed into an adjoining room, and returned with a small phial bottle from which she poured about twenty drops into water, and held it to his lips. Unconsciously he drank it, and ten minutes later he was again fully conscious, and amazed at finding himself face to face with the stranger.

"Well, sonny?" asked the sinister man who had served many years of penal servitude, "what's all this you know about Sugar? If you can tell me where he is you'll get out of this alive. But if you don't, well; you'll be found dead by the police to-morrow," he said fiercely, drawing a revolver and holding it close to his brow. "Now, let's talk business. What do you know about Sugar?"

Gordon Latimer, realising that he was in a tight corner, decided that the best course was to tell the truth.

"I only know that he is dead."

"Dead!" cried the girl hysterically. "How do you know that?"

"Before I answer I want to ask a question. Is Ben Benham alive?"

"Certainly," was Molly's reply.

"Then I may tell you that Sugar is dead, and here is his photograph taken by the French police," said Latimer boldly, taking the three pictures from his pocket-book.

On sight of the first the girl Molly shrieked, and almost fainted.

"Yes, it is Sugar--poor, dear Sugar! Dead, and he loved me! Do forgive me--forgive us--and tell us all that you know. What happened to Sugar and to Tony Donald?"

"They are both dead--and this girl too--dressed as a man." And he showed them the other pictures.

"Gwen!" gasped Molly. "It's Gwen! She's dead also! Tell us what happened. Where were they found?"

Both stood open-mouthed and aghast.

"How did your little French friend find out what she did?" asked the old criminal, whose name was Joe Hawker, an expert forger.

"If I tell you I shall expect you to tell me all that you know regarding the affair," said the young radio inventor.

"That's agreed," replied Molly. "We have a lot to tell you--more curious than you can possibly imagine. How did she suspect that I knew anything?"

For a few seconds the young radio expert reflected, then he decided that straightforwardness was best.

"The fact is, Miss Molly," he said, "Professor Plaud, the French medico-legist, on seeing the photographs, at once suspected, from the position and appearance of the bodies, the fact of the palms being outstretched and the purple colour of the countenances, that death was due to an almost unknown, but very subtle and deadly narcotic poison called enconine. From only one person in London, whose name is known to the Professor, can the poison be obtained in secret, and a very high price is charged for it. That fact led us to search the underworld of London thoroughly for persons who had purchased it. There were six of them known to us, but our inquiries were narrowed down to yourself. You bought the poison for your friend Candy, and you kept some for yourself. It was that which you gave me in my drink just now. You can't deny it!"

The girl stood aghast at the allegation, unable to utter a word.

"I do not seek to harm you," he at once assured her. "I only want to solve the mystery. We have ascertained the truth up to a certain point--that you obtained the drug which cost Candy, Donald, and the girl Gwen, their lives."

"But what happened to them?" the girl asked breathlessly. "They wouldn't all commit suicide."

"Before I tell you I want to know the nature of the bank business in which Candy and Donald were interested."

"Well--you, no doubt, saw in the papers last August how the strong-room of Carron's, the big private bank in the City, had been blown open after the night watchman had been gassed, and how nearly a quarter of a million had been carried away in a blue motor-car."

"Yes, I remember," Latimer answered.

"Well, Sugar and Tony did the trick, while Gwen gassed the watchman. They hid the money in a house down by the sea at Pevensey Bay, but one day they were all three missing as well as old Ben Benham, and we've had no word of any of them till now you've shown us that they're dead."

"What actually occurred becomes quite plain," Latimer replied. "Candy and your other two friends no doubt feared the police and were anxious to get the loot in secret across the Channel, where the securities could be disposed of. They arranged with the skipper Benham, whom they had found to be a clever smuggler, to take them and their treasure over to France on that night."

They went on board after dark and steered a course presumably to fish as usual, when Benham, who had evidently stolen the drug from Candy without his knowledge, offered all three a drink, which they took with fatal results. He then seized the money and securities, paid the crew well for their silence, lowered a boat, and having extinguished the vessel's lights, they rowed forward to the French coast, where he and the crew, whom he had sworn to silence and to remain in France, separated. Three hours later the vessel was sighted by the cross-Channel steamer, and the bodies discovered in the position in which you see them."

"Then Benham killed them!" cried the girl hysterically. "We'll kill him!"

"There is no necessity," was Latimer's reply.

"This afternoon I received a telegram from the Paris police to the effect that a man much resembling the skipper Benham, though he had shaved off his grey beard and moustache, was discovered at a small hotel in Rouen. When the police went to arrest him, however, he shot himself. In the room nearly seventeen thousands pounds in cash and nearly the whole of the securities were found."

CASE NUMBER THREE

THE MAN WITH THE SQUINT

Just before nine o'clock on the evening of January 8th, 1923, the postman, going his last round, dropped a letter into the box at a small house in a mean South London street, the address, to be exact, being No. 293 Mina Road, a turning off the Old Kent Road.

The six-roomed, frowzy old house, one of a long terrace, was occupied by a poor invalid widow named Vergette, who had lived there in straitened circumstances for the past ten years.

She was alone in the house, and going along the passage, she obtained the letter, put on her glasses and opened it, when to her surprise, she found within half of a fifty-pound Bank of England note. That was all. There was no letter or any clue to the sender. The letter had been posted in the E.C. London district, and the address was typed.

In her ignorance she felt it wicked for anyone to have mutilated and destroyed a note for such a sum, and for two hours sat beside her kitchen fire, wondering who had sent it, and why? She came to the conclusion that someone, knowing of her dire poverty, had sent it to her to tantalise her by showing that other people possessed such wealth that they could afford to destroy bank-notes.

Her views next morning, however, underwent a change when the postman brought her another letter, exactly similar to the first, containing the missing half of the fifty-pound bank-note. To her next-door neighbour, a young clerk in the City, she mentioned the receipt of the two letters, whereupon he told her that if she pasted the halves together the note was as good as fifty pounds, and would be cashed anywhere.

She was, however, afraid to do this lest the law might come upon her, and though she possessed only a few shillings in the world, she put the two halves of the bank-note away in a drawer.

During the following week she was nearly starving. Her married daughter usually sent her a weekly pittance upon which she existed, but she had gone to Spain with her husband on business, and the usual letter was apparently delayed.

Seven days later exactly the same thing occurred. Mrs. Vergette received two halves of a fifty-pound note by successive postal deliveries. Then three days later she received a further fifty-pound note in halves; still she dare not attempt to pass them for fear of arrest. She knew the coinage must not be mutilated, and believed that bank-notes should not be cut in half.

The few shillings she had were spent, and while waiting for the remittance from her daughter she went hungry, until one day she was seen by a neighbour lying upon the path of the narrow back-yard in a state of collapse. The police were informed, and she was taken to the St. George's Infirmary on an ambulance. There she was given food, and soon recovered. Meanwhile, as is usual, the police, suspecting a tragedy, searched the home and found the six halves of the bank-notes carefully hidden. They suspected them to be part of a robbery and took the numbers, which were eventually found to correspond with those of notes stolen from a wealthy Dutch merchant who had been on a visit to Paris. The widow was questioned, and fortunately she was able to produce the last of the six envelopes she had received from an unknown source. Two days later, the morning post brought her half a one hundred-pound note, and at evening came the other half. These she handed to the police, who at once established the fact that the further note in question had been among those stolen.

Scotland Yard took the matter up, and were much mystified. Mrs. Vergette was a perfectly respectable old woman, and why she should be the recipient of stolen notes was certainly a problem they failed to solve.

In rapid succession three more one hundred-pound notes, stolen like the others, arrived, and she duly handed them over to the police. Inquiries were made concerning her past, but there was nothing in her life in the least suspicious.

Mr. Van Ordt, of Amsterdam, had been staying at one of the principal hotels in Paris, and one night had gone to the Montmartre. There, at a cabaret, he met some friends, and they had supper together, but afterwards he found his wallet had been stolen, probably by somebody who had jostled up against him. He had that day drawn the notes from the Paris branch of a London bank, and at once he had been able to give the police the numbers.

This mystery, however, was only an insignificant one. The Paris Sûreté made inquiries. Several well-known pickpockets were suspected in turn, but no arrest was made. Moreover, their attention, and that of Scotland Yard, became suddenly centred upon a strange affair, which was being carefully concealed from the public. The world was in ignorance that Prince Ernest of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderbourg-Glucksbourg, brother of the King of Greece, had mysteriously disappeared, and that foul play was suspected.

He had last been seen walking along Bond Street, but he had not returned to Claridge's, and no trace of him could be found. The Foreign Office at Athens had sent, in strictest confidence, to all their Legations abroad asking them to seek the co-operation of the police of the country to which they were accredited, in order to solve the mystery. To the police of Europe, as well as to Scotland Yard, a minute description of the missing Prince was issued, in which it was stated that his age was forty, his hair and moustache dark, a rather high forehead and long face, protruding cheek-bones, somewhat sallow, and narrow-set dark eyes in which was a slight squint.

The exact details of the mysterious disappearance were examined and discussed at the monthly meeting of the club, all the ten members being present except Maître Jean Tessier, who was absent in Marseilles, where he was defending the notorious poisoner, Couget, who afterwards went to the guillotine.

The stout Baron d'Antenac explained the facts as far as were known, facts supplied by Lucien Dubosq. Nine persons were at the table, all experts in their own branches of medicine, law, and criminal investigation, and listening most attentively as the Baron placed the mysterious facts before them.

"The Prince is of a somewhat retiring disposition, and hates publicity in any form," the Baron said. "He came from Athens to Paris incognito, attended only by his faithful valet, George Epites. The latter was taken ill and went into a nursing home on the day of the disappearance. The Prince, calling himself Andreas Bourakis, after a fortnight in Paris, went to London and stayed at Claridge's under the same name. He is well known there, and knows London intimately. In addition, he has quite a number of friends there and is frequently seen in society. He spent Christmas at a country house in Yorkshire and then returned to London. He was last seen on the afternoon of December 28th by Lady Crossford, who met him in Bond Street, close to the corner of Clifford Street, and he raised his hat to her. He was accompanied by a rather stout, aristocratic-looking woman of forty-five or so, extremely well-dressed. Since that moment nothing has been seen or heard of him. His luggage at the hotel was opened in the hope of finding a clue to his disappearance--a letter, or a message; but there not a scrap of writing was discovered, except his cheque-book upon the Westminster Bank, which has revealed nothing. There is the problem, messieurs--one which is being investigated by the police of Europe, but in vain. Prince Ernest

walked down Bond Street with a lady and simply vanished.

"The first thing to establish is the identity of this lady friend--this well-dressed lady," remarked Maurice Jacquinet.

"True," said Gordon Latimer, who was sitting next to Fernande Buysse. "But surely, there must be some motive," he went on. "Men-about-town like the Prince are not fools to be tricked by confidence men. He may have been lured by some woman--perhaps by that stout lady."

"Lady Crossford has given a minute description of her," said the Baron. "We have it here. Perhaps our friend Dubosq will read it, exactly as it has been circulated."

The slim, dark-bearded man, Lucien Dubosq, elegantly dressed with the red rosette in his lapel, successor of the great Goron, smiled, and from a paper before him read the woman's description--that she was dark, about forty, handsome, well-preserved, and was wearing a cinnamon tailored costume with hat to match and a diamond brooch in the shape of a double triangle.

"She may have been seen at Claridge's," suggested the sprightly Fernande.

"She has never been seen there," Dubosq replied quickly. "Further, the Prince was by no means a lady's man. The Greek Minister was with me yesterday and told me that it was imperative that His Royal Highness should be found, as his life is insured for a very large sum in several British insurance offices, and foul play was suspected. His valet, George Epites, has stated that his master, only three weeks before his disappearance, made a will in favour of a young English girl with whom he seemed to have formed an attachment. He met the young lady on the Riviera last winter."

"What was her name?" asked Professor Plaud.

"Unfortunately the valet does not know her surname. He only heard her addressed as Mary. He witnessed the will, but it was so folded that he did not see the name. The will was made at the Hôtel Negresco, in Nice, and the other witness was the floor-waiter," Dubosq replied.

"Where is the will?" asked Gordon Latimer.

"Who knows? Its existence is as mysterious as the sole legatee," said the Chef de la Sûreté. "The insurances, together with His Highness's private fortune, amount to a very large sum. But the disappearance having taken place in London we are leaving Scotland Yard to deal with the enigma." He paused. Then clearing his throat, said: "I have, Messieurs, to tell you an even stranger fact--one which complicates matters very considerably, which is utterly inexplicable and which renders the mystery of one of the most remarkable that we, the Sûreté of Paris, have ever had to deal. It is this: When the Prince's effects were searched after his disappearance, nearly one thousand pounds in English bank-notes were found in his steel dispatch case, which, having an English patent lock, was opened by the makers. The numbers were taken with a view to establishing the identity of the person from whom the Prince received them, when it was discovered that they were following numbers of some bank-notes which a poor woman in South London has received in halves anonymously by post. And those notes had been stolen from a Dutchman in Paris at the time when the Prince was staying there at the Grand Hotel as Andreas Bourakis."

"Very strange--very!" remarked Professor Lemelletier. "Perhaps it is a crook who is personating the Prince?"

"Certainly not," said Dubosq. "That theory has been investigated in London, and it is established that the man living at Claridge's was actually the Prince. A dozen persons who know him in London recently have testified to that. But there remains the fact that the stolen notes were in his

possession, and that several notes stolen at the same time were sent to a starving widow living in an obscure quarter of South London."

"A most interesting problem!" remarked Jacquinet. "Surely, the Prince could not be a pick-pocket? Has the widow in South London been questioned?"

"Yes," replied Dubosq. "It was she who took the notes to the police. She has been questioned, and is innocent of any knowledge of the anonymous sender, or of the Prince."

"Has she any relations?" asked Fernande.

"A daughter who is married to a mining engineer named Garcia, who is at Barcelona."

"If we are to take up the case I think we should start there," remarked the lantern-jawed Professor gravely. His slow, patient methods in dealing with evidences in cases of great crimes was world-renowned. In the courts he tore the evidence for the defence into shreds, when called by the prosecution, by his latest and up-to-date scientific methods including the deadly mirror test for arsenic in cases of suspected poison. "I myself happen to know Barcelona well, and am prepared to make the first essay in our investigations," he added.

His suggestion was unanimously adopted, and it was arranged that Gordon Latimer should accompany him to Spain and make preliminary inquiries. The Prince had disappeared leaving no trace except that of the stolen bank-notes. The situation was highly interesting to that little circle of criminologists who had banded themselves together to assist the police to solve the more difficult problems so constantly placed before them. As usual, every member was prepared to assist and act his or her part in the patient and unremitting search for the truth.

The Professor and Latimer arrived in Barcelona a few days later, travelling by way of Port-Bou, and put up at a modest little hotel, the Universo, in the Plaza de Palacio. A few judicious inquiries resulted in the information that the mining engineer, Alfonso Garcia, who had been superintending some trial borings at a copper mine at Moron, in Andalusia, was taking a holiday at Sitges, a charming little seaside resort close to Barcelona. He was staying with his wife at the Hôtel Saburt.

At that hotel Latimer took up his headquarters, and being English, it was but natural that Señora Garcia should get into conversation with him.

Many times they had chatted in the lounge of the hotel. Latimer explained that he was a writer of stories, who had come to Spain to obtain fresh ideas, while she told him that she came from London, where her mother lived.

One night, as they sat together after dinner, on the terrace overlooking the moonlit Mediterranean, Garcia being absent in Barcelona, Latimer cleverly questioned her. The conversation turned upon one's relations, when Madame said:

"I see very little of my relations. I haven't seen my mother since I married ten years ago. I, of course, write to her regularly. My father left her quite comfortably off, and she lives in London."

This was not in accordance with the facts in possession of the police. Madame's mother was the reverse of being well off. She had nearly succumbed to starvation when her regular remittance ceased. Latimer dare not tell her this, for fear of arousing suspicion. Garcia's wife was a very handsome woman of a somewhat opulent type, even though a trifle over-dressed. But that is usual with Englishwomen married to foreigners.

Latimer, posing as a wandering Englishman, began to chatter about persons he had met in his wanderings about Europe, and in the course of his entertaining gossip he said, watching the

woman's face intently:

"At the Hôtel Negresco, in Nice, last season, I met a very pleasant man, a Greek named Bourakis. We became very friendly and I often went walks with him, and once or twice we motored over to Monte Carlo together. He struck me as an extremely refined type of man. But I was astounded one day, a few months later, to see his portrait in the Paris *Daily Mail*, and to discover that he was really Prince Ernest, brother of the King of the Hellenes."

He watched the woman's face, for the moonlight fell full upon it, giving it a deathlike pallor. But not a muscle of her eyelids quivered.

"How curious!" she remarked quite coldly. "One often meets interesting people in one's travels. I have known many."

Her attitude quickly convinced the young English radio inventor that the rather over-dressed Englishwoman, who somehow bore the peculiar *cachet* of a retired actress, had no knowledge of the missing prince.

Therefore he returned to Barcelona next day and admitted to the Professor that they had had their journey to Spain in vain.

"But why has the Prince disappeared? Why has a portion of the contents of the Dutchman's wallet been found among his effects? We must conduct our inquiries in London," declared the Professor. "The Prince vanished in London."

"You suspect foul play, I think?"

"I certainly do. The insurance in favour of this unknown girl, Mary, arouses my suspicion. There are, of course, a hundred reasons why a man may disappear--a love affair for aught we know! The Prince's family can give us no assistance. He was a bachelor without a care in the world, and one of the most eligible men in Europe from the point of matrimony," the medico-legist said. "In any case, we are losing time by remaining here."

Three days later they were in London where they found the journalist, Maurice Jacquinet, and Fernande Buysse awaiting them. Latimer had, however, gone back to Sitges before leaving, and had surreptitiously taken a snapshot of Madame Garcia as she sat in the hotel garden.

After a conference held at the Charing Cross Hotel, where the quartette made their headquarters, Gordon Latimer took train up to Durham whence he motored to Hesseldon Hall, and called upon Lady Crossford.

The latter was about to dress for dinner when the butler took in Latimer's card with a note asking her to grant him an interview. As he waited in the handsome old library into which he was shown, he walked round admiring the several *objets d'art* it contained, when suddenly the door opened and Lady Crossford, a tall, handsome, well-preserved, white-haired woman entered.

"I must apologise for calling at this hour, but I could not get down from London earlier," he said. "My object is a somewhat curious one," and taking from his pocket the snapshot, he asked: "Do you, by any chance, recognise this photograph. Have you ever seen that lady?"

She took it across to the shaded lamp upon the writing-table, and bending, examined it with curiosity. Then suddenly she exclaimed:

"Why, if I'm not very much mistaken, that is the woman I saw with Prince Ernest in Bond Street!" Then an instant later, she said: "I'm sure it is! Who is she? You know the Prince has disappeared, and the police have been several times to see me, as I am the last to have seen him alive. His Highness has been my guest here several times, so I know him well. Besides, his half-

closed left eye is so noticeable. Have they found the woman?"

"I can scarcely tell," was Latimer's halting reply, for the identification made his heart leap within him. "I presume you have no doubt that it was this woman whom you saw with him in Bond Street?"

"Not the slightest. Are you a detective?"

"I am simply following up a clue which has unexpectedly arisen," was his answer. And then, after some further conversation, he withdrew.

Next morning he was back again at the Charing Cross Hotel. His report caused much satisfaction among his companions, who saw that if Lady Crossford had made no mistake then some great mystery was hidden. Latimer had exhibited the photograph suddenly, and she had quickly identified it.

Thus it seemed clear that the daughter of old Mrs. Vergette was the well-dressed woman who had walked with the Prince in Bond Street.

But where was the Prince? Why had some of those stolen notes been cut in half and sent anonymously to the poor widow in South London?

Half an hour later Professor Lemelletier spoke on the Paris telephone to Dubosq, telling him the result of their investigations.

"*Bien!*" he replied. "It would assist us if we could ascertain the identity of the young English girl who benefits under the missing man's will. I will send an agent to Barcelona to-night to keep observation upon Madame Garcia."

And he rang off.

The Greek valet, George Epites, was still at Claridge's awaiting news of his master. He had made several statements to the police, some of them just a trifle contradictory. Indeed, when Superintendent Warner, of the Criminal Investigation Department, had questioned him a few days before, he seemed to grow nervous and uneasy; a fact which the well-known detective told the Professor when he called on him at Scotland Yard.

"Then he may be fully aware of his master's fate!" exclaimed the Professor. "It is rather curious that he was taken suddenly ill on the day the Prince was missed."

"True," remarked Fernande, a smart figure in her little cloche hat and furs. "But it has struck me that this Greek servant may know the identity of the girl whom his master met in Nice, and in whose favour he made a will. In my opinion that man could reveal a great deal to us if he chose."

"I quite agree," said Jacquinot, who was always alert for a good "story" for his paper, and eager to assist in solving these inscrutable mysteries which so constantly occupied the attention of the secret council of the Crimes Club. "Shall I see him and endeavour to get something out of him?"

The others assented to such a course, the Professor warning him to be most discreet.

"My own belief is that His Highness is alive, in which case, if we aroused any suspicion that we are making investigations, he might meet with foul play."

"We must try to discover the identity of this young girl who is to inherit his fortune," said the journalist. "I will see him to-day."

An hour later Jacquinot found at Claridges the Prince's valet, a tall, thin, pallid man with deep, black eyes, and a scraggy black moustache. The journalist represented himself as a Parisian friend of his master's for whom he inquired in French, as though he were in utter ignorance of the

Prince's mysterious disappearance.

"I much regret, M'sieur, that my master's whereabouts is not known," he replied. "He disappeared on the 28th of December last, and has not since been seen or heard of. On the day in question he was recognised by a lady as he passed down Bond Street. That is all."

"Very curious!" remarked Jacquinot, in pretence of surprise. "The last time I saw him he spoke of some young English girl he had met last season at Nice. Do you happen to know who she was?"

The Greek flashed a quick, sinister glance of suspicion at him.

"I have no idea," he replied shortly.

"The Prince told me he had fallen in love with her," airily remarked the slim, rather effeminate Jacquinot. "That is why he bequeathed to her all his fortune in the event of his death." He paused to light a cigarette. Then he added: "Is your master really dead, do you think? If he is, then this English miss will be extremely wealthy--eh?"

"I do not think he is dead, M'sieur," said the valet confidentially.

"Then why has he so completely disappeared?"

"He may come back," the valet said in a tone which showed the shrewd young journalist that he was not telling all he knew.

"Are you certain you do not know the name of the young English girl?"

"Quite certain, M'sieur. His Highness was very careful to conceal her name," the valet replied. "I am remaining here awaiting his return."

Jacquinot was discreet enough to see that if he carried his inquiries further he might confirm the suspicions already aroused in the Greek's mind. He was a subtle, elusive fellow without a doubt, and he knew more than he dared to tell.

A thought arose in the journalist's mind as he walked back to Charing Cross whether the Prince's disappearance was due to the machinations of the man Epites, who was so careful to pose as a faithful servant.

Three days later, Jacquinot, accompanied by Latimer, arrived late in the evening at the Hôtel Negresco, at Nice, and next day the journalist, being French, had a chat with the chief of the reception bureau, asking:

"Do you remember my friend, Monsieur Bourakis, staying here last season--you know who I mean," he added confidentially, "the Prince!"

"Certainly, Monsieur. He had suite No. C."

"And that young English girl who was so often with him. Miss--I forgot her name. He introduced me to her once."

"Oh! Miss Mary Symington, you mean."

"Ah! yes. That is the name," Jacquinot replied with satisfaction.

"She lost a valuable diamond bangle while she was here, and we have had a great deal of correspondence about it. I had a letter from her from the Ritz Hotel in Paris only yesterday. She thinks it was stolen from her dressing-case at the railway station."

Jacquinot noted that the young English lady was in Paris, and then thanked his informant and left.

Later Latimer was chatting with the concierge after having ascertained the time of the next train over to Monte Carlo, when suddenly he said:

"I'm interested in a lady--a friend of mine. Has she ever been here?" and he showed him the photograph of Madame Garcia.

"Oh! yes. That's Madame Demarest, a great friend of the Greek Prince who goes about incognito as Andreas Bourakis. She is here nearly every season. Probably she will come soon."

"And her husband? Does he come with her?"

The man in the long black coat with golden cross-keys upon his lapel smiled, and replied:

"I did not know she had a husband. There was a Spanish gentleman often with her, but I do not know his name."

"Was he about fifty, with dark hair and beard, and wearing round spectacles?" asked Latimer, describing Garcia.

"Yes, M'sieur. That is the gentleman exactly."

"Did the Prince know him?" asked Latimer, greatly interested at these disclosures.

"I think not. He was Madame's friend, and lived in one of the cheap hotels at the back of the town. There was something mysterious in the friendship, I think," said the tall, fair-haired concierge. "Madame was never seen publicly with His Highness, though she went to Monte Carlo each evening."

"And Miss Symington? What of her?"

"She was extremely friendly with Madame Demarest. They were inseparable. The young lady was very pretty, and had a host of admirers."

Gordon Latimer learnt but little more, so that same evening they took the *rapide* back to Paris. At Marseilles Jacquinet got out and bought several newspapers to read on the long night journey, for there was no *wagon-lit* upon the train. He was seated again in the corner of the compartment when he gave a start, and handed the *Temps* to his companion opposite.

As Latimer read his eyes started out of his head.

It was a report of a sensational discovery made in the courtyard of a dingy old house in the Montrouge quarter of Paris, where a well-dressed young girl had been found at three o'clock in the morning lying dead. She had apparently taken poison, for a bottle was lying near. She had been identified as a young English girl named Mary Symington, who was staying at the Ritz Hotel with a friend, Madame Demarest.

The two men were alone in the compartment.

"Is it suicide or murder?" asked Latimer. "Remember, the Prince left her his fortune!"

"That we must determine, and at once," replied the journalist, who was a man of action. He dashed along to the guard and ascertained that the next stop was at Avignon.

Back to his friend he rushed, saying:

"You go on to Paris. I'll get out at Avignon and ring up Dubosq. He will place a watch upon the elusive and mysterious woman who calls herself Garcia, or Demarest. On arrival in Paris go at once to the Sûreté, and tell him all we know. Meanwhile, after warning him, I will follow you."

"Good! I strongly suspect that the English girl has met with foul play. If so, it proves that the

Prince is already dead. If he were not, there would be no motive in removing the girl."

"It might be suicide!--a love affair with the Prince might even be suggested."

"I think not. But we shall know before long--when our inquiries are complete," said Jacquinot.

At that moment they were running into the big station of Avignon. It was three o'clock in the morning, and the place was deserted except for the railway officials. Jacquinot bade *au revoir* to his companion, and, taking his small bag, descended to the platform, while the big engines were changed before the night express roared on again upon its journey to the capital.

Without much trouble he found the station-master's office, and asked for use of the telephone "for police services." The clerk on night duty ushered him into an inner office where the instrument was installed, and closed the door.

In about a quarter of an hour the journalist found himself speaking to Dubosq who was in bed at his flat in the Rue Royale.

The conversation was a long one, for the French journalist related practically all that has been chronicled here. When Dubosq was told the connection between the missing Prince and the dead English girl, Miss Symington, he uttered a cry of surprise, and said:

"I'll get up and see into the matter at once! We must keep that woman under observation. Thanks, my dear Jacquinot, you have done excellently. We shall piece together this jig-saw puzzle, never fear. You are coming on to Paris--Good! I will await you. *Bon soir!*"

And he rang off.

The journalist, having finished the night at the old-fashioned Hôtel de l'Europe, so well known to motorists on their way to the Riviera, continued his journey early, and arrived late in the afternoon in Paris.

In Dubosq's room at the Prefecture of Police there had assembled Latimer and Jacquinot, with the Baron d'Antenac and Dr. Plaud.

The latter was speaking:

"I have to-day examined the body of the supposed suicide. The poison used was prussic acid. The girl did not drink it for it was placed in a capsule and forced down her throat. She was murdered while unconscious, without a doubt. There is no trace of poison in her mouth. Water was used to wash down the capsule. The body must have been conveyed there in a motor-car, and the bottle placed beside it."

"The woman, Demarest, made a statement to one of my inspectors yesterday morning, saying that Mary had been very depressed of late owing to news of the death of her lover in New York, and had several times threatened suicide," said Dubosq. "The girl had gone out on the previous afternoon presumably to call upon a friend at Neuilly, and had not returned. When, however, I called at the Ritz Hotel after receiving the telephone message from Avignon, I found that Madame Demarest had left in a hired car at five o'clock on the previous evening for the country. I at once telephoned to Calais, Boulogne, and Dieppe, believing that she would try and escape to England, but up to the present she has not been seen."

"Then she has slipped through our fingers?" remarked the Baron.

"For the moment--yes," admitted Lucien Dubosq. "But already the net is spread across Europe, and she will fall into it ere long. I am never impatient. In the meantime, Messieurs," he added, "I trust you will continue your inquiries as to the fate of the missing Prince."

That night the Crimes Club held an extraordinary meeting at the Café de l'Univers at which all the members except Dubosq were present, the situation being minutely discussed, and resolutions passed concerning the further conduct of the case.

A suggestion was made that as the woman Garcia, alias Demarest, intended to escape, she would, in all probability, go into hiding with her mother in that obscure quarter of London, the street off the Old Kent Road.

With that surmise everyone agreed, and Latimer and Fernande Buisse--who had not been engaged actively on the case and therefore would be unsuspected--were to keep watch upon old Mrs. Vergette's house.

With that object they both took the next train to London, Dubosq remaining behind having promised to wire to them any information he could gather regarding the woman's movements. On arrival at Victoria they were met by a detective inspector from Scotland Yard, with a message from the chief of the Paris detective force, saying that from Antwerp he had ascertained that a woman answering the description of Mrs. Vergette's daughter had left Antwerp for Harwich on the previous night. So she was on her way to London.

The young French girl, wearing shabby clothes and a battered hat, and Latimer in his oldest clothes and a dirty handkerchief in lieu of a collar, set out for the Old Kent Road, and watched the corner of Mina Road incessantly for two whole days, until on the third, a stout, rather ill-dressed woman casually descended from a bus and walked along to the widow's house, at which she knocked and was admitted.

Latimer rushed to the nearest telephone, and within twenty minutes three detectives arrived at the corner of the road in a taxi.

They went straight to the house, but there a great surprise awaited them, Madame Garcia had evidently recognised Latimer as the affable young man whom she had met by the Mediterranean, for when the police entered they went upstairs to find her lying on the bed quite dead. She had committed suicide by poison!

The Crimes Club had, it was true, run the woman to earth, but the mystery of the Prince's fate remained unsolved, until three days later the valet, George Epites, who had apparently feared lest the evil woman Garcia should make reprisals if he dared to speak, made a most amazing confession at Scotland Yard. He had been afraid of her because he had acted as her tool in several nefarious matters.

At Biarritz, four years before, Prince Ernest had, it seemed, first met Madame Demarest, an extremely wealthy widow, and after a brief courtship he married her secretly, never dreaming that instead of being the relict of Monsieur Jean Demarest, the banker of Brussels, she was one of a gang of expert crooks of which the man now known as Garcia was the head. The vast funds that Madame had at her disposal were gained by robbery and fraud, she having been assisted by Epites until she contrived that he should become her husband's valet.

Husband and wife were frequently parted for months, because the Prince wished to keep his marriage secret from his family. They were in Paris together when one night the man Garcia robbed the Dutchman of his wallet, and passed half the contents on to the woman, who, in turn, gave the Prince some of the stolen English notes in exchange for French money which she wanted. She was in the habit of sending her mother two pounds each week, but a thought occurred to her to send a good, round sum in half-notes which would put her mother into funds, and she did this, little knowing that the numbers of the notes had been taken. It was that little slip that had proved her undoing.

She knew that her husband had become infatuated with Mary Symington, who was in reality one of the decoys of the gang, though she was supposed to be under the guardianship of her uncle, and from Epites Madame Garcia learnt that he had made a will in the girl's favour, revoking the will he had made in her own favour two years before. This, together with fierce jealousy, prompted her to plot with Garcia to take the lives of both the girl and the Prince, in which case the latter's fortune and insurance would come to her, and Garcia would share it.

The story was amazing enough, and would have created an enormous sensation had it been allowed to leak out to the Press. But the Greek Government begged both the police and the Crimes Club to suppress the truth, which they did.

It appears that the Prince, having been heavily drugged in the middle of the night of December 28th by his wife and her accomplices, was taken in a motor-car to a spot beyond Pangbourne, where the Thames runs close to the high road, and there thrown in. Thanks to Epites--who was, after all, loyal to his master--gaining knowledge of what was intended, he feigned illness, and went to the place beforehand, and with another Greek, a waiter he knew, lay in the shadow in a boat, ready to rescue the drowning man, which, after a terrible struggle with the strong current, they managed to do.

Epites took his master to a cottage close by, where the good people dried their clothes, and with a present of a couple of pounds the workman's wife was well satisfied and asked no questions.

The valet then took the Prince to Reading, where he went into obscure lodgings in a back street, and there remained incognito awaiting events, intending to suddenly reappear to denounce the murderess, while Epites, on his part, returned to Claridge's to await his master's reappearance.

An hour after Epites had made his statement, Prince Ernest was on his way to London to thank Latimer, Jacquinet, and the pretty Fernande, for elucidating facts of which he was in entire ignorance, and bringing the culprit to justice.

The French police were quickly on the heels of Garcia, who had been recognised as one of Europe's most desperate crooks, and found him in a small hotel in Bologna. He fired at a policeman who attempted to arrest him, and failing, put the pistol to his head and shot himself.

And till to-day the world knows nothing of the narrow escape of Prince Ernest, "The Man with the Squint."

CASE NUMBER FOUR THE ROGUE OF THE RUE ROYALE

About noon one December day a pretty young American girl with dark, shingled hair and a pair of big dark eyes peering forth from beneath a cinnamon *cloche* hat, very *chic* and smartly dressed in a brown coat trimmed richly with sable, stepped from a taxi outside Vine Street Police Station, in a state of great agitation, and inquired of the station-sergeant whether she could speak privately with the inspector on duty.

Politeness is always proverbial with the Metropolitan Police; hence she was at once ushered into the small, bare office in which, seated at a table, busy with correspondence, was Inspector Charles Clay, tall, good-looking, and rosy-faced, well known in the West End, and a terror to evil-doers.

She gave her name as Miss Greta Wilbur, daughter of Curtis J. Wilbur, the international banker, of Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, but at the moment staying at the Carlton Hotel, on a voyage round the world with her aunt, Mrs. Grayson, and a maid.

Mention of the name of Wilbur caused the Inspector to evince a great interest in her, for only a couple of days before he had read in the newspaper that the daughter of old Curtis Wilbur, the multi-millionaire, was in London, and that, with the huge fortune left to her a year before by her uncle, and the money she would inherit from her father, she being an only child, she would be one of the richest women in the world.

"I'm in great distress," she said with a pleasant American accent. "I've lost all my jewels. They've been stolen!"

"That is most unfortunate," exclaimed the Inspector. "Are they very valuable?"

"About twenty thousand pounds, exclusive of my ruby cross," she replied.

"Are they insured?"

"They were, but the policy ran out only a week ago. I discovered that it had lapsed, and wrote to my father in Philadelphia about it, but he has not got my letter. I only posted it three days ago."

"What a great pity!" Clay remarked. "It is always so with insurances. Will you try and explain in as much detail as you can how you discovered your loss." And he took a sheet of ruled foolscap from the rack and placed it upon his blotting pad, at the same time inwardly remarking as to the girl's wonderful beauty. It was not given to every inspector of Metropolitan Police to interview one of the richest girls in the world.

"Well, I was going to a luncheon party to-day at Lady Somerby's, and when I went to my jewel-case, I unlocked it, and found it empty."

"It had been emptied, and relocked--eh?"

"Yes."

"Whom do you suspect? Your maid, a servant at the hotel, a thief staying there as a visitor?"

"Neither. The jewel-case was not at the hotel. Before I arrived in London a friend advised me to rent a safe at the Universal Safe Deposit Company in Holborn, and for the past two months I have kept my jewels there. The value, I told you, does not include the large ruby cross which the late Tsaritzza gave to the mock-monk Rasputin, and which the Bolsheviks sold privately here in

London. Father gave a huge sum for it for a birthday present for me. That has gone, too!"

"Can you give me a description of the jewel?"

"I'll sketch it for you," she said, and being handed a pencil and a piece of paper, she drew a Maltese cross to scale with the jewel, each arm of the cross, as she explained, consisting of a perfectly matched pigeon's blood ruby an inch and a half long, cut from a broad edge to a tapering point, the four narrow ends being joined to a great cabochon emerald set as the centre.

"This shall be circulated at once," said Clay. "The thieves dare not dispose of such an ornament as that, for it must be one of the most valuable crosses in the world."

"Yes, my father says it is. That is why I placed it in the Safe Deposit vaults. I dare not let him know that I've lost it."

"At present remain silent about your loss, Miss Wilbur. Does anyone else know?"

"Not a soul. Not even my aunt. I came right away here."

She was in every way typical of the smart up-to-date American girl.

To the Inspector she dictated a list of the missing jewels with their description. In addition, there was in the jewel-case five thousand dollars in American bills.

Clay was not a man to lose time. Even while she sat in his room he spoke to Scotland Yard on the private telephone, giving a brief account of the robbery, together with a detailed description of the ruby cross.

"All right, Mr. Wagner. The lady will wait here for you. You're coming along in a taxi. Right!" he said into the telephone transmitter. Then he hung it up, and turning to the American girl, explained: "Superintendent Wagner of the Criminal Investigation Department is coming along to see you, Miss Wilbur. He will, no doubt, take you to the Metropolitan Safe Deposit vaults to make inquiries."

"It is awfully good of you, Mr.----"

"Clay," said the other. "Inspector Clay. It is only my duty, Miss. Don't distress yourself too much. We'll see what we can do to get them back."

Then he busied himself in giving orders to a constable to type out the list of the missing jewels.

"Oh!" she said suddenly. "There is one thing that I particularly want to get back. I value it above everything else--even more than the ruby cross which they say Rasputin was wearing round his neck when he was assassinated--and that is a round, plain ring like a wedding ring, but made of blued steel. There is an inscription on the inside."

Clay raised his head, and his eyes met hers. He saw that she hesitated.

"May I know what the inscription was?" he ventured to ask.

Her cheeks went a trifle red, and she held her breath.

"The inscription? Oh, yes," she faltered at last. "It was 'G.B.W. from C.G. 6.9.24.'"

"Three months ago!" remarked Clay aloud, instantly scenting romance.

"Yes. It was given to me by a friend last September. It--it was my mascot. I wouldn't lose it for anything."

Clay looked her straight in the face, and remarked with a smile:

"The 6th September was a day to be remembered--eh?"

The girl blushed, and nodded without replying.

Ten minutes later a rather dapper, middle-aged man in a grey overcoat and hard felt hat entered the office abruptly, and Clay introduced him as Superintendent Wagner, a man who, being one of the famous trackers of criminals, was one of the "Big Four" who direct the operations of the Criminal Investigation Department, and head of the famous Flying Squad. It was that squad that had already been turned out in consequence of Clay's conversation on the telephone. Already the printing machine was at work printing a description of Rasputin's cross for circulation among the police all over the country, for when a crime of any magnitude is reported all goes like clockwork at the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Half an hour later, Greta Wilbur and Henry Wagner were seated in the office of the secretary of the Universal Safe Deposit Company in Holborn discussing the clever robbery. The vaults of the company were of the very latest pattern, bomb-proof, burglar-proof, fire-proof, and entirely impregnable, inasmuch as each night the whole of the basement of the huge building in which they were situated was flooded with water which, in the morning, was pumped out before the treble steel doors could be opened.

"For an outsider to get access to the safe is utterly impossible," declared the bald-headed secretary, astounded and perturbed by the visit of the well-known official from Scotland Yard.

In the room was the armed and uniformed doorkeeper, an ex-sergeant of police whom Wagner knew well, and the clerk whose duty it was to take signatures of all safe-renters, to establish their identity, and hand them the second key without which their safe could not be unlocked. The register of signatures lay open on the secretary's desk, and showed that at one-fifty-eight p.m., two days before, Greta Wilbur had signed her name and been handed the pass key of safe No. 2819.

"Is that your signature?" asked Wagner eagerly.

"It is," the American girl admitted. "But I did not come here two days ago, and I did not sign the book."

The bald-headed secretary shrugged his shoulders.

"I think you must be mistaken, Miss," said the clerk. "I recollect handing you the key. You had just had a tooth out, you told me, and you held a handkerchief to your face. You signed the book, showed me your key, and I gave you the pass key."

"I certainly did not!" protested the girl indignantly.

"But excuse me, Miss, I'm quite certain that you did."

"I have been at Brighton for four days, and only returned to London this morning," she said.

"Well, Miss Wilbur, it seems that the attendants saw you and recognised you, and that you had the jewel-case in your possession last Tuesday morning. If that is so you cannot expect us to be liable for the contents of the case," said the secretary.

"But I was not in London. My aunt can testify to that."

"Was she with you all day on Tuesday?" asked Wagner. "Did you lunch with her at Brighton?"

"Certainly I did--at the Metropole."

It was plain that the secretary, the clerk, and the attendant were all of opinion that the pretty young girl had taken the jewels herself, an opinion which Superintendent Wagner also shared.

Her motive in pretending they had been stolen was quite obscure, but her signature, a difficult one to forge, combined with her identification by both the doorkeeper and clerk, made it plain that she had been there, and perhaps she was now suffering from a lapse of memory.

The large jewel-case covered with red morocco stood upon the secretary's table. Wagner inspected the patent lock very minutely, working the complicated works backward and forward slowly with the key which Miss Wilbur had given him.

"You say that this case was locked when you took it out of the safe?" he asked her.

"Yes. I unlocked it, and to my amazement I found it empty."

"You are quite sure you found it locked?"

"I am positive."

"The thief opened it with a false key and relocked it. That shows that he or she was in no hurry."

"There were some letters there which I would not have allowed out of my possession for anything," the girl said.

"Love letters, perhaps?" laughed Mr. Wagner.

The pretty American blushed and smiled.

"Ah!" remarked Wagner. "I expect the contents of this case are already on the other side of the Channel and broken up. The ruby cross is in Amsterdam, without a doubt, and so altered that you would never recognise it. Jewel thieves act boldly and quickly. The theft took place at two o'clock. Probably one of the gang left Victoria for the Continent by the four o'clock service."

An hour later Wagner sat in Mrs. Grayson's private sitting-room at the Carlton, and broke the news of the theft to her. Afterwards, he questioned her regarding her niece's movements on the previous Tuesday, and was told that they lunched together at the Metropole Hotel, Brighton, that day.

Therefore, that Miss Greta was suffering from a lapse of memory might be ruled out. Yet Wagner, when once suspicious, was not easily misled. The elderly American lady, rather elegantly dressed, might, for some purpose or other, be hiding a rapid journey of her niece's to London and back. Still, the fact that the insurance had lapsed rather led to the conclusion that the theft was genuine, and, if so, it was extremely cleverly planned.

In the succeeding weeks Scotland Yard did everything in its power to discover the person, or persons, by whose hands the jewels had been spirited out of the locked safe. All pawnbrokers and dealers in precious stones were warned, inquiries made in certain quarters only known to the Criminal Investigation Department, and a thorough comb-out made of all the expert jewel thieves known to be at large. Indeed, it was discovered that by the four o'clock train which left Victoria for Folkestone on the day of the theft, the detective on duty at the barrier had noticed that a man, known in the underworld as "Clemmy Jix," *alias* Lord Oranford and a dozen other names, a well-known jewel thief, who had spent years in French and English prisons for his clever sleight-of-hand trickery upon jewel-cases, had left for the Continent. With him was a young lady in rich furs very much his junior. As they walked to the Pullman, they looked like the doting father and his daughter. They were on their way to the Riviera, for they had tickets for Nice. That was on Tuesday. It was not until Friday that the inquiry was made, and by that time, of course, "Clemmy Jix" had passed out to the Riviera. Quickly on the trail, Wagner went to Boulogne and on to Nice, where he found that two persons named Clarkson, who had *wagon-lit* tickets to the Côte d'Azur on the day in question, had not given up either their sleeping-car vouchers or their tickets. This

showed that two passengers, a man and a woman, had not travelled south from Boulogne. Hence, he surmised that on landing they had taken the slow train along to Calais, and waited for the night express to Brussels, and so to Amsterdam, the metropolis of the gem trade, and where there are many "fences" in the industry of re-cutting precious stones.

Though weeks went on, that was as far as the English, Belgian, and French police could get. Not a single article of the missing jewellery came upon the illicit market. The contents of Greta Wilbur's jewel-case had disappeared as if by magic.

Though the millionaire's daughter and Mrs. Grayson remained in London, hoping to hear news of the recovery of the girl's property, and especially the letters about which the girl worried daily, not a single clue was forthcoming. Scotland Yard acknowledged itself beaten, and Wagner himself could see no rift in the cloud of mystery.

In all the secret inquiries made by the police in the underworld of London, and especially in certain dance clubs in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus, not one clue was found. The only suspicion of a clue came from Monsieur Berenger, inspector of the fourth division of the *police mobile* stationed at Boulogne. He traced the movements of "Clemmy Jix" and his young lady companion to Calais. They had a late meal at the terminus buffet, and early in the morning they left for Brussels. There they spent the day at an obscure hotel opposite the station, and in the evening bought tickets for Rotterdam. But he could find no evidence of their arrival there. Meanwhile, old Curtis Wilbur was cabling to his daughter to return home to Philadelphia. Her cousin was to be married, and she had to grace the ceremony. Her excuses puzzled him. Mrs. Grayson supported her by pleading illness, and consequently inability to travel. The real reason was that Greta hoped against hope to recover her lost treasures, including that little packet of letters, the loss of which had grown upon her nerves so much that she suffered from insomnia each night.

Such was the case placed before the secret council of criminologists, that Council of Ten in Paris who called themselves the Crimes Club, in imitation of the Crimes Club of London, of which the chronicler of these happenings is one of the original members.

It was a complete enigma. At their monthly meeting on February 14th, the situation was seriously discussed by the ten members, comprising the most exclusive club in the world, all of whom were present. The consensus of opinion was that the statement of Mrs. Grayson was unreliable, and that Greta Wilbur had taken the jewels herself. Her identification by the two servants of the Safe Deposit Company could not be refuted, as it would be held as evidence before any jury in a court of law.

For five hours the Crimes Club, seated at their big round table with doors locked, discussed it.

Lucien Dubosq, as was usual, placed the facts before the club, but refrained from discussing them. They had been sent to him in the usual course of information from Scotland Yard, and he had, in turn, referred the matter to the members of the club.

"I cannot see what motive the young lady had in stealing them if she really was the thief," remarked the white-haired Dr. Plaud. "Personally, I am of opinion that they were stolen by some person unknown."

"But how can we dismiss the evidence of identification by two persons who saw and spoke to the girl at the Safe Deposit vaults? She wore the same clothes, a brown coat trimmed with sable, and a felt *cloche* hat to match," remarked Maître Tessier, whose legal mind dwelt always upon evidence, either direct or circumstantial. "Apparently they had no difficulty in recognising her. She wore the same clothes and carried the same handbag."

"The identification I dismiss," declared Plaud firmly. "I do not think that the girl stole her own jewels. If they were heavily insured one might form another conclusion."

The journalist, Jacquinot, held the lawyer's opinion, but Latimer was inclined to agree with the doctor's views.

"Miss Wilbur and her aunt are still in London," the former remarked. "The girl apparently dare not go home and tell her father of her loss. If 'Clemmy Jix' did take Rasputin's cross to Amsterdam, the police there can find no trace of it. Personally, I believe the young lady to be an artful minx. At any rate, the Safe Deposit people have repudiated all responsibility, and rightly so to my mind."

Fernande Buysse spoke for the first time, saying in French:

"Surely we have discussed this affair quite long enough. Are we to make our own inquiries or are we not? If we are, I will assist most readily. I should like to meet this much-travelled millionaire's daughter."

The club eventually decided to endeavour to elucidate the mystery and fix upon the culprit--they were to begin where the police of Europe had failed. Theirs was always from the start a forlorn task. It was only when those ten expert criminologists began to pit their brains against the criminal's that their keen interest caused them to persevere in patience towards their goal. In such cases the smallest incidents or events were always examined microscopically, for many a culprit had been run to earth by the very slightest suspicion excited--a suspicion at first unfounded, perhaps abandoned and then reconsidered and followed.

In consequence of the club's decision the toxicologist, Dr. Plaud, Gordon Latimer, and the shrewd, smartly-dressed Fernande, came to London two days later, and put up at a private hotel in Cromwell Road. Latimer, however, removed to the Carlton on the following day, taking a room in the same corridor as was Mrs. Grayson's suite.

They made no sign to Superintendent Wagner, but simply followed the millionaire's daughter about in order to learn her habits. Old Dr. Plaud went to Holborn, where he rented a safe in order to discover the routine and red tape consequent upon a renter going to his safe to open it. The first day he was in possession of the safe he brought a brick wrapped in brown paper and heavily sealed, which he deposited in it. To the clerk who handed him his pass key, he was a fussy old foreigner, impatient, yet polite.

Meanwhile, Fernande and Gordon took turns in keeping observation upon the smart, go-ahead American girl. Her aunt, though elderly, was in quite a good set in Mayfair, and she and her niece were constantly out at receptions, parties, dinners and dances. Sometimes they went to Ciro's, or the Embassy, and on two occasions an artist friend of theirs took them to that gay Bohemian dance-club, the Hambone, near Piccadilly Circus.

On the night Latimer followed them there he, knowing a member, sought him out and spent the evening, eating for supper one of the succulent kippers which are such a feature of the place. He rubbed shoulders with her on the crowded dance floor, where she fox-trotted with the artist, none in that artistic circle dreaming that the pretty girl who danced so well was one of the richest girls in the world.

Just before midnight a tall, thin man with bushy black hair, and wearing a brown velveteen jacket, lounged in, and halting before a table where Miss Wilbur and her aunt were drinking Russian tea, bowed low and sat down to chat. The girl introduced her aunt, whereupon he made a most courtly bow.

Presently they danced together, and as Latimer watched, he saw that as they went round they were holding a very serious conversation in secret. Was it an assignation? It looked as though it was, for after the dance he took her to her table, bowed and then leaving her, went straight out.

Of his friend, Latimer inquired who the bushy-haired man was.

"Oh! he's a sculptor--a Spaniard named Juan Herrero--lives in Chelsea--comes here a lot to dance," was his friend's reply.

"Do you know the American girl over there with the dark, shingled hair and the silver tissue dress?" asked Latimer, indicating Miss Wilbur.

"No. Except that I've see her here twice. She seems to meet Herrero."

Miss Wilbur and her aunt left the club at one o'clock, just as the fun was at its height, for after the theatres many stage notabilities drop in for a drink and a dance. Latimer followed them as far as Shaftesbury Avenue, where they hailed a cab, and he heard the elder lady tell the driver to take them to the Carlton.

Latimer saw that if he continued his surveillance upon the girl, he would be compelled to leave the Carlton, therefore he wrote to Paris to the Baron Edouard d'Antenac, asking him to come at once to London and take up his quarters in the hotel in his place.

To this he consented, and three days later the Baron, who spoke English extremely well, installed himself in the room which Gordon Latimer had vacated.

The vigilance of the watchful quartet remained unrewarded. As far as Scotland Yard was concerned they had made every effort to trace Rasputin's cross and the other jewels, but in vain, and now they relied upon the meagre chance of it coming into the market from abroad. It was more than likely that it had either gone to India to be offered to one or other of the native princes, or had been broken up and reset. The rubies were among the most valuable in the world; hence it was somewhat improbable that they would be recut, for such was their size that their value would be lost.

One day, while Mrs. Grayson and her niece were out, the maid being also out, the Baron, in pretence of mistaking his room, entered their private suite. It was a very cosy and artistic place, the sitting-room carpeted in pearl grey, with satinwood furniture, and a piano in the same wood. Upon the table stood a bowl of red tulips, and books were lying in an armchair before the fire.

The room on the left was evidently Mrs. Grayson's, while that on the right, communicating with the bath-room, was the girl's, for her brown coat trimmed with fur and her small brown hat were hanging upon a peg behind the door. The Baron, after a swift glance round, noted that the girl had carelessly left her purse and a wrist-watch set in diamonds upon her dressing-table, together with her keys, her gold cigarette-case and match-box. He crossed to the door behind which hung the coat, and found it unlocked. Through it he passed out into the corridor.

Evidently the girl was grossly careless of her valuables.

That day Fernande was keeping observation as usual upon the two ladies, who had gone to Kensington shopping. Just at noon, while they were at Barker's, the girl made some excuse to her aunt, left her and, hurrying out, went along to High Street Kensington Station close by, where, at the booking-office, she was met by a tall, thin foreigner with bushy black hair--the Spaniard, Juan Herrero. The man in a few quick sentences told her something which caused her instantly to turn pale. She seemed staggered at what he had said, and almost reeled.

She was silent for a few moments, evidently greatly upset. Then she uttered a few rapid words in

an undertone, raising her fingers to impress upon him what she said, and grasping his hand, evidently thanking him, she left and rejoined her aunt, while the sculptor hailed a taxi and drove in the direction of the Albert Hall.

When the four met in Cromwell Road that afternoon the incident was related by Fernande, and all wondered what part the romantic Spanish sculptor was playing in the life of the American millionaire's daughter.

That same night the Baron dined in the grill room at the hotel, but noticed that Mrs. Grayson dined alone at her usual table, her niece being absent. He knew that the others had relinquished their watchfulness and left it to him that night, therefore he was angry with himself that she had managed to slip out unobserved. He, however, waited for her return, which was not till past midnight. She could not have been out to dinner or a theatre with friends, for she was in her plainest walking dress, and wore a mackintosh, the weather being showery.

Next morning he learnt from the chambermaid that Mrs. Grayson was not very well, but soon after ten o'clock her niece, dressed as she had been on the previous night, left the hotel and took a taxi to Chelsea, being followed by the Baron in another taxi. At the farther end of Cheyne Walk she alighted, paid the man, and then hurried up Ashburnham Road to King's Road, which she crossed, and went up an obscure thoroughfare called Fernshaw Road, which ran through to the Fulham Road.

It was evident from the furtive manner she looked behind her she was suspicious of being watched, but presently she halted before a rather shabby-looking house, the curtains of which were stained yellow with fog and smoke, and running up the steps, let herself in with a latch-key.

The Baron waited till four o'clock, when at last she emerged and drove back to the Carlton. He still remained to see who else came forth, and he was not surprised to see, about a quarter of an hour later, Juan Herrero come out and walk away.

Next day Fernande took his place in King's Road at the corner of Fernshaw Road, and sure enough, about eleven o'clock, the young American girl passed along and entered the dingy house with her latch-key. She remained there only about an hour, and was back at the Carlton in time to lunch with her aunt. For a whole week, indeed, she paid daily visits to that house, and on each occasion when she left, Herrero, the sculptor, would emerge and go to the nearest bar for a drink. The natural conclusion was, of course, that the pair were lovers, a suspicion which was confirmed by the fact that they were never seen together in the street. Latimer had learnt that the sculptor had his studio at the rear of the house, and lived there with two other men, both of whom were artists who were travelling abroad.

It now became quite plain why the girl remained in London instead of returning home to Philadelphia. Her aunt was, of course, in utter ignorance of the love affair, and her niece excused her absences by telling Mrs. Grayson that a girl named Harrison, whom they had met in Rome, and who lived at Palace Gate, was constantly asking her to meet her and go about London with her.

The quartet of criminologists felt that their watchfulness had only resulted in the discovery of a little love romance, for what more natural than that a smart, pretty, go-ahead girl should fall in love with a good-looking young Spaniard, and a sculptor to boot.

Was he modelling her in clay? The whole four, after much discussion, formed that conclusion, and were about to return to Paris with the mystery of the jewel robbery unsolved, when Latimer, while watching the house in Fernshaw Road, made a curious discovery.

It was a crisp morning in the middle of March, and the sun shone brightly, an unusual morning in

London. Greta Wilbur had entered the house half an hour before when suddenly the door opened, and there emerged Herrero and a grey-bearded little old man bearing between them a long invalid carriage on rubber-tyred wheels, upon which lay stretched full length a thin-faced, pallid young man of about twenty-three, who looked extremely ill, and was evidently suffering from some spinal ailment.

The two men carried him very carefully down the steps and placed the carriage upon the pavement, when the girl came hurrying down and made some remark to the poor invalid, who smiled sadly, and taking her hand, looked gratefully up into her face.

The elder man returned up the steps while the sculptor slowly pushed the helpless young fellow along, Greta walking at his side. No second glance was required to realise that, instead of her entertaining affection for the sculptor, the love look in her eyes was for his friend, the pallid invalid who now and then seized her hand and held it tenderly as she walked slowly at his side.

Soon after crossing King's Road they reached Cheyne Walk, and there went along in the quiet by the river, a truly pathetic trio.

Latimer wondered if the poor invalid, who looked so ill and in terribly straitened circumstances, ever dreamed that his devoted companion was one of the richest girls in the world.

At a distance he followed them to the corner of the Albert Bridge, watching the charming little romance which was so unexpected. There they halted, and the tall sculptor discreetly left them, and, crossing, went into a public-house. She stood beside the man she loved so devotedly, and while he held her hand, again furtively so that nobody should notice, he looked up at her and spoke what were undoubtedly words of gratitude and love.

On their way back they passed a fruiterer's, when she left him, returning with a basket of the most expensive hothouse grapes, which she put into his thin, nerveless hand.

Subsequently they reached the house again, and the same grey-bearded old man helped Herrero to carry in the invalid.

It was nearly one o'clock. Therefore a quarter of an hour later the American girl emerged, and hurrying into King's Road, took a taxi back to her aunt.

Latimer lingered in the vicinity as usual, and he received a great surprise when, ten minutes or so later, the sculptor came forth accompanied by the clean-shaven invalid, who had removed the pallor from his cheeks and the darkness from his eyes, and laughing gaily, walked as airily as his companion along to that bar which the sculptor always patronised.

He had changed into a dark blue suit, and with a grey felt hat and gold-mounted cane he presented a smart, even gentlemanly, appearance. Greatly interested, and feeling certain that neither of the men had noticed him while he had followed them, Latimer allowed a few minutes to elapse when, acting with boldness, he entered the bar where they were. There were three other men present, but the instant he entered, the conversation between Herrero and the invalid stopped. The sculptor offered the other a cigarette while Latimer ordered his drink. Then he heard Herrero say in a low voice to his companion:

"You're getting on fine with the crutches. It can't be delayed very long now."

"I've fixed it for this day week."

"And the best of luck to you, dear old Charlie. Have another?"

And they did.

The young man addressed as Charlie certainly was no invalid, and Latimer became more than ever puzzled. That Greta Wilbur was devoted to him was very plain by the manner in which she walked by his side as he lay prostrate, now and then taking his thin hand and looking so fondly into his face from time to time.

At Cromwell Road, half an hour later, he related to his companions the pathetic incident he had witnessed, and how swift had been the invalid's recovery.

"She is evidently being fooled," remarked Fernande. "But for what purpose?"

"That is for us to discover," said Dr. Plaud.

"But is it worth while to carry our inquiries any further?" queried the Baron. "The girl simply has a lover who is imposing upon her."

"I think we should still watch the progress of this little love drama," the doctor said. "He is evidently playing the invalid in order to arouse her sympathy. Besides, something is to happen next Friday--this day week. Let us till then take turns in watching not only the girl, but this mysterious 'Charlie' when he throws off the guise of invalid."

This course was adopted, and they found that each morning when fine, the American girl, wearing her mackintosh to hide the smartness of her dress, would walk at the side of the invalid along Cheyne Walk and through the quieter streets of the vicinity. The sight of the two devoted friends, the one pushing the helpless one lying on his back, his pale face on the pillow, and the girl who loved him, chatting as they walked, always excited pity.

Soon it was found, however, that Charles Glenister, for that was his name, led a very hectic and Bohemian life, for each evening he went to the West End where, at the night clubs in Soho, he met all sorts of questionable people. The sculptor was usually with him when he gave frequent supper parties regardless of their cost. From the way he spent money it was clear that he was possessed of considerable funds.

One morning Glenister had so far recovered that he was able to appear on crutches. His left foot was held from the ground in a sling, and he managed to struggle along slowly with the sculptor on one side of him and Greta on the other. They did not get very far, however, for the lame man declared that it was too tiring, so they returned. As soon as the girl had gone he washed his face, changed his clothes, and with his companion took a taxi to the Criterion, where they lunched exceedingly well.

Through the whole week the actions of Glenister were most mysterious and puzzling. Friday came, and Latimer, whose turn it was to keep watch, was loitering at the corner of the road, when he saw a taxi drive up to the house. In a moment he hailed another taxi himself, to be in readiness to follow if necessary.

It was well that he did this, for a few minutes later the invalid descended the steps on crutches, followed by Herrero and Greta who, instead of wearing her mackintosh, wore her handsome sable-trimmed coat. Glenister having entered the taxi with great difficulty, the other two got in. As it drove away, Latimer followed closely behind. They drove to a street off the Kensington High Street where they pulled up before an office building. Next instant Latimer was out and had paid his man. Just then the Spaniard got out of the taxi, and, glancing at his watch, told his companions that there were still ten minutes to spare.

Latimer took in the situation at a glance, for he noticed that a brass plate beside the door announced that it was the office of the Registrar of Marriages. Therefore he pulled from his pocket a long official blue envelope, and carrying it in his hand as though bent on business, he

bustled in, and passing the swing doors, asked to see the Registrar on very urgent business. He was shown in, and found a white-haired old gentleman seated at a table ready to perform the marriage that had been arranged.

In a few brief sentences he explained the situation--that the girl was a millionaire's daughter upon whom the man was imposing, and he begged the official to find some flaw in the notices, and thus delay the wedding till the following day so that he might place the matter before Scotland Yard. Further, he told the Registrar the reason he and his fellow-members of the Crimes Club were in London.

"I quite understand, Mr. Latimer. Leave the matter to me," the Registrar said. "Please ask the police to communicate with me. There will be no marriage to-day."

"You will, I beg of you, arouse no suspicion," urged Latimer.

"I shall be extremely cautious. But you had better go, as they will be here in a moment."

And he rose and showed him the way out by a side door.

Half an hour later, accompanied by Doctor Plaud, Gordon Latimer sat in Superintendent Wagner's room at Scotland Yard, and explained what they had discovered concerning the young lady who had lost her jewels, and who was now being imposed upon and tricked into marriage.

As soon as he heard the strange story, he spoke to the Registrar over the telephone and learnt from him that they were returning at eleven o'clock the following day.

Then he took note of the number of the house in Fernshaw Road, and asked Latimer to accompany him there and wait till the men emerged. They waited till just before half-past two, when the pair emerged and, as usual, walked to their favourite bar.

Wagner's eyes followed them with a look of keen interest combined with surprise.

"All right," he said to Latimer. "I may have something to tell you to-morrow."

The story which next evening the superintendent related to the quartet from Paris, who assembled at his invitation in his room, was truly an amazing one.

It appeared that as soon as he saw Herrero and Glenister, he recognised them as well-known jewel thieves, who were believed to be in prison on the Continent. Miss Wilbur had met them in Florence in the autumn, and they had not been long in discovering that she possessed some very valuable jewels. "Tricky" Davis, *alias* Glenister, who was known to the Paris Sûreté as "The Rogue of the Rue Royale" on account of a big swindle he once engineered from an imposing office in the Rue Royale, began to make violent love to her, and in order to enlist her sympathy pretended to be suffering from a spinal ailment. Soon they became great friends, inasmuch as, believing the devoted pair to be poor, she one day gave Glenister a hundred pounds to pay their fare to London, so that they might be near her. This is exactly what the pair of crooks desired. They wanted to be near the jewels. In Florence the case was kept in the bank, so it was impossible to get possession of it. Furthermore, an armed messenger was sent with it from the Florence bank to the Safe Deposit Company in London. Hence, the two ladies did not carry the valuables with them on their journey to England.

It was not long, however, before the Spaniard, while Glenister engaged the girl's attention, abstracted her keys and took wax impressions of the key to the jewel box and also the one which opened the safe. And next day Glenister spent hours in making faithful copies of her rather bold signature, which he had upon some letters she had written to him.

Several times in secret they watched her go to the Safe Deposit, and so learned the formalities

necessary to obtain the pass key. Therefore there only remained the necessity of making a bold coup. While Mrs. Grayson and Greta were at Brighton, Glenister, who had taken a room near theirs, succeeded in getting one of the girl's coat-frocks, her fur-trimmed coat, hat and handbag. These he carried to Fernshaw Road, and next afternoon, attired in them--for his nick-name "Tricky" had been earned by his cleverness in disguising himself as a woman--he took a taxi first to Charing Cross and then to Holborn. He signed the book without hesitation, being careful that the clerk should not see his right hand, and at the same time holding a handkerchief with his left to his face, and mumbling something about having had teeth out.

He was given the key, and breathed more easily as he walked into the vault and found the door of the little safe, which yielded to the complicated key he had had cut.

A few moments sufficed to unlock the jewel box, stuff its contents, together with a steel ring, the letters he had written her, and the bank-notes into his pockets, and relock the box. Then he gave up the key, and a few moments later was in a taxi driving to Victoria Station. There he waited for ten minutes or so, and then took another taxi to King's Road, where he alighted and walked to Fernshaw Road.

"This morning when they arrived at the Registrar's office the two men found a little surprise awaiting them," Wagner went on. "I arrested them, whereupon the bride elect promptly fainted. But a couple of hours later I gave her a surprise rather more pleasant, for I asked her to call here and identify these."

And opening a battered old bag, he displayed to them Rasputin's magnificent cross and the whole of the splendid jewels intact. The bank-notes were, however, missing.

"On searching the house after the men's arrest we found this beneath a floor-board which had recently been removed," he said. "Thanks to your vigilance not only is the mystery of the robbery solved, but the plunder has been recovered, and the millionaire's daughter has been snatched from the vile marriage trap by which the precious pair of criminals hoped to gain very considerably, because she has a fortune in her own right. They are both old hands, and have been convicted before. No doubt they'll get ten years each this time."

And they did.

Greta Wilbur is now back in her father's princely house in Philadelphia, thankful to the Crimes Club, which not only recovered her jewels, but rescued her from marriage with that notorious young thief known in Paris as "The Rogue of the Rue Royale."

CASE NUMBER FIVE THE CROOKED SOU

"But why is it crooked?" asked Maurice Jacquinot.

He held in his hand, closely scrutinising it, a French copper coin of one sou, worn almost smooth by many years of handling, but still bearing quite legibly the head of Napoleon III. It was a thin little coin, a French halfpenny, not quite round, for a little piece had been broken off on one side deliberately and not by wear and tear. Yet its crookedness, three heavy dents across it, as though to disfigure the face of the head of the last Empire, was most apparent. In addition, it was bent hollow and had a hole pierced in it. Some heavy mechanical force must have been used to treat the humble coin in that manner.

Such was the view of the secret assembly seated around the club table on that warm August night.

The *haut monde* was at the little seaside *trous*, including such places as Deauville, Dinard and Granville, and Paris was given over to the cheap, gaping tourist from all corners of the earth. Though the capital was *en campagne*, yet the so-called *attractions* and *galas* still flourished for the benefit of the foreigner, without whom the Montmartre could not exist.

"An enigma! A complete enigma!" declared the Baron d'Antenac, placing his monocle in his eye. To strangers he looked an empty-headed man of means, prone to an exotic life of indulgence and over-eating, yet his real nature was exactly the contrary. No keener student of the psychology of crime was there in all France. When faced with a mystery he never rested until he, with other members of the club, had arrived at its solution.

The mystery surrounding the discovery of that bent and worn French halfpenny, which Jacquinot held in his fingers, was one which seemed beyond solution. The Brussels police, as well as Scotland Yard, had endeavoured to probe the curious affair, but without the least result. The Big Four in London and Monsieur Mommaert, chief of the Brussels Sûreté, with his excellent staff had made every effort before the matter was, as a last resource, referred to the Crimes Club for their opinion and assistance.

On that breathless evening with the noise of the Paris traffic and the incessant hooting of motor horns coming in through the open window, the affair had been briefly outlined by Professor Ernest Lemelletier, Dubosq being absent on vacation. His vacation was, as a matter of fact, a flying visit to Cairo after a certain pseudo-Baron who had murdered his lady secretary in Bordeaux. The Professor, lean and shrunken in his well-brushed black clothes, with the red rosette in his lapel, had recounted to the eight persons seated around the table the actual facts regarding that crooked sou as far as the police had been able to ascertain them.

It seemed that six months before, just after twelve o'clock on a very foggy February night in London, a young man-about-town, Gilbert Rothwell, only son of Sir Gilbert Dargate Rothwell, Baronet, of Broadstone Manor, Buckinghamshire, was passing along Howland Street, which runs between Cleveland Street and the Tottenham Court Road, on his way home to his rooms in Ryder Street, when, in the dense fog, he collided with an elderly, well-dressed man who had a young girl on his arm. He apologised, whereupon the girl began to pour forth upon her companion a torrent of abuse. Her voice was refined, and she was apparently a lady. Her companion uttered some words in a foreign language and disengaged his arm from hers, whereupon the girl gave vent to a loud scream, swayed forward, and fell to the pavement while the man, who was short

and stout, left her hurriedly and disappeared in the fog.

Next moment a passer-by came up from the gloom. He was a working-man of whom young Rothwell sought assistance. The pair tried to lift the fallen girl, but she was inert and silent, apparently having fainted. The working-man, whose name was Fawcett, hurried to the corner of the Tottenham Court Road, where he eventually found a constable, and subsequently the girl was conveyed to the Middlesex Hospital in the police ambulance, where, in the light, it was discovered that she was dead. She was well-dressed in a dead-black evening-gown with half-sleeves, beneath a rich fur coat, and wore two valuable rings, but when undressed, it was found that tied around her well-moulded left arm above the elbow and hidden by her sleeve, was a thin silken cord, which passed through a hole in a bent copper coin--the crooked French sou--the coin which Maurice Jacquinet at that moment held in his hand.

The two young surgeons and the two nurses at once saw that there had been foul play, and told the police constable so, while young Rothwell, to his surprise and chagrin, instantly found himself the central figure in a mysterious tragedy of the London streets.

The autopsy held on the following day revealed that the unknown girl had been killed in a very unusual manner, for in the nape of the neck, just visible because her hair was shingled, was a puncture so light as to be almost imperceptible. Examination of the tiny wound showed that a long, thin instrument, possibly a long pin, had been driven into the neck to the spinal cord, thus causing almost instant death.

The affair was a complete mystery. The girl's clothing was of the finest quality, but the identification was impossible, because there was nothing upon her to serve as a clue as to who she was. She carried no handbag--not even a handkerchief, while the laundry marks had been cut out of her linen, a fact which seemed to establish that the murder had been committed as the result of some deep plot. The only thing found was slipped in the wide fur cuff of her rich heavy coat, a tram-ticket which showed that its bearer had, five days before, travelled by electric tram from the Bourse, in Brussels, up the steep hill to the Porte Louise.

At the inquest, which, as the interests of justice, was so arranged that the reporters missed it, Gilbert Rothwell deposed to meeting the dead girl and her companion suddenly in the fog, and described the man as far as the distortions of a London fog at night with the unreal glow of the street lamps would allow. He was broad-faced, high-browed, with narrow-set eyes, and wearing round glasses. He had a dark beard, but no moustache--evidently a foreigner. That was how he described him. To the police he made an even more minute statement concerning the stranger's voice, the contour of his face, as far as he was able to discern, and gave every information possible. The result was that descriptions of the alleged murderer and his victim were circulated by every channel possible, and also broadcasted by wireless, a reward of £500 being offered for any information which would lead to the arrest of the man.

Every clue proved to be false. Weeks and months went by. Because of the ticket of the Tramways Bruxellois found in the girl's coat-cuff Monsieur Mommaert, chief of the Brussels police, made every effort to discover whether the girl had been staying at any of the many Brussels hotels. All that had been established was that a girl much resembling the victim, had been staying at the Hôtel du Trône, an unpretentious little place in the Rue Royale, at the time the tram ticket had been purchased. She had registered in the name of Mary Beeton, and had as companion a girl somewhat older than herself, named Edith Ray. They had occupied a double room, and were travelling under the auspices of a second-class tourist agency--not Cook's. Their tour was a cheap one by Harwich to the Hook of Holland, Rotterdam, Antwerp, six days in Brussels, up the Meuse to Namur and Dinant, back to Brussels, and returning via Antwerp to

Harwich and London. Both the proprietor and concierge of the hotel remembered them quite distinctly, because at about ten o'clock one night an Englishman had called and asked for Miss Beeton. She refused to see him, and insisting, he became so infuriated that at last she came down and went out for a walk with him, talking very excitedly as they left the hotel.

The description of the man did not, however, tally in the least with that of the man whom Gilbert Rothwell had seen in Howland Street. He was a tall, white-bearded old man, whereas the man suspected was a dark, extremely well-dressed foreigner. That the murderer was possessed of some surgical knowledge was shown by the manner in which the attack had been made, the doctors having demonstrated to the police with what consummate ease a person can be killed almost instantly by that means, and with no more formidable weapon than a lady's hat-pin. The swiftness and unerring manner in which the fatal blow had been struck astounded the investigators, who were baffled from the very outset.

Fortunately, the face of the murderer had been seen, and young Gilbert Rothwell declared that he would be able to recognise him again anywhere.

Time had passed, yet no girl answering the description was reported missing in England or in Belgium. At the inquest a verdict of "wilful murder" was returned, and then the enigma of the crooked sou had already been added by the police to the long list of London's unsolved mysteries.

For that reason the famous medico-legist, Professor Lemelletier, had placed the details briefly before the members of that exclusive little circle, the Crimes Club, and for an hour it had been discussed.

"And now, I presume, ladies and gentlemen, you would like to confer with the only person who saw the murderer's face--young Mr. Gilbert Rothwell," said the grey-haired expert in criminology. He rose, and unlocking the door, admitted a smartly-dressed, young Englishman, clean-shaven, with well-brushed hair. He bowed on entering, and the Professor, welcoming him, drew a chair to the round table for him.

In reply to a question from Jean Tessier, he gave a minute description of the tragic encounter in the fog, while the pretty Fernande Buisse regarded the new-comer approvingly.

"When I accidentally brushed up against her she turned upon me wildly, and then abused her companion," Rothwell said. "I just apologised, and her companion merely uttered a few foreign words. 'Come,' she said, 'let us go on. We shall be late!' Then next second she uttered a sharp cry, and as he unloosened her arm, she collapsed upon the pavement, while in an instant the man vanished from sight."

"Did you actually see his arm uplifted, ready to strike?" asked the Baron, much interested in the curious story.

"I noticed that he raised his arm, but I saw no blow struck. The shriek was a cry of pain, and she put her hand to the back of her head as she staggered. She tried to articulate some words. They seemed like 'Father! Father!' but I am not quite certain what they were. I was too startled at the suddenness of it all."

"Was the man a foreigner?" asked Gordon Latimer.

"I think so, but am not quite positive," was Rothwell's reply. "He was short, and rather stout. In the uncertain light thrown by the street lamp, through the fog, I took him to be a southerner, perhaps a Spaniard, on account of his dark beard and his quick, piercing eyes behind the big round spectacles."

"He might have been a doctor," remarked the *chic* little Fernande.

"And there is not the slightest clue to the identity of either the victim or the culprit?" remarked the stout, plethoric Baron, resting his elbows upon the table and looking across at the sole witness of the tragedy.

"Not the slightest. Superintendent Bawdon told me at Scotland Yard three days ago that, without knowledge of who the dead girl was, no motive could be assigned for the perpetration of the crime. It is a complete mystery."

"And the clue to the mysterious affair lies in this," declared Jacquinot, holding up the crooked French halfpenny. "What can it denote? Perhaps the unfortunate girl regarded it as a talisman, or, perhaps, she kept it to remind her of some lost or dead friend. At any rate, she treasured it. That she was not a common person is proved by her well-manicured hands; the perfume she used was one of the most exclusive and expensive; her clothes, even her lingerie, had, no doubt, been made in Paris at an expensive establishment, yet all the tabs bearing the name of the makers had been carefully cut out."

"Cut out purposely by those who plotted her death, Superintendent Bawdon thinks," remarked Rothwell. "It is evident that the murderer took every precaution to conceal his victim's identity, and yet, at the same time, he was audacious enough to strike down the girl in my presence."

"It seems incredible that he should have done so and been able to withdraw whatever weapon he used without you noticing his action," remarked Doctor Plaud, who had not hitherto spoken.

"I agree. But I was so taken aback by the girl's violent abuse that my interest was centred in her. And perhaps the more so because she was extremely good-looking," he admitted.

The entire absence of any clue as to the dead girl's identity rendered the mystery utterly inscrutable. But, as Professor Lemelletier pointed out, the club had successfully investigated several affairs in which clues had been wanting, hence there was no reason why they should not all combine in an endeavour to solve that latest problem. After a long discussion, in which the tragedy was thoroughly debated, it was resolved to assist the young Englishman in his determination to investigate further the brutal murder of the unknown girl.

So, without the least suspicion of a clue, the club began the investigation of one of the most remarkable mysteries of our modern London.

A few days later the ex-minister, Delcros, together with Jacquinot, Dr. Plaud and Mademoiselle Fernande, formulated a plan. It was the latter who suggested it. She would first go to Brussels and see Monsieur Mommaert, the Chief of Police. This she did. The clothing of the dead girl had been sent from Scotland Yard to Brussels for an expected identification, which was not realised, and Mademoiselle was allowed to examine the various garments at the Prefecture of Police. It was a pathetic little pile of delicate lingerie, soiled by the many police officials and others that had handled it. It lay upon the table in the cold, bare room. The black charmeuse evening-gown, the rich fur coat, and the smart patent shoes taken from a box by a detective, were placed on one side of the table, while on the other was the murdered girl's underclothing.

Fernande, who was alone with the detective, slowly examined every article. The man pointed out where the laundry marks and maker's tabs had been cut away, saying:

"They were evidently obliterated prior to the crime. Mademoiselle was, no doubt, in ignorance that precautions had been taken to destroy any clue to her identity."

"No doubt," remarked Fernande, as though speaking to herself as she held each piece of lingerie in her hand, spread it upon the table, and minutely examined it.

As she spread out a pretty camisole in ibis Siamese crêpe with ochre lace, she knit her brows thoughtfully. Several times she examined it, and then stood for a few moments pondering. Of the detective she requested the loan of a tape measure, and he went at once to obtain one. Again she spread the expensive little garment out upon the table and closely examined it, especially the position where the maker's name had been.

On obtaining the tape-measure she lost no time in carefully taking the measurements, and noting them upon a scrap of paper. A sweet odour greeted her nostrils as she did so, that of one of the most expensive and exclusive of all the Parisian perfumes.

Suddenly a thought occurred to her. The introduction from the club to Monsieur Mommaert had instantly opened the doors of the police department to her, therefore why should she not take advantage of it and request the loan of the dainty article of underwear for a few days?

With this end she again sought the Director of Police, who at once granted her request on condition that it should be returned.

That night, without making inquiry at the Hôtel du Trône, she eagerly travelled by the rapide back to Paris, and next morning, with the camisole in her little dispatch-case, called at the Maison Boulaye, in the Place Vendôme, that very expensive *couturière*, and asked to see Monsieur Neuville, its director.

Fernande Buysse was an expert in women's clothes, earning her living, as she did, by writing about fashions, and she had recognised the dead girl's camisole as one of M. Neuville's models of nine months before.

She explained her errand, and showed it to him, together with the measurements she had taken. The brown-bearded, elegant designer examined it critically, and, leaving her, went to his bureau where records were kept by the clerks.

On his return, he asked her to call on the morrow when a complete search would have been made for the name of the customer whose measurements coincided with those of the garment.

That night she called at Jacquinet's apartment, in the Rue du Bac, and explained what she had done, which at once aroused his interest. He was one of the keenest members of the club, for he was ever active and untiringly on the look-out for crime stories for *Le Journal*.

They sat together in the journalist's cosy room, she smoking the cigarette he had given her, while they discussed the difficult problem. They were old friends and fellow-workers, for she frequently contributed fashion articles to *Le Journal*, and he had long ago found her to be a very charming little companion, whose tastes were greatly in common with his own, and how in their criminal investigations she was not only astute but daring to a degree.

The hot summer's day was ending, and the red glow of sunset fell into the room as they chatted. Fernande looked very charming in her light summer gown and a black, close-fitting hat to match. She knew most of the fashionable *couturières* in Paris, hence she could always dress both well and cheaply.

"I am afraid you will have some difficulty in determining the woman for whom the camisole was made," Maurice remarked at last. "Yours is a worthy effort, without a doubt, and I wish you all success, Fernande. Let us go out to Armenonville and dine. We can afterwards have a stroll in the Bois. It will be cool. Besides, I have promised to meet Dupuis of the *Petit Parisien* there."

And so they went forth together to spend the evening. Later, when they returned to the Grand Café, they came across Gordon Latimer. The trio sat together in a corner and, over their coffee, further discussed the affair of the Crooked Sou.

"The mystery interests me very much," Latimer said. "If our inquiries lead us to London, I'll be ready to go there at any moment."

Next day Fernande called upon Monsieur Neuville.

"You are faced with considerable difficulties, Mademoiselle," declared the great dress designer. "Exactly the same design, the same material and the same exact measurements have been supplied to seven different customers. Since last December we have ceased to make that design."

"May I have their names and addresses?" asked the lady journalist eagerly.

In a few minutes the list was handed to her. There were seven names, but only five addresses. The other two customers had been staying at Paris hotels, one at the Ritz and the other at the Chatham. The first name was that of the Baronne de Fontaneilles, of the Château Thiaville, in the Vosges, who was well known in Paris society, and being middle-aged, was certainly not the victim of the tragedy in Howland Street. Neither was the second person to whom a similar garment had been supplied, Mademoiselle Yvonne Vierzy, the lady artist, living at Barbizon. There were three others whose addresses were given, and the two who had been temporarily in Paris were evidently Americans, their respective names being Stevens and Marsden.

Fernande went back to her own apartment au *troisième* in the Rue Chardin, and there wrote to the three other ladies, Madame Darboux living in Blois; the Viscomtesse Helya de Marolles, at the Château de Vèreux, in the Alpes-Maritimes, and Mademoiselle Lavissee, living in Provins, explaining the reason of her search, and enclosing stamped envelopes for replies.

She was about to put on her hat and go out to post them when a sudden thought occurred to her. In writing she was acting most injudiciously. It might alarm the assassin. She would see each of the ladies personally, even though it must entail long journeys across France. So she tore up the three letters, and, taking a small suit-case, she left the Gare de L'est that afternoon for the quaint old town of Provins, where she arrived about six o'clock. An hour later she had an interview with Mademoiselle Lavissee, who lived in a large house near the church of St. Ayoul, and found that instead of being a young girl, she was a wealthy, middle-aged maiden lady. Fernande briefly explained the object of her call, and then apologising, left and returned to the Hôtel de la Boule d'Or where she spent the night.

It took her all the following day to reach the old town of Blois, it being a cross-country journey, but she was determined upon making a thorough investigation, and at last, after spending the night in the capital of the Loir-et-Cher, with its narrow streets and flights of steps, she found the house of Madame Darboux in the Avenue Victor Hugo, close to the old Castle. Madame, she learnt, was the wife of the Prefect, therefore it was useless to call. So she left Blois for Cannes, where next day she took a taxi up the valley beyond Mandelieu to the fine old Château de Vèreux. At the hotel she had learned that the Viscomtesse Helya de Marolles was quite young and was English, and further that neither she nor her husband had been seen at the Château for nine months or more.

Fernande drove beneath the great grim walls of the old fortress of François I, and then returning to Cannes, at once telegraphed to Professor Lemelletier requesting him to ask young Mr. Rothwell to meet her at the Hôtel du Parc at once.

Two days later the smart young Englishman arrived, full of expectancy, and when they were alone, Mademoiselle told him of her discovery that the Viscomtesse was English, that her husband was much older than herself, and that they were supposed to be abroad.

"But the girl did not wear a wedding ring," Rothwell remarked.

"No. But does not the report of the autopsy say that there was a distinct mark upon her finger, as though a wedding ring had been worn? If the marks on her clothing had been removed, why not the ring?"

Together they took a taxi that afternoon out to the Château, and entering the spacious courtyard, rang a great, clanging bell.

Of the liveried man-servant who appeared Fernande inquired for Madame la Viscomtesse, to which he replied:

"Madame, with Monsieur, is absent abroad. She will not return until next Friday."

"Then she is returning?" asked Fernande eagerly.

"Certainly, Mademoiselle."

Fernande and the young Englishman exchanged glances.

She thought quickly. Then, with a winning smile, she asked the man-servant:

"When did you last hear from her?"

"Oh, I think it was about last December. She wrote to me from New York, giving me several orders. But I heard from Monsieur Le Viscomte only about six weeks ago. He wrote from the Turf Club in Cairo."

Mademoiselle put further questions to him, but could obtain no more information. Therefore they re-entered the taxi and returned to Cannes.

"I wonder if we are on the scent?" asked Rothwell reflectively as they drove along.

"I have every hope that we are. The Viscomtesse is young; she has not been seen for months. Only you can establish her identity--but how?"

"Certainly not by seeing her," said Rothwell. And they both lapsed into thoughtful silence.

On their return to Cannes, Mademoiselle did not relinquish her activity, but with the young Englishman accompanying her she called at Bellots', the fashionable photographers in the Rue d'Antibes, where she asked the young lady who received her whether they had of late taken a photograph of the Viscomtesse de Marolles.

"The Viscomtesse, who is a great friend of mine, told me that you have taken a portrait of her. The fact is, I want some cabinets taken in the same style," Fernande added, making a blind shot, for she felt that the châtelaine of Vèreux would certainly be photographed by that highly-fashionable establishment.

"I think we took a portrait about a year ago," replied the girl. "If you will take a seat I will see," and she conducted the pair to a waiting-room, where they sat impatiently for nearly a quarter of an hour.

At last the girl reappeared, saying:

"Yes. We did take a portrait, and fortunately I have a print of it."

And she exhibited to them the picture of a refined young woman in an elegant evening-gown.

Rothwell's face fell, as he remarked:

"No it is not her! The Viscomtesse is much older."

Then the pair, with excuses, rapidly withdrew.

All their efforts had been in vain. The only course now was to return to Paris and acknowledge themselves beaten.

Instead of doing so, however, Fernande, accompanied by Rothwell, travelled by way of Dijon and Bâle, back to Brussels, where they put up at the small Hôtel du Trône, and from the proprietor obtained as much information as they could concerning the girl Mary Beeton, who so closely resembled the victim, and her friend Edith Ray. Nothing was known of either except that they had gone sight-seeing each day and often went out in the evening. The frail, white-bearded old Englishman who had called for Miss Beeton had given his name as Mr. Thomas, and it was apparent that she had been greatly annoyed by his call. It was known that a second man called on the following day, but he was seen by a porter who had since been dismissed and could not be found.

All was therefore shadowy and unsatisfactory. Indeed, it was not entirely established whether the dead girl was actually Miss Beeton. The only evidence that the dead girl had been in the Belgian capital was upon the assumption of that tram ticket.

They returned once again to Paris, where they reported their failure to Professor Lemelletier, who simply shrugged his shoulders and counselled patience.

Another week passed. Several members of the club were in favour of giving the mystery up as beyond solution. But still undaunted, Fernande determined to make yet a last attempt, and with that object she again called upon the dress designer, Neuville, to report the failure of her inquiries.

"It may be that the garment in question was made for one or other of the American ladies who were visitors to Paris," he said. "They paid cash, so we merely delivered the goods to them at their hotels. In that case you will, as I feared, Mademoiselle, experience considerable difficulty."

"Well," said Fernande, unrolling the dead girl's camisole from a sheet of tissue paper. "I have been wondering whether this might perhaps be identified by the work-room hand who made it."

"Possibly," said the head of the famous dress-making house. "Only four hands have been employed in making those special designs. I will see, if you will leave it with me till to-morrow. They will then have an opportunity to identify it. Had the tab with the number remained, then we could have traced it in a few minutes."

Next day, when the lady fashion writer was ushered into Monsieur Neuville's room, he had with him one of his workwomen, a thin-faced young Frenchwoman, who had the camisole in her hand:

"I made this myself, Mademoiselle. I made an error in this seam, and corrected it. See!" And she pointed to a seam at the side. "I recognised it as my work. It was made for Madame Darboux of Blois, wife of the Prefect."

"Is she young?" asked Fernande.

"I regret I do not know," the woman replied. "It was an order by post. She sent a self-measurement form."

The wife of the Prefect! Fernande had been in Blois, but had not called at the house in the Avenue Victor Hugo. She thanked the great designer of frocks and quickly sought young Rothwell. Together that night they left for Blois, and next day Fernande rang the bell of the large old-fashioned residence standing back from the Avenue in a pretty garden ablaze with flowers.

The iron gates were unlatched by an unseen hand, as they so often are in France, and walking up

to the house, they found a middle-aged woman waiting at the door.

On inquiring for Madame Darboux, the woman replied that Monsieur le Prefect lived there no longer. He had resigned his position some months before, and the house was up for sale, she, the wife of the butler, being left in charge.

After some conversation, during which they learnt that the ex-Prefect had been there as recently as six weeks before, Fernande explained that the reason she had called was because, while in Deauville the previous season, she had made the acquaintance of a Madame Darboux, who said her husband was Prefect, but she had doubted her. She wished, for her own curiosity, to make sure.

"If Mademoiselle will enter there is a photograph of Madame in the petit-salon--also one of Monsieur," the woman said politely.

Scarce daring to breathe in their excitement, Fernande and her companion followed the woman.

The instant Rothwell's eye fell upon the large, framed photograph, he exclaimed:

"That's her! And that's the man! Yes, I'm certain!"

The caretaker, somewhat surprised at Rothwell's ejaculations, remarked:

"Madame is English, and quite young. I do not understand English, I regret."

"You are an old servant of Monsieur le Prefect. Have you ever seen this coin?" asked Mademoiselle Fernande, producing the crooked sou from her handbag.

The woman opened her eyes as though startled and took the worn French halfpenny in her hand, examining it closely.

"Why, yes!" she replied. "I have seen this very often. Madame always wore it on her arm as her mascot. She once told me that her only brother, who fought with the English at Hill 60, was struck by a German bullet, and this coin deflected the bullet and saved his life. That is why it is bent and broken."

"And Madame?" asked the girl. "Where is she?"

"Ah! I have no idea," was the reply, "except I believe she is in England with Monsieur."

Further than that they could obtain no other information. But they pursued other inquiries regarding the Prefect, and during the next few hours learnt of his sudden resignation and decision to sell his fine house and its contents. About two years before he had married a smart young English girl, apparently of very good family, who had been on a visit at the château in the vicinity, where he had met her. But his reputation was that of a man of many amours, and it was believed that they did not get on very well together. That was all that was known in Blois.

Next day Rothwell and Mademoiselle called at the Prefecture and there saw Monsieur Gaschard, his successor, and from him they learnt that the retired official had written only a few days before, from an address at Putney, in London. This address, which he gave to the pair, proved to be in a block of flats overlooking the River Thames, near Putney Bridge.

Without delay the pair of investigators once more returned to Paris, where a special meeting of the club was convened, and at the famous round table in the Café de l'Univers, the result of their inquiries was reported.

Professor Lemelletier was unanimously requested to go to London with Gordon Latimer, Maurice Jacquinot, Fernande, and the witness Rothwell.

Forty-eight hours later, Maurice Jacquinot, accompanied by young Rothwell, and followed by a detective inspector, left their companions at the foot of Putney Bridge, on the Surrey side, and walked to a great block of flats facing the river. It was seven o'clock in the evening, and still light. Of the hall-porter, Rothwell made inquiry as to who lived in the flat indicated by the Prefect at Blois, and was told that it was a French gentleman named Deprez, who had taken the flat furnished, but had gone away somewhere in the country, where he was about to be married. He would not be back for a month. The porter did not have his address, but said that a tailor named Evans, who lived in the High Street, near Putney Station, had been making him a suit, and that he might know.

"Going to be married again!" remarked Maurice with a grin as they thanked the porter and hurried towards the tailor's shop, which was only five minutes away. Arrived there, they quickly ascertained that a new suit of clothes had, on the previous night, been sent to Monsieur Deprez, at the Queen's Hotel at Leeds.

Within two hours the party were on their way from King's Cross, and duly arrived early in the morning. From the hall-porter at Leeds, Latimer, who took a room at the hotel, learnt that the French gentleman was to be married to the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer on the following day at St. Peter's Church, in Kirkgate. But an unpleasant surprise awaited the bridegroom when on his return to the hotel half an hour later, he was confronted by Gilbert Rothwell and given into the custody of the detective from London.

The wedding was, of course, postponed, for that same night the ex-Prefect was brought to London in custody. Then a strange thing happened. When charged at Bow Street he made a remarkable statement to the effect that he knew that his wife, with whom he had been on very unfriendly terms, had been murdered on that foggy night. He explained that she had confessed to him her infidelity in Brussels, and in great anger he intended to take divorce proceedings against her lover, a married man named Mitchell, a retired doctor. She had written to Mitchell telling him of her confession, whereupon the latter, while they had been on a brief visit to Brussels together, had cut the identification marks out of her clothing, determined to kill her afterwards in secret, and thus prevent proceedings. Mitchell had followed her and her husband on that foggy night, and in Howland Street, after a quarrel, she had taken off her wedding ring and thrown it away. Suddenly, as they had stopped, Mitchell had dealt the fatal blow in the fog.

The prisoner declared that, finding his wife attacked from behind, he instantly realised what had occurred. He feared to be accused of the crime, and feeling certain that he was unknown in London, had slipped away, and so escaped.

Then he had resigned his position as Prefect, and remaining in England, changing his name, and keeping his knowledge to himself, was now about to marry again.

"But how can you prove all this?" queried the incredulous inspector when, after warning him that the statement might be used against him, he had finished taking it down.

"By this," was Monsieur Darboux's quick reply, as he drew a crumpled letter from his wallet and handed it to the police official, whose face instantly wore a look of amazement as he read it.

"This is a confession," the inspector said to the eager little group who stood beside him in the police station. "It is written by Dr. Crane Mitchell, of Sherbourne Gardens, Hampstead, to the effect that he killed young Madame Darboux in the fog in Howland Street, and that her husband is innocent. The letter explains that, fearing arrest, he is taking his own life."

And he handed it to the investigators to read.

Within an hour the police had established that Dr. Crane Mitchell had unaccountably committed

suicide at his house in Hampstead on the very day that the letter had been written, six months before, and further, in a drawer in his writing-table there still lay, wrapped carefully in paper, a lady's long steel hat-pin with a black glass knob, evidently the weapon he used on that fatal night. Thus was solved the very curious problem of "The Crooked Sou."

CASE NUMBER SIX THE CLOCHE HAT

To the Black Museum at Scotland Yard there has recently been added a girl's felt hat of the cloche type. It is of fuchsia colour with an arrow of imitation brilliants in front, rather soiled by much handling, and hangs upon a peg, a mute piece of evidence which proved most important in bringing to a solution one of the most remarkable mysteries ever investigated by the Club.

In the archives of the Criminal Investigation Department, the chief features of the Affair of the Cloche Hat are set out in a file which is endorsed "No arrest"--a remark synonymous with failure. A postscript is, however, added which negatives the first conclusion, as I will endeavour to show.

The official record, which occupies many pages of close typewriting, is in several respects unique, for it forms an amazing mystery that entirely baffled the police of Europe. At the outset the facts were simple. An extremely wealthy American named John Kay Lorillard, his wife, and two daughters, arrived in England, and took furnished, for a year, Enderby Hall, Lord Templand's place near Bedford, a fine ancestral mansion in the centre of a great park with a long avenue of old oaks leading to the great lodge-gates on the London road. The American, who had made a colossal fortune in real estate in Chicago, had taken over the whole staff of his lordship's servants, and Lord Templand and his young wife had gone to the Riviera extremely pleased to obtain such a generous tenant.

Mr. Lorillard and his wife soon became highly popular in the neighbourhood, probably on account of his extreme wealth and the lavishness of the entertainments he gave. It was, however, a great surprise two months later when it was rumoured that Mary Lorillard, a pretty brunette of twenty-two, the elder of the two girls, had become engaged to a smart young doctor, Lionel Clements, living at Leighton Buzzard. Clements had been taken to a dance at Enderby one evening by Doctor Holt Mulholland. The latter had been a mental specialist in London and, recently retired, lived on the Kempston Road at Bedford.

When the engagement was formally announced, congratulations were showered upon the pair from all sides, and a portrait of the smiling bride-to-be appeared in several of the pictorial papers.

Meanwhile, old "Mull," as Doctor Mulholland was affectionately called by the rich American, became his intimate friend. Lorillard voted him a "real fine chum," and he certainly was. Though sixty years of age, he was a good shot, could play a good round of golf, was an excellent dancer and an ideal ladies' man. The whole family liked him, hence he spent half his time at the Hall, often remaining the night there instead of returning to Bedford.

Through four months the entertainments at Enderby were unceasing, and the society gossips frequently gave accounts of them in the Press. Lorillard's shrewd business secretary, Mr. Henry L. Timmons, arrived one day from Chicago, and for a week was daily closeted with his principal who was engaged in a very big deal, the purchase of a huge property in the Austin district of Chicago. The hard, lantern-jawed Timmons met Dr. Mulholland, and the pair became great friends. The rich American's secretary told him about his employer's enormous interests in Chicago, his high financial reputation, and his magnificent home on Lake Michigan, all of which caused the doctor to ponder.

A few days later, namely, on the 6th June, Mr. Timmons, who had business for his employer in Paris, left for the French capital in order to sail afterwards from Cherbourg, while Mr. Lorillard went with him to have an interview with a Paris banker with whom he was transacting some

business.

The pair duly arrived at the Hôtel Vitelli, an expensive establishment near the Opera, and remained there a few days until they parted, Timmons for Cherbourg on his way back to America, while Mr. Lorillard arranged to travel that same afternoon by the four o'clock service from the Gare du Nord via Boulogne to London. He was about to leave the hotel and enter the taxi when the concierge handed him a telegram. He read it, gave vent to a chuckle of satisfaction, re-engaged his room, and waited there for another day. On that night the hotel was alarmed by a great jewel robbery that had been committed. On the second day at three o'clock he paid his bill, had his suit-cases placed upon a taxi, and drove away.

That same evening he telegraphed to his wife at Enderby that he was meeting off the Orient liner at Naples a business friend, Mr. Edward H. Orr, of Christchurch, New Zealand, and would be absent possibly another fortnight. From Naples four days later, and again a week later, he telegraphed to Mrs. Lorillard. Later on his wife received a long telegram from Toulouse announcing that the deal in Chicago was satisfactorily progressing and that he would return to Enderby in ten days, but they would all have to return to America almost immediately, as his presence was urgently needed in Chicago. The wire concluded with the words, "Kindest remembrances to Mull."

Next day Dr. Mulholland went over to Enderby, when Mrs. Lorillard showed him the telegram at which he expressed the greatest gratification.

Meanwhile, Mary Lorillard and Lionel Clements, a perfectly matched pair, were inseparable. Old Dr. Mulholland was the right hand of Mrs. Lorillard in her husband's absence, ever ready to give advice, and was often consulted as to who should be invited to the constant entertainments, and who should be ignored. The good people of Bedford scrambled for cards of invitation to Enderby, and well they might, for no such lavish hospitality had been known in the county for half a century.

Mr. Lorillard, who still delayed his return on account of his business, wired several times to that effect. He seldom, if ever, wrote a letter, leaving correspondence to his secretaries of whom he kept three in Chicago.

When, however, he had been absent a month and had telegraphed from Toulouse and also from Grasse, his wife wrote to him at the Regina Hotel at Grasse, but, ten days later, she received the letter back marked, "Unknown." Much surprised, she, without saying anything to anyone, telegraphed to the hotel proprietor at Grasse, prepaying a reply, and the same evening received an answer that Mr. Lorillard had left a fortnight before.

His wife confided in Mulholland and Clements, who instantly started inquiries. They telegraphed wildly hither and thither. The director of the hotel in Paris replied that the last seen of Mr. Lorillard was on the night of June 11th, when he left in a taxi, while a wireless message to Chicago brought a quick response from Mr. Timmons that he had left Mr. Lorillard on June 9th and since then had had no communication from him.

Mrs. Lorillard and her daughters began to grow anxious. Her husband was often a trifle eccentric, and would frequently travel suddenly, as extremely wealthy men sometimes do.

Another fortnight went past, and old Mulholland, accompanied by Clements, both greatly alarmed, went to Scotland Yard, and there reported the millionaire's disappearance. They gave a photograph and description of the missing man--a portrait which readers may possibly remember was published in the newspapers and formed the centre of a large placard posted outside all the principal police stations in the country.

On the 14th August, Mrs. Lorillard received a telegram from Utrecht, in Holland, with the words, "Home next week.--KAY."

That same night young Clements left London post-haste by the Hook of Holland route, and next morning at nine o'clock arrived at Utrecht. After some little difficulty with the Dutch post office, he established the fact that an elderly, clean-shaven American wearing round glasses with heavy shell rims had handed the telegram over the counter in the ordinary course of business. Indeed, he was shown the original message. It had been written upon a portable typewriter, and the name of the sender was given as "John K. Lorillard, Hôtel Het Kastell van Antwerpen, Utrecht." At the hotel, just on the opposite side of the canal to the post office, he learnt that two days before an American named Lorillard arrived late at night and stayed till next morning. The director remembered the day, for that night a German lady lost all her jewels--someone breaking into her room.

At Mulholland's suggestion the distressed wife then put an advertisement in *The Times* addressed to "Kay," asking him to return at once. To it no reply was received. Meanwhile, Mr. Timmons had left Chicago to consult with Mrs. Lorillard, while young Clements and Doctor Mulholland became active in their endeavours to find the elusive millionaire, and the police, on their part, left no stone unturned to trace his erratic progress from country to country.

One curious fact of which, however, the police took but little notice at the time, but which greatly perturbed Mrs. Lorillard and also Doctor Mulholland was, that in a cupboard in the millionaire's bedroom there had been found, hanging among his clothes a girl's cloche hat in fuchsia felt. Kenyon, the faithful old valet, had found it there, and for a long time said nothing to his mistress until, when the great anxiety arose, he produced it, and in due course it was taken to Scotland Yard as a mysterious piece of evidence--but of what?

Private detectives were employed by Mulholland at his own expense, but they discovered practically nothing, and at last the matter was placed before the Secret Council of Ten, of the world-famous but exclusive Crimes Club.

They deliberated after their usual monthly dinner held in September at the Café de l'Univers, where Maître Jean Tessier detailed the facts as they have been here briefly explained.

The discovery of the girl's felt hat was one of the chief points of the great lawyer's speech to his nine fellow members of the club. Afterwards, before the matter was discussed, he introduced to them Doctor Mulholland, a chubby, round-faced, broad-shouldered man, whose complexion was pink, and who looked the picture of robust health. With him was Miss Lorillard's *fiancé*, Lionel Clements, dark-haired, smart, upright and well-groomed.

As the intimate friends of the wealthy American they were asked to give their theories. Mulholland, representing the rich man's wife, was asked a number of questions, to all of which he replied promptly.

The club then discussed the affair in all its various aspects, each member giving his or her personal views. For nearly two hours the discussion continued, all sorts of theories being advanced.

"Certainly there is a woman in the case," declared the wizened ex-Cabinet Minister, Gustave Delcros. "The discovery of that girl's hat among the American's clothes is, in itself, the outstanding feature of the case. Whence could it have come, if not from some lady? And how did it get there? Perhaps he might have had a secret visitor?"

"Yes," remarked the lady journalist, Fernande Buysse. "But she would hardly have left without her hat."

"Except that she might have been there in the evening, and left in a car," said Doctor Plaud. "Perhaps she left her hat behind accidentally. There appear to have been many visitors to the house," added the famous expert on poisons.

Once the club decided to pursue its investigations, it never allowed the grass to grow beneath its feet. Jacquinot left Paris early next morning for Naples to inquire into the American's movements, while Gordon Latimer accompanied Mulholland back to London; the Baron Edouard d'Antenac went to Havre on his way to Chicago; Fernande Buysse to Toulouse, and Dr. Plaud to Grasse, in the Alpes-Maritimes. All pursued active inquiries, but learnt little more than the police had done.

Within a fortnight the club held another meeting to receive their reports, one of which was a telegram from the Baron in America, but they were all negative ones. John Kay Lorillard, one of the wealthiest men in Chicago, had disappeared.

"The only way in which the truth of this affair will ever be discovered is by some channel unexplored by the police," remarked Doctor Plaud.

Latimer put forward a suggestion that Lorillard had disappeared purposely--perhaps to evade the payment of losses upon some great business deal. Such things had been known. Perhaps his wife knew where he was in hiding--even communicated with him through some newspaper. This theory was at once adopted by more than half the members of the club.

In addition to the cloche hat found at Enderby, old Lorillard had left behind him, on his departure from the Hôtel Vitelli in Paris, a pair of old brown shoes. These had been given over to the Paris police, and, in turn, they had been handed to the club. Latimer, with Jacquinot and Fernande, became interested in them, noting that in the soles were Swiss nails similar to those used by Alpine mountaineers. It was known that the Lorillards had been in Switzerland before arriving at Enderby, and probably he had had his shoes and boots nailed there for easier walking, as so many travellers do.

A few days elapsed, and while the others were following clues in various parts of Paris and elsewhere, Latimer again returned to London, and on the following morning went down to Bedford, where he put up at the old Swan Hotel.

After dinner he went out to Enderby Hall. The night was fairly dark, but skirting the park wall he found a spot where it had partly fallen away, and over it he clambered, making straight across the grass for the big mansion with its many lighted windows.

Creeping silently forward he crossed the ornamental water by the bridge, and then over the pleasure grounds to the Hall, which he approached noiselessly. It was after ten o'clock and the members of the gay house-party were dancing in the great hall. Indeed, as he passed, several of the windows had their blinds undrawn and he could see within. Suddenly, as he stole round the corner over some flower-beds, he came to a window where the pink silk casement curtains had been pulled, but did not quite meet. Curiosity prompted him to advance over the damp turf, and by standing on tip-toe, he could see that it was a small panelled ante-room of octagonal shape, with well-filled cases of brown-backed, time-stained volumes, evidently Lord Templand's business room.

An elderly, well-preserved woman in a black-and-silver evening-gown stood near the table, and with her two men in dinner-jackets, one round-faced and a trifle bald, and the other dark, slim, and clean-shaven. In a second he recognised the men as Mulholland and young Clements. The woman, who was evidently Mrs. Lorillard, stood as though paralysed. They had apparently told her something.

She seemed stricken by fear.

"No! No! I won't, I--I promise you I won't!" were the words Latimer heard from the distressed lady's lips.

"Very well," said the young man. "Then no more need be said. We are doing our best--but if you interfere we must at once withdraw."

"Yes--I see, you are quite right, Lionel," faltered their hostess. "I leave it all to you both."

The pair left the room and closed the door, while the distressed lady stood motionless, gazing straight before her. Suddenly, a few moments later, the door was opened cautiously, and a girl's fair bobbed head appeared--a pretty girl wearing a dance-frock of cyclamen georgette, the younger daughter, from the resemblance she bore her mother.

She whispered a few words, then placed her finger upon her lips indicative of silence, while Mrs. Lorillard, starting violently, held her breath in evident amazement. Afterwards the mother kissed her daughter affectionately, and they left the room together, the latter switching off the light.

Latimer stood in the darkness without moving. What did it all mean? Secrets, without a doubt. But of what nature? He reflected deeply, but after waiting at the spot for another hour, he came to the conclusion that his theory had no foundation. Mrs. Lorillard was in ignorance of the whereabouts of her husband, and the doctor and young Clements were doing all in their power to seek a solution of the problem.

Just as he was about to turn away, a car with strong headlights drew up at the entrance, and from where he stood he saw the doctor and the girl's *fiancé* enter it hurriedly, and drive away down the avenue on their return to Bedford.

Scarcely had the red light disappeared when he thought he saw the indistinct figure of a man creeping beneath the shadow of some bushes. He watched the intruder slip noiselessly round the corner of the house and clamber up to one of the ground floor windows which it was apparent he was trying to unlatch.

Latimer instantly realised that to give the alarm was impossible as he would only betray himself. Further, he might, if discovered, be taken for an accomplice of the thief. He saw that to withdraw was the best course. Therefore he slipped into the shadow again, but not before he had watched the intruder crawl through the open window and disappear. Meanwhile the dancing was still in progress, and no alarm was given.

Twenty minutes later Latimer was well out on the high road to Bedford, and shortly before midnight reached the Swan and retired to bed.

Next morning the whole town was agog. A great jewel robbery had been committed at Enderby Hall. Mrs. Lorillard had found her jewel-case open on the bed, and its contents gone. The thief had escaped through the window of an adjoining dressing-room and down a stack-pipe. The police were searching everywhere for a man who had been seen to pass along the road from Bedford to Enderby in the evening, and who had returned soon after midnight. This caused Latimer much anxiety, so fearing to take train lest the stations be watched, he joined a motor omnibus which took him out to Hitchin, and thence he returned to King's Cross by train.

Three days later, Latimer was back in Paris, but Fernande and Jacquinot had left for Bedford. Inquiry at Kempston Road and by telephone to Enderby Hall, showed that Doctor Mulholland was away. When night fell, the pair of expert investigators of mysteries of crime went out to Enderby--which had been minutely described by Latimer. It was raining, so both wore mackintoshes, but when they entered the park the weather became fine. They watched the

dancing through the uncurtained windows until the clock of Enderby church struck midnight, when one by one the lights were extinguished, all save the big lamp over the portico which threw a long ray of brilliance far down the drive.

Together they stood near the corner of the house, not far from the porch, but hidden in the shadow of some large rhododendrons, when they heard a window slowly open and saw the figure of a man in golf cap and raincoat slowly emerge. He dropped noiselessly on to the turf and, bending, crept away. Had the burglar returned for more booty? In the darkness his form much resembled that of Dr. Mulholland!

Next day Fernande and her companion called upon the police, and had an interview with the chief constable, to whom they revealed who they were, and presented credentials from the Chef de la Sûreté in Paris.

They discussed the burglary, whereupon the police official said:

"Fortunately the ground was soft, therefore we have secured good plaster casts of the thief's footprints, as well as several finger-prints from the jewel-box, and from a lacquered table in Mr. Lorillard's bedroom," and he showed them both the finger-prints and the plaster casts of the footprints. Sight of the latter caused the pair to exchange glances, but a second later the telephone rang and the chief constable was informed that a second burglary had taken place! It had only been discovered twenty minutes ago. A quantity of very valuable jewels, miniatures, and priceless Carolean silver, heirlooms of the Templand family, had been stolen!

Fernande and Jacquinot said nothing of what they had witnessed on the previous night, but Mulholland and Clements being away, they accompanied the detectives out to Enderby and assisted in the search for footprints which they found quite distinct, at the exact spot where the burglar had emerged from the window--footprints exactly similar to those found upon the first occasion. The robberies were undoubtedly the work of the same man!

The watchers kept their own counsel, but next day telegraphed to Paris for Latimer to join them. On the evening of the latter's arrival they held secret council in his bedroom. Then all three went forth, and walked together through the rain to Enderby.

The turn affairs had now taken was astounding. The three concealed themselves in some bushes near the mansion where the usual evening gaiety was in progress. The rain abated, and the night grew bright as they watched in silence till the deep bell of Enderby church struck midnight, and the lights one after another were extinguished. At last the dark window they were watching opened cautiously, and the same mysterious figure slowly emerged and dropped to the ground.

Fernande gripped her companion's arm in silence. A few seconds later, just as the figure crossed the drive, the light in the portico which was still on, shone full upon the man's countenance.

The face was that of the published photograph of John Kay Lorillard! It was very thin, haggard and drawn--the face of a man who had gone through untold suffering both mental and physical. But it was the missing man without a doubt!

This discovery staggered them.

They allowed him to walk some distance, when suddenly, Jacquinot and Latimer held back and Fernande overtook him, and explained in her very fair English that she was lost, and inquired her way to Bedford. At once the old man became interested. Next moment, however, she explained who she was, and afterwards introduced her companions, telling him that they were engaged on trying to solve the mystery of his five months' disappearance.

"Well," said Mr. Lorillard, as they walked together back to the house. "I must thank you and your

Crimes Club, and I'm real glad to meet both of you. The fact is I've been bagged right square, and only by a miracle I'm back here. Nobody knows I'm here, except my wife. I got in like a burglar, but one of the darned maids raised the alarm, and I had to snatch all my wife's jewels and hide in a cupboard, so that they should think that a thief had been and gone. My wife opened the dressing-room window out of which I was supposed to have escaped. But, come in. There's nobody about. Don't make a noise. Creep in after me," and all of them scrambled through the window.

He conducted Fernande, Jacquinot and Latimer to the study. It was plain that he was suffering from a terrible breakdown. The twitching of the muscles of his face betrayed it.

"Listen," he said, turning to them. "I'm--well I'm playing a waiting game just now. I've had some strange news from Chicago by cable to-day," and the furrows on his grey forehead deepened. "Soon after I met Mulholland and that precious young scoundrel Clements, who pretended to be in love with my girl Mary, the doctor took me to a Bohemian dance-club off the Tottenham Court Road, called 'The Fiends and Fairies.' He introduced me to a pretty young dancing instructress named Iris Ormead. She seemed a decent type, so I engaged her to come down here one night and give some exhibition dances for my guests. The dances were to be a complete surprise. Young Clements knew her, and he was to be her partner. A car brought her from London on the evening in question, and my valet, Kenyon, showed her up to my room in secret to take off her hat and cloak. Her hat was a pretty fuchsia-coloured one of felt, and my man put it aside. She gave her dances at two o'clock in the morning, and they were a great success. Afterwards the young lady--to whom I had given a cheque--left for London in the car, but when she had gone I saw she had not taken her hat, so I hid it away in my wardrobe, intending to take it to her in London. I, however, forgot all about it until one night, when I was at the club with Mulholland, I met her, and she told me that she had secured an engagement in Paris and was going over shortly. A few days later I went to Paris with my secretary, Timmons, and when I had concluded my business he left to return to Chicago. I was about to return to London, when I received a telegram from Miss Ormead asking me to meet her on her arrival in Paris the following day. This I decided to do, and met her. To my surprise Mulholland was with her, and they both greeted me warmly, the doctor explaining that he had come over to see what sort of cabaret had engaged the girl. They were going out to Neuilly to stay with a friend of his, and he pressed me to go and spend the evening with them. I did. On arrival at the house, a big detached one in a lonely situation, they gave me some vermouth that was doped, and I didn't wake till thirty-six hours after. It affected my eyesight and I could only see dimly, as through a yellow haze. All I remember when I came to was, that I was sitting at a table with my cheque-book before me, and I heard Mulholland say, 'Sign your name, old fellow. We'll soon get you out of this fix. Trust old Mull,' and he pressed my fountain pen into my fingers. But I hesitated. 'It's only a bribe to the warders of this private asylum. Sign, and let's get away. We've both been entrapped,' he added.

"Not knowing what I was doing, I signed, my brain being too muddled to think, my hand almost too weak to scrawl my name. Days, weeks passed, but I kept no count of time. The devils doped my food, and gave me injections of their accursed drugs which sent me half mad. I tried to refuse to eat, but starvation got the better of me. Then, on another evening, while I was dazed and almost blind, they compelled me to sign another cheque. I saw, though indistinctly, that it was filled in for two hundred thousand dollars, payable to a firm of whom I had no knowledge. They threatened to dope me and send me insane if I did not sign. I therefore obeyed. But half an hour later Mulholland had a violent quarrel with the keeper of the private asylum, and as soon as he had gone, the Frenchman, to my relief, brought in the girl Iris, who apologised that she had connived at the dastardly plot, and told me that I was free. She even lent me ten pounds with

which to get to Bedford, and travelled with me. The two men had quarrelled over the proceeds of the cheque, and the Frenchman had his revenge. Both cheques were made out to a false firm--Guidrock & Coborn, of Wabash Avenue, Chicago--and they were supposed to be the purchase money for the big block of property for which I was negotiating. The gang of swindlers had taken temporary offices in Wabash Avenue and opened a small banking account for the purpose of dealing with my cheque. The latter had been refused by my bank because I had put the signature I use for correspondence, and not my bank signature. Mulholland and Clements had learnt all about my business from my secretary, Timmons. One of the gang had travelled about Europe personating me and sent those telegrams to my wife, while my cheques had been sent to America to be cashed by Mulholland's accomplices. The second cheque, with my right signature, I have already stopped by cable. The scoundrel will, as soon as he knows that I have escaped, come here to get news of me. My poor wife has been distracted, but what puzzled and distressed her most was the discovery of that girl's felt hat in my wardrobe."

Hardly had he uttered the last sentence when the sound of an approaching car was heard. It stopped, and a moment later the bell rang loudly.

"It's that accursed Mulholland! He knows I've escaped!" shrieked old Lorillard, beside himself with anger. "He's been over to Paris, and is back here in search of me! I'll open the door and give him a surprise. Come with me!"

They dashed along the corridor, and Lorillard threw open the door. Next second Lorillard and Mulholland were face to face, but Lorillard swiftly closed the door. Then swinging round, the doctor found himself looking down the barrel of a heavy automatic pistol.

"The tables are turned, Mulholland! You swine! You are my prisoner now!" the American shouted hoarsely.

But the doctor, pale as death, raised his hand and, without a word, fired point-blank at his accuser.

Next second the door was burst open and five men appeared, each of the strangers holding pistols.

"Hands up! We are police officers!" cried the leader, who was Inspector Parmiter, of Scotland Yard. "We arrest both of you. Dick Plipeson, *alias* Herman Bernard, *alias* John Kay Lorillard, and other names--I arrest you, 'Tubby Kay,' for several big jewel robberies in the United States, France, Italy and England; and you, Robert Farrell, George McLaughlin, Doctor Holt, Mulholland, for forgery upon the Crédit Lyonnais in Paris, the Union Bank of Chicago, and other American banks. I hold warrants for you both. Kindly give me your pistols," said the well-known detective quietly.

The men handed them over calmly, realising that the game was up.

"What does all this mean?" asked Fernande breathlessly of the chief constable of Bedfordshire, who was one of the raiders.

"Well, Mademoiselle, it means that two dangerous international criminal gangs, after a long association, have quarrelled. Mulholland, knowing Lorillard to be head of one of the most daring gangs of burglars in the world, quarrelled with him and held him captive in Paris to extract a big cheque out of him, Lorillard's family being unaware of his real profession. The first cheque was obtained but not cashed, and the second, Lorillard cancelled while it was on its way to America. It has been a huge conspiracy in which many persons of both sexes in the underworld of London and Chicago have been engaged, and the Crimes Club were consulted in order to throw the police off the scent; but, thanks to its astuteness in identifying the Swiss nailing of Lorillard's shoes--

two pairs of which he had made identical while in Switzerland--the truth is now out."

"Damn you!" snarled the "burglar-millionaire." "I've been a fool, and given myself away just because I like to walk about in comfort!"

"Yes," laughed Jacquinot. "I agree with you. You've put us to a great deal of anxiety and trouble, but it is not often one lights upon a quarrel among thieves, or even a more interesting situation than this affair of the cloche hat."

While Lorillard's family faded into oblivion in a few days, he and Mulholland were extradited from Row Street to New York, where they are both now undergoing long terms of imprisonment.

The insurance company, by the way, has not paid the claim made in regard to Mrs. Lorillard's jewels, which were very valuable, being the pick of fifty burglaries all over Europe, by various members of the gang.

The police are still searching for Clements. Therefore, is it any wonder that at Scotland Yard a curious case is recalled by the sight of that fuchsia-coloured cloche hat?

CASE NUMBER SEVEN THE AFFAIR OF THE ORANGE

The Affair of the Orange was a mystery of London, which baffled even the most astute brains of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Scotland Yard had placed the remarkable facts before the Paris police, inquiring if they had ever had a similar case brought to their notice, and Monsieur Lucien Dubosq had, after reading the many pages of closely written typescript, placed the mystery before the Club as an interesting problem for consideration and investigation.

A most remarkable story was disclosed to the full meeting of the Club which, at Dubosq's suggestion, had been summoned.

Dr. Henri Plaud, who spoke English rather well, having heard the story, proposed that the club should assist Scotland Yard, as it had done on several occasions.

In order to prosecute inquiries into the Affair of the Orange, as the Paris Sûreté termed it, one evening a week later, Dr. Plaud sat in the well appointed laboratory in London, lent to him by Sir Hubert Wilding, K.C.I.E., C.B., F.R.C.P., one of the medical advisers to the Home Office.

With him sat a squint-eyed, ill-dressed little Chinese from Limehouse, from whom the doctor was seeking information.

"You have a clue, Ah Tung. I know you have! What is it? Tell me!" said Dr. Plaud in fairly good English.

Over the man's sallow face a sphinx-like smile spread as he held out his long, thin hands, replying:

"Ah Tung not know-ee."

"I brought you here as an expert," declared the white-bearded toxicologist. "I see in your face that you can, if you are so inclined, solve this mystery. Now tell me what you suspect?"

"Ah Tung know-ee nothing. There is nothing on Ah Tung's face," was the simple rejoinder in a high, piping tone in his pidgin-English.

"Except a lie!" snapped the doctor. "Come, don't fence with me. You can put us on the right track if it suits you."

"Ah Tung can't tell-ee story."

"No. You can tell me the truth if you like," declared the famous French savant angrily. "You are pretending ignorance. You want money. How much?"

"Money to hangee somebody?" replied the slim little denizen of London's Chinatown. "No--no. Ah Tung richee. He no wantee money."

"No. I suppose you make quite enough out of your infernal gambling hell in Pennyfields to be well off--eh?"

"All-ee velly fair play. No swindlee," protested the crafty Celestial, whose fan-tan cellar in Pennyfields was well known to the police as a notorious resort of opium smokers of the best class, many of them West End degenerates.

"I suppose not," laughed the expert in his quiet professional manner. "All the same, Ah Tung, I asked you to give me your valuable opinion. You are an honest Chinese, at any rate."

Ah Tung grinned at the flattery, noting which, Doctor Plaud went on:

"You have heard of the circumstances. Do you follow them?"

"No exactly. Ah Tung likee hear you tell-ee story again."

"Very well," said the French scientist. "Just listen. Take it all in, and digest the true facts." Then throwing himself back into a chair he lit another cigarette, and said: "In one of the large houses in Palace Gardens, Kensington, there lived an extremely wealthy widower, Mr. Howard Sibley, head of Sibley and Caird, the great iron-founders of Swansea. He was something of a speculator and put money into all sorts of schemes, including several theatrical ventures which had proved highly successful. He bought the provincial rights of several plays which afterwards proved popular, and sent them touring in the provinces. So popular was he with the members of these companies that they always referred to him as 'Uncle Howard,' for he paid them well and was particularly generous. He lived practically alone in Palace Gardens, with a staff of servants and his faithful secretary, Allan Diamond, who had been over twenty years in his employ. His only daughter married an officer, Captain Pitt, and went to India, but about nine months ago the Captain died and she was left a widow and is now living with friends in Calcutta. Now what happened as far as the police can make out, has all been in the papers. You have, no doubt, read it."

"Ah Tung never read papers," replied the little Chink in his high-pitched voice, and a strange expression of resignation in his slant, half-closed eyes.

"Well, what occurred is this," the shrewd investigator went on. "On the sixth of this month, Mr. Sibley gave a small dinner party at his house, before the first performance at a West End theatre in which he had become financially interested. After the theatre he took four of his friends home in the car to supper. They were Derek Donaldson, the dramatist and author of the new play; Hugh Galton, a wealthy man well known in society, and especially in racing circles; Miss Mae Miller, the leading lady in the new play and a friend of Galton's; and Miss Avice Ellerton, who is also leading lady in one of Mr. Sibley's provincial companies. Mr. Sibley's secretary, Mr. Diamond, a tall, bald-headed man, was already in the house when the party returned, and all six sat down to a champagne supper. Afterwards the men played billiards while the two ladies sat chatting and smoking until nearly three o'clock. Naturally drinks were served, but Mr. Sibley, being a teetotaler, always preferred an orange before going to bed, therefore the footman brought in three fine Jaffa oranges on a plate, and left them for his master.

"The party was about to break up when suddenly Miss Ellerton exclaimed to her genial host, 'You haven't had your orange! I'll have half with you, shall I?' and taking up the dessert knife lying upon the plate, she selected the finest of the three and severed it. She gave him one half, and proceeded to eat the other, finding it most refreshing and delicious. She had half finished her portion when Sibley, whose attention had been attracted by a big break which Diamond was making, commenced to eat the half which the actress handed to him upon a plate. He took a spoon and began to scoop it when suddenly he stopped, and exclaimed, 'What a queer taste this orange has!' Miss Ellerton, who had nearly finished hers, replied, 'Mine is quite all right.' Then a second later the millionaire cried, 'How terribly bitter! How----!' He sprang from his seat, and clutching at his throat in sudden agony, gasped: 'My God! I--I'm poisoned!'

"The others rushed to him as the plate with the remainder of the orange fell upon the carpet. His face went livid and he was seized with convulsive twitchings, his jaws became set, and he was seized by a violent fit of coughing. Mr. Diamond dashed to the telephone and rang up a doctor,

who arrived in all haste, administered emetics, and did all in his power to restore his patient. But he had already fallen into a comatose state in which he remained for five days, when he died. That Mr. Sibley was poisoned by some secret means is quite plain. I have been called to investigate this affair, and with me my friend, Professor Ernest Lemelletier of Paris. We have analysed the remainder of the two portions of the orange, but failed to trace anything abnormal. Further, in the viscera of the dead man we can find no trace of poison whatever, all the organs being quite healthy and no sign of disease anywhere. Now, Ah Tung, I want your opinion," added the greatest analyst in France.

"P'raps leetle lay-dee want kill Meester Sibley?" remarked the Chinaman, whose sallow, inscrutable countenance had not altered.

"Not at all. It was to Miss Ellerton's interest that Mr. Sibley should live. She had a five years' contract with him at very excellent terms."

"Then p'raps somebody else," said the squeaky-voiced Celestial.

"If he died of poison, as he certainly did, then there was some secret motive on the part of somebody unknown to get rid of him," the doctor argued. "What I am, however, concerned with, is the method employed to produce such symptoms, and subsequent coma and death. You were a doctor in China, Ah Tung. You told me so in Paris three years ago. Hence I have called you into consultation."

The Chinaman gravely shook his head. His long, talon-like fingers were folded in front, and he sat like a statue.

"Ah Tung likee to see orange," he presently replied in that same monotonous voice.

"Then come here," said the toxicologist. And he led the shuffling man to the end of the room, where, upon a glass plate, protected by a glass cover, lay several pieces of orange.

The slant-eyed man removed the cover, and bending, examined the fragments through the big magnifying glass which the doctor handed to him. By means of a glass rod he turned over the pieces of pulp and peel as though in minute search of something. Then he said:

"There are no leetle needles like crystals of the plant keladi. Ah Tung expect them. But they not here. Ah Tung know-ee nothing. Somebody put death curse upon Meester Sibley p'raps."

"Bosh! I don't believe in death curses, spells, sooth-saying and all that bunkum," declared the French savant with annoyance. "I ask you, Ah Tung, could a perfectly ripe orange cause death by poisoning?"

"Meester Sibley, he die. Missee she live. Ah Tung no understand!"

"I repeat my question, and beg you to answer it. Have you any knowledge which causes you to suspect how the murder was accomplished?"

"By the orange," was the sphinx-like man's simple reply.

"I know. But why has the orange caused death?"

Again the elusive Chink shrugged his shoulders indicative of ignorance, yet beneath that mask he wore Dr. Plaud detected that, if he spoke, he could explain.

Again he turned over the fragments of the orange, as though to reassure himself, and then, refolding his hands, turned away without comment. So the doctor gave him a cigarette, and realising that whatever he knew which would elucidate the mystery he would keep to himself, he dismissed him rather abruptly.

When he had returned to the laboratory which had been lent him, he placed beneath the microscope several pieces of the orange of both the half partly eaten by Miss Ellerton, and that eaten by the man now dead. After a very careful examination he turned away, muttering to himself:

"No. The affair is a complete mystery! Yet I wonder what Ah Tung had in his mind. The crystals? I wonder why he thinks of the juice of the keladi--those masses of fine needle crystals. In the case of likir they are orange coloured!" And he paused. Then aloud to himself he said: "But there are none visible. Besides, the symptoms of keladi or likir poisoning are entirely different. Again, the woman suffered no ill effect."

At the Home Office next day Dr. Plaud and Professor Lemelletier, together with Sir Hubert Wilding, held a long consultation with Superintendent Frazer of Scotland Yard. The Coroner's inquiry at Kensington had been further adjourned for a fortnight to allow inquiries to be made concerning the millionaire's sudden death, but both the three analysts and the high official of the Criminal Investigation Department admitted to each other that it was a complete enigma.

"All persons present that night have, ever since the fatal seizure, been under close surveillance," remarked the alert, clean-shaven Superintendent as he sat in his chair against the table. "But up to the present only one slight suspicion has been aroused. It has been found on investigation that Miss Avice Ellerton, until two years ago, occupied a very humble position in the chorus of an obscure revue in the provinces. Mr. Sibley found her by accident, took a great fancy to her, and raised her to be one of his principals. It is known, too, that she had a violent quarrel with him in his office only four days before the fatal supper party."

"And she selected and cut the orange--eh?" remarked the white-haired Dr. Plaud thoughtfully.

"Yet you tell me that there is no trace of any subtle poison?" said the Superintendent.

"None whatever," answered Dr. Plaud, with which Sir Hubert agreed.

"Then we can offer no further evidence at the inquest," said the Superintendent. "It must be an open verdict, and we must continue our strict watch upon the young actress."

"I suppose it must be an open verdict," remarked Sir Hubert with annoyance, for failure to establish the cause of death was always irritating to him even though the two most famous investigators in France had also failed. "I certainly cannot positively affirm that Mr. Sibley actually died of poison, though there was every symptom of it. The medical man who was called gave me a most minute account of the symptoms, so did the two specialists who saw him afterwards before death," he added.

Meanwhile the dead man's widowed daughter, Mrs. Pitt, who had been cabled to, was hurrying home from Calcutta. The movements of Avice Ellerton were just a trifle suspicious, for she evinced a great anxiety concerning the dead man's will, and even went the length of calling upon the deceased's solicitor, Mr. Caulfield, to ascertain whether she benefited under it.

To her undisguised chagrin she learnt that she did not, and leaving the lawyer's office in Bedford Row, she took a taxi to Duke Street, St. James's, and called upon a smart, good-looking friend of hers named Henry Hough, a man of about thirty-five, who had rooms there. Apparently she had rushed there to tell her friend of her disappointment, which was not lessened by the fact that, on the following day, she received notice from the dead man's executors of the disbandment of the theatrical company with which she was about to commence another tour.

At the same time Ah Tung, in his evil-smelling opium den in Limehouse, was also greatly puzzled. Late one night he was squatting with a friend of his, Li-Shen, a wizened, yellow-faced

little man who kept a Chinese restaurant in the West End and who often came there to indulge in his opium pipe, when he referred to Mr. Sibley's mysterious death.

"I see that he ate the orange," remarked Li-Shen in Chinese.

"Yes. I wonder who knows the secret of that poison? No European does, I feel convinced," replied Ah Tung in the same language. "It is so deadly, and yet so secret and puzzling!" and the yellow-faced man who spoke remained inscrutable.

"I wonder," echoed his friend as he climbed into a bunk and began to caress and puff at his pipe.

"Have you sold any lately?" asked Ah Tung. "I have not."

"No, neither have I. I sold the last dose in Paris three years ago."

And with that the conversation abruptly ended.

With the exception of a few bequests to charities, "five thousand pounds to my devoted secretary, Mr. Allan Diamond," and several legacies to the heads of departments in Sibley and Caird's, Mr. Sibley left the whole of his great fortune to his only daughter Annabel, widow of Captain Pitt.

The Crimes Club, however, still continued their investigations. The public, by the evidence of Sir Hubert Wilding, and the verdict of the Coroner's Jury, came to regard the tragic affair as death from natural but unknown causes, and after a few weeks, the public memory being so short, the matter was forgotten except that two charitable institutions benefited very materially, while a sum had been left to endow a "Sibley Ward" at St. Thomas's Hospital.

One June evening, four months later, a ragged and unkempt young foreigner was selling newspapers in St. Martin's Lane near the corner of Cranbourne Street. It was the journalist, Maurice Jacquinot. He had sold newspapers every evening at that point for the past three weeks, and had kept his stand from five o'clock till past ten. Though unnoticed, there always hovered in the vicinity, idling about and usually smoking a cigarette, a loungee of the class usual in that quarter. The man was not always the same. Sometimes it was a young man, and sometimes he was elderly. But the ill-clad newspaper vendor always had someone within call.

On this particular evening there emerged from the doorway of a block of flats nearly opposite where the young newspaper boy was standing so patiently with the contents-bill in his hand, a dark-haired young man in evening-dress, overcoat and opera-hat, who first glanced up and down, and suddenly turning into Cranbourne Street, walked hurriedly in the direction of Leicester Square.

The moment his back had turned the newspaper man crumpled up the contents-bill, and throwing it into the road, walked off in the opposite direction in apparent despair. That action, however, was a signal to his assistant. His three weeks' vigil had been rewarded. The man who had been keeping so closely in hiding had emerged, and his assistant, a wizened little old man, who was none other than Gustave Delcros, started around the corner to follow him.

Entering Ham Yard, a *cul-de-sac* off Great Windmill Street, the young man who had come forth from the flats entered a small club and there met a man about his own age. They sat in earnest conversation together for about a quarter of an hour, apparently in whispered argument. The face of the man in evening-dress was red and bloated, while the man awaiting him at the obscure club was a low, beetle-browed foreigner, either Spanish or Italian, most probably a waiter.

When he emerged he went along to Duke Street, still followed, unobserved, by old Delcros, and there called upon Mr. Henry Hough.

Hardly had the man who had been in hiding disappeared into the house when Maurice Jacquinot,

his appearance entirely changed, came up behind his assistant, and whispered in a low voice in French:

"The woman Ellerton went in five minutes ago. They are holding a consultation. I'll remain here. You watch me, and hold yourself in reserve."

In consequence Delcros lounged leisurely along the street and halted at the corner, where he could keep his eye unobtrusively upon his friend the journalist.

The house in Duke Street was let out in sets of bachelor chambers, and a fortnight before, a smart young army officer, Lieutenant Smeed, of the Hampshire Regiment, had come as tenant on the third floor, Mr. Hough's rooms being on the first.

While Jacquinet was waiting outside, the Lieutenant, or rather Gilbert Latimer, was seated in his room with a pair of wireless telephone receivers over his ears, listening to a very remarkable conversation and scribbling it down in shorthand.

The fact was that below, in Hough's sitting-room, concealed behind a picture, was one of those harmless but highly sensitive and useful little microphone buttons from which two fine, silk-covered wires, so thin as to be almost invisible, ran along the high wainscoting, outside the door and up the wall to the room on the third floor where, upon a table, stood a small box containing a battery and amplifier. To the latter the telephone receiver was attached.

The supposed lieutenant had for nearly three weeks lived there, keeping vigil each time the tenant below received visitors. Though he had heard many confidences exchanged between Hough and his guests concerning racing, the conversation on that particular night proved extremely interesting.

On the entry of the man who had lived in hiding in St. Martin's Lane, both Hough and Avicé greeted him enthusiastically.

"I'm glad you managed to get into England all right, Jimmy," Hough said. "I was afraid about your passport. If you had been discovered the officials at Dover might have made it awkward for you. Sit down, Hubbard, and tell us how you've been getting on."

"I wrote and told you I could not screw up old Isaac to more than two thousand for the stones," replied the man addressed. "I took them from Rotterdam to Antwerp and offered them to Cutsaert, but he wouldn't give more than eighteen hundred pounds for them; said the risk was too great and all that bunkum."

"Two thousand!" cried the elder man. "Why, they're worth ten--or even more."

"He gave ten thousand three hundred for them," the young actress declared. "He told me so."

"They are splendid stones," said Hubbard. "I suppose he intended to give them to Mae Miller. Sibley was fond of her--wasn't he?"

"Yes. She was his latest flame, so I thought we might just as well have them as she," laughed the girl. "He was furious when he found that somebody had broken in and taken the case from the drawer where I told you he kept them. He told me all about it next day, but when, pretending indignation, I urged him to inform the police, he said he had bought them for me, and that he didn't want to court publicity. But I knew quite well that he'd bought them for Mae."

"Well, we've only got two thousand for them. I knocked them out of their settings and took them over in my glove," said the man addressed as Hubbard. "So we've got to divide. I've got the money here in English notes."

The listener could distinctly hear the rustle of crisp Bank of England notes and the voice of Avice Ellerton counting in tens.

"A lot of trouble for a very paltry sum," the listener heard Hough remark as he pocketed his share. "But it's a good job Sibley didn't report his loss to the police, as they might have suspected Avice."

"Well, he's dead now, so what matters?" asked Hubbard.

"It matters that none of us have made a penny profit out of his sudden death," the girl said. "I fully expected he'd leave me a bit."

"Pity he didn't, certainly," said Hough sympathetically. "His daughter has got enough, in all conscience--nearly two millions less death duties. I suppose she'll marry again--eh?"

"Probably, lucky devil," remarked the actress. Then turning to Hubbard, she said: "I suppose you'll be found at the old place, Jimmy, if we decide upon another little affair."

"I don't know," said the man who had admittedly stolen the jewels bought by Mr. Sibley shortly before his mysterious death. "Don't count on me--at least not at present. In this last deal the game hasn't been worth the candle. Old Isaacs is an infernal old thief--like all that unholy crowd in Rotterdam."

There were sounds of glasses, followed by the gurgle of a bottle and the swish of a siphon of soda, and then Hubbard and Avice bade farewell to Hough and went out together to a small and rather disreputable dance club in Wardour Street, into which they were followed by the journalist, Jacquinet, who had been on watch outside.

Meanwhile Gordon Latimer, *alias* Lieutenant Smee, hurried down to Scotland Yard, where, in Superintendent Frazer's private room, he read over his shorthand notes of the strange conversation.

"We knew that Jim Hubbard had something to do with the theft of Lady Rotherley's jewels at Euston Station, and that he was one of the gang who did that neat job at Findlay's in New Bond Street, but this unreported theft from Mr. Sibley is quite a surprise," the Superintendent remarked.

"And Harry Hough is going to reform, he says," remarked Latimer.

"I wonder what has induced him to think of cutting himself adrift from the crowd?" remarked the Superintendent thoughtfully. "He got twelve months for attempted robbery two years ago, so we must have his record. I'll get it looked up. Meanwhile observation will still be kept upon the gang. We shan't be able to arrest them for the theft of Mr. Sibley's jewellery, as we'd get no evidence."

"Unless we could discover of whom they were bought."

"And if we did, the defence could say that Mr. Sibley gave them away, and that they were never stolen. If old Isaac Celdstein has them over in Rotterdam, then we shall never see them again," the Superintendent added.

One morning, about a fortnight later, Dr. Plaud was seated in consultation with the Superintendent, and they were both examining some papers from the Record Department with greatest interest. They threw some light upon the past of Henry Hough, a past which would hardly bear investigation, for it showed him to have been an associate of crooks and a deceiver of women from his early youth.

"I admit that your theory is extremely interesting," said the doctor. "But we have much to establish before we could act."

"That's admitted, Monsieur. You have the inquiry to hand, you have full liberty to continue it," replied the well-known police official, one of Scotland Yard's "Big Four."

Three weeks went by when the Inspector received a telephone message from Gordon Latimer, who was still posing as Lieutenant Smee in Duke Street, that the man under surveillance had gone to the house in Upper Grosvenor Street where young Mrs. Pitt was living with her aunt, Mrs. Axbury. He apparently knew the widow, for after his first call, he went to the house regularly each day, and they often went shopping together, or she would take him out motoring to Windsor, to Brighton or other places. They had been together to Wimbledon to watch the tennis, to Henley Regatta and to Cowes, apparently greatly enjoying themselves, but always upon them was the ever watchful eye of Jacquinet, Delcros, or the dark-eyed Parisienne, Fernande Buysse, who had come over to bear her part in the investigations, and to write an article on English fashions for *Le Journal*.

As for Jim Hubbard and the disappointed girl Ellerton, they had disappeared into the provinces, their whereabouts, however, being known.

The general interest of the club of investigators was now concentrated upon Hough. That Mrs. Pitt was possessed of some very valuable jewellery which her father had given her was well known. Was it possible that Hough was ingratiating himself with her for the purpose of one day disappearing with the contents of her jewel-case, as he was known to have done in more than one instance? It seemed so.

Superintendent Frazer was much puzzled how to act. After his long record in the Metropolitan Police, in which he had risen from uniformed constable in the T Division to his present high office in the Criminal Investigation Department, he had learned to be as diplomatic as he was acute and far-seeing. His success in the many great criminal investigations of which he had been placed in charge, had been mainly due to his extreme caution and patient painstaking. It would, of course, have been quite easy to go to the dead millionaire's widowed daughter and point out that the man Hough was not what he was representing himself to be. But the lady might resent such intrusion upon her private affairs. Indeed, she probably would.

So as day followed day, and he constantly received reports of the visits the man paid daily to Upper Grosvenor Street, and his peregrinations about London with the young widow, he became more and more anxious regarding the safety of her valuables.

At last he determined to have an interview with Mr. Caulfield, the late Mr. Sibley's solicitor, and point out to him the dangerous position of affairs, so that he might see Mrs. Pitt and warn her.

Mr. Caulfield, who had represented the family at the inquest, was at once alarmed, and lost no time in calling at Upper Grosvenor Street, where, with the utmost tact, after a purely business conversation relative to the estate, he ventured to mention Henry Hough.

"Oh! yes," said the rather handsome young lady. "Mr. Hough is a great friend of mine. He knew my father well. Indeed he dined with him only a few weeks before his death."

"Where did you first meet him?" asked old Mr. Caulfield.

"In India. I had gone up to Simla for the hot weather. He was awfully kind to me at the Cecil Hotel, for I was something of an invalid at the time. Afterwards I met him again in Cawnpore, and after my husband's death he called on me in Calcutta."

"Was he in the Army?"

"Oh no. He had an important post with a big rubber company at their offices in Singapore."

The grey-haired old lawyer paused and looking the handsome young woman straight in the face, said:

"Would it surprise you very much, Mrs. Pitt, to know that the gentleman you so often entertain here is a notorious adventurer?"

The millionaire's daughter drew herself up in instant indignation.

"How dare you say that against Harry--I mean Mr. Hough?"

"My dear lady, I can supply proof, if you wish," replied Mr. Caulfield quite calmly.

"I want no proof," she snapped angrily. "I don't see it is any business of yours. You are paid your costs by my father's executors, and that is surely enough, Mr. Caulfield. I resent any intrusion upon my private affairs."

"But, Mrs. Pitt, I think it is only my duty to give you warning that the man Hough is----"

"I want no warning!" the woman cried angrily, starting to her feet. "Please say no more. Nothing you can say can set me against Mr. Hough. So that's sufficient!"

"Then you refuse to hear me?"

"Absolutely."

For a moment the old lawyer hesitated, then he picked up his hat and bade her a cool farewell.

Mrs. Pitt was tactful enough to say nothing to Hough when two hours later he called. But at the interview which Mr. Caulfield had with Superintendent Frazer a little later, the latter remarked:

"The truth is quite plain. The widow is in love with him!"

This surmise was indeed borne out a fortnight later when the *Morning Post* announced the engagement of Mr. Henry Hough to Annabel, widow of the late Captain Ralph Pitt, and daughter of the late Mr. Howard Sibley.

Doctor Plaud noticed it, pointed it out to his fellow members of the club, and pondered. That morning he motored down to Whitehall, and had a long and confidential chat with Superintendent Frazer.

In consequence the Superintendent that same day sought out Mr. Diamond, who had been Mr. Sibley's secretary and was now engaged in a stockbroker's office in the City, and had a chat with him in which he learnt that Mr. Henry Hough had, about a month preceding Mr. Sibley's death, approached him with a proposal to finance a rubber property in the Malay State of Johore, whether a serious business or not was not known. They had several interviews, and one night Mr. Sibley invited the man from the East to dine tête-à-tête to talk over the proposition which, however, did not eventually fructify. He had told Mr. Diamond that he had met his employer's daughter in India.

On hearing this, Doctor Plaud went down to Limehouse and again sought out Ah Tung. When they were alone in the basement of his squalid little opium den in Pennyfields--a close, evil-smelling place, for several men were smoking in the adjoining cellar--the great pathologist said:

"I have come to appeal to you, Ah Tung, to tell me how Mr. Sibley died. Was it of one of the Malay time-poisons of which I have heard, but have never believed. The juice of the bark of the bebuta tree, combined with certain other ingredients, is, I have learned, one of the most dangerous poisons used by the Malays. Is that so? Tell me, I beg of you, is there any such poison,

one dose of which can, by the amount administered, be timed to produce death at a given date?"

The diminutive yellow-faced man who stood near the table while his visitor was seated upon a rickety chair, remained immovable.

"I have saidee before. Ah Tung know notheeng," was his vague reply.

"Come," cried the old French scientist, jumping up angrily. "Answer me at once, or I shall tell them at Scotland Yard certain suspicions I had of you in Paris three years ago and of that precious friend of yours, Li-Shen. I repeat my question. You have lived in the Malay States, and have studied there. Is there such a thing as a time-poison? Answer me straight now." And he gazed fiercely into the shifty, slant eyes of the Chink.

"More'n one," replied the squeaky-voiced Chinese, thoroughly alarmed. "Ah Tung no think bebuta, for he causee blind man. No, wali-kambing juice and jelatang seed mixee with rengut. Ah Tung think that because orange every day makee dead man velly soon."

Much gratified at the reply, the doctor asked if the dose could be introduced secretly into drink, whether it was tasteless, and whether a single dose could be regulated as to the time it would take effect. To these questions the Chinaman replied:

"Tastee nothing. Big dose kill soon, little dose takee long time, but must have orange evelly day."

"And is that the only poison which is fatal if oranges are eaten?" asked Sir Hubert.

Ah Tung grinned sardonically and nodded in the affirmative.

With this knowledge Doctor Plaud lost no time in imparting his suspicions to Scotland Yard, whereupon Gordon Latimer, who was still at Duke Street, was instructed to make a thorough search of Henry Hough's rooms during his absence, when that night, secreted in an old leather cigarette-case lying in a drawer, was found a white paper packet containing a small quantity of brown powder which the radio expert seized and took to Doctor Plaud who, within an hour or two, identified it as powdered jelatang seed, one of the ingredients of the terrible time-poison of the Malays.

The mystery of Mr. Sibley's tragic death was now quite clear. The adventurer Hough, having met the rich man's widowed daughter, conceived the devilish idea of ingratiating himself with her, and being in possession of the poison he had brought from Penang, resolved to go to London, meet Mr. Sibley, and remove him secretly so that the daughter should come into her father's fortune, when he would afterwards marry her.

All had gone smoothly for the crafty murderer until, on that night when the identity of the poison was established, Annabel had told him of Mr. Caulfield's allegation, and of some curious inquiries Sir Hubert Wilding and Doctor Plaud had been making. The man instantly saw that danger threatened, and having left Upper Grosvenor Street, he wandered about the London streets for many hours, until at early dawn he wearily let himself into the house in Duke Street with his latch-key.

As he did so, a movement in the hall startled him. Next instant he was seized by three sturdy detectives. With a sudden movement of his right arm, however, he proved too quick for them, for he slipped something into his mouth, and ere they had dragged him into the room beyond, he was already dying.

CASE NUMBER EIGHT THE HOUSE OF EVIL

The facts concerning "The Cedars," an ancient house on Richmond Green, to be sufficiently understood, must be recorded in their right sequence.

In the ordinary course of business the old-established firm of Peyton & Crow, auctioneers, valuers and estate agents of Richmond, Surrey, were, by the executors of the late Mrs. D'Arcy Haviland, given the sole agency to dispose of certain premises with their contents in that pleasant riparian town. The place was described as a most desirable freehold property situated on Richmond Green, "with characteristic features of oak floors, original panelling, and Queen Anne staircase."

According to the advertisements the charming old-world residence, entirely modernized, faced that quiet open space near the Thames just off the bustling centre of Richmond, a spot which is a backwater of suburban London, the same to-day pretty much as in the days when Anne was Queen.

Naturally such a property, together with the antique furniture and works of art which had been for more than two centuries in the ancient family of Haviland, attracted considerable notice among connoisseurs and men who, being engaged in business in the City, were anxious to purchase an old-fashioned property so near London.

On the death of the last owner, an eccentric widow, Mrs. D'Arcy Haviland, the house had been closed for nearly twenty years owing to some litigation. It was never cleaned, and the old rooms with their priceless furniture, which included several very rare Carolean chairs and a day-bed, was given over to the moths, rats, and dust. The shutters were closed, and the line garden with its big spreading cedars became overgrown, and the front garden filled with litter.

Naturally, in Richmond, all sorts of weird stories were told concerning the place. One story was to the effect that the late owner, a pleasant widow of sixty, was murdered there. It was true that she had been found dead one evening at the foot of the great old staircase, the wide oaken steps which were worn thin by the tread of generations. She was in her night attire, and as there were marks on the back of her head and her neck was broken, it was quite plain that she had met with death by accident. She had come from her room attracted by some noise, real or fancied, below, and had slipped and fallen, sustaining injuries that were at once fatal. Evidence of this was shown by the plated bedroom candlestick which lay upon the stone floor of the hall, and the half-burnt candle which was lying near by. None of the four servants had heard anything in the night, and none of the ground-floor windows were found unfastened. But that was in 1906, and as the house had been closed ever since it was quite natural that an air of mystery had grown up around it, and that locally it was known as the house where a rich old woman was murdered.

The aspect of the old, red-brick, inartistic place was certainly mysterious. Through the years the tattered green holland blinds had been down. The ivy had overgrown half the house, the lower windows were heavily shuttered and barred, the gravel drive in front was choked with weeds and moss, the bushes had grown high, and grass and wild flowers grew on many of the window-sills. Through those years the old wrought-iron gates had always been secured by a rusty chain and padlock which nobody had been seen even to unlock.

The houses in the vicinity, all of them early Georgian residences, were well-kept and prosperous, for they were the artistic, old-fashioned homes of barristers and merchants, yet "The Cedars"

remained an eyesore upon a very charming spot.

One day, however, workmen came and filed the chain which secured the gate to admit two estate agents, after which the blinds were drawn up, the rotting windows opened, and a board was next day put up announcing that this desirable property was to be sold by Peyton & Crow. Then the whole neighbourhood became instantly agog.

A curious story was, however, at once bruited abroad to the effect that on the second night of the re-opening of the long-closed house a constable, passing across the Green, saw a red, glowing object moving slowly across one of the ground-floor rooms that had been unshuttered. On investigation he found the house locked and the gate chained, for the agents had locked it up for the night and taken the key. Hence, the old untenanted place, full of dust and cobwebs, was declared by all the neighbours to be haunted.

Advertisements that the place was for sale just as it stood, with its antique contents, soon attracted a number of interested persons. Old furniture is interesting to most people, and numbers of persons, out of mere curiosity, in order to go over the house of sinister reputation, applied for orders to view.

Up and down that wonderful old oak staircase, wide and easy of tread, with its oak balustrade and hand-rail, people went daily, while the caretaker placed in charge, an old commissioner named Donald Blair, escorted them through the sombre, time-dimmed rooms into which the wintry light struggled through the leaded panes.

It was concerning this house that a special meeting of the club was convened, to hear the report which the dark-eyed, round-faced French lawyer, Maître Jean Tessier, had brought with him from London.

With the exception of the stout Madame Léontine Van Hecke, all the members were present.

"Our friend Frazer, of Scotland Yard, is much puzzled by a very strange sequence of inexplicable events in a house at Richmond, near London," said Lucien Dubosq. "I ask our dear Maître to describe to you the facts which are put forward for the consideration of the club."

Thereupon the famous criminal lawyer adjusted his gold pince-nez and read from some typewritten pages a most weird and curious story. Certain visitors to that long-closed house had been curiously affected by some sinister influence which was utterly mysterious and inexplicable.

On the second day that orders to view "The Cedars" were given out by Messrs. Peyton & Crow, at about two o'clock in the afternoon a well-known member of the Stock Exchange named Mr. Ralph Crowher, attracted by the advertisement, went by car to Richmond Green, and attended by the commissioner, Blair, inspected the premises. He was in excellent health, but on descending into the hall he was seized by a sudden stroke, and on being carried into his car, expired before his chauffeur could reach Kensington, where he lived. There was an autopsy, and at the inquest death was declared to have resulted from angina pectoris.

Two days later, at ten o'clock in the morning, a young clerk named Lamb, employed by Peyton & Crow, had been making a schedule of some odds and ends in an attic when, on leaving the house, he was seized by violent fits of shivering, followed by paralysis of the lower extremities. He was conveyed on a police ambulance to the Richmond Hospital, where his symptoms were found to be most mysterious. He had suddenly become delirious, and imagined he was seeing horrible and ghastly reptiles crawling over the ceiling and upon the walls. It was a fortnight before he was discharged cured.

The next curious event took place three days after the young clerk's mysterious seizure, and concerned a young man named Harold Fludyer, the nephew of a peer, who was about to marry, and whose *fiancée* was a great lover of antique furniture. The pair went to "The Cedars" with an order to view and spend two hours in the house. They were together the whole time, but suddenly, while in the dusty, neglected drawing-room, with its faded damasks and moth-eaten carpet, the young fellow complained of violent pains in his arms and legs. He sat down in an old armchair, and in pain, cried:

"Oh! my throat! Oh!--oh!"

Those were the last words he uttered, for his limbs stretched themselves out. Then, in convulsions, he fell upon the floor, while his *fiancée* screamed for help. Blair dashed into the room, and kneeling, held up his head, but two minutes later he was dead.

The Richmond Coroner and the police were now thoroughly mystified, and an account of the inquest appearing in the Press, and with some comments of the Coroner, at once aroused the public curiosity.

The Criminal Investigation Department determined to investigate, and one morning Superintendent Frazer and Chief Inspector Charman motored down to Richmond and went over the house of mystery, when, to everyone's surprise, the sinister influence, or whatever it was, made itself felt to Inspector Charman, with the result that while in one of the second floor rooms he suddenly collapsed. The police surgeon, who lived close by, was summoned, but it was twenty-four hours before he sufficiently recovered to be able to be removed to his home.

The most searching investigation had resulted in nothing tangible to account for this remarkable phenomena. One fact remarked, however, was that, though dozens of women had visited the place, not one had--as far as was known--experienced any ill-effects.

On the weird circumstances being published in the papers, no fewer than eight persons--all men--wrote stating that within a short time of visiting "The Cedars" they, too, had experienced great pain in their arms and legs, accompanied by shortness of breath, vertigo, or semi-consciousness. Each of these persons had been seen by two eminent medical men appointed by the Home Office, but the symptoms could not be identified with any of those of common diseases. All sorts of theories had been set up by amateur investigators, spiritualists and others, all of which had been dismissed by Scotland Yard. It was at this juncture that the aid of the expert investigators who composed the Crimes Club were invited to view the premises and give an opinion of the cause of the extraordinary sinister influence prevailing in the place.

When the great French criminal lawyer had finished reading the amazing statement there was a dead silence for some moments, each member seated around the table exchanging glances with his neighbour.

"A complete mystery, Messieurs," remarked the stout Baron d'Antenac. "We should, I think, endeavour to solve the problem. Scotland Yard are quite baffled, it would appear."

"Superintendent Frazer spoke to me over the telephone from London last night," the elegant Chef de la Sûreté added. "Still another tragedy occurred yesterday. Mr. Crow, of the firm of Peyton & Crow, happened to be upstairs in the house talking with a prospective purchaser when a boy telegraph messenger, who had been to deliver a message to him, descended and mounted his cycle on his way back to the post office, when he reeled and fell off. When he was picked up life was extinct. He had been in the drawing-room, the same in which Mr. Fludyer had been so suddenly attacked!"

Gordon Latimer at once announced his readiness to assist in the investigation, and was joined by

Fernande Buysse and Maurice Jacquinot, both of whom were ever on the look out for a fresh "stunt" for *Le Journal*. Next moment both the easy-going Baron and Professor Lemelletier agreed also to go to London and endeavour to unravel the mystery.

Four days later a young Frenchman, accompanied by a fair-haired young Englishman, took rooms at the Roebuck Hotel on Richmond Hill, which offered a magnificent view across the picturesque Terrace Gardens and away up the winding valley of the Thames. They were Gordon Latimer and Maurice Jacquinot, who were there to once again try for success in unravelling one of the most remarkable mysteries with which the Metropolitan Police had ever been faced. The Professor, the Baron, and Fernande Buysse had taken their quarters at the Grosvenor Hotel in London, so as to be near Scotland Yard.

The morning after their arrival was cold and wet, but at eleven o'clock Latimer and Jacquinot, with umbrellas, turned from George Street on to the Green, and by the estate agents' board recognised the big red brick, Queen Anne house, half hidden by its riot of untrimmed ivy. Beneath the porch stood Blair, the commissioner, who had received notice of the two visitors. Inside the great, square, rather dark hall, stood the Professor, Mademoiselle Fernande, and the stout Baron in conversation. They had arrived a few moments before, therefore the door having been closed, all four proceeded to make an inspection of the lower rooms. The big dining-room, with its heavy furniture and a dozen fine old family portraits, looked gloomy and mysterious; the library, filled from floor to ceiling with heavy brown-backed tomes, had an old-fashioned geographical globe at the dirt grimed window; and the morning-room with its heavy leather furniture, and the ante-room upholstered in faded green damask, ragged and rotten, smelt damp and mouldy. In the corners huge cobwebs waved in the draught when doors were opened, and the very carpets seemed to rub away to thinness beneath one's feet.

"What a dismal place!" exclaimed the Baron, in French. "No wonder some people have experienced a creepy feeling."

"And no wonder that somebody has declared that a ghost walks across the library at night!" remarked the sprightly young Parisienne, who wore a big fur coat and close-fitting hat.

Latimer and Jacquinot made a cool and studied tour of each apartment, while the Professor scrutinised everything through his pince-nez, and the Baron stood and surveyed the rooms in general.

Presently they ascended the wide staircase, and as they did so, they were joined by Superintendent Frazer, who had that moment arrived, the tall commissioner following.

The big old-world drawing-room, the three bay windows of which looked out upon the Green, was shabby and dirty in the morning light, the old Brussels carpet, grey and threadbare in patches, the gilt furniture, tarnished and blackened by age, the straight-backed cane chairs of the days of King Charles, the Queen Anne tables, the rusty old fire-dogs, the decaying red silk damask curtains which hung in rags, and some of the pictures, being half obscured by great black cobwebs, rendered the apartment depressing and mysterious.

Blair, pointing to an old armchair upholstered with old yellow silk damask, woven with coloured birds, said:

"Mr. Fludver was taken ill and died in that chair within six minutes."

The little knot of visitors regarded the big old chair with considerable interest. The Professor and the Baron both sat in it, and were followed by the pretty Fernande. The latter, as she sat in the chair, gazed thoughtfully around the depressing old room, with its air of a century ago, and yet the furniture of which would probably fetch record prices under the hammer.

"Tell us about the ghost," Latimer asked of the white haired old commissionaire in uniform.

"Well, sir, I don't believe in no ghosts, and yet----" and he paused.

"Well? Have you seen anything?" inquired Fernande in her broken English.

"The night before last, Miss, just before I locked up at five o'clock, I was on my way downstairs, and passing the door of this room, I saw distinctly shining from underneath a dull red glow. I at once opened the door, but the room was in darkness. Yet I could have sworn that I had seen a funny light here, like the light of a fire!"

"You didn't investigate further?" asked the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"I went round the room, Sir, but I saw nothing."

"Imagination, I should say!" remarked the Professor.

"The constable who first reported having seen the curious glow downstairs, I have myself questioned very closely, and he is convinced that he really saw something unusual," the Superintendent remarked.

The party went round the rooms on the first floor, and then by a wide spiral staircase, a continuation of the oaken one, they ascended to the bedrooms on the second floor, where, in each room, stood an old carved four-poster, hung with its original chintzes, now black with age, and in many places tattered and decayed. Like the rooms below, they were all dirty, with windows begrimed with dirt and pests, cobwebs swaying everywhere.

So far as the party could see there was nothing whatever to account for the fatal injuries, or the sudden serious indisposition, by which other unfortunate visitors had been stricken. That some unknown but deadly influence was present in that long closed house had been proved a number of times, but strangely enough, of the dozens of women who had gone in and out, not one had ever complained of any extraordinary feeling.

The party had reassembled in the dining-room when Superintendent Frazer asked Blair to leave them, and then locked the door.

Addressing them, he said slowly in English, so that all could understand:

"Now, Mademoiselle and gentleman, you have seen the house, which I have ordered to be closed to the public while you are conducting your investigations. I confess that the problem has completely baffled us. There seems no logical reason for the weird phenomena. Indeed, you will agree, I think, that there is something entirely uncanny about the whole circumstances. I hand over the inquiry unreservedly to you, well knowing the abilities of your excellent club. We have held several theories, but each has, on investigation, broken down. I am highly interested in your views, and of course if you wish for any help, I have already given orders to the sub-divisional inspector of police here in Richmond, to give you every assistance possible."

"Oh! Oh!" cried the stout Baron suddenly, as though in pain, and taking a deep breath he suddenly gasped in French: "I--I don't feel very well myself!" The others, alarmed, instantly noticed how flushed his face had suddenly become, and in a second Latimer had drawn a chair behind him, and taking his arm, sat him in it, while Lemelletier was instantly at his side asking how he felt.

"I am quite dizzy! My head seems bursting, and terrible shooting pains are going through my eyes. My legs are cold--ugh! shivering!" he said. And he huddled himself in the chair, his wide open eyes staring fixedly straight before him, while his hands clenched with the pain he suffered.

"Someone fetch some brandy--quick! A bottle!" cried the grave-faced old medico-legist, and instantly Latimer dashed out of the house to the nearest public-house. He got the bottle opened by the bar-man, and taking a syphon of soda and a tumbler, he rushed back to where the Baron sat, half-conscious, with Jacquinot and Fernande supporting him.

The Professor poured out nearly a quarter of a tumbler of neat brandy, and forced it between the Baron's lips. Then, taking a little scribbling-block from his pocket, he wrote out a prescription, and this the young Englishman took to the nearest chemist who at once made it up. A dose of this mixture was administered to the Baron every ten minutes, while the others stood aside conversing only in whispers.

They had there proof positive that any attempt to solve the uncanny mystery would be at great personal risk.

What was the secret of that fatal influence which made itself felt only upon men?

In about an hour the Baron had sufficiently recovered to be assisted into the car which had brought him, with the Professor and Fernande, from London, and the meeting broke up without anything being definitely arranged. Everybody had been alarmed and mystified beyond measure at the amazing suddenness of the Baron's attack.

Back at the Roebuck, Latimer and Jacquinot calmly discussed the situation for nearly two hours, the pair being locked in Latimer's bedroom.

"One would almost suspect the existence of some sinister kind of death-ray," remarked the young inventor of radio-television, whose discovery had made him world-famous. "Of course there is, up to the present, no such thing as a death-ray, yet I see no reason why, with the rapid development of electricity, some such device may not be demonstrated in the very near future."

"Well, my dear friend, what is your theory?" asked the popular French journalist.

"I have none. I cannot see why this mysterious unseen influence should affect some--even to death--while others are immune," he said. "What, for example, actually happened to the Baron? He was at my side the whole time. He was affected, while I felt nothing!"

"Exactly. It is all most horribly weird and uncanny. Superintendent Frazer seems to have grown apprehensive lest either one of us may be stricken with death. He warned us to be extremely careful, you will recollect," said Jacquinot.

"Personally, I think that if we are to solve the problem, we ought to have the premises entirely at our disposal," said Latimer. "Blair should be withdrawn, and the house, closed to all visitors, should be put entirely into our charge. If you agree, then we will see the estate agents regarding it."

"I entirely agree," said the young Frenchman. Hence the pair later on called upon Mr. Peyton, an affable, alert, middle-aged man in glasses, who at once expressed interest in their inquiries, and acceded to their request that no further orders to view be given, and that Blair should be withdrawn.

The young clerk, Mr. Lamb, was called, and gave his experience of the mysterious attack, his symptoms and his subsequent delirium.

"What's your opinion regarding the red glow that a constable saw one night and that Blair also saw quite recently?" asked Latimer of the estate agent.

Mr. Peyton smiled incredulously and replied: "In most cases houses that have been closed for long periods earn the reputation of harbouring shadows from the spirit world. We have had

several such cases. Indeed, in these days when such interest is being taken in spiritualism, the number of houses declared to be the refuge of those from the Beyond seems to be increasing.

"Then you dismiss that?" remarked Jacquinet in English.

"Certainly I do. But of course, the evil influence present in the house is a bewildering problem. I cannot in the least account for it. Indeed, I regret that my firm have ever had anything to do with the Haviland estate."

In reply to Gordon Latimer, Mr. Peyton told them that the solicitor representing the executors was a Mr. Drage, whose offices were in Lincoln's Inn Fields. So that afternoon he and Jacquinet called upon him.

Latimer explained the reason of the visit, and how they were endeavouring to elucidate this mystery of "The Cedars," and asked the elderly, well-preserved lawyer whether they might know something of the history of the estate.

"Certainly," he replied, and calling a clerk, sent him for the papers. In a few moments the young man returned with a formidable bundle of faded and dusty documents bound with tape that had once been pink but was now grey with age.

"The estate was first placed in the hands of my grandfather in 1830," said the clean-shaven lawyer. "Our new client was a Mr. Henry D'Arcy Haviland, who also had an estate near Iver, in Buckinghamshire. From the correspondence Mr. Haviland appears to have been something of a recluse; the scion of a very ancient family who had lived since 1662 in the house at Richmond, now known as 'The Cedars,' the grounds of which were then very extensive and ran down to the Thames. He had travelled considerably, and had been in South America in the early days. He had married a Brazilian lady, but as far as I can discover, the lady either died or lived apart from him, as there is no record of her ever having been at 'The Cedars.' In 1862 Mr. Henry died, leaving the whole of his property, including 'The Cedars' and its contents, to a young cousin, Mr. D'Arcy Haviland, who married, lived there with his wife until 1906, when he died. Apparently in the last ten years of his life Haviland, who had shown great promise at Oriel, became a studious recluse, for there are people still in the neighbourhood who recollect him, dressed in the style of the 'sixties, sitting in his garden in summer, and very rarely being seen beyond the threshold of his front gate. During those years the place became dirty and neglected. He kept chickens in the basement to supply him with eggs, which seemed his staple diet, and at one time had no fewer than fourteen cats on account of the swarm of mice with which the house had become infested. Then, when he died, litigation arose, and his wife, who was eccentric and lived apart from him, died suddenly. Then the house was closed and sealed, the key handed to Messrs. Peyton & Crow as estate agents, and for nearly twenty years nobody set foot into the place till just recently, when the state of the premises was found to be as you have seen them."

"It is little wonder that the public imagination has declared it to be inhabited by something supernatural," Latimer remarked.

"It seems to be extraordinary from all I hear!" declared Mr. Drage. "I only hope, gentlemen, that you and your friends will be successful in ferreting out the truth, and put an end for ever to this death-trap for the unwary."

During the two days that followed, Jacquinet and Latimer were in London in consultation with the Professor, the Baron, and Fernande, when, after many theories had been advanced, Latimer and the French journalist volunteered to keep night-watch inside the house of mystery in order to investigate the mysterious red glow that had been witnessed on at least two occasions. Mademoiselle Fernande was eager to accompany them, but they would not hear of it. The risk

was far too great they all agreed.

The house was closed, and the keys of the padlock on the gate and that of the front door had been given them. Hence, on the following night at about nine o'clock, the pair, carrying electric torches and automatic pistols, entered the house unobserved, and drawing the ragged blinds so as not to be noticed from outside, lit a child's night-light and placed it in a saucer in the grate of the dining-room, where they produced their flasks and sandwiches, and noiselessly settled themselves down in two big old easy chairs to wait. Their movements were exactly those of two detectives whom Frazer had sent there some weeks before, and who had discovered nothing. Would the Crimes Club fare any better?

Hour after hour they kept vigil, but beyond the rattling of the windows, the howling of the winter wind, the banging of an upstairs door, and the slow rustling of a tattered silk curtain blown by the draught, nothing was heard and nothing seen. The room through the long night presented a weird, mysterious scene illuminated only by the faint little light burning in the grate, flickering ever and anon and casting strange shadows upon the ceiling. At two o'clock they emptied their flasks and ate their sandwiches, and at seven, just as day was dawning, relinquished their watch and returned to the hotel to snatch a few hours' sleep. Before doing so, however, Latimer telephoned to his friends at the Grosvenor Hotel reporting the result of their vigil.

Next night and the next went by just as uneventfully. The nights had grown colder, and not daring to have a fire, they were compelled to wrap themselves in travelling rugs to keep themselves warm.

On the fourth night Jacquinet was replaced by the Professor, who was most anxious to bear his share in watching, and as they sat together at about two o'clock, Latimer's quick ears suddenly caught a light sound, apparently out in the hall. Motioning to the Professor to keep quiet, he rose stealthily, and taking up his pistol, crept quietly and noiselessly to the door, which, with a sudden movement, he flung open.

A blood-red glow almost blinded him, and so startled was he, that an exclamation of surprise escaped him, but next second the hall was plunged in complete darkness. Snatching his flash-lamp, he turned it on, and with the Professor searched every nook and cranny. There was no place where anything could be concealed, hence, though the phenomenon of the red glow was corroborated, its origin was as complete an enigma as before.

Thus the investigators became even more puzzled. The glow which the constable had first noticed was no imagination but an actual fact! Yet the whole circumstances were entirely baffling, and it was felt that only by tireless vigilance could the mystery of the strange red glow, and with it that of the sinister influence, be discovered.

Hence night after night a ceaseless watch was kept, but all without result. At last it was decided to withdraw for a week, allow the place to be visited by prospective purchasers, and then suddenly keep further watch.

This course was adopted, but on the very first day the public, ignorant of the investigation in progress, were admitted, a retired Mincing Lane merchant named Tweedie, who had looked over the place with his wife, complained of feeling unaccountably unwell immediately he entered the drawing-room, and he sat for a whole hour in that fatal armchair before he felt sufficiently recovered from vertigo to descend and return to the station.

Therefore, once again the house of death on Richmond Green was closed, and then, after a lapse of a week, Latimer, Jacquinet, and the Professor formed a trio to watch again.

The night was cold and damp, and a heavy fog lay over the valley of the Thames, so that by

midnight the Green was enveloped so thickly that it was hard to distinguish any object a yard away. Inside the house, as the three men sat facing the tiny light which shed its uncertain rays to the ceiling of the spacious room, the silence was complete. The door had been purposely left half open, and now and then strange sounds were heard, as there are in every house in the silent hours, stairs creaking, panelling cracking, or the scamper of mice overhead. The watchers made no sound, for it had been agreed not to speak. They only made signs to each other, hardly discernible in the dim light.

The old oak stairs had creaked once or twice, but they put the noise down to the expansion of the wood, which, after being depressed by the feet of those who had last ascended, was expanding. But Latimer, seized by sudden curiosity, pointed to the door to show his intention, and rising, crept noiselessly along the wall, and then suddenly out into the hall.

Next second the sharp report of a pistol rang through the house, instantly followed by a second. A cry of pain and the exclamation, "My God!" Latimer's two companions dashed out with their torches, only to find him lying crumpled up against the panelling of the hall, while half-way up the stairs lay the body of an undersized, bearded little man with a gorilla-like face. He had been shot through the jaw in self-defence by Latimer.

The latter was still conscious.

"Don't--don't touch that hand-rail!" he managed to gasp as they found that he was wounded in the chest.

While the Professor remained, Jacquinet rushed round to the police station, where the sergeant on duty telephoned to the doctor while two constables and another sergeant hurried round to "The Cedars."

At once they identified the foreign-looking little man, who was quite dead, as having lived for years in Friars Lane, a narrow way which led from the Green to the towing-path beside the river. His name was Teddy Haviland who, though well educated, followed the calling of waterman, and whose old cronies had always understood that he was in some way connected with the Havilands who once owned "The Cedars." While the doctor, hastily summoned, examined Latimer, the others made searching investigation of the strange little man who had been shot on the stairs. At the bottom of the staircase lay a small flash-lamp across the glass of which was stuck a thin layer of red gelatine, while near by lay a small bottle, of which the brown greasy contents--which looked like furniture polish--had nearly all escaped.

The unconscious man's warning not to touch the hand-rail upon the stairs caused them to search, whereupon they at last discovered that just above the spot where the intruder had fallen the wood had been smeared with some of the greasy liquid from the bottle.

At the inquest Mr. Peyton gave evidence that as soon as the news was circulated that "The Cedars" was to be opened and sold, the eccentric old waterman called and declared to a clerk that he was the rightful owner of the place. But his claim was laughed to scorn and quickly forgotten. Whether there was any justification in the claim is not known, but the police authorities, eager to suppress the actual truth, regarded the death as that of suicide while temporarily insane, a verdict to that effect being returned.

Professor Lemelletier and Professor Boyd, the Home Office expert, were soon busy analysing the contents of the bottle, some of which was found spread upon the hand-rail of the stairs.

The fact that the dead waterman, Haviland, had told Mr. Peyton's clerk that he had lived his early life in Brazil gave the Professor a clue to the bewildering affair, and within a week he and Professor Boyd were able to make an authentic statement to Superintendent Frazer to the effect

that the ugly little man, obsessed by the fact that what he rightly or wrongly considered to be his birthright was to be sold, conceived a dastardly idea of revenging himself upon those who desecrated the place by going there to inspect its antique treasures.

In South America they found he had for some years lived with a native tribe on the banks of the Amazon River, a thousand miles from its mouth, and had, from a medicine-man, learnt the secret of perhaps the only deadly poison which can be absorbed through the skin. Years before he had written down the formula, and also the various ingredients, two of which were extremely difficult to obtain in this country. He had, however, been able to get them from a herbalist in Paris, and, after infinite trouble, had mixed the deadly compound with which, from time to time, he paid secret visits to the house, and smeared the hand-rail of the stairs, with the terrible results already described.

The Professor and his colleague were able to identify the poison; the chief ingredients were the ground seeds of the cebera odollam mixed with those of the carica papaya, mercury, and several other substances which combine to make one of the most terrible and deadly poisons, yet one hardly at all known to European toxicologists.

As the hands of the innocent persons rested upon the rail on the top of the banisters they absorbed the poison, and by it were more or less affected according to the amount absorbed.

Hence the reason that no lady was attacked was rendered quite clear, because they invariably wore gloves.

To-day "The Cedars" has been renovated, pointed, restored, and refurnished, and for obvious reasons its name has been changed by its new owner.

CASE NUMBER NINE

A SECRET OF THE UNDERWORLD

"My opinion is that the old Spaniard Hernan is guilty!" declared Baron Edouard d'Antenac, raising his glass of *chartreuse* to his lips and slowly sipping the colourless liqueur.

"*Mon cher* Baron. That is an opinion unpremeditated, hence it should not be expressed," remarked Lucien Dubosq. "Recall for a moment the circumstances of the Goullin affair at Poissy. You were convinced that Mademoiselle Meignan was responsible, whereas she was entirely innocent," he added reprovingly.

"The circumstances of the case under consideration are entirely different," interposed Professor Lemelletier, an opinion with which Doctor Plaud entirely agreed.

An extraordinary meeting of the club had been convened behind locked doors for the purpose of considering the report of the Chief of Police of Madrid concerning certain mysterious circumstances which had occurred at Olmedo, a good-sized village between Madrid and Valladolid.

Each of the members of the club seated around the table in that rather bare, stuffy room, was aware of the facts which had been published from time to time in the Paris and London Press, and which had aroused general interest on account of the mysterious and unaccountable affair.

Briefly related, the enigma was as follows:

About six months before, a rich, good-looking, well-bred young Englishman, Lieutenant-Commander Hugh Armstrong, late of the Royal Navy, arrived with a man friend, Mr. Harold Trevor, at the Ritz Hotel in Madrid, and announced that he desired to purchase an old château, with the intention of living in Spain. Quickly he was chased by estate agents of all sorts, and he viewed at Escorial, La Granja, Aranjuez, and other places, old castles, the proprietors of which were anxious to sell their estates to a rich Englishman. After considering many offers he decided at last to buy an ancient, rather dilapidated property called the Castle of Olmedo, once the property of the lord of Castile, but having passed into the hands of a spendthrift heir who was earning his living somewhere in America, the creditors were only too ready to accept the small sum which Commander Armstrong offered for it. The place was a big turreted building, strongly fortified, a large number of its rooms containing antique furniture which was included in the purchase. The banqueting-hall was adorned by faded frescoes by Bayen, Maella, Velazquez and other painters, and a great quantity of old tapestry was hung everywhere.

The dark gloomy building with cyclopean walls and narrow windows stood upon a hill commanding the country towards Madrid, while the reputation of its foul dungeons and torture-chambers during the Inquisition was a highly sinister one.

After three months occupied by legal formalities prior to the tall, dark, clean-shaven Englishman entering possession, there one day arrived at the Ritz Hotel from Paris an elderly Frenchwoman and her handsome daughter, who at once searched for Armstrong and found him. Their meeting was enthusiastic, and the girl's mother, having visited the Castle by car, at once set about engaging local servants. As a temporary staff, a cook, three maids and a man were considered sufficient for the wants of the bachelor, for he intended to open only eight of the rooms, and leave the remainder closed.

The young girl, who had signed the hotel visitors' book as Valentine Reudnel, could speak

English very fluently, for a chambermaid had overheard a violent quarrel between Armstrong and herself on the night prior to his leaving the hotel to take up his residence at the Castle, an important fact which she afterwards recalled. She, however, not knowing English, had no idea what the disturbance was all about.

Apparently mother and daughter went with the new owner of the Castle by car to Olmedo, lunched there in celebration of the Englishman's entry upon his new property, and then returned to Madrid in the afternoon. Armstrong expected to be rejoined by his friend Trevor, a well-dressed young man of means, who before the completion of the purchase had gone on business to London, but only on the previous day he had telegraphed from the French frontier at Irun to say that he was on his way to Madrid by the Sud Express.

According to the new servants, Commander Armstrong remained up till midnight, when Hernan Andino, the old *valet-de-chambre*, was given orders to close the heavy front door and retire. Next morning when one of the maids went to the big old library she found the door locked. She had gone there to open the shutters and dust it, but it was closed. Hernan, on going to the Englishman's room, found that the bed had not been slept in. In the centre of the room were two copies of the *Scotsman* newspaper, dated January 10th, which had apparently been crumpled up and cast aside.

The Castle was searched but there were no traces of the missing owner, who had only the previous day entered into possession of the historic old place. The closed library aroused the servants' curiosity, but it was believed that Commander Armstrong had perhaps gone out to explore the neighbourhood during the night--which had been a brilliant moonlit one--and become lost in one of the nearby forests, some of which were of great extent.

At noon, he not having returned, old Hernan saw the village gendarme, who helped him to burst open the door of the library. The room was in darkness, for the heavy, iron-bound shutters were closed and fastened on the inside by strong bars. On one of them being opened, allowing the sunlight to fall across the polished oak floor, they were horrified to see the body of the English naval officer lying huddled in the corner of the great long room.

A second's glance at his distorted features was sufficient to show that he had been strangled! Around his throat was a thin, dark mark, but there was no sign of the cord which the assassin had used.

How could the unfortunate man have been attacked when the windows were all closed and barred, and the door locked on the inside?

The two Spaniards saw themselves faced by an inexplicable mystery. A maidservant was sent hurriedly for a doctor, while the gendarme telephoned to his chief at Valladolid and to the two ladies, Madame and Mademoiselle Reudnel, at the Ritz Hotel in Madrid.

Mother and daughter were aghast at the terrible news, and announced their intention of leaving the capital at once and coming to render any assistance possible in tracing the assassin. Then, an hour later, a motor-car drove up from the station and in it Armstrong's bosom friend, Harold Trevor.

Old Hernan, who met him upon the threshold, broke to him the terrible news of his friend's mysterious death, causing him to halt speechless in amazement. But only for a moment.

Instantly he was active in minute inquiries into Armstrong's movements. He stood beside the doctor who was examining the dead man's injuries, and conversed with him in French, which the dark-faced Spaniard fortunately understood.

"No," said the doctor decisively. "This is certainly not suicide, but deliberately-planned murder. Great strength must have been exercised by the assassin. Probably after killing his victim he drew the cord still tighter until it snapped, leaving the ends in his hands. These he probably placed instinctively in his pocket before escaping--a premeditated crime, without a doubt!"

"True," said Trevor. "But how was it possible when door and windows were all secured from the inside? There is no other means of ingress, the police agent says!"

"Señor, I regret, but it is a mystery which the police must solve," replied the little bald-headed doctor. Nothing more could be said.

From Valladolid, four police agents in plain clothes arrived two hours later and searched the library thoroughly, ascertaining that there was no other entrance, secret or otherwise, to the place. Yet it certainly could not have been a case of suicide, one proof being the absence of the cord by which the murder had been committed.

During the afternoon the stout, overbearing Madame Reudnel and her daughter arrived by train from Madrid in a state of great agitation. Madame had known Armstrong for some years, and it was understood by the servants that Mademoiselle Valentine was engaged to be married to their master, that being the reason why he had purchased the Castle and estate.

Old Hernan, at their urgent request, showed them the body of the dead man--a sight which moved the poor girl to a paroxysm of tears--and later both mother and daughter left again for Madrid.

Days went by. Inquiries were prosecuted by the police of the district, while the affair was also taken up from Madrid, and the keenest officers of the Spanish detective force were called in to try and solve the curious problem. Trevor went at intervals to the Castle and worked unremittingly, giving the police every assistance, but all to no avail, until at last Madrid gave up the inquiry and sent its report, much as already stated, to the Crimes Club in Paris for their consideration and advice.

The Spanish police acknowledged themselves baffled by a mystery equally inexplicable both as regards motive and the manner in which the crime had been committed. Hence on the winter's night in question, the members of that strange organization of criminologists in Paris were seriously discussing it.

"The affair could be easily accounted for if some secret exit to the library existed, but apparently there is none," remarked the great criminal lawyer, Maître Tessier.

"Where did the rich Englishman come from?" queried the level-headed Doctor Plaud, to whom Dubosq, who had been in communication with the Madrid police concerning the affair, replied:

"At present that point is not definitely established. Trevor has been questioned by Señor Andrade, Chief of the Madrid Detective Department. He said that he and Armstrong had met casually in Monte Carlo two seasons before, and had travelled together for some months in America. Armstrong had been axed from the navy after a brilliant war-record in which he had charge of a destroyer and gained his D.S.O. on the Mole at Zeebrugge. He was evidently well off, for he paid Trevor's travelling expenses to Madrid, asking him to keep him company while he found a suitable estate."

There was a pause.

"But what can an English naval officer want with an old castle in Spain?" queried Jacquinet.

"Except that he was intending to marry Mademoiselle Reudnel," suggested Fernande Buysse.

After a long discussion the white-bearded Doctor Plaud said:

"Messieurs, if we discuss this complicated affair for a whole week we shall never arrive at any conclusion without examining the spot, and collecting evidence at Olmedo."

This common-sense view was unanimously endorsed, and at once it was resolved to accede to the official request of the Madrid police that some of their members should travel south and endeavour to solve the extraordinary problem.

Within a week active steps were being taken by the Professor, Jacquinot, Latimer, and Fernande, who travelled together to Spain for the purpose of resuming the investigation of the tangled affair at the point where the Spanish police had relinquished their inquiries.

The Professor and Jacquinot, in pretence of being French tourists, took up their quarters at the primitive little *fonda*, the del Norte in the village of Olmedo, beneath the frowning Castle with a distant view of the Guadarrama mountains on the one hand, and the great plain of the Duero River on the other, a spot in the midst of the richest wine-lands of Central Spain. Latimer and Fernande, however, went on to Madrid, where they put up at the Hôtel de la Paix in the busy Puerta del Sol, in the centre of the city.

The first visit of the young Englishman and his pretty companion was to the police headquarters, where they were welcomed by a tall, rather bald, black-bearded Spanish official, Señor Alfonse Andrade, director of the detective force, who had been advised of their coming. He received them in his cool, shady private room, which looked out on a great courtyard.

After declaring that the affair was a mystery which apparently admitted of no solution, he said:

"The Englishman, Trevor, still remains at the Ritz Hotel."

"Does he know more of his dead companion than he has admitted?" Fernande queried. "Is he concealing anything?"

Señor Andrade exhibited his palms with a gesture of ignorance.

"If we are to solve the problem, we must first ascertain the true identity of this wandering Englishman who buys a castle and is murdered on the first night he enters possession," said Latimer in French. "At present he is a mystery. Was the body photographed after death?"

In response, Andrade showed the pair a gruesome portrait of a face so disfigured by strangulation that recognition would be impossible.

"Has the luggage of the man Trevor been examined?" Latimer asked, receiving a reply in the negative.

That decided the pair of investigators. That same evening they moved to the Ritz Hotel and took rooms on the same floor as that occupied by Harold Trevor.

Next morning they sat in the big palm lounge and saw Trevor go out at about eleven o'clock, leaving the key of No. 161 upon the counter at the bureau. Presently Fernande and her companion passed into the *salle-à-manger* where they ate their luncheon. Half-way through, Latimer called a page and sent him to the office for the key of 161, which the unsuspecting concierge handed out.

Ten minutes later he was in Trevor's room rapidly examining his luggage. His suit-case had an ordinary lock which soon yielded to one of the keys upon Latimer's bunch, and quickly running through the contents, he found at the bottom, with a number of papers, a snapshot photograph of Trevor with a companion, which he secured. Among the letters were two in French signed

"Valentine Reudnel," showing that he and Mademoiselle were upon very friendly terms. In one she urged him to leave Madrid for Athens, as it would be "more pleasant." Why?

Ten minutes sufficed to examine thoroughly Trevor's possessions, after which he relocked the suit-case, and leaving everything as he found it, returned to Fernande, carrying with him the two letters and the photograph.

When later that afternoon he showed the snapshot to Andrade, the latter instantly identified Trevor's companion as Commander Armstrong! Latimer did not, however, show the Spaniard the two letters from Armstrong's *fiancée* to his friend.

That evening Fernande followed Trevor when he strolled out after dinner, and watched him meet two rather ill-bred looking Englishmen at a small café in the Calle de Cervantes, at the rear of the hotel. They sat for half an hour in deep conversation, after which all three rose and went to a rather questionable variety theatre where they spent the remainder of the evening.

Next morning Latimer and Fernande took train to Olmedo, where they had a conference with the Professor and Jacquinot, who had already made the acquaintance of old Hernan the valet, the other servants having been dismissed. The Professor and his friend posed as strangers full of curiosity to see the room in the Castle in which the tragedy had occurred, and after a twenty-peseta note had been slipped into the old fellow's ready palm, he conducted them to the dark, sombre old room.

The ice thus broken, the two Frenchmen pretended to be interested in spiritualism, and arranged with Hernan to spend the night locked in the room. They hoped that during the night hours they would be able to examine thoroughly the place for any secret entry by which the assassin had passed.

That same evening, leaving Fernande with them, Latimer motored into Valladolid and caught the Sud Express to Paris, and on to London.

Superintendent Frazer at Scotland Yard expressed delight at his visit, and when he heard of the unaccountable strangling of an Englishman in the Castle of Olmedo, he at once became interested.

"Curious that a wandering Englishman should purchase a dilapidated old castle!" he remarked.

"Where is his *fiancée* now?"

"I have not been able to ascertain."

Frazer sniffed and drew his forefinger across his shaven upper lip, a habit of his when mystified.

"I think his friend, Trevor, knows much more of the affair than he will tell," the young radio experimenter went on. "I have photographs of both of them," he added, producing the picture he had secured from Trevor's suit-case.

The Superintendent placed it upon his blotting-pad, and bending to it, examined it closely for quite a long time. Then, taking a large reading-glass, he rose, carried it to the window, and scrutinised it very closely with the most intense interest.

"Apparently we've hit upon something very interesting here, Mr. Latimer," he said, his face betraying suppressed excitement.

And ringing, he ordered the constable who entered to seek Mr. Batson.

A few moments later a tall, well-dressed man with deep-set grey eyes and high cheek bones entered.

"Do you recognise this pair, Batson?" asked the Superintendent.

The man smiled the instant he took the picture in his fingers.

"I think so--at least this one," and he pointed to the portrait of Commander Armstrong. "But I'll go and see if I am correct."

"I think you are," laughed Frazer. "Better make certain."

When ten minutes later Inspector Batson, in charge of the criminal records, returned, he bore in his hand a neat little file, which he opened, displaying a form upon which were finger-prints, a long typewritten record, and several photographs.

One of the pictures was of a man without collar or tie--the portrait having been taken by the police--the exact counterpart of that of the naval commander who had been so mysteriously murdered!

"Ronald Levy, *alias* Barron, Hopgrove, Armstrong and other names. Usually poses as a Lieutenant-Commander in the Navy," the Inspector read from the record. "Aged thirty-four. Last sentence at the London Sessions, October, 1918, five years for burglary and theft of jewels, the property of Lady Ridgend, of Wood Newon Hall, near Davenport. Works with international gang who seek employment in country houses and let in their accomplices at night. Associate of Henry Martin, *alias* Grey, Clapperton, Trevor, and other names, expert jewel thief who lives in Paris. There are dates of other previous convictions," he added.

"Trevor!" cried the young wireless research worker who was such an enthusiast in the investigation of mysteries of crime. "That's the name of the other man in the photograph!"

Without delay the records of the man who posed in Madrid as a wealthy idler were brought, and when the photographs were compared, it was seen that the faces of both were identical. The finger-prints were there also, together with a very black record which included a sentence of seven years at the Manchester Assizes for safe-breaking at a well-known jewellers in St. Ann's Square, and other convictions, one of them being at the Assizes of the Seine for jewel robbery at the St. Lazare station in Paris.

Rapidly Latimer scribbled down the details, and from the Superintendent and the Inspector learnt that both men were dangerous criminals.

He then produced the crumpled copies of the *Scotsman* newspaper found on the floor of the dead man's bedroom, and asked:

"Have you any report of a jewel robbery immediately prior to January 10th last?"

Inspector Batson was absent nearly a quarter of an hour, when he returned with another inspector who bore a paper in his hand.

"There was a great safe robbery on January 8th at Macfarlane's, the well-known jewellers in Prince's Street, Edinburgh, Sir," the man said. "Here is a list with some sketches of part of the missing property, worth sixty thousand pounds. The thieves got away with a greater part of the stock."

They examined the newspaper and found in it a report of the sensational robbery and a statement that the thieves had got clear away.

With this knowledge, Latimer telegraphed to the Professor in cipher asking him to warn Andrade to keep Trevor under strict observation, and explaining that he was on his way back to Spain with all haste. That same night he left London, and three days later sat in consultation with his three

friends in the little *fonda* at Olmedo.

"The fact that Trevor has been convicted in Paris will be of interest to our friend Dubosq, at the Prefecture," remarked the Professor. "He may have a further record of him."

"I have already written to him," said Latimer. "I scribbled a note in the train and left it at the Prefecture as I crossed Paris to the Quai d'Orsay. What we have next to discover is the identity of those two women, mother and daughter, and the real motive why this castle was purchased."

"As the headquarters of the dangerous gang perhaps?" laughed Mademoiselle.

"No, some deeper motive, I think," remarked Jacquinot.

Latimer felt that, in view of what he had ascertained in London, he should lose no time in again seeing the head of the Madrid detective force, hence that hot August night he left the little wayside station of Olmedo for the Spanish capital. The train was a slow one, the journey dusty and tedious, and through the greater part of the night he dozed in the ill-lit carriage, arriving at the Hôtel de la Paix about five o'clock in the morning.

Later, when he sat explaining to Señor Andrade what he had learnt in London, the Spaniard said:

"I had the telephone message from Professor Lemelletier, but unfortunately, before I could act upon it, the Englishman had left Madrid! We know that he took a ticket for Barcelona, but as far as we can discover he has not yet arrived there."

"H'm! Scented danger, and bolted, I suppose! What about the two ladies?"

"They left three days after the affair at Olmedo--for the north, I believe."

"Then they were not followed?"

"No, Monsieur. There was no suspicion against them. The younger was the *fiancée* of the unfortunate victim, and as such received all our sympathy."

Gordon Latimer laughed. He, like other members of the Crimes Club, did not hold the intelligence of the Spanish police in very high esteem. Fernande had, from the outset, declared the whole detective force to be what she termed "a set of officious bunglers."

Latimer, however, felt reassured that even if the elegant Harold Trevor had slipped through their fingers, then either the French or English police would sooner or later lay hands upon him in connection with the safe robbery in Edinburgh. The chief point now was to establish the identity of Madame Reudnel and her pretty daughter Valentine, and that night, as he sat alone on the balcony of his room overlooking the broad, brilliantly lit square, the cafés gay with life and movement and the strains of several orchestras rising from below, he pondered deeply, feeling that if the Paris Sûreté had any record of the jewel thief caught at the St. Lazare Station, they, perhaps, had some memoranda of his associates and accomplices.

Therefore he returned to his room and wrote another long letter to Dubosq, making inquiry and urging an immediate reply.

Meanwhile the trio living at the humble and unpretending little *fonda* at Olmedo, kept up the fiction that they were tourists greatly interested in Spanish archæology, and for that reason they visited a number of other old castles in the neighbourhood, their sole interest, however, being centred in the castle purchased by the clever and plausible international jewel thief now dead.

In such a small place it was difficult not to arouse the curiosity of the neighbourhood, especially after the occurrence of that tragedy, but as both Jacquinot and Fernande could sketch fairly well both were often seen drawing pictures in pencil of ancient doorways, arches and towers which set

the ignorant village tongues at rest.

As Trevor and the two Frenchwomen were no longer in Madrid, Latimer realised that no purpose could be secured if he remained in the capital. Yet he lingered on in the vain hope of hearing from Andrade that Trevor had been found.

One morning he was called to the telephone and from Jacquinet learned that they had arranged to spend the night alone in the room wherein the false naval officer had been found.

"Why don't you catch the midday train and join us?" he suggested. "We've not been able to arrange with the old valet before, because the lawyers of the vendors have had an agent in the place, there being a balance of twenty-five thousand pesetas of the purchase money still to be paid. So they have retaken possession of the castle, which makes it awkward for us," explained the young journalist.

Latimer promised to come, and at noon left, arriving at Olmedo in time for the simple evening meal of sweet ham and that delicious stew *puchero*, washed down with wine grown on the slopes close-by.

Before dark the party stood listening to a peasant playing on his guitar, and then wandered out of the little inn singly, so as not to attract attention. Each went by a different way to the steep, stony road which led to the postern gate of the Castle, where they found old Hernan awaiting them in the twilight. The representative of the late owners had gone to Madrid, hence they were free. So they crossed the large paved courtyard, the stones of which were covered with rank weeds, and after passing down a narrow passage where the stones were worn hollow by the tread of armed men, they soon found themselves in that great room with vaulted ceiling in which the Englishman had been found murdered.

In the fading light they searched the place thoroughly for any secret means of entrance, but could discover none.

The Professor was suspicious that there might be a sliding panel behind the great piece of ancient tapestry on one side of the apartment, therefore it was detached, but no part of the panelling was found to be movable.

"Those crumpled old newspapers which gave us a clue to the date of the robbery were found upstairs in the bedroom," remarked Fernande. "Was it possible that part of the contents of the Edinburgh jeweller's safe were wrapped in them. If so, the assassin must have gone up there, and---"

"And secured the stolen property, eh?" asked Jacquinet. "Yes, Mademoiselle, it certainly is a point!" he added. "We should certainly examine the bedroom, though Armstrong never slept there."

"The assassin, if theft were the motive, must have found him locked in here from the inside. He entered somehow or other, strangled him, and afterwards opened the door, ascended and found the jewellery. Then he passed back by the way he came into the room, locking the door on the inside."

"If that theory is correct," remarked the Professor, "then there must be a secret entrance to this room, and the crime was committed because Armstrong would know who the thief was--in other words the man was murdered by a friend!"

Having, after a minute search, failed to find how the apartment could be entered while the door and windows were secured, the party ascended to the bedroom, the small window of which looked out upon the courtyard. The room was an old-fashioned one with an antique four-poster

bed and faded hangings of silk damask. The bed, with its silken coverlet embroidered with noble arms, had not been disturbed since the night of the crime, though police officials from Madrid and other persons had searched that room. While the Professor stood looking on, Latimer, Jacquinot and Fernande carried out a complete investigation of the room searching for any secret place wherein any stolen jewellery might have been hidden. There were many small cupboards and drawers—including several in an antique wardrobe near the bed, but in no instance did they discover anything extraordinary.

"The present theory is not a sound one, I am beginning to think," remarked the Professor, noting that their search was in vain.

"On the other hand," said Latimer, "I'm inclined to believe we are right. There is no evidence that the proceeds of the robbery in Edinburgh have yet been disposed of to the 'fences.' Hence, it may very probably have been concealed here by Armstrong as the leader of the gang, and stolen by somebody who knew the jewels were here."

"The newspapers certainly look as though something had been wrapped in them," said Fernande. "It was fortunate that old Hernan preserved them."

Meanwhile Jacquinot, who, eager for a "stunt" for his newspaper, had been going about the room with his walking-stick, tapping here and there to discover anything suspiciously hollow, half-consciously tapped one of the carved mahogany posts at the foot of the antique bed. He started at the top, but when his stick descended to the thicker part of the post where it joined the bedstead, it sounded hollow.

Again he tapped, while his companions stood in silence. It certainly sounded hollow in comparison with other parts.

Quickly they all bent to examine the Renaissance carving, when after a little time, they discovered that, cleverly concealed by the scroll design, one portion of the bulbous post slid round, disclosing a cavity filled with newspaper.

Next moment Jacquinot's hands were upon it, and as he drew it out, there fell to the floor a collection of magnificent rings, pendants, diamond necklets and other pieces of jewellery, together with a number of small tissue-paper packets containing cut gems of great value.

"There they are!" cried Latimer. "I knew we were on the right scent. What about this other post?"

Examination was made of the opposite bedpost, but no cavity existed in the same position. They, however, found one lower down, and this, in turn, yielded almost as much stolen property as the first. The head-posts were then examined, and in secret hiding places in both of them was also found a quantity of gems of various sizes and value, evidently stolen jewels which had been knocked from their settings, for among them were two large pieces of melted platinum the size of oranges.

Nothing was said to Hernan, but the whole of the jewels were placed in a pillow-case and put away ready to be handed over to the Madrid police.

"The assassin apparently found one parcel of jewels, but could not discover the others," the Professor remarked, well satisfied with the result of the investigation as far as it had proceeded.

But though they spent four successive days and nights endeavouring to discover the secret of the room in which the notorious jewel-thief had been done to death, they failed to find it.

One night old Hernan, who had been down to the inn, returned at about nine o'clock with exciting news. Trevor had unexpectedly arrived from Valladolid by the last train, and recognising Hernan

had paid for some wine for him, after casually inquiring if the late owner's agent was still in residence there.

"He seemed very inquisitive, Señor," added the old man.

At once the Professor, whom the Englishman had never seen, volunteered to return to the inn to watch. Meanwhile the others held consultation, but they were dismayed an hour later at finding Hernan dead asleep in his chair in the little den he occupied near the door. No effort was successful in awakening him. He had evidently been drugged.

Meanwhile the Professor down at the inn was not idle and was carefully watching, listening to Trevor's inquiries regarding what had happened since his friend's mysterious death, and subsequently following him when, at about eleven o'clock, he went out for a stroll up the hill, at last turning into some chestnut woods upon a path which he sought by the aid of a little flash-lamp.

The Professor dare not follow too closely lest the crackling of twigs beneath his feet should attract the Englishman's attention. Suddenly, he heard low voices, scarcely above whispers, and then the light disappeared in the darkness and all was silence, he being left in the wood to make his way out as best he could.

Meanwhile, at midnight, Jacquinet, Latimer, and Mademoiselle had settled themselves in the library waiting in silence in the great cavernous apartment, expectant of anything that might happen. If the assassin knew that other jewels were concealed in the place, it was but natural that he would return and resume his search. That some secret entrance to that room existed they felt convinced, for the assassin had, they conjectured, had access to the upstairs room through that apartment.

For two hours they sat near the door without uttering a single word. A weird, creepy atmosphere pervaded the place, and the slightest noise caused them to start.

Suddenly, they distinctly heard a man whisper in French:

"I hope the door is not locked from the outside!" and then they heard two persons crossing the room in the darkness.

They reached the door, fumbled at it, opened it, and by aid of the flash-lamp passed into the corridor and up the stairs to the bedroom above, a woman leading.

Jacquinet and Latimer, both of whom drew their pistols, accompanied by Fernande, the latter holding a flash-lamp, crept silently after them. They waited for some moments to allow them to enter the upstairs room, when, of a sudden, they dashed in and shone the lamp full in the startled faces of the intruders, who proved to be Trevor and Valentine Reudnel.

"You won't find any of the jewels, Henry Martin, *alias* Trevor!" laughed Latimer. "We've already got them, and you'll now have to explain who killed your friend Ronald Levy, or Armstrong as they know him here! Besides, the Edinburgh police are so interested in you that they have offered a reward for information concerning yourself. We're out to get that reward. And the same applies to your lady friend, whom the Paris Sûreté is anxious to interview."

"Damn you!" yelled the jewel-thief. "Take that!" and he fired a revolver point-blank into Latimer's face.

The bullet happily missed, but a second later Jacquinet sprang upon him like a tiger from behind, securing his murderous hands while the man attacked held him by the throat. Instantly Fernande produced a pair of handcuffs, and after a little difficulty, the wrists of both the man and the

shrieking woman were locked together.

While Hernan was still unconscious owing to the drug, the three investigators hauled the pair to the gendarmerie post in Olmedo, and next day they were taken in custody to Madrid, where in the office of Señor Andrade the girl Reudnel confessed that at Trevor's instigation she had accompanied him by the secret way from the woods which led to a movable section in the oak flooring of the library, where they had suddenly attacked Armstrong and strangled him. Upstairs they found in a drawer a portion of the jewels wrapped in a newspaper, but they were alarmed and left the place by the way they came, relocking the door on the inside. On the night of their capture, hearing that the owner's agent was absent, they drugged Hernan and returned to make another search for the remainder of the stolen jewels.

It was further discovered that the reason Armstrong had purchased the Castle was in order to make it a safe retreat for the gang, the secret exit from the library being the chief attraction, because it would enable them to escape from the police if ever surprised. Besides, the proceeds of robberies could be stored there in perfect safety.

Later it was discovered that Armstrong was shown by a peasant the entrance to the secret way in the woods, and that the thief, fearing lest others might learn of it, paid the man's passage to Canada and gave him a nice round sum to commence life as a farmer.

Both Trevor and Valentine Reudnel were tried at Madrid a year later, and as they violently denounced each other in court, they were both found guilty of murder and sent to hard labour for life. Though Scotland Yard has never revealed the truth to the public, all the jewels, with the exception of the few taken on the night of the murder, were duly restored to Messrs. Macfarlane & Co., in Edinburgh, while the Crimes Club found itself the richer by five hundred pounds, the reward paid by the assessors for the recovery of the stolen property.

CASE NUMBER TEN THE ELUSIVE CLUE

"Will any member of the club offer any theory, or make any comment?" asked Dubosq, as usual a slim, dark-bearded figure in his well cut dinner-jacket, as he stood at the end of the table in that upstairs room where the club was holding an extraordinary meeting.

The renowned Lucien put down the typewritten dossier from which he had been reading, and glanced around the table in expectancy.

Everyone, astounded at what he had read, remained silent and thoughtful.

"Of theories we can have none," remarked the white-haired Doctor Plaud. "The only comment we can make is that the whole affair is entirely inexplicable."

"It sounds like a mediaeval fairy-tale!" laughed Jacquinot.

"That is admitted," said Dubosq. "Had you not better come with me to Amiens to see the spot? I confess that we of the Sûreté are entirely baffled. The affair is utterly amazing and unaccountable. If we left by car before midnight, we should be at Amiens by early morning."

"Is it really so imperative that we go at once, before we have an opportunity of fully discussing the affair?" asked old Professor Lemelletier.

"It is," replied the police official. "I have been there all day and only returned an hour ago. I should much like you, Messieurs, to inspect the premises and give your considered opinion."

Thus urged, the members of the club present--which did not include either Maître Jules Tessier, who was away from Paris, to prosecute an assassin at Lille, or Madame Léontine Van Hecke--hurried home to change their dinner clothes. They reassembled half an hour later to find two powerful police cars ready for the hundred mile run due north from the capital.

It was already light when they arrived at Amiens, for the month was June, and as they entered the broad Boulevard de Belfort, and drove round the old city, only the policemen on duty were astir in the bright, clear morning.

After a short distance, both cars, dusty after the run through the night, pulled up at a tall, superior-looking, grey-painted house in the tree-lined Boulevard Carnot--the house of mystery. A police agent on duty stood at the door, and recognising the Chief of the Paris Sûreté, saluted and allowed the party to pass into the long, rather dark stone hall, beyond which could be seen a small courtyard which had been turned into a well-kept flower garden.

Into a spacious room on the right, Dubosq conducted the party of investigators, and then, having closed the door, he addressed them, explaining once again the latest problem with which they were faced.

Briefly he related that the house in question was occupied by a middle-aged man named Charles Udall, a Danish subject, and his French wife, who two years ago had been Mademoiselle Lafont, daughter of a jeweller whose shop was in the Rue de Beauvais in Amiens. Monsieur Udall, who was a commission agent, was often away for considerable periods abroad, in England, Switzerland, Germany and other countries, during which time Madame usually had her unmarried sister, Gabrielle, to stay with her.

Udall, who was fairly well off, was highly respected, as was his wife's family in Amiens, and in

the war he had greatly distinguished himself during the trying days when the Germans were advancing upon the city. Indeed, if you search the list of names of France's heroes upon the great tablet in the Hôtel de Ville, you will find his name among them.

What happened in that house on the night of June 21st was a complete mystery.

Madame was absent and only Monsieur Udall was at home, with a single servant, a cross-eyed old woman named Grodet. According to this woman's story, Monsieur Udall returned from Paris by the train arriving from the Gare du Nord at 8.13 that evening, carrying with him a good-sized and rather heavy handbag, which he took to his bedroom, and depositing it, locked the door. He then ate his dinner, smoked, and read the evening newspaper until half-past ten, when he retired, she going to bed half an hour later.

"Let her relate her own story," Dubosq added, and opening the door he admitted a moment later a bent, cross-eyed old woman, with a red face and trembling, uncertain gait. The sight of the assembly seemed to unnerve her, but Dubosq reassured her, and said: "Now, Madame, it seems that a terrible affair has happened in this house. You allege that you saw something in your room?"

"Yes, M'sieur. The night before last was bright and moonlit, and a streak of white light was shining across the room when I woke suddenly," croaked the old hag. "I thought I heard something, and lay still and listened. But there was nothing, and I began to doubt it, and wondered if I had been dreaming. I lay listening, when suddenly I saw something, a horrible looking old man, cross the room noiselessly. He passed through the streak of moonlight, and I seemed to be able to see through him. He came slowly towards my bed. I saw him distinctly. But I--well I must have fainted."

"And what followed? Tell us in detail," urged the Chef de la Sûreté.

"I--I hardly know," replied the old woman, who was evidently highly agitated and nervous. "The sun was shining when I came to myself, and I saw it was eight o'clock, so I went along to Monsieur's room to call him, but the door was bolted and I could get no reply, though I banged upon it, making a terrible clatter. Three times I tried to wake him but failed. Then I got old Père Boucher to come in from next door, and with a crowbar, we broke open the door, when we found to our horror, Monsieur lying upon the floor dead! Ah! Messieurs!" shrieked the old woman covering her face with her hands. "It is terrible! awful!"

"I agree, Madame, it is," said Dubosq sympathetically. "And it is most mysterious."

Then turning to his companions, he suggested that they should go upstairs and see the room in which her master had been found. They ascended to the second floor, when the famous chief of the Paris detective force first showed them the room occupied by Madame Grodet, and then passing to the other side of the house, they entered a big bedroom where the morning light fell upon a ghastly scene. The place was in great disorder, furnished in old-fashioned style with a wooden bedstead of the Empire period, with curved ends. The parquet floor was well polished, and upon it, beside the tumbled bed, lay the body of a man in striped pyjamas, a terrible wound showing in the side of his head. His distorted face was blackened, his tongue protruded, and his hands had clenched themselves in his dying agony, while around him was a pool of congealed blood.

"I gave orders for the body to remain until you saw it, Professor," he said, turning to old Lemelletier. "You and Doctor Plaud will make the examination and give us your opinion. But," he added, "I wish to point out certain features of this case. You will see that the window is an English one, with sashes to draw up and down. It was put in here two years ago by Monsieur

Udall himself, as he apparently feared intruders, and now see!"

He crossed to the window, and showed them that inside the sash, screwed by long thick screws, were heavy blocks of wood which prevented the window from being raised either at top or bottom more than four inches, an efficient safeguard against intruders.

"Besides, the door was bolted on the inside, Messieurs," he said, "and yet Monsieur Udall was undoubtedly murdered!"

"And what of that precious bag he brought from Paris?" asked Jacquinot.

"That is missing," Dubosq said quietly.

The investigators, turning from the body of the unfortunate victim, glanced around the room which they saw was absolutely wrecked. The curtains had been torn down and reduced to shreds, the sheets torn, the pillows slit so that feathers were about the room, the counterpane slit across, and the bed itself flung to the opposite end of the room. The dead man's clothes, a suit of dark grey flannels, had been torn to ribbons by the assassin who, in his mad paroxysm, had delighted in destroying his victim's property.

In cases of burglary, it is curious how often thieves commit wanton damage, even to the extent of leaving water taps turned on, without any motive except the satisfaction of destruction. The disorder in that room, with its torn hangings and cracked mirror, was complete, and showed an idiotic demonstration of ill-temper on the part of the assassin.

Dr. Plaud and Professor Lemelletier were on their knees carefully examining the body of the victim. The wound at the side of his head was a large one, and Plaud at once exclaimed:

"He certainly was not killed by a bullet. Even an explosive one would never cause such a wound."

"I agree," said the Professor. "Death has been caused by some unusual instrument used with most terrific force. He must have been attacked in his sleep, for the wound is such as would cause death."

"Whatever was used has been carried away," the observant Jacquinot remarked.

"Together with the precious bag," added Latimer. "I wonder what it contained?"

The cross-eyed old Madame Grodet was recalled and in reply to Dubosq, declared that the bag her master had brought from the station was far too large to go through the four-inch space to which the window opened.

"It was a brown leather bag, Monsieur, bulky and heavy. I noticed it was heavy when he placed it on the chair in the *salle-à-manger* before he took it upstairs and locked it up."

"And then he descended and ate his dinner--eh?" asked Mademoiselle Fernande. "While he was at table the thief might have gained access to the room, secured the bag and relocked the door!"

"Possible--but not probable," declared Jacquinot. "The motive of the crime was the theft of the mysterious bag. That's plain."

"But how is it possible that any assassin could enter by an opening like that yonder, a space of four inches, commit the crime, do all this damage, and escape with the bulky bag described by Madame Grodet?"

"It is a complete enigma," declared the elegant police official. "The problem becomes more and more inscrutable. That some person entered this bolted room in secret and committed robbery and murder is plain, and cannot be denied. Madame Grodet saw what she declares to be an ugly

old man. But even the most expert thieves cannot reduce their bodies so as to pass through such a small space. The whole affair is one of the most mysterious that I have ever encountered." Then, turning to his companions, he added: "Messieurs, the matter is left entirely to you to investigate, and if possible to obtain a solution of the problem of how the crime was committed. Yesterday, when I arrived, I found newspaper reporters and Press photographers here, but I prevailed upon them not to publish any mention of the affair, or any pictures for the present, lest the ends of justice be defeated. Whatever we discover we must keep strictly to ourselves, and allow the assassin, whoever he may be, to believe that he is scot-free--as they say in English."

His companions made a careful and methodical search of the room, while the doctors were both busy with their examination of the body. Indeed, for the next hour they searched the whole house, when, just as they had concluded, a middle-aged, well-preserved woman arrived in a great state of anxiety, and the cross-eyed woman, seeing her, exclaimed:

"Ah! Here is Madame Udall! She has been staying with her sister down at Culoz."

The distressed wife who had been telegraphed for, having viewed the body of her unfortunate husband, was shown into one of the downstairs rooms and questioned sympathetically by the Chef de la Sûreté.

In her nervous, agitated state it was somewhat difficult for her to reply to his questions.

"I understand that your husband's business was that of a commission agent?" asked Dubosq at last, to which the poor woman nodded in the affirmative.

Dubosq paused, and then looking straight into her face, asked in a firm tone:

"Was that his *only* profession, Madame? Please answer correctly, for it is our business to make every inquiry in order to fix the assassin."

Madame Udall was obviously confused.

"He--well, he sometimes lent money to friends."

"A money-lender, *bien!* Then he might have enemies--men to whom he lent money, but who did not repay," remarked the police official. "It would be to the advantage of such persons if he died--eh?"

"I do not know anything of his affairs, Monsieur. He was always very secretive, and told me nothing."

"He was a rich man, and gave you many presents of jewellery and money. Am I correct?"

"Quite, Monsieur. Charles was frequently very generous when he came off some of his long journeys."

"Was he often travelling?"

"Very often. Sometimes he would be away on business for two months--or even more."

"Has he been away lately?"

"He was in England for nearly a month and returned last week. The day following his return I went to my sister's in Culoz."

"He returned from Paris carrying a heavy brown leather bag which is now missing. Have you any knowledge of such a bag?"

"It was his old travelling bag, Madame," interrupted the cross-eyed old woman servant.

"If that was the bag I certainly know it," said the dead man's wife.

"He had friends in Paris. Who was his most intimate friend?" asked Dubosq.

"Ah! Monsieur, that I can hardly tell you. I know little of his friends in Paris. He was frequently there on business. He shared an office with his friend Paul Vincendon, in the Rue Thérèse."

The address Dubosq scribbled down, while Jacquinet and Latimer both made a mental note of it. Perhaps something might be gleaned from his friend Vincendon. For a full hour Dubosq submitted the widow to a careful cross-examination, surprised and suspicious at the ingenious manner in which she fenced with some of his questions, more especially those concerning her husband's business and his friends. Of the latter, she pretended ignorance, but Dubosq had a shrewd idea that she knew much more than she would admit.

The investigators, with the exception of Plaud and Lemelletier, who were busy in their examination, lunched in a private room at the Hôtel du Rhin, while the good people of Amiens were utterly ignorant that a sensational mystery of crime had been discovered in their midst. The police had surreptitiously removed the body of Monsieur Udall to the St. Jean's Hospital, close by, and there, with their microscopes, they were conducting a close examination.

The expert medical man who examines the body of a person discovered in mysterious circumstances never fails to examine microscopically the dirt collected beneath the finger-nails for evidence of the last object touched before death. In one notorious murder case, Professor Lemelletier found beneath two of the dead man's finger-nails tiny hairs of dark brown wool of a curious shade. In his struggle with the assassin, his hands had come into contact with the coat of the man who had attacked him. This man, arrested on suspicion, asserted his ignorance and set up an alibi which was well in progress before the court at Marseilles, until the Professor stepped into the witness-box and gave evidence that the dark brown fluff, too minute for the human eye to see, was identical with the same fluff and the same dyed shade as the cloth of which the assassin's coat was made! This sudden statement so upset the prisoner that he confessed, and was duly brought to the guillotine.

That afternoon, while the members of the Crimes Club were discussing the mysterious case from every standpoint, the two famous doctors were busy with their glass slides and microscopes in the hospital laboratory.

The Professor had his eye to the microscope, focusing it upon something so minute that by means of a big magnifying glass he had placed it upon the slide with a thin glass cover upon it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed to Plaud at his side. "Hairs! Grey crooked hairs--human hairs! Udall was attacked by an old grey-haired man, and in the struggle must have clutched at his head before receiving a terrible blow. Look!"

Dr. Plaud applied his eye to the microscope, and in turn, said:

"Yes. They are hairs, no doubt, three of them all crooked. We have found soot and grease from the handle of a railway carriage under the nails of the right hand, crumbs of bread beneath those of the other, left by handling his bread at dinner, some plumbago dust, showing that he must have sharpened a pencil shortly before going to bed, and also traces of dark green wool evidently from the coverlet of the bed. But," he added, "these hairs tell their story."

"True. Old Mère Grodet declares that she saw a weird looking old man in her room, and was so frightened that she fainted at sight of him," remarked the Professor.

"Old women of her sort do not easily faint. If she had been struck by the intruder, then I should the more easily credit it," said Doctor Plaud. "I wonder if she is telling the truth?"

"Dubosq did not query her story. He accepted it in its entirety."

"Lucien is silent sometimes when he suspects a person of misleading him," remarked Plaud reflectively. "One could easily form a theory that the widow and the old servant both had a hand in the crime or, if not, they know something about it. Udall could never have been murdered in that closed room and the assassin escape through that four inches of space and leave the door bolted."

"That is just my point," exclaimed the Professor. "Even the mode in which the victim was done to death is unique. Without a doubt we are correct in assuming that the terrible wound was caused by a humane killer, such as is used in slaughter-houses, and this would lead to a strong supposition that the crime was committed by a butcher, local or otherwise. Dubosq must look for the assassin in the slaughter-houses of Amiens," he added. "The instrument is missing, so the assassin carried it away, thus removing every trace."

"If he knew where Monsieur Udall slept why should he have risked entering the old woman's room in the moonlight?" Plaud queried, after again glancing at the three short grey hairs. "No, the more I reflect, the more suspicious I am that the two women, mistress and servant, know more about the matter than they will tell."

"At the outset we must concentrate upon the past of Madame Udall. Did she travel across France to Culoz in order to be out of the way when the crime was committed?" suggested the Professor. "Let us join our friends at the Hôtel du Rhin and explain what we have found as far as we have conducted our inquiries."

This they did, and their fellow members of the Crimes Club, seated in that upstairs room overlooking the trees in the Place René Goblet, listened with all attention.

"The suspect was described as an ugly old man by Mère Grodet," remarked the Baron Edouard d'Antenac between the puffs of his cigarette. "And that he was such is proved by the grey hairs. But how did he get in and out of the place with the heavy kit-bag? I noticed that the window-sill was quite wide. With Jacquinot, I examined it very closely for foot-marks or finger-prints in the dust, but there were none. The only mark outside was as though a portion had been brushed away by a towel being swept across it near the centre."

"Perhaps to obliterate foot or finger-marks," suggested Latimer.

"I will telephone for two agents from Paris, who will be unknown here, and let them discover what they can concerning the dead man's widow," said Dubosq. "We will have the official inquiry postponed for a week. I will see the Prefect, and we will allow nothing to leak out to the Press while we make further inquiries concerning the victim's friend, Monsieur Vincendon."

Jacquinot, who was longing to be able to publish an account of the mystery as a "scoop" for his paper, at once volunteered to make discreet inquiries concerning Vincendon, and both Latimer and Mademoiselle Buisse expressed their eagerness to assist.

That night all returned to Paris, but not until the two agents had arrived from the detective headquarters, and Dubosq had explained the facts to them and given them instructions.

Early next day Jacquinot, passing along the narrow Rue Thérèse between the Palais Royal and the Avenue de l'Opera, found on the inside of a dark, narrow doorway the name "Paul Vincendon, 3 me Etage."

Of the wizened old concierge who sat idling over his *Matin*, the journalist inquired if Monsieur Vincendon was in his bureau.

"No, M'sieur," was the old fellow's reply. "He is ill--at his country home at Choisy-le-Roi."

"Could I find him if I went out to Choisy, do you think?" asked the inquisitive Maurice.

"No doubt, M'sieur. He lives at the Villa Jasmin, close to the station. He sent me there once."

This decided Jacquinet, and he took the next train from the Quai d'Orsay eight miles out to the pleasant little town made historic by Mademoiselle de Montpensier and Louis XV, and by Rouget de Lisle, the author of the "Marseillaise." After a few inquiries he found the Villa Jasmin, a small, unpretending little house near the end of the Rue du Pont, standing behind a garden full of roses.

As he passed on the opposite side of the road, he saw a little hunchbacked old man in a huge dirty brown straw hat cutting some roses. He had a receding forehead and a short white beard, altogether a queer-looking old fellow.

Of a woman farther along the road, he ascertained that the man was Monsieur Paul Vincendon himself. Was it possible that the ugly old hunchback was the man whom Madame Grodet had seen in her bedroom on the night of the crime!

This idea occurred suddenly to the journalist, and he therefore hesitated to approach the old man lest he should be suspected. It was curious that the hunchback was absent from his office in Paris on pretence of indisposition, yet he was shuffling in his slippers in his garden, apparently in quite robust health.

Jacquinet was extremely anxious to have a chat with the old fellow and ascertain what he knew of the late Charles Udall, but he dare not. In view of the fine grey hairs discovered in the dead man's nails which might easily have come from the old man's beard or hair, he hesitated.

He repassed the cosy little house, and, unnoticed by the quaint old man, he regarded his movements closely. What, he wondered, could be the nature of his business in Paris? He might be a usurer as his friend Udall undoubtedly was. Further, was he keeping out of Paris fearing that inquiries were being made regarding Udall's death?

Back in Paris in the late afternoon, he called again on the concierge in the Rue Thérèse and told him that he had been to Choisy, but could not find Monsieur Vincendon, as he was told he was out.

The old fellow smiled mysteriously.

"Is your business very urgent," he asked, in his weak, thin voice. "You want to borrow money--eh? Everybody who comes here wants money from Monsieur Vincendon."

"He's very rich then?" the journalist ventured to remark.

"Very, I think. Lots of well-dressed people go up to his office with eager faces, and come down satisfied," said the observant old man.

"He has a friend called Udall, has he not? I met him once, a dark-haired man with a thin bony face and a little black moustache. He lives at Amiens, I believe."

"You mean Monsieur Ricard," said the concierge. "Yes, they are great friends--in partnership, I think."

That was all that Jacquinet could obtain from the hall-keeper, so he placed five francs in his palm and left.

He telephoned to Mademoiselle Fernande and met her later on the terrace of the Grand Café, where, over a *bock*, he explained what he had seen at Choisy, and suggested that she should go

there next day and keep old Vincendon under observation.

"If he is guilty he might have visitors of interest," he added.

Mademoiselle agreed, and next day went out to the pleasant suburb, Latimer accompanying her.

Throughout the day they took turns watching the neat little villa, when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, they saw a visitor approach the house.

It was Madame Udall, dressed in deep mourning.

To her old Vincendon opened the door himself, apparently greatly surprised to see her, and admitted her, closing the door hurriedly afterwards. Scarcely had she entered when an ill-dressed man slouched past Latimer, who at once recognised him as one of the detectives whom Dubosq had called from Paris to Amiens.

By reason of a slight motion on the part of the man who had mutually recognised the Englishman as one of the expert investigators, Latimer turned and followed him round a corner.

"Madame is acting very mysteriously," he told the Englishman. "She left Amiens by the early express for Paris this morning, and at a little café in the Montmartre she met an old Italian named Pietro Porri, who is a well-known thief, though he poses as an itinerant organ-grinder. What business she could have with such a man who has been in gaol several times, I do not know. They sat together for nearly half an hour and, from her gesticulations, she apparently told him of her husband's death. Then she left and took the train here."

"Do you suspect her of having had any hand in the crime?" the Englishman asked.

"Who knows, Monsieur?" he replied. "Who knows how the crime was committed in that locked room! My duty is to keep surveillance only, and report. *Au revoir!*" And the ill-dressed man lounged away, while Latimer rejoined Fernande and told her what the detective had said.

About midday two days later, Latimer having called upon Professor Lemelletier and reported the result of observations upon Madame Udall and old Vincendon, the Professor sat a long time alone in silence. Then, of a sudden, a suggestion flashed across his active brain. He rose quickly, passed into his laboratory, took the little glass slide with those three crooked hairs found under the dead man's finger-nails, and placed them beneath the most powerful of his microscopes.

Eagerly he examined it, his eye glued to the instrument.

"Exactly!" he ejaculated "Increased power shows it quite plainly. Surely, this is most interesting!"

And putting on his coat and hat, he at once took a taxi to the bureau of the Chef de la Sûreté.

Dubosq, a cigar between his lips, sat at his official table and listened to his friend most attentively. His eyes suddenly opened in amazement at what the Professor told him.

"Do you think it could be possible?" he asked breathlessly.

"Of course. Why not?" answered the Professor.

"Well we will lose no time and spare no pains to test your theory thoroughly, Professor. I will give orders at once, and conduct the inquiry in that quarter in person."

That same night, about ten o'clock, Lucien Dubosq was sitting at home in his sumptuous flat near the Porte de Passy when his discreet, clean-shaven man-servant, in yellow-striped waistcoat, ushered in a beetle-browed, ill-dressed, down-at-heel foreigner, undoubtedly a denizen of the underworld of Paris.

The Chef de la Sûreté greeted him smilingly, for the fellow of Russian birth, whose name was Kremer, was, though a member of a dangerous gang of thieves, also an informer in the pay of the police.

"I asked you here to-night to help me. I want to make the acquaintance of your friend Pietro Porri, the Italian musician."

"You will have to exercise great care, Monsieur," replied his shabby visitor. "If he discovers who you are he will not hesitate to use his knife!"

"I quite understand that!" laughed the head of the Paris police. "But I'll take the risk. I am interested in his doings. I shall for a time become a thief, like yourselves. I am Jules Jamont, of Marseilles. You knew me there as the *Sac à charbon!*" he added, laughing as he used the *argot* of the Paris thieves, meaning that he had disguised himself as a priest. "And I am an adept at the *Père François!*" meaning a certain manner in which to attack a passer-by with the object of robbery.

The thief agreed, and for the next hour he sat instructing Dubosq where to meet him, and how to act.

That night the Chef de la Sûreté sent a brief note to the Professor requesting the members of the Crimes Club to take no further steps until another meeting was called at which he would make a report. From that moment Lucien Dubosq disappeared and became the expert thief Jules Jamont, haunting the lowest dens of Paris *à la flan* in company with the itinerant organ-grinder, who carried a long keen knife ready, as he boasted, for any agent of police who dared to lay hands upon him.

So cleverly did Dubosq succeed in imposing upon him that he took him into partnership in an unique campaign of theft, and one night they both went forth to Versailles, the Italian carrying his pet monkey, a rather large one, in a leather kit-bag. After wandering about the dark streets, they came at last to a large house in the fashionable quarter, where the night being warm, one of the windows on the second floor was partly opened at the bottom.

The man Porri signalled to his friend to halt, and then in silence took from his pocket some pieces of jewellery. These he showed to the monkey and pointed to the bag and to the window. The animal at once realised what his master required of him, and a few seconds later, ran up the stack-pipe, swung himself upon the window-ledge and disappeared inside. A few minutes elapsed when he reappeared. First he flung out to the lawn a lady's morocco dressing-case, and then, climbing swiftly down the stack-pipe, he handed over a quantity of jewellery, including a valuable pearl necklace, all of which he had taken from the dressing-table without awaking the lady.

Porri, having thrust the jewellery into his pocket, put the monkey back into his bag, and picking up the dressing-case, moved swiftly away in the shadows.

Later, when they were safely back in Porri's room in Paris, the Italian showed his partner how he had trained his monkey to use a humane killer upon the skull of anybody sleeping. He gave the instrument to the animal when at once he used it with terrific force upon a round block of wood shaped like a man's head, upon which he had been trained.

"Carlo is very intelligent!" added the old thief. "If he finds that a bag will not go through a space in which he can himself pass he will empty the contents upon the window-sill, pass out the empty bag by squeezing it through the opening, then refill it again from the outside, and drop it to the ground."

When next night a meeting of the Crimes Club was held to hear Dubosq's report, he related in detail his experiences with Porri, and added:

"The Professor's discovery that the three grey hairs were not human, but those of a monkey, first gave rise to the theory of how the murder at Amiens was committed, and which is now proved."

"Is the motive of the crime known?" asked Latimer.

"Everything is known," was his reply. "Porri is under arrest, and has confessed. He acted in collusion with Madame Udall, who wished to get rid of her husband in order to marry Vincendon, his partner in the very lucrative business of a 'fence,' or buyer of stolen property, carried on in the guise of money-lending. The bag stolen at Amiens contained a quantity of valuable jewellery which Udall had bought for a small sum from a thief on the day of his death, and which, of course, has gone into the hands of his partner. Madame Udall is also under arrest, and I have placed them both at the disposition of Monsieur Henri Paul, the examining magistrate, thanks to the Professor's theory of The Elusive Clue."

CASE NUMBER ELEVEN THE GUINEA PIG'S TAIL

"And there is no trace whatsoever of the Guinea Pig?" asked Mademoiselle Fernande.

"Not the slightest, Mademoiselle," replied Maître Jean Tessier. "Scotland Yard has invited us to give them our assistance, and for that reason I have been over to London. Our fellow-member, Monsieur Dubosq, will explain the matter to you more fully."

At that meeting only six of the ten members who founded the unique association were present, as the month was August and *tout Paris* was at the sea.

"Well," said Dubosq as he sat at the table and put down his coffee cup, "the affair is equally puzzling to us in Paris as to our confrères in London. You have all, no doubt, seen in the papers reports of the remarkable and daring exploits of the 'Guinea Pig.' About a year ago there began, in the West End of London, a series of robberies of famous pictures and objects of art from the collections of wealthy connoisseurs. The robberies spread to country houses which, in some instances, were set on fire by the burglars, and in more than one case the house robbed was afterwards actually burned down, yet Scotland Yard utterly failed to trace the perpetrators.

"At first the burglaries were attributed to different gangs, but soon it became noticed that the thieves always worked upon the same plan and, moreover, after each robbery, a lady's visiting-card was found upon which was neatly typewritten 'Pull my tail!--The Guinea Pig.' Suddenly the robberies ceased in England and began here in Paris, at houses in the Etoile Quarter. Not a finger-print, not a slip, not the slightest clue have the thieves left except the impudent invitation to trace them. As you know, Messieurs, all criminals specialise in their work, and both the Sûreté and Scotland Yard are acquainted with all the expert art burglars. Those at liberty have all been carefully watched, as well as the 'fences,' but we are convinced that not one of the 'old hands' has had anything to do with these puzzling but very serious thefts, nor have any of the pictures or objects of art come into the market.

"Besides the leaving of the card another curious feature is that money, jewellery, or plate is never stolen--only things of beauty. It is true that there is a secret market for stolen art treasures, possibly in America, but as far as the New York Police and customs officers are concerned, they have been unable to trace any of the stolen property having entered the United States.

"Whatever precautions are taken by ourselves, or the English police, the robberies continue, the card is left, and no other clue whatsoever. For months we have been working in the dark until now. Scotland Yard have invited the aid of the club in trying to establish the identity of the thief or thieves who have brought burglary to a fine art. During the past year it is estimated that ancient masters alone to the value of over half a million sterling have disappeared, and despite all our efforts, the robberies still go on, sometimes in France, sometimes in England, the card being invariably left."

"There are no finger-prints. The thieves must wear gloves," remarked Gordon Latimer.

"Undoubtedly," said Dubosq. "Whoever he is, he is a wary bird. Three times he has been seen escaping, and on each occasion he has been described as a dark-haired, good-looking gentleman in evening clothes and an opera-hat. That conveys nothing to us. Most *escrocs* of quality of both sexes dress for dinner."

After a brief discussion, it was decided to send a delegation of the club to London--where the

greatest number of robberies had taken place--therefore two days later the Baron d'Antenac, Maurice Jacquinet, Gordon Latimer, and Mademoiselle Buysse went to London in order, if possible, to solve the mystery of the series of burglaries.

When on the morning after their arrival in London all four were ushered into the private room of Superintendent Frazer at Scotland Yard, he welcomed them warmly, saying:

"You have come here just at an opportune moment. The Guinea Pig was at work again last night! A report has just come in," and taking an official telegram from his desk, he read it.

The message was to the effect that from the picture gallery at Penhoe Hall, Lord Prestatyn's seat in Bedfordshire, the celebrated Rubens "Nymphs with a Cornucopia" had been stolen. In the gallery was a glass case containing some gold plate and other objects, but nothing had been touched except the very valuable Rubens, which had been carefully removed from its frame, and the canvas probably rolled up and taken away. In its place the impudent card had been left.

"I am just going out to Penhoe myself," said Frazer. "Possibly you would like to go also?"

The suggestion was accepted at once, and very shortly two police cars were travelling out of London on the road to Bedford.

From the high road between Amptill and Elstow a by-road was taken, until the cars entered the handsome lodge-gates of Penhoe, and ten minutes later pulled up before the fine old Elizabethan mansion on the first floor of which the famous picture gallery was situated. An hour and a half after leaving Scotland Yard, Lord Prestatyn, a handsome old gentleman of about seventy, greeted them in the hall, and followed by the Chief of the Bedfordshire Constabulary, who was there to greet Superintendent Frazer, led them up the broad oak staircase to the long gallery where hung on one side the famous collection which included fine examples of Reynolds, Romney, Velazquez, Holbein, Murillo and others. Only one frame was empty, that of the famous Rubens.

There were three men busy with their grey and white powders and camel-hair brushes searching for the finger-prints of the thief, but all they had found were those of about six servants.

"The thief evidently let himself in with a false key," said his lordship, after a short conversation with the Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department. "The wire of the burglar alarm was previously cut, and nobody heard a sound in the night, except that Grindlay, the lodge-keeper, says he heard a motor-car being started at about three o'clock in the morning."

Frazer, accompanied by the four members of the Crimes Club, made a long and careful examination of the spot. Certainly the thief had been careful to leave no other trace except his mysterious card, defying the owner of the property to "pull his tail."

The cutting of the electric wire of the "talker," as burglars call them, naturally attracted the attention of Gordon Latimer. He traced the wires and found that, in order not to pierce some ancient panelling, the lead had been brought through the wall to the outside, concealed in the thick ivy for about three feet, and then taken into the house again. The wire was severed at the spot outside the house, but so high up that a short ladder must have been used. It was evident that the place had been "minded," as crooks call it, that is, it had been watched for some time.

"This shows conclusively that the thief has studied the premises very carefully," he remarked to the stout Baron d'Antenac. "Or perhaps, he might have a confederate in one of the servants."

He questioned Lord Prestatyn on this point, but none of his servants had been in his employ less than six years, and all were trustworthy. That the job had been done by an expert was clear. But who was this elusive thief who only stole the most valuable and artistic objects, and who scorned to touch gold or silver which, melted down, could so easily be turned into money?

"I wonder what can be the fate of all these pictures?" asked the pert little Fernande. "Is 'some fence' buying them at a low figure and holding them up until, in a few years, the hue and cry will have died down. It seems so."

"The impudence of the thief in leaving his card and no other vestige of a clue is both annoying and puzzling," said Frazer. "We know the whereabouts of every burglar who specialises in pictures--except the mysterious Guinea Pig," and he turned over the mysterious card in his hand.

Minute search for footprints near the ivy failed entirely. Even of these the thief took precaution to obliterate every trace. True, there were two depressions where the base of the ladder had rested, but where the ladder had come from was also a mystery, for it must have been carried back to its place.

"The alarm may have been put out of action days ago," the Baron remarked.

Meanwhile, the Bedfordshire Constabulary were making inquiries at all inns and hotels within ten miles around to see if any suspicious strangers had been noticed, but without result.

During the whole of the day the party continued their investigations, but when at night they returned to London, they were compelled to admit that, like the police, they had met with failure.

From Frazer, Maurice Jacquinet next day obtained a list of all the pictures and objects of art known to have been stolen in London and the provinces--a formidable list representing treasures valued at a very large sum--and two days later the party returned to Paris, greatly disappointed at obtaining no clue to the redoubtable Guinea Pig.

They reported their investigations to Lucien Dubosq, as well as delivering a message from Superintendent Frazer, and there the matter ended. The elusive Guinea Pig had collected up some of the art treasures of the world and defied the police of Europe. Was it one person who was perpetrating the robberies, or was it a highly organised gang who left the card in order to mystify those who should search for clues? Again, what was the motive of stealing objects that could never appear in the public market, as they were known to experts the world over? That the Guinea Pig burglaries were carefully planned was obvious. Each of the premises were, no doubt, watched for weeks, perhaps months. The habits of the household were noted, together with those of the adjacent premises; the police patrols were ascertained, and also the important fact whether the house was "alive" or "dead"--whether protected by electric alarms, or "talkers." In no case had the Guinea Pig made one false slip, and so confident was he of evading the police that he invited the world to "pull his tail!"

Two months went past when Dubosq, sitting in his room at the Quai des Orfèvres, received a telephone message from the Chief of Police in Tours to the effect that on the previous night a valuable masterpiece, a sixteenth century landscape called "Orpheus," by Nicholas Poussin, had been stolen from the famous collection of the Duc d'Annonay, at the ancient Château d'Entremont, about five miles from the city. A card had been left bearing in typewriting the words in English, "Pull my tail--The Guinea Pig."

That night, in accordance with Dubosq's request, Madame Léontine Van Hecke called an extraordinary meeting of the club, when all were present except Monsieur Delcros.

The mystery of the Guinea Pig was seriously discussed for over two hours. The club were antagonistic to the idea that failure should be written upon the record of any of their exploits, and agreed that a big and increasing effort should be made to "pull the tail" of the defiant thief.

"If we could only discover the motive then investigation could be so much easier," declared Dubosq. "But the thief or thieves are evidently not in want of money, or they would also take the

gold and jewels which they pass by in disdain. The only piece of gold taken, as far as our reports go, is the antique gold chalice of the Baron Eustrangin in the Avenue des Champs Elysées."

"We must lay a trap for him," declared Jacquinot. "But how?"

"Ah! There is the question," laughed the sprightly Fernande, her bare elbows resting on the table at which they all sat.

"There must be a way," remarked Doctor Plaud. "We must discover one. Let us meet again tomorrow night."

"In the meantime, to travel to Tours is scarcely worth while," remarked Dubosq. "I have already sent half a dozen expert officers there, and if there are any clues or finger-prints they will report."

Next day, when Jacquinot called at the Prefecture, he was told by Dubosq's assistant that no finger-prints had been found. There was not a clue to the evasive Guinea Pig. It certainly looked as though the thief, or thieves, worked upon a set plan which defeated all inquiries. In any case, they defied the police.

That night yet another secret meeting of the Crimes Club was held. They only took *apéritifs*, instead of dinner, as the meeting was an emergency one. It lasted, however, three hours, at the end of which time a certain plan had been formulated.

In accordance with it Jacquinot, Gordon Latimer and the ever-active Fernande called upon the aged Monsieur Guillaume Chintreuil, the well-known art expert, at the house where he lived in retirement in Monthéry, about sixteen miles outside Paris.

The white-bearded, rather wizened old gentleman, whose dark eyes were bright notwithstanding his age, received them politely but with some surprise. Jacquinot had asked him over the telephone whether he would receive them, and had obtained an affirmative reply. Monsieur Chintreuil was, without doubt, the greatest art expert in France, and was always called in consultation before a picture was purchased for the Louvre Galleries. Old masters were constantly being submitted to him by the great dealers for his opinion as to their genuineness and value. With steel-rimmed spectacles, he was short and shabby, and had the old-fashioned habit of snuff-taking.

In his small, but well-furnished *salon* the quartette seated themselves while Jacquinot explained the object of their visit, and produced the list of the principal objects stolen in France and England by the Guinea Pig.

The old connoisseur took the list to the window, and as he read it, he nodded every now and then. Many of the pictures were known to him.

For a few seconds he held the list in his thin hand and gazed thoughtfully out of the window. Then turning to them, he said:

"The thief is no ordinary one! He is a collector. *Mon Dieu!* What a collection--all so blending, all so beautiful--the dream of an art connoisseur. Yes, Messieurs, this thief is an expert. He chooses only what he wants for his perfect gallery."

"You do not think, then, that he is a professional thief?" asked Jacquinot.

"Ah! That I cannot say. All I am convinced of is that he has an intimate knowledge of old masters, and that his collection must be on the way to becoming unique. Apparently, he is an expert in burglary, as he is in art."

This did not carry the investigators much further, but they were in no way disheartened. When

the Crimes Club assisted in the investigation of mysteries they did it wholeheartedly and by devious ways, which were afterwards admired both by Scotland Yard and the Paris Sûreté. In this case they spared neither trouble nor device to bring their investigations to a satisfactory issue.

One morning, about a fortnight after the visit to the great art expert, the *Matin* announced that Señor Vargas, the Chilian millionaire and connoisseur of art, had arrived in Paris from Valparaiso with the object of purchasing one or two old masters to add to his collection. He had taken an apartment in the Avenue de la Grande Armée, and his wife was giving a series of weekly receptions to the high artistic circle in Paris. Invitations were being eagerly sought by the Bohemian and artistic set, and each Wednesday the *salons* of Señora Vargas were filled by men and women of the highest intelligence in Paris. At such evenings the most recent purchases of art treasures by Señor Vargas were on view.

Naturally, this announcement attracted a good deal of attention in artistic circles, and Señora Vargas was besieged by people anxious to accept the millionaire's hospitality and view his latest acquisitions.

One of these was a very beautiful fifteenth century goblet of crystal, encrusted round the base with precious stones. It was of Italian work, and had once belonged to Lorenzo di Medici. Photographs of it appeared in the papers, and a small select party of friends were invited by the Vargas to inspect it.

Then suddenly came a newspaper sensation. After the guests had left the Vargas *salon*, a watchman, left in charge of the place, heard a noise at about two o'clock in the morning, and caught a burglar red-handed. He was a young Italian, who gave the name of Bertini, a stranger to Paris, but when questioned by Dubosq at the Prefecture, he said that he had met a gentleman in a café, which he indicated, who, giving him exact plans of the apartment, urged him to break in and steal the goblet, the picture of which he showed him in the paper, and agreed to purchase it for twenty-five thousand francs. The stranger had told Bertini that he was an agent of police, and it was evident that he knew all about his past, which persuaded him to fall in with his suggestion.

But while Dubosq was questioning the thief, another event happened at the Vargas apartment, which had been left unattended by the watchman, who was none other than Jacquinot. The door was found forced, the valuable goblet gone, and in its place was found the card of the Guinea Pig!

The trap set by the Crimes Club had failed, and, moreover, they had lost the goblet which had been borrowed from a well-known dealer in antiques. Vargas had been none other than the Baron d'Antenac, while Madame Van Hecke had posed as his wife.

This contretemps was certainly unexpected. The whole was a brilliant scheme devised by Jacquinot and his friends, but they had been checkmated.

The trap laid by the investigators was an ingenious one, inasmuch as Jacquinot and the Baron had a second scheme, in case the first failed. They never expected to be compelled to use it, as it would require much labour. But, faced with the loss of the goblet for which the club would be compelled to pay, they at once carried out their second plan.

At the Vargas receptions a good deal of champagne was always served. The three superior male servants who served the wine and cakes were agents of the Sûreté, and always wore white gloves, while the dishes and glasses, before being brought in for the guests, were always polished perfectly clean with a silk handkerchief, and when handed to those invited, there was no trace of human touch upon them. When returned to the pantry, all of them bore the finger-prints of the different guests. Each of these were developed, photographed, and recorded with data, and

classified by officers of the Record Department of the Sûreté, just as though every guest was a criminal. This had been done from the very first reception that had been held, therefore a large quantity of prints had accumulated. Each of them was now compared with those of French and English criminals, and by this means the criminal pasts of a number of highly respectable persons became revealed.

After several months of patient search, during which the Guinea Pig left his card upon a wealthy Brussels collector and took away a gem of Dierick Bouts of the Early Dutch School, the police pointed out to the members of the Crimes Club three persons who might be identical with the Guinea Pig.

One was a Frenchman named Delacroix, and the others English. One was named Andrew Hogg and the other Morton Dain. The first named, a cashier, had been in the hands of the French police about three years before and served a sentence of twelve months for forgery. The records of the other two were at Scotland Yard.

Still in pursuit of information, and hoping that one or other might be the perpetrator of the mysterious burglaries, Latimer and Jacquinet returned at once to London, and Frazer being away, gave to Inspector Bevan, in charge of the Criminal Registry Office, the prints secured from the glasses used at the reception at the rich Chilian's in Paris.

In half an hour from the Finger-Print Bureau were produced two neat files.

"They are not very interesting persons, either of them," remarked the Inspector. "Here you are. The records do not show much against them. Read for yourselves."

What the two keen investigators read was as follows:

"No. 84,296 B.G.--Hogg, Andrew Charles, *alias* Horton. Born in Cork, 1899. Married. Lived hitherto respectably. Lost left eye during the war. Arrested June 22nd, 1921, at Liverpool for being concerned with Arthur Whiteley, *alias* Hoare, Big Ben, Tucker, etc., in a burglary of furs from Messrs. Fowler & Sharpe of Lime Street, Liverpool. No previous convictions. Sentenced to eighteen months at Liverpool Assizes 3rd September, 1921. Has a brother James, a jeweller in business at Southsea."

The other read:

"No. 72,863 T.L.--Dain, Morton, *alias* Moore, Day, etc. Born in London, 1896. Educated Tonbridge School. Jesus, Cambridge. Superior education. Assistant master at Rokeby School, near Peterborough. Unmarried. Arrested in London January 22nd, 1918, charged with obtaining £246 by false pretences from Howard Morley, solicitor, 38 Bedford Row, London, and obtaining £33 from Mrs. Hannah Page, widow, of Tilehurst, Berks. Sentenced at the Old Bailey to two years imprisonment on April 3rd, 1918."

"You have two to choose from," said the Inspector. "I will see whether anything is known about their present whereabouts." And he left the pair to study the records of the two persons who had attended those lavish entertainments given by Señor and Señora Vargas.

Was either of them the Guinea Pig? It was clear to them that the Inspector believed them to be following a false trail, for when he returned he dismissed both records, saying:

"I'm sorry, but nothing is known as to where they are at present. It is evident that neither of them is an habitual criminal, hence we do not trouble about them as we should in case they were old hands. Upon the latter we keep a watchful eye. Without doubt, both men recorded here are leading perfectly honest lives, and are, perhaps, highly respectable citizens. There are hundreds who take one false step and afterwards retrieve it. I often think it is very hard upon such folk that

their criminal record and finger-prints should remain here against them for the remainder of their lives."

Both men agreed.

"We must discover where both these men are," said Latimer.

"James Hogg, jeweller, of Southsea, will surely not be difficult to trace," Jacquinot said. "He may tell us something."

He did, for next day both men called at the shop of the jeweller in Osborne Road, Southsea, and saw Hogg's brother. Latimer told a very plausible story. He said he was a solicitor, and wanted Andrew's evidence in a motor-car case. He had witnessed an accident, and he was most desirous of finding him.

The jeweller, taken off his guard by the attitude of the pair, told him that his brother was living in Norman Road, Canterbury, and was employed as the manager of a garage.

For the next three days the pair of investigators lived at the County Hotel in Canterbury, and carefully watched the movements of the man who had been convicted as assisting in a burglary. But to all intents and purposes he was now leading an honest life, and was a happy father of a family.

To trace Morton Dain they at once set out. The head master of Rokeby School, near Peterborough, whither they went, had no knowledge of the late assistant master, except from report. He had been a well-mannered swindler, it was said, and he had gone to prison. That was all he knew, for he had not been appointed until a year after Dain had been convicted.

Inquiries in the school itself resulted in a statement by one of the elder boys that, six months before, he had received a letter from the degraded master asking him to send him an old book he had forgotten, to an address in Paris. Urged by Latimer the boy, after a long search among his belongings, at length produced a crumpled letter, asking him to send the ancient copy of Virgil addressed to Monsieur Verton, at an address in the Rue Garnier, in Paris.

Was this information of value?

They both hastened back to Paris, and within twenty-four hours they identified the photograph of Dain, taken by the Liverpool Police, as that of Jules Verton, a middle-aged, studious man who lived in comfortable quarters in Neuilly, and only went out each evening with a lady friend, a pretty, dark-haired young woman, Mademoiselle Yvonne Mayet.

At once strict surveillance was kept upon the pair. Mademoiselle lived in the Rue Perronnet, close to the Seine, and each evening they met and dined together. In the neighbourhood it was common gossip that the pair were engaged to marry.

But was this Englishman masquerading as a Frenchman identical with the mysterious art thief, the Guinea Pig?

Felix Dubosq, as Chef de la Sûreté, was of opinion that he was not, while the members of the Crimes Club were of divided opinion. All, however, were determined to get back that costly crystal goblet which had been stolen from beneath their very noses.

Patiently, for three weeks, the doings of Monsieur Verton were watched and noted, sometimes by Fernande, and at others by Jacquinot, Dr. Plaud, the Baron, and other members of the club, while at frequent intervals, agents of police in plain clothes also kept observation upon the pair.

The Crimes Club wanted the Guinea Pig, but they also wanted to recover the stolen property.

Of a sudden, Monsieur Verton, finding that he had attracted the attention of the police, left Paris early one morning, and disappeared.

Maurice Jacquinot, who had taken charge of the surveillance and indeed of the investigations, let him go, hoping that he would take refuge where the stolen masterpieces were hidden.

Next day he played another card. Fernande Buysse, late in the afternoon, called at the house of Mademoiselle Mayet, in the Rue Perronnet, and presenting a card bearing the name of "Marie Lafont," was shown in.

Without very much preliminary Fernande told the young lady that her lover was Felix Dubosq, Chef de la Sûreté.

"He has betrayed me, and I have come to betray him in return, Mademoiselle!" she said, with face pale and hard set. "Dubosq is determined to arrest your lover, as there is some very serious charge against him. Therefore, in order to defeat him, I have come to you that you may warn Monsieur Verton. He has escaped from Paris, I hear. Telegraph to him at once to go into some hiding-place where he cannot be found, for if he shows himself again at present, he certainly will be arrested."

Mademoiselle Mayet stood staring at her visitor as though believing she had taken leave of her senses.

"I am really glad now that Dubosq has deserted me, for I can revenge myself by warning your lover!" Fernande went on, acting the jealous woman perfectly. "Tell him to hide himself."

Mademoiselle Mayet did not invite her visitor to be seated, but simply said:

"Really, Mademoiselle, I know nothing of what you are talking about. Monsieur Verton has gone on a business visit to Brussels, and will return to-morrow. When I tell him that the Sûreté are looking for him he will be greatly amused. If your late lover likes to blunder it is no concern of mine or of Monsieur Verton's. Good afternoon!"

Fernande left the house utterly defeated. Again the investigators were off the track of the elusive Guinea Pig. She hastened back to the Quai des Orfèvres where she described to Dubosq what had taken place.

"Did I not tell you, Mademoiselle, that Verton is not the Guinea Pig?" was all the sympathy she received. She had certainly made a fool of herself, but she had not acted without the consent of the Crimes Club.

Secret observation was kept both upon Mademoiselle Mayet and upon Verton's house, but though three days went by, the Englishman posing as French did not return from Brussels.

Fernande's spirits rose again. Mademoiselle Mayet had sent neither telegram nor letter to her lover. She had apparently simply dismissed her visitor as a woman obsessed by jealousy. Yet the fact that Verton had not returned was, in itself, a trifle suspicious.

Latimer, Jacquinot, and Plaud were keeping watch upon Mademoiselle's movements, aided by three agents of the Sûreté, when suddenly one evening four days later, Verton's lady friend emerged from the house with a small suit-case, and drove in a taxi to the Gare de Lyon where, looking about furtively to ascertain that she was not observed, she bought a ticket and *wagon-lit* supplement for Marseilles.

Latimer, though he had no travelling-kit, purchased a first-class ticket for the same destination, and travelled in the rear of the train, first sending a verbal message to Dubosq by an agent of police in plain clothes, who was, as usual, on the platform.

Through the night he travelled until, on arrival at Marseilles next day, he watched Mademoiselle go to the office of the Fraissinet Company and book a passage across to Bastia, in Corsica. As soon as Latimer had ascertained that, he went into the lower quarter of Marseilles and there bought a suit and cap such as was worn by a French working-man, which, with a common shirt he exchanged for his good clothes so that when he boarded the steamer late that afternoon and disappeared among the crowd in the steerage he no longer looked the refined Englishman that he was.

The voyage was calm and uneventful, for it was summer, and the Mediterranean perfect.

On arrival at Bastia next day Mademoiselle took a little old-fashioned horse-cab to the outskirts of the town, to a big white house overlooking the sea, a fine view-spot whence the islands of Monte Cristo, Elba, and Capraia were visible. In front of the long artistic house ran a veranda, whereon stood Monsieur Verton waving welcome to her. Somehow, probably through her maid in Paris, she had managed to send him a message of her coming. Around the house was, as is usual in Corsica, a big clump of ancient mulberry trees, while beyond was an orange grove with a high cactus hedge.

Mademoiselle, unsuspecting of having been followed to her destination, entered the house while the dirty French labourer made his way back to the bureau of police, where he saw the Prefect, explained matters, and soon a message in code was being telegraphed to Dubosq in Paris.

But was Jules Verton identical with the Guinea Pig?

Dubosq acted instantly. Within two hours he, with an assistant, Jacquinot, Fernande, and Doctor Plaud had left Paris, and two days later they met Latimer on the *quai* at Bastia. Then, after a consultation with Monsieur Calvi, the bald-headed prefect of police, a surprise visit was arranged.

That night, after it had grown dark, the place was surrounded by police, who crept up singly through the trees and took their stations, until suddenly Dubosq and Calvi--both armed because they knew that if their surmise as to the true identity of Verton was correct he might act desperately--knocked at the door.

There was no response.

Calvi, in the name of the law, demanded the door to be opened. Still no response.

At a sign from the Chief of Police three men brought up an old iron wheel off some agricultural machine, and with it smashed the door to matchwood.

Shots were fired from the darkness within. The moment was an exciting one. The two police officials, with two of their men behind them, emptied their automatics indiscriminately into the darkness as soon as they had been fired upon.

Then, as there was silence, lights were brought. Upon the floor of the entrance hall lay Mademoiselle Mayet badly wounded, while at the same moment they heard a shot and men's shouts from the rear of the premises.

"He is here!" somebody shouted. "Tried desperately to escape, but he has shot himself!"

And so it was.

When the investigators searched the artistic house they found hanging in the fine long gallery which occupied the first floor, the whole of the priceless works of art stolen by the Guinea Pig, as well as the precious crystal goblet.

Ultimately the whole of the property was restored to its owners, each of whom wrote letters of thanks to the members of the Crimes Club who had been so ingenious and painstaking in tracking down the audacious thief, whose artistic kink led him to create for himself and Mademoiselle one of the most beautiful art collections ever got together.

Thus was the tail of the impudent Guinea Pig eventually pulled.

CASE NUMBER TWELVE

THE GREAT THAMES MYSTERY

A man's life and an insurance policy for fifty thousand pounds were the principal points in the Great Thames Mystery.

The affair was an enigma from the first, and yet the facts were quite ordinary ones, a case of robbery with violence in which the victim was killed because he resisted.

The police records in every capital in Europe are punctuated by such cases, in which most of the assassins are traced and ultimately brought to justice. At first the investigations of Scotland Yard proved abortive, the matter being hushed up as far as possible owing to the high standing of the victim, who was a distinguished foreigner.

At first reported to the local police constable at the pleasant little town of Pangbourne, on the Thames, it appears that a labourer, early on a January morning, passing over the bridge that spans the river between Pangbourne in Berkshire, and the picturesque village of Whitchurch in Oxfordshire, saw before him in the heavy mist an object huddled against the open iron railing of the bridge. This proved to be a middle-aged, dark-bearded man in evening-dress, who lay crumpled up with a bullet wound behind his ear. He was quite dead. Very quickly the constable was upon the spot, the body was removed, and, on a search being made, an automatic pistol was, a few hours later, found thrown into a ditch two hundred yards away from the bridge on the Pangbourne side. This showed that the assassin had met his victim on the bridge, killed and robbed him, and then turned back into Pangbourne again and thrown away the weapon, for on the Whitchurch side of the river was a toll-gate, a fact of which he must have had knowledge.

The doctor who examined the body declared that the murder had probably taken place about two o'clock in the morning. The toll-keeper who lived in the cottage at the opposite end of the bridge heard no shot, yet a woman living close by, at Whitchurch Mill, distinctly heard a shot in the night. The heavy mist which lay over the river that night had favoured the assassin's escape, for he must have hurried back into Pangbourne, discarded the pistol after leaving the bridge, passed under the railway arch, and gained the high road to Reading which leads through the town.

The shot had been fired at close quarters, but naturally the identity of the murdered man was at first unknown. His wallet was gone and so was his money, for only a few coppers remained in his pocket, but some business papers, mostly in French, remained, among them two bonds worth five hundred pounds apiece, which had been overlooked by the thief.

But more! Search of the pockets revealed a typewritten letter which bore neither address nor date, but in French the words: "Agreed! I will meet you at Whitchurch Bridge as you suggest. Bring the money with you, and do not make a fool of me, or you will pay dearly for it. You humbugged me last time. I am in no mood for further trickery.--P."

The two Scotland Yard officers, who hurried down by car from London, seized on this letter as evidence, and rightly so. On the face of it, was shown that the foreigner, whoever he was, had had some secret dealing with somebody whose initial was "P." They had met at Whitchurch Bridge; there had probably been a quarrel, and "P" had fired the fatal shot.

But who was the victim? His clothes were of foreign make. The stud remaining in his blood-stained shirt-front was a fine carbuchon emerald surrounded by diamonds, and on his cuff-links was the initial "C" set in diamonds. It would be thought that to establish the identity of such a

person would be an easy matter.

It was not so. A fortnight passed after the opening of the inquest and still the police were in ignorance of who he was, until a certain Baroness de C eroux reported to the Brussels police that her husband, the Baron, an ex-Minister of the Belgian Government, had gone to London on business and had left the Carlton Hotel to go into the country, but had not returned.

The Brussels police communicated with Superintendent Frazer, sending him a photograph of the missing politician, and it was not long before the reception-clerk at the Carlton identified it, while the local constable at Pangbourne declared it to be the portrait of the murdered man who had already been buried after being photographed.

Thus it became established that Baron Emile de C eroux, a wealthy man and ex-Foreign Minister of Belgium after the war, had been assassinated. But who was "P"? Superintendent Frazer sent two expert officers to Brussels, where they had an interview with the widow at her fine house overlooking the beautiful Bois de la Cambre. They also had interviews with several of the dead man's political friends, but none of them had any knowledge of the person in question. The dead man, it was evident, had a secret acquaintanceship with the assassin, but told nobody of it, not even his wife. When a man meets another on a lonely bridge in the country at night, it must be with some sinister purpose, either the exchange of guilty secrets or to further some conspiracy.

Thus the identity of "P," the assassin, could not be established, and after six weeks had passed Scotland Yard found itself at a dead end.

The whole of these circumstances were then put before a meeting of the Crimes Club, and a solution sought. The members were not highly interested, except in the curious fact that the murderer, when taking his booty from the body, should leave his papers, and especially that incriminating letter behind.

When the matter was discussed in camera, the only member who appeared to take the slightest interest in the matter was the grey-haired Professor Ernest Lemelletier. The others all dismissed it as an ordinary crime of violence, which must be dealt with by the English police, but the Professor, on the other hand, regarded it as an interesting enigma of crime.

Suddenly there came into the possession of Scotland Yard a note which had been sent to the H tel Cecil, in London, addressed to the Baron, the writer evidently under the impression that the ex-Minister was staying there. The hotel sent it to the Dead Letter Office, which had noticed the name of the addressee, opened it, and instead of returning it to the writer, had sent it to the Criminal Investigation Department.

The note was in French, and was dated ten days before the crime. The typing was the same as that of the note found upon the unfortunate Baron, and in French it read:

"I am glad, Your Excellency, that in your own interests you have arrived in London. We must meet, but it must be in secret. If 'A' knew, then neither of us dare make another move. Chazal (a Belgian statesman) does not suspect. Send me an appointment to meet at night somewhere in the country. But *mon Dieu!* Be careful!"

It was signed in typewriting "Henri Pierre," and the address was in a street off the Camden Road.

In half an hour, two detectives were on the trail. With care lest the man should suspect, they discovered that he was a hairdresser and worked at a shop in Oxford Street. His description was that of a short, thin, hard-faced man about twenty-eight, rather broad shouldered, and with a thick nose and wide mouth.

That afternoon Inspector Blurton of the Criminal Investigation Department entered the shop and had his hair cut by the mysterious "P."

That evening the suspect was arrested outside the shop and taken to Bow Street. When he heard the charge, he protested his innocence, and contrary to the advice of the police inspector who took the charge, he made a statement which was, on the face of it, a very lame one.

"I am a Belgian," he said. "I came to England during the war. The Baron owed me money. I asked for it, and he paid me. I wanted to meet him in secret to tell him something that I knew about one of our Socialist politicians, and at the same time get the remainder of the money he owed me. He made an appointment to meet me on the bridge outside Pangbourne. I accepted, but next day he wrote sending me the money and telling me that it was unnecessary to meet me. So I got my money, and I know nothing further. I have never been in Pangbourne in my life."

"This will be used in evidence against you on your trial, you know. Remember, I cautioned you," said the Inspector, as he finished taking down the statement.

"What I have told you is the truth. I have never been to Pangbourne. I do not know where it is, so I am sure you can never find me guilty of shooting His Excellency."

"The pistol has been found," said the Inspector. "Suppose it is proved that it is yours?"

The prisoner went white to the lips. He tried to reply but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

The Inspector was not slow to note this.

Then he ordered the constable to take him to the cells.

Next day he was put in the dock before the chief Magistrate at Bow Street, and naturally the charge of murder against him aroused much public curiosity, and afforded a good "story" for the evening newspapers.

But the prisoner remained dumb. His brain seemed paralysed by realising the seriousness of the charge.

He was remanded for a week, and no further evidence being given against him, the magistrate committed him for trial at the Old Bailey.

It was then that Professor Lemelletier wrote to Superintendent Frazer for a full account of the man Pierre's arrest and statement, which was, in due course, sent to Paris from Scotland Yard, together with a request to the great scientist to assist in the prosecution if it were possible, and supply one or two links in the evidence that were missing. The Professor's interest at once increased. Though the affair was such a palpable case of robbery with violence, combined with revenge, yet he was one of the very few who gave any credence to the hairdresser's story.

Why did the wealthy Baron owe the humble *coiffeur* money? Why should there be a suggested meeting on Whitchurch Bridge--a meeting evidently first suggested by the Baron? These questions the police asked themselves, and assured themselves that Henri Pierre had fired the fatal shot.

In addition, there was the revolver. Though the Professor was in ignorance, Pierre had been shown the revolver and confessed that it was his!

The prosecution, working up the facts, saw a perfectly clear case against the foreign hairdresser who, in addition, had, it was discovered, no permission from the Home Office to reside and work in England. How he had come to London he would not reveal. He only loudly protested that he

had never been to Pangbourne, and that he had certainly not met the Baron there. Yet when invited to prove an alibi he became very confused, and merely said, "I was with friends that night, friends whom I do not wish to name."

A more weak defence could not be imagined. The man's whole bearing was that of guilt. Though pressed to establish his alibi, he absolutely refused to give any information concerning his "friends" in London with whom he stayed on the night in question. Hence, it was not to be wondered at that the Crown built up a strong and straightforward case against the prisoner, while Norman Drew, the alert young counsel into whose hands the Home Office had given the defence, found himself faced with one of the weakest defences ever put up at the Old Bailey.

He did not at first believe in his client's guilt, but as time went on and he had many interviews with him in prison preparing the defence, he began to realise that he was fighting a lost cause. To an extent the Belgian was a very clever actor when he asserted his innocence, but when it came to questioning him he could bring not a soul to witness on his behalf. The alibi he tried to establish could not hold water, because of his steady refusal to tell the names of his witnesses with whom he spent the fatal night. He seemed to fear to incriminate others.

Slowly it became forced upon the brilliant young criminal lawyer that the man he was to defend was guilty of the crime.

About three weeks before the date set down for Henri Pierre's trial, Lemelletier placed the facts before the club, explaining that he had interviewed the widow of the dead man and that certain facts had come to his knowledge which caused him to doubt that the accused was guilty. Everything pointed to it, he admitted, but he urged that as the object of the club was to see that justice was meted out, its object was equally to see that no injustice was done.

It was eventually agreed that the Professor and Dr. Plaud should go to England and assist the young barrister, Norman Drew, in the man's defence.

They first visited Superintendent Frazer at Scotland Yard, who, in turn, introduced them to Inspector Chambers, the Criminal Investigation Department Inspector at Vine Street. The latter sitting in his room told them what was known of the accused Belgian.

"He first came over here as a refugee before the fall of Antwerp, when he was about sixteen, and became a kitchen boy in the Piccadilly Hotel and later on at the Carlton. He began to associate with West End undesirables, and five years ago became a hairdresser at a shop at Holborn. Then he was engaged in Wardour Street at a shop, where one day about eighty pounds disappeared from a drawer in the manager's table. Though there was no direct evidence against him, he left a week later and went into the country. A young man answering his description was wanted a month later for highway robbery with violence in an ill-lit street in Manchester. His victim, left for dead, recovered and gave the description of his assailant. When Pierre returned here, we arrested him. The victim came to London but failed to identify him, though we felt sure he was the guilty one. Then he took a place in Oxford Street, where he was arrested for the murder of the Baron. He is a very bad character, without a doubt. Unfortunately, till now, we have had no finger-prints of his."

"It is unfortunate that both the letters are typewritten," remarked the Professor, thanking him.

"A common habit with blackmailers," and the clean-shaven Inspector, an expert in dealing with West End crooks, smiled merrily. "Those gentry are always highly cautious. He is no doubt a blackmailer."

"Why, I wonder, won't he confess to where he was on the foggy night of the murder?" asked Doctor Plaud.

"He would implicate his friends," said the Inspector. "A closed mouth, he thinks, is best."

"Personally, I doubt if he is the guilty person," ventured the Professor.

The Inspector, however, did not reply, but smiled incredulously.

Back to Scotland Yard they went, and a request that they should have the automatic pistol for examination was granted. On the way back to their hotel they stopped at a chemist's, borrowed a microscope and bought several small phials of chemicals, some filter paper, some distilled water, and a test tube. Then, a quarter of an hour later, the Professor, having had several basins brought to his room, commenced to examine the pistol scientifically.

First he took it to pieces very carefully, and laid them side by side upon a newspaper. In the magazine four cartridges remained, for only one had been discharged--the one which had caused the Baron's death.

To search for finger-prints upon the weapon had been useless from the first, for it had been handled much by the police, doctor, the man who discovered the body and other persons. But the Professor held a theory which he was about to test.

He first took the pistol barrel, placed his finger on one end, and the other he filled with distilled water, and thoroughly shook it up and rinsed it. Then he poured part of the water out, filtered it, and placed it in a test-tube.

He added a drop of one of his chemicals, and remarked, as though to himself:

"The colour of the solution should be pale yellow." But it remained water, so he threw it away. Into a second portion of the water with which he had washed the barrel, he added two drops of another chemical, and smelt it several times.

There was no odour of sulphuretted hydrogen, as he expected.

Salts of lead were then added to the water, and he expected to see a black precipitate. But none showed. He examined for sulphuric acid, salts of iron, and alkaline sulphides, but found none.

Both specialists in the investigation of crime grunted in unison.

The lock of the pistol was then treated in the same way, giving results which apparently mystified them. Afterwards the pistol was carefully put together again as it was the most important piece of evidence for the Crown, and they took it together to Scotland Yard.

"Well," asked Frazer of the Professor, "have you found anything of interest?"

"At present it is too early to tell," was the reply. "In a few days we hope to return for a further conference." And they left.

Next day they took train from Paddington to Pangbourne, which on that cold wet winter's day presented a very different aspect to the pretty riparian resort it is in summer.

They first called upon the local constable, who, on ascertaining who they were, at once went with them under the railway arch to the ditch beside the road where the pistol was found flung away by the murderer in his flight, and then out upon the bridge where, on the left-hand side ran the footpath, they were shown the exact spot where the body was discovered.

"The Baron was lying huddled up close to the railings," the constable said. "He was apparently standing with his back against them when shot."

"If that is your theory, then how was it that the body was not moved when the assassin searched his pockets?" asked Doctor Plaud in good English, in that quiet, unflurried tone of his.

"I don't know, Sir. I'm not a detective," he laughed.

"The assassin must have hurried for quite two hundred yards before he threw the pistol away," said the doctor and, glancing along the bridge to the Oxfordshire side, he noticed the white toll-house and gates, one for foot passengers and the other for road traffic.

Meanwhile the Professor's interest was centred in the white-painted hand-rail which ran along the light iron bridge. With his fingers he felt it very carefully as though to find something. He remained there fully a quarter of an hour, and both the doctor and the constable were equally mystified. Now and then the lantern-jawed old man produced a big magnifying glass and peered at one spot and then at another. Then he would look over into the fast flowing Thames as though trying to discern something.

He took the position of the spot where the dead man had been found, and then, with a tape measure he produced from his pocket, he measured along the top of the rail to a point where an almost invisible portion of the paint had been chipped off, exposing the rusty steel beneath. Then he stood upon the spot on the footpath and stretched his hand along to the almost imperceptible mark.

Presently he directed his companion's attention to the mark on the railing which he had found, and handed him the big magnifying glass. Plaud applied his eye carefully to it, and nodded in agreement.

Afterwards they crossed the bridge, paid and passed the toll-gate, and then at the beginning of the picturesque village of Whitchurch, they found the woman who heard the shot in the night.

"You are certain you did not hear two shots fired?" asked the Professor as the elderly woman stood on the door-step of her neat, old-fashioned cottage against the water-mill.

"I only heard one, Sir," she replied, wondering who the foreign gentleman might be. She recollected, however, that the murdered man was found to be a foreigner, and perhaps her visitor was one of his friends. "I'm glad they've got the murderer," she added. "Fancy such a thing happening on Whitchurch Bridge! But it was terribly foggy that night. You couldn't see a yard before you. I managed to get up the village to the post office but I bumped straight into one of them big trees on the road-side though I believed I was quite clear of them--and I've lived in Whitchurch all my life. I heard Mr. Thwaites' car at River Bank, across the road, take quite a time before it could get into the gate. But Mr. Waller, the chauffeur, is always very careful," said the garrulous old woman.

"You are quite positive you heard no second shot?" asked the old Professor.

"No. I didn't, Sir. And that's the truth. I've told the perlice everything I know."

"Well, thanks, Madame," said Lemelletier, raising his hat, an example the doctor followed, and leaving the place, they recrossed the bridge, where at the corner in the village of Pangbourne they chatted for five minutes with the constable. After that they crossed to the Elephant Inn, and lunching there, returned to London by the next train.

"Well?" asked the doctor as they sat in the first-class compartment of the express for Paddington. "Is your theory a sound one?"

"At present I cannot tell. I believe it is. But I must have time to reflect--to reconstruct the crime," replied his companion. "There is yet the motive--which is as obscure as ever. We must find that before we can put together the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle."

And a silence fell between them as the train rushed on towards Reading and London.

That night, in response to a telephone message whether Norman Drew was at home at his chambers in Fig Tree Court, Temple, the pair called at about ten o'clock, and climbing the stone stairs, were admitted to the brilliant young barrister's rather shabby sitting-room.

Drew, a tall, clean-shaven, alert young man, offered each of them a Corona and lit a pipe himself. The room in which they sat had been occupied for over a century by various men who had left their mark upon the annals of the laws of Great Britain. More than one of its previous tenants had risen to be a judge, and several had become Members of Parliament. It was a small, brown, low-ceilinged room which led into a smaller bedroom with a little kitchen beyond. But Drew dined "in Hall," hence his "laundress" only came once a day to clean up and make his bed.

When they were seated in the dingy, but rather cosy little room, the Professor began with a straightforward statement of his theory of the innocence of Drew's client without, however, telling him of the result of his minute investigations.

"That is all very well, Professor," said the young barrister, who was out to do his best to prove an alibi before the judge and jury, "but I have been to Brixton Prison only this morning and my client absolutely refuses to make any statement as to his whereabouts on the night in question. Hence my hands are tied."

"Upon the face of it he is a fool. Either he fears to give certain persons into the hands of the police, or else he is a chivalrous man who is prepared to sacrifice his life to preserve his secret."

"But what secret?" asked Doctor Plaud, as he slowly lit his cigar.

"A secret concerning a woman. It can only be that," was the reply of the greatest medico-legalist in Europe.

"That is certainly a romantic side of an otherwise very sordid case," said the lawyer. "I wonder if it is really so. The attitude of the accused is not that of a murderer, I must admit. Whenever I have an interview with him he remains practically silent, and simply says he is innocent of the crime."

"And I am certain of it," said the Professor, removing his cigar from his lips and knitting his grey brows. "Ere long I hope to prove it--even to counsel for the Crown."

"They have a very fine case. It will be hard to shake it. Besides, we go before Mr. Justice Graydon, one of the most severe of criminal judges," said Drew.

"If my theory proves correct, the case built up by the Crown will collapse like a pack of cards. I may tell you, in confidence, that my colleague, Doctor Plaud, and myself are working in order to put such evidence in the hands of the court that the Grand Jury will throw out the bill."

"Such a *dénouement* would be magnificent, Professor. It would at once make my reputation as a criminal lawyer. Shall you be able to do it?" he cried excitedly.

"I am doing my best. First, I tell you that Henri Pierre is no murderer. Of that, I have already proof. It only requires the motive of the crime to be established and then you will see the utter collapse of the prosecution. Oh! if only Pierre could be induced to tell us the truth in strict confidence."

"He refuses. A thousand times I have tried to cajole him, but he is obdurate. He only says that if they still accuse him, they may do their worst. He admits that the pistol found was his. Once when he met the Baron they quarrelled and he drew his pistol, which the Baron snatched from him and kept. But he swears that he was never in his life at Pangbourne."

"And, honestly, I believe it. One day, as soon as I carry my theory a little further, I will place my

cards upon the table, and I will prove it, and the result will be startling."

Next evening both travelled by way of Harwich and Antwerp to Brussels, where again the Professor had a long interview with the Baroness in her fine mansion overlooking the Bois.

The doctor did not accompany him to the house, as he thought if the Professor were alone the widow might reply to his questions in confidence. On that grey, snowy afternoon the Professor sat with the handsome Belgian lady for over an hour. So pointed were the Professor's questions that the widow twice gave way to tears. She had nothing to conceal. She only mourned the loss of her talented and popular husband.

"Then the Baron, in secret, feared the fellow Pierre who blackmailed him," said the Professor.

"Yes, my husband told me so in confidence. He was at an hotel in London during the war when Belgium was occupied, and at a secret conference of his political party which took place there, a decision was taken regarding the attitude of Belgium. A certain complot was formed, and this was overheard by an employé of the hotel, the young man Pierre, who had listened to the conversation in Flemish. He then started to blackmail my husband, and got from him quite large sums. My husband made no secret of it from me. I only suppose that a secret meeting was arranged between them, and Pierre--because my husband refused to pay further--shot him."

"That supposition is entirely wrong, Madame. Henri Pierre is not the murderer, I assure you. What you have revealed to me is of the utmost value in saving the life of an innocent man. But I tell you frankly that young Pierre is innocent."

"Then who is the guilty one?"

The Professor looked the handsome widow straight in the face, and after a pause of a few seconds, said in a clear voice:

"Your husband!" he answered in a strange hard tone.

"My husband! What do you mean, M'sieur?" she gasped.

"I mean, Baroness, that I shall prove the young fellow's innocence." Then he added: "I am right in surmising that the results of my confidential inquiries into your husband's financial position are correct? He died practically insolvent? You, indeed, are to-day hard pressed for money. Is not that so?"

The stout, rather handsome woman in mourning admitted that such was the case.

"Ah! I thought as much," remarked the Professor. "I have to return to England at once to secure the young man's release."

That night he and Doctor Plaud left Antwerp for Harwich, and three days later they both called upon Norman Drew in the Temple.

"Ah, Professor!" cried the barrister excitably. "I have been in search of you. At last the prisoner has confessed to me where he was on the night of the murder. He was assisting two friends, one a woman of whom he is very fond, who are coiners in the borough. They will have to come forward to establish the alibi."

"That is already established by this," replied the old Professor, triumphantly producing from his bag an automatic pistol somewhat heavier than the one found in the ditch. To the butt was attached a stout cord about four feet long, and at the other end a heavy piece of iron. "This is the weapon which caused the Baron's death. We have succeeded in recovering it from the river, beneath the bridge, at the spot where the tragedy occurred. What happened was that the Baron,

having insured his life for a large sum two years ago, gradually found himself without funds, and preferring to die rather than face poverty, and at the same time provide for his widow, hit upon an ingenious plan.

"He first faked the two letters signed "P," probably never dreaming that Pierre the blackmailer would be actually discovered. One he placed in his pocket, and the other he sent to the Hotel Cecil addressed to himself. Then on the foggy night in question, he went down to Pangbourne, flung into the ditch Pierre's automatic pistol--which our analysis proved had not been fired for a year or more, and was of different calibre to this--and passed on to the bridge. Taking this," and he held up the weapon, "he put the iron attached to the string over the railing of the bridge, and raising the pistol to his head, fired. The pistol relaxed from his hand struck the iron railing, chipping off a tiny piece of the paint, and was jerked by the iron weight into the water below, from which a diver recovered it yesterday."

"Then it was no murder?" gasped the defending counsel, utterly astounded.

"Certainly not. The prisoner must be released."

And released he was, for as soon as the court sat the Grand Jury threw out the bill, and the young Belgian walked out of the Old Bailey a free man.

THE END

THE "ACE" SERIES
THRILLING STORIES OF FLYING ADVENTURES

Price 3s. 6d. per copy

THE SPY FLYERS. By Flying Officer W. E. Johns. One of the most thrilling yarns ever written. War flying adventures.

THE CRUISE OF THE CONDOR. By Flying Officer W. E. John. "Biggles", that most popular character of this well-known author, stages an exciting aeroplane expedition, after the War to South America, in search of treasure.

THE HORNETS' NEST. By J. Railton Holden. A vivid narrative. The latest type of "plane" is stolen from an English aerodrome and stirring adventures follow.

ACES UP. By Covington Clarke. A story of breath-taking conflicts by modern young warriors of the air.

FOR VALOUR. By Covington Clarke. Young warriors fighting in the clouds--a popular story of air fighting.

DESERT WINGS. By Covington Clarke. A giant plane in search of hidden treasure, a story of flying adventures in the barren and dangerous Sahara.

WINGS: FLYING ADVENTURES. Edited by Flying Officer W. E. Johns. A book of thrilling flying adventures by well-known pilots.

ARNOLD ADAIR WITH THE FRENCH ACES. By Lt. Col. Laurence Driggs. A story of thrilling adventures with the French Flying Corps, dropping spies behind the lines, combat by day and night.

ARNOLD ADAIR WITH THE ENGLISH ACES. By Lt. Col. Laurence Driggs. Arnold Adair serves with the Independent Squadron, a band of brave and clever pilots, specially selected for this command.

THE PIRATE AIRSHIP. By John Noy. The adventures of a remarkable airship preying on transatlantic shipping.

Send for a complete list of books on flying
JOHN HAMILTON, LIMITED
32, BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON, W.C.1

[The end of *The Crimes Club* by William Le Queux]