Murder in the Squire's Pew

J. S. Fletcher

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This is

Entry Number Three

in the

Case Book

of

Ronald Camberwell.

J. S. FLETCHER

MURDER IN THE SQUIRE’S PEW

BEING ENTRY NUMBER THREE IN THE CASE-BOOK OF RONALD CAMBERWELL

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CHAPTER I

THEFT—AND SACRILEGE

We had just settled down to business that morning—a Tuesday morning in the second week of April 1921—when the telephone bell in my room suddenly interrupted Chaney and myself in the middle of an argument. The next moment an unfamiliar voice asked a question:

"Is that Camberwell and Chaney?"

"Yes! This is Camberwell speaking."

"This is Canon Effingham, Rector of Linwood—speaking from Linwood."

"Yes, Canon Effingham—we know Linwood."

"Can you and your partner come down to see me at once, Mr. Camberwell? Both of you?"

"Urgent business, Canon Effingham?—Serious?"

"Both urgent and serious!"

"Can you tell me the nature?"

"I had rather tell you in person. Can you come—this morning?"

I turned to Chaney, who was engaged in opening our letters.

"Canon Effingham, Rector of Linwood, wants to see us there, immediately. Won't say what it is till we get there. But very serious and urgent."

"Tell him we'll go," said Chaney.

I turned to the telephone again.

"We're coming, Canon Effingham. Both! At once."

"Thank you. There's a fast train—"

"We'll run over in our own car, sir. Be with you in about an hour."

I put down the receiver and turned to my job—which was to complete the drafting of a brief memorandum for our invaluable clerk, Chippendale. Chaney in silence finished reading, sorting, and arranging the letters.

"Nothing here that can't wait until this afternoon, or, for that matter, until tomorrow," he said, rising from his desk. "Linwood, eh? Let's see, that's the pretty village just beyond Havering St. Michael, isn't it?"

"That's it—close to Wrides Park," I replied, "where, Chaney, you made my acquaintance! Perhaps this is another Wrides Park case—murder."

"A good burglary would be a pleasant change," he remarked. "Any particular shade of excitement or that sort of thing in his reverence's voice?"

"N—no," I said, a little uncertainly. "Seemed a bit flurried. Besides, if it's murder, he'd have been at the police, not us."

"Family plate stolen, I suppose," grunted Chaney. "Well, let's be off—nothing here that Chip can't attend to. Where is he?"

Chippendale, duly summoned from the eight-foot square cabinet in which he exercised his already busy brain, expressed his ability to deal with anything with which Chaney and I had the ability to deal—which was not far from the truth—and we left him in charge and went down to dig out our car from a neighbouring garage. We had only recently set up that car and were very proud of it; already it had proved eminently useful. And its usefulness on this occasion was proved anew by the fact that although Linwood is some twenty-seven miles south of London, we were in sight of its ancient church within an hour and five minutes of quitting our offices in Conduit Street, in spite of suburban traffic and constant other drawbacks.

Havering St. Michael, well known to Chaney and me, is a small, old-world market town; Linwood, two miles away, is an equally old-world village of timbered houses set in homely gardens and deep orchards and shut in from all the world by thick woods. It is just a bit of the old

rural England, and very peaceful and quiet it looked that April morning when we ran our car off the main road up to the gates of the Rectory. There, on one side of us, stood the fine old fourteenth-century church with its splendid proportions crowned by the high and massive keep-like tower; there, on the other, was the scarcely less venerable-looking Rectory—really a seventeenth-century erection—its grey walls, high roofs, and queer chimneys rising from its beautifully kept gardens and shaven green lawns. Nothing could be more inviting, nothing more suggestive of peace, quietude.

"Not much like the scene of anything in our line, this, Camberwell," said Chaney, as we got out of the car. "But look!—the good gentleman seems grave enough!"

I glanced across the lawn and saw Canon Effingham coming from his front door to meet us. I recognized him at once as an elderly clergyman I had often seen in Havering St. Michael at the time Chaney and I were investigating the Wrides Park murder—a tall, ascetic, rather distinguished-looking man, probably about sixty years of age, who was characterized by what is called the scholar's stoop and had a trick of walking with downcast eyes, and hands clasped behind his back. He was walking in this way now, but he raised his head as he came close to the gate and, out of innate politeness, smiled faintly at us.

"It is very kind of you to come so quickly," he said. "Your car, now? We have a garage. Or will you let the car remain where it is until—"

"Until we have had our little talk, sir," replied Chaney. "As a result of that talk we might require the car in a hurry."

"Oh, just so, just so!" agreed Canon Effingham. "It will, I am sure, be quite safe there—my gardener"—he indicated a man who was working close by—"will keep an eye on it. This way, gentlemen. Which of you, now, is Mr. Chaney, and which Mr. Camberwell?"

We informed him on this point, and he led the way across the garden to the house, where he conducted us into a big room lined from floor to ceiling with books. Closing the door carefully, he motioned us to easy chairs on either side of a cheerful fire of logs and was about to take a chair between us when he suddenly appeared to remember something.

"I am forgetful!" he said. "You have had a journey—you would like some refreshment? Wine? A little whisky?"

He pointed to a cupboard set in an angle of the room and was moving across to it, but Chaney stopped him.

"Nothing, sir, thank you, for either of us!" he said. "Later, perhaps, as you're so very kind. But—business first, I think, sir."

Canon Effingham sat down, rubbing his hands slowly around his knees and staring at the fire. He sat there for a moment and then looked from one to the other of us, shaking his head.

"What I have to tell you is really of a most extraordinary nature!" he said: "I have been reflecting on it, in all its various phases, for the last four or five hours, and I am utterly at a loss to understand what has occurred!"

"Perhaps we may be helpful, sir," responded Chaney. "If you will put us in possession of the facts—"

"The facts are very strange—and very puzzling," replied Canon Effingham. "Beyond me! I have not told anyone—except my wife, and my lady secretary—of them so far. I thought at first of the local police, but there are reasons—as you will see—for privacy, and even secrecy, at first, at any rate. I sent for you, Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell, because I am acquainted with your work in the Wrides Park case, and, later, your work in connection with those dreadful affairs in London—"

"Hope yours is nothing of that sort, sir," interrupted Chaney.

"It isn't," said the Canon. "No—it is not murder. But crime, yes! Theft—and in addition to that, sacrilege!"

“Ah!” exclaimed Chaney. “Something stolen from the church, eh, sir?”

“I had better explain everything,” answered the Canon. “And, to begin at the beginning, you are no doubt aware that our parish church is of great antiquity—one of the very oldest churches in this diocese. It preserves certain treasures. Four are of great age, and—though I could not estimate the exact amounts—of great value; I mean, value in money. There is a fifteenth-century chalice of solid gold—a most rare specimen—and a paten, also of solid gold, which matches it. There is an illuminated Book of Hours, on vellum, exquisitely bound, and its covers studded with precious stones. And there is a copy of the four Gospels, on purple vellum, bound in gold plates and ornamented similarly. Well, gentlemen, the fact is that these four valuable things have been stolen!”

“From here—from your house, sir?” asked Chaney.

Canon Effingham shook his head and looked sad.

“No!” he replied. “Perhaps I should have kept them in the house—and yet they could not possibly have been safer here than where they were. No—they were stolen from the church.”

“When, sir?” inquired Chaney.

“During last night,” replied the Canon. “I will further explain matters. These treasures, when I came here, some years ago, were kept in a stout oak box in the rectory—I don’t think many people knew of their existence, and of those who did, few, I believe, realized their immense interest and value. But, having been all my life a student of archæology, I did realize, and I took immediate steps for the safety of all four. I had a special safe built into the outer wall of the vestry, wherein to house these treasures, and a special lock placed on the vestry door. The key of the safe, the key of the vestry, and the key of the small door opening into the chancel have always been in my personal possession, and I can testify that no other hand than mine has ever opened that safe—until now! But now—the safe is empty!”

“When did you discover the loss, sir?” asked Chaney.

“This morning—very early,” replied Canon Effingham. “I am in the habit of rising very early. This morning, about seven o’clock, remembering that I wanted a certain register from the church, I went to this desk”—here he turned in his chair and indicated a massive oak desk which stood in the centre of the room—“to get the keys from that drawer—”

“A moment, sir,” interrupted Chaney, who had begun making notes in his little book. “Please particularize these keys. What were they on?”

“A substantial ring,” replied the Canon. “And there were, as I have said, three of them. The key of the chancel door; the key of the vestry; the key of the safe.”

“Proceed, sir, if you please,” said Chaney.

“The drawer was locked—”

Chaney held up a finger.

“On that point, sir, will you be most particular—for I see what is coming,” he said. “You are absolutely certain that the drawer—that drawer, which you now indicate—was locked?”

“Absolutely certain!” assented the Canon.

“But—you see, sir, how I anticipate—the church keys, the three keys already particularized, were not there?”

“They were not there!”

Chaney wrote in his book for a minute or two. Then he looked up.

“When had you last seen them there, sir?”

“Last? I put them there myself last night! Just before going to bed.”

“And locked the drawer?”

“Certainly, I locked the drawer.”

“Where did you put the key which locks the drawer, sir?”

“It is a key which is on my private bunch of keys,” replied the Canon, thrusting a hand in his

trousers pocket. “This bunch. This is the key.”

“We will return to the subject of that key later,” remarked Chaney. “Well, sir, on opening the drawer—the locked drawer—you found the church keys gone. What did you do?”

“Well, at first I was tempted—scarcely the word to use, but you know what I mean—tempted to think that I hadn’t put the church keys there last night! But I knew—knew beyond question—that I had. I remembered most clearly—and most positively—the exact moment in which I had placed them in the drawer. As to what I did—well, after a brief consideration of the matter, I hurried across to the church. And I found the keys in the door of the chancel.”

“Outside or inside, sir?” inquired Chaney.

“They were hanging from the lock outside,” replied Canon Effingham. “The chancel door was locked. I turned the key, withdrew the bunch, and hurried to the vestry. The vestry door was locked. I entered the vestry. The door of the safe was locked. I unlocked it. The contents, as I have already said, were gone!”

“And—then, sir?” continued Chaney, still busy with his book. “You—what?”

“I returned to the house. No one—I mean none of the servants—had come down, and I went round the doors and windows, for I was certain that the house had been entered and my keys abstracted during the night. Everything was as it should have been, with one exception. There is a side-door in one of our ground-floor rooms which opens on the gardens. When I returned from the church, Bleacher, our parlour-maid, told me she had found it open on coming down this morning, though she was certain she locked it last night.”

“Yes,” said Chaney. “Well, sir—and anything else?”

“Nothing—until I telephoned to you,” said the Canon. “Except that I told my wife and my secretary, Miss Bolton, of what had occurred.”

“Did you make any inquiries in the house as to whether any of its inmates had heard any noise, any unusual sound in the night?”

“I have not done so yet.”

Chaney put his book and pencil away.

“There are two questions I’d like to put to you, Canon Effingham, at once,” he said. “The first is: when did you last see these valuable articles in the safe in the church vestry? The very last time?”

Canon Effingham replied promptly.

“Yesterday afternoon at five o’clock.”

“That’s positive?”

“Absolutely positive!”

“Then they have been stolen during this last night! Well, the next question—a most important one, sir—is about your private bunch of keys. Where do you keep that bunch? In your pocket, of course, during the day? Yes—but what do you do with it when you retire?”

“I place it with my watch, purse, small pocket articles, on a certain small tray on the table of my dressing-room. Always in the same place—I am a man of regular habits and never deviate from them.”

“Then you put the private bunch of keys in its usual place last night?”

“Certainly!”

“Was it there this morning?”

“Yes—just where I had placed it.”

“Do you sleep in that dressing-room, sir?”

“No. But my room is close by—opens from the dressing-room, in fact.”

“Did you hear any sound—unusual sound—from the dressing-room last night, sir?”

“No!”

“And this morning the private bunch of keys was in the same place on the table in which you

had placed it last night?"

"The exact place."

Chaney rose from his seat and approached the desk.

"The next thing I want to know," he said, "is—is this sort of lock, this lock in the drawer in which you keep the church keys, a simple one to open? A special lock, too, sir? Um!—this, sir, is becoming a really interesting case!"

CHAPTER II

THE SQUIRE'S PEW

I don't know whether Canon Effingham understood or appreciated Chaney's remark; he turned a somewhat puzzled glance on him.

"You think—?" he said.

"Ah, I don't know what I think yet, sir!" replied Chaney, still examining the drawer and the key which fitted its lock. "What I see is that this, as you say, is a special lock, with, of course, its own specially made key. Therefore, on the surface of things, it looks as if we must presume that when the drawer was opened for the purpose of abstracting the keys of the chancel, the vestry, and the safe, it was this key, from your private bunch, that opened it."

"And that means—eh?" asked the Canon.

"That means, sir, that we must set up the theory that the thief first stole your keys from your dressing-room. Then he came down here to your study, unlocked this drawer, and abstracted the church keys. Then he went across to the church, entered by the chancel, passed into the vestry, opened the safe, and removed the four missing articles. Then, locking things up again, he left the church keys in the chancel door, returned to the house, and replaced your private bunch of keys in your dressing-room. And that, to me, is a most amazing thing! Why on earth should he, having accomplished his object, have troubled himself to come back here and put those keys of yours in your room upstairs? Extraordinary!"

"It certainly seems so," admitted the Canon. "But the facts are as I have said—there the keys were!"

"Well, sir, then all I can say is that on those facts I must ask you a very plain, but very necessary question," said Chaney. "What about the members of your household?"

Canon Effingham smiled—a very deprecating smile.

"Oh!" he answered promptly, "I can assure you that there is no one—no one at all!—in my house whom we could possibly suspect. There are not many of us. My wife—I suppose no one would suspect her!—my secretary, Miss Bolton—a lady of the highest character and abilities, for whom, when she came to me some months ago, I had the most satisfactory ref—"

"I was thinking more particularly of your domestic staff, sir," interrupted Chaney. "Servants are sometimes got at, you know."

"Our domestic staff is a very limited one," replied Canon Effingham, smiling. "A cook, Mary Summers, who is elderly and has been with us nearly twenty years; a parlour-maid, Jane Bleacher, who has been in our service about ten; a housemaid, Jane Flint, a good, honest, unimaginative country lass; and a page-boy, Tom Deane. I don't think—"

"No menservants, sir?" inquired Chaney.

"We have a gardener, the man you see working out there," said the Canon. "Charles Lightowler, a plain, bluff Yorkshireman who has been in my employ nearly as long as the cook, Summers; he came to us soon after she did, I remember. But he does not live in the house."

"All these people, then, are like—like somebody's wife—I'm no great scholar, sir—beyond suspicion?" said Chaney, smiling. "Well, we must turn elsewhere. Now, have you had any visitors here lately that you—"

The Canon lifted his hands.

"That I could suspect of stealing my keys and robbing a church?" he exclaimed. "No, indeed! —most emphatically not. Anyone received in this house—"

"Would, I am sure, sir, be of the highest character—and ability—" said Chaney, dryly. "But you see, sir, in the exercise of my profession, if you like to dignify a detective's work with that word, I have known a good many people of supposed high character and of unquestionable

ability who, on occasion, and under the pressure of necessity—especially the latter—could do some very, very naughty deeds! I have known ladies of title who were thieves; men of rank who cheated; young society women who—"

"We are not acquainted with any of that sort of person," interrupted Canon Effingham, a little loftily. "I should as soon think of suspecting my own wife as any of the visitors we have ever had. Of course," he added, hastily, "I cannot vouch for the occasional visitors who come to see the church."

"Ah!" exclaimed Chaney, cheerfully. "Now, that's more like it, sir! Visitors to the church, eh? Though, to be sure, it's difficult to see how a visitor to the church could get into your dressing-room during the night and abstract your private keys. But we'll pursue that subject a little. You have many visitors to the church?"

"A considerable number in the course of a year," asserted the Canon. "It is a remarkably fine and interesting edifice, and of historic associations, too."

"Then I suppose a great number of people have seen the stolen valuables at one time or another?" suggested Chaney. "They must be quite well known to a lot of people."

"No!" replied Canon Effingham. "They are not. There are two classes of visitors to the church. There are the people who can enter it whenever they like—it is open all day—and there are the people who are what one may call special and privileged visitors. It is only these—the last-named—who ever see the valuable things I have told you of. And those are never shown to anybody but by myself. That safe has never been opened except by me since it was built into the church wall; no other hands than mine have ever handled the missing chalice and paten, and if I have occasionally allowed bibliophiles or very distinguished visitors to take the two books into their hands, I can assure you that I have kept a jealous eye on them while they did!"

"Is there such a thing as a register of visitors in the church, sir?" inquired Chaney. "There is? Good!—I suggest that we go across and inspect it."

Canon Effingham led us across the garden and through an intervening shrubbery to the church. The west door stood wide open; through it we had a vision of the big nave, with its high roof and massive pillars, and of the chancel in the distance. At the base of one of the piers of the chancel arch we found the register, a strongly bound volume laid out on a desk, with pen and ink ready to hand.

"This," remarked Canon Effingham, laying a hand on the book, "is the ordinary register. It is ruled, you observe, for the name and address of the visitor and the date of visit. But I have another, a sort of private register, in the vestry, in which are the signatures of the people who have been allowed to inspect the contents of the safe. Some of those signatures may appear in both books—I think you will be most interested in the vestry register."

"I think so, sir," agreed Chaney. "These, after all, are signatures and only signatures and can't convey much to me. Possibly you can tell something about the persons whose signatures are in the other book?"

"We will go into the vestry," said the Canon. "But, first, observe the door in the south wall of the chancel. That is the door I spoke of whereby the thieves entered—as far as I know. They would then cross the front of the chancel to this vestry door—the vestry, you see, is situated in the north-east angle of the church. Look at the lock and key of this door; you see they are exceptional. Now here is the interior of the vestry—and there is the safe!"

He opened the safe door; the cavity was, of course, empty; he had already remarked that the safe had been specially built for the secure keeping of the valuables now missing from it.

"And here," Canon Effingham presently continued, "is the vestry register. It goes back, of course, for some years."

"Ah, but we needn't turn back as far as all that, sir," remarked Chaney. "Recent entries are what I want to see—entries made since, say, the New Year."

Canon Effingham turned the pages of his register until he came to one headed in boldly made figures "1921." He ran a finger down it.

"There have been only a few visitors—I mean visitors to whom the valuables were exhibited—since the year began," he said. "I can, of course, tell you anything you want to know about them—all of them. You see what the general type is—two or three ecclesiastical dignitaries, certain eminent archæologists, an antiquary or two, two or three foreigners of distinction, and so on. Nobody, I think, likely to be a burglar in disguise!"

Chaney made no reply to the last remark. He was rapidly glancing over the names before him, and I, standing at his elbow, was doing the same thing. Suddenly he put a finger on a section of the page dated February 21.

"What is this group of names—some nine or ten; no, eleven in all—all coming together, sir?" he asked, turning to the Canon. "A Sunday-school party?"

"No, no!" replied Canon Effingham, smiling. "Those are the signatures of a party of ladies and gentlemen, guests of Sir Bartle Shardale—"

"The racing man?" interrupted Chaney quickly.

"Sir Bartle has racehorses, certainly," assented Canon Effingham. "He is our local Squire, you know, living at Linwood Hall, just beyond the Rectory."

"Yes?" continued Chaney. "And these people were his guests, at this date?"

"He had a large house-party just then—hunting people, most of them," replied the Canon. "One day—owing, I believe, to an unusually severe frost—they couldn't hunt, and a great many of them—all whose signatures are there—came over to inspect the church. I took them round myself, and of course showed them the treasures."

"Ah, to be sure!" said Chaney, with affected carelessness. "Principal thing to see, of course. Did you expatiate on the value of the treasures, sir?"

"I may have done," replied Canon Effingham. "Probably I did."

Chaney's note-book suddenly appeared. So did his pencil.

"I think I'll just copy a name or two," he said guilelessly. "You never know what may be useful, you know, sir."

Leaving him to this occupation, with the Canon watching him, I went out of the vestry and back into the body of the church, to have a look round. There was a great deal in that church that was very old and very interesting, but what had struck me most as we walked up the nave was a great, square, horse-box of a pew which, Canon Effingham had remarked in passing, had for generations been sacred to the Squire. I wanted, out of sheer curiosity, to look inside it. And now, approaching it, I pulled open the heavy door and peeped in. The next instant I started back, staring. There before me, stretched out, face downward, across the flooring lay the body of a man—still, rigid.

CHAPTER III

THE BRAND-NEW SPANNER

I knew, of course, that this man was dead and that in all probability he had been murdered. The wooden walls of the old pew were high, and the light in its interior dim, and the man's face was mostly hidden from me, but I fancied that on a bit of cheek-bone which caught the light I could see the mark of a terrible blow. For a moment longer I stood looking at him, without going nearer. He was a little chap, undersized, roughly dressed in poor clothes; the best part of his attire was a pair of good, serviceable nearly new leggings or gaiters. The boots which terminated these were hob-nailed; there was chalk on their soles. That is a chalk district.

I turned suddenly and, stealing back to the vestry door, attracted Chaney's attention and beckoned to him. He came out. Canon Effingham followed; I waved him back.

"A moment, if you please, sir," I said. "I want to speak to my partner."

He turned into the vestry again, and Chaney followed me into the nave.

"What is it?" he asked. "Seen something suspicious?"

"Found something!" I whispered. "A dead man!"

He started, staring at me incredulously.

"Where?" he exclaimed after a gasp of astonishment.

"Come this way," I said, and led him along the nave to the open door of the old pew.

"There!" I continued, pointing. "And now, what's that mean?"

With a smothered exclamation Chaney bent down and looked closer.

"Dead enough!" he muttered, straightening himself again. "Nice mess they've made of his face and forehead, too, poor chap. Who will he be? Some villager, I'll bet."

"Canon Effingham will know him if he is," I said. "Better fetch him."

Turning in its direction, I saw that Canon Effingham was watching us from the vestry door. I motioned to him; he came hurrying to us. Chaney went to meet him.

"Prepare yourself for a shock, sir," he said. "There's a man laying dead in the big pew."

Canon Effingham threw up his hands in horror as he started forward.

"In that pew!" he exclaimed. "The Squire's pew? Who—"

He was at the open door by that time, and we stood aside and let him look in. Probably he recognized the man by his clothes; at any rate, he spoke his name without hesitation.

"Merciful Heaven!" he said. "Jim Skate! What—what does this mean? You say he's dead? Why, how—"

"He's as dead as a man can be, sir," answered Chaney, stolidly, "and as to how, well, I've already got my ideas about that! But—who is he, sir?"

"A man living in the village," replied the Canon. "A native, indeed. A sort of ne'er-do-well. And I believe he had the reputation of being a confirmed poacher."

"Poacher, eh?" exclaimed Chaney. "Ah, that simplifies things! I see it, now! This chap was out poaching last night. He came this way—by the church. He saw and perhaps interfered with the fellows who carried out the raid on the safe. And—he paid for his interference with his life! They knocked him on the head and bundled his dead body into this queer old pew."

"What is to be done?" asked the Canon, almost piteously. "This is—murder!"

"Murder it is, sir, hard enough, and now we want the murderers!" agreed Chaney. "Now we'll just have to call in the official police. Will you go over to your phone, sir, and ask the Police Superintendent at Havering St. Michael to come here at once—and say that we are here, Camberwell and Chaney? He knows us. But—don't tell him what the trouble is—we'll tell him all that. And you might send your man for the nearest doctor—I want to find out how long this chap's been dead."

Canon Effingham hurried away, and Chaney beckoned me to follow him into the churchyard. Once outside in the bright spring sunlight, he drew a long breath and stretched his arms.

"Phew!" he said. "That's better! Well, here we are again, Camberwell, faced with another murder!"

"You think it's that?" I replied.

"Pooh, man, what else? Plain as that stone! As soon as I heard the parson say that this fellow was a poacher, I saw through it. What's his name—Skate? Well, this is my reconstruction of it. Skate was out last night on one of his little excursions. Rabbits, I suppose—"

"Breeding season!" I objected.

"Oh, well, something—I'm not a countryman. But he was out. He came through this churchyard. He saw or heard something. Perhaps he saw a spot of light in that vestry. Anyhow, he was fool enough to interfere, instead of going for assistance. And—he got a tap on his head that settled him! That's all there is to it," he concluded with decision. "But come—let's have a look round. For my belief is that the dead man was carried in there from outside."

We began to search the churchyard. It was of considerable extent and of varied arrangement. On one side it sloped down to the main road and the village; on the other it extended to the outer edge of a thick wood which stretched along the hill-side. It was beautifully kept and planted, and the turf was well cropped and rolled. That last fact was all in our favour; we had not been searching about very long before we came on a stretch where the velvet-like surface showed the marks of much trampling and here and there exhibited, unmistakably, the imprint of heavy-soled and nail-studded boots.

"Those are Skate's—the dead man's," muttered Chaney. "I noticed his boots and leggings particularly. I reckon this is where he held up the raiders; it's between the church and the lych-gate, you see. And—hello, what's this?"

As he spoke, Chaney moved quickly forward, to pick up from a flower-bed close by something which had suddenly glittered in a shaft of sunlight that pierced the light clouds overhead. He turned to me, holding the thing out for my inspection.

"A spanner!" he said. "Brand-new and stainless—except for those specks of rust caused by lying out in the dew all night and for—that! See what that is, Camberwell? Blood!"

I looked at the mark he meant; it certainly seemed to me something other than rust.

"You may be pretty certain that this is what that poacher chap in there was hit with," Chaney continued. "Probably one of his assailants—"

"Why the plural?" I interrupted. "Do you think more than one man has been in at this job?"

"I should say at least two," he replied confidently. "It doesn't seem to me like a one-man job at all. What I expect we shall find out is that these fellows—let's suppose there were two of 'em —made use of a car. They came down from town. They hid their car somewhere in the lanes close by this spot. They secured the keys we've heard so much about—never mind exactly how; we'll go into all that later—and they got into the church and secured the loot. As they were coming away, Skate stopped 'em. One of them had this new spanner—don't forget that it's brand-new—in his pocket. He quietened Skate with it. Then they carried Skate back to the church and put him in the Squire's pew."

"How do you account for that spanner being dropped—just here?" I asked.

"I think there's no need to account for it! It was dropped—or I shouldn't be handling it. I should say that after using it to crack Skate's skull the man who had it in hand shoved it back in his pocket, as he thought—and dropped it in that patch of soft grass. Anyway, here it is. A brand-new spanner, out of a motorist's outfit. We're going to trace its ownership, Camberwell."

"Stiff job, I think, Chaney!" I said. "I guess they turn those things out by the scores, perhaps hundreds of thousands!"

"Never mind, my lad!" he retorted. "We'll see. All sorts of ways by which we may get a bit

of information on that little point. Hallo! Here’s his reverence coming back with somebody; doctor, I suppose.”

We went back into the church with the doctor and were presently listening to what he had to say. And that was little—Skate, he said, had been struck two violent blows on the left temple; yes, the spanner which Chaney showed him was probably the weapon which the murderer had used, and either blow was sufficient to cause death. And Skate had been dead, approximately, nine or ten hours. That meant, we concluded, that the raid on the church safe and the murder of Skate had taken place soon after midnight.

The Superintendent of Police, bringing a couple of his men and the village policeman, had arrived by this time, and to him the whole story had to be told. He was obviously not at all well pleased that Canon Effingham had sent for us before sending for him, and said so.

“I was not aware of the—the murder, as I fear it is,” pleaded the Canon, “and I wished to avoid publicity in respect of the robbery, as far as I could.”

“That’s impossible, sir!” snapped the Superintendent. “Crime is crime and can’t be treated as a private affair. We should have been informed at once—every hour that’s elapsed means additional facility to the criminal to get clear away.” He turned to Chaney and me; he knew us well enough, for we’d had previous dealings with him over the Wrides Park affair. “I suppose you’ve heard all about it from the Canon?” he suggested. “You’d better post me up.”

We went out into the churchyard with him and told him all we knew, Canon Effingham standing by and corroborating and amplifying where necessary. The Superintendent listened without comment, but he put a shrewd question at the end which Chaney had not put.

“Yes,” he said, when the full story had been told, “but there’s something I want to know about.” He turned to Canon Effingham. “Did anybody in your household, sir—I don’t include Mrs. Effingham—know where you kept those church keys—that you kept them in that particular drawer in your desk in the study?”

Canon Effingham made a wry face and shook his head.

“I should say,” he answered, slowly, “I should say—as they must have seen me take the keys from that drawer hundreds of times—that everybody did!”

The Superintendent shrugged his shoulders and turned to Chaney.

“What’s your notion about it?” he asked brusquely.

“Mine?” responded Chaney. “That’s soon told! That the man we want was well aware of the value of the articles deposited in the vestry safe. That he was equally well acquainted with Canon Effingham’s arrangements about his keys—private bunch and church bunch. That he came here last night, got the keys, effected the robbery, and was probably getting quietly away when Skate accosted him. Whereupon he settled Skate. Those are my notions. But I have still another.”

“Well?” asked the Superintendent. “Out with it! What?”

“That he had an accomplice!”

The Superintendent gave Chaney a sharp look.

“Inside—or outside?” he asked, significantly.

“That,” replied Chaney, “is just what somebody has got to find out!”

The Superintendent nodded and, walking across to the spot which we had previously pointed out to him as the probable scene of the scuffle, stood there for a minute or two in silence, evidently reflecting on the problems just put before him. He came back, glancing from Chaney to me and evidently joining us together in his thoughts.

“I think we’d better make a division of labour,” he said. “Canon Effingham fetched you two down on account of the robbery, eh? I think you’d better stick to that and leave the other matter to us.”

“Are not the two crimes indissolubly united?” remarked Canon Effingham.

“They are, sir, they are, no doubt,” agreed the Superintendent. “When we find the thief, we

find the murderer; when we find the murderer, we find the thief. But Mr. Chaney knows what I mean. Let him and his partner go on the track of the missing articles and we'll see to the other. Now, to start with, sir, those matters that have been stolen—they're of real value? Not sentimental, but real?"

"They are of real value," asserted Canon Effingham. "Great value—in money."

"You couldn't put a figure to it, sir?"

"I can say confidently that they are worth a great many thousand pounds!"

"And could realize that?"

"Most certainly!"

"Then there's one thing you must do at once, sir," said the Superintendent. "You must prepare a full description of the four missing articles—the two pieces of plate and the two books—and it must be supplied to the London press and to the news-distributing agencies this afternoon. And now if Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell will give you their assistance in that matter, and will then see about the necessary publicity, I and my men will—"

He completed his sentence by a significant wave of the hand in the direction of the church and went off there. Canon Effingham, Chaney, and I returned to the Rectory; once within his study, Canon Effingham rang a bell, once, twice. An inner door opened; a lady appeared.

"My secretary, Miss Bolton," said the Canon. "Miss Bolton, I want to supply these gentlemen with a description of the articles stolen from the vestry safe last night. If you will kindly take it down, we'll afterwards revise it before you make a typed copy in duplicate. You have your note-book? Well, now—"

Miss Bolton spread out her note-book on a table near Canon Effingham's desk and prepared to write, and Chaney and I sat down to wait. We listened, of course, to the Canon's description of the lost valuables, but I confess that I was rather more interested in Miss Bolton herself than in what she was writing down—in shorthand. She was not at all the sort of secretary I should have expected to find employed by a man of learning, devoted to such dry-as-dust subjects as archæology and ecclesiastical history, for she was young, very pretty, smart as to clothes and appearance, and therefore quite a contrast to the surroundings in which we sat. As for the rest of her it needed very little observation to see that behind her retiring and demure air there was an unusual fund of perception and intelligence; she had, in short, as Chaney subsequently observed of her, all the appearance of a smart young woman of superior mental powers.

We had to check and, as it were, edit Canon Effingham's descriptions—he was inclined to be too technical and too prolix. Eventually we got what was really necessary for publication, and Miss Bolton was retiring to typewrite the revised matter when Canon Effingham stopped her. He turned to us.

"There is still something to add," he said. "I must insist on its being added, and on due stress being laid on it in any publication of these descriptions. As these valuable articles were stolen out of my guardianship, I will give a reward of a thousand pounds to any person whose information—you understand?"

"Leads to their recovery," added Chaney. "We understand, sir. Very good."

"Add a sentence—clearly worded—to that effect," said the Canon to Miss Bolton. "And then—two copies, if you please."

Miss Bolton brought us the typed copies very shortly; we told Canon Effingham what we should do with them and went away. Outside, Chaney gave me a queer look.

"Um!" he said. "Cool old chap, his reverence, after all!"

"Why?" I asked, wondering what he meant. "What makes you say that?"

"What?" he answered. "Why, didn't you notice that he sat down and gave that girl a calm, detailed description of the stolen goods, but never even mentioned to her that the theft of 'em had led to murder? I call that damned cool!"

CHAPTER IV

WHO IS HE?

I had had some such thought myself as I sat in Canon Effingham's study watching Miss Bolton's steady fingers taking down his instructions. It certainly seemed strange that he had made no mention of the murder. But there were stranger things than that in the circumstances of the morning.

"Queer business altogether, Chaney," I said. "And one thing strikes me as being extraordinarily queer!"

"What?" he asked. "What—more than another?"

"Why, the business of the keys! Why on earth should the thief—and especially after his encounter with this poacher chap!—bother to restore that small bunch of private keys to Canon Effingham's dressing-room? He'd got what he wanted by that time. Why didn't he go straight off? Why risk detection a second time by returning to the house?"

"Ay—but did he?" asked Chaney, with a dry laugh.

"The keys were there, anyway, when the Canon looked for them this morning. There, he says, in their usual place, where he had laid 'em last night."

"Again ay, my lad! But—had they ever been touched?"

"That's a special lock on the drawer in the study desk, Chaney."

"Maybe. Say it is. But special locks can be picked."

"You think that, eh? That the thief never entered the dressing-room?"

"I don't say he did, and I don't say he didn't. What I say is just what you say—that if the thief did abstract the small bunch of private keys from Canon Effingham's table in his dressing-room, it's the most astonishing thing I ever heard of that he troubled to put 'em back!"

We were not the only persons whose minds were occupied by the queerness of that key business. As we were about to set off, the Superintendent signalled to us from the churchyard, where he was talking with one of his men and the doctor, and came across to our car.

"I say, just a word or two before you go," he said, "Have you got the description of these missing goods?"

"We have—and the Canon's offering a reward, too," replied Chaney.

"Much?"

"A thousand!"

"Whew!—well, he's a well-to-do man; he'll not miss that bit. But I say—that tale of his about the keys? Do I understand that he says that though his private keys must have been abstracted during the night in order to open the drawer in his study wherein the church keys were kept, they were in their proper place this morning? Is that it—have I got it?"

"You've got it!"

"Very well, then—the thief must have had an accomplice in the house!"

"What are you figuring?" asked Chaney.

"You'll not make me believe that the thief, after securing the loot, and incidentally killing this chap Skate, would bother to make his way back to the Canon's dressing-room to put those keys where he found 'em! No, no—I can't swallow that. I think that the church keys were handed to him from inside the house, and that he never handled the private keys at all!"

"Um!" remarked Chaney reflectively. "You mean that somebody inside the house quietly possessed him or herself of Canon Effingham's private keys, went down to the study, took the church keys from the drawer, handed 'em out through a window or a door at a certain time, and then put the private keys in their proper place? That something like it?"

"That is it! That's what I do think!"

“That, then, would certainly mean that there’s an accomplice inside that very innocent-looking residence! But—which of ’em is it? According to Canon Effingham, they’re all absolutely above suspicion.”

“He’d say that, of course. But we know that nobody’s above suspicion.”

“I prefer to say that everybody’s subject to temptation,” said Chaney. “However, which of ’em do you suspect?”

The Superintendent looked round. Our car was still stationary at the garden gate of the Rectory; it was, however, well away from the house.

“Oh, well,” he said in a cautious whisper, “there’s only one person in that house who’s what you might call a stranger, a new-comer. The secretary!”

“Miss Bolton?”

“Miss Pamela Bolton. That’s her full name. Been here—I live in Linwood, so I know—a few months. Came from London to be the Canon’s secretary and typist—he writes a good deal, and he’s busy at some big book on this parish and neighbourhood. Smart girl, no doubt—but who is she?”

“Canon Effingham says he had the most exceptional references.”

“Oh, I reckon nothing of references! Anyway, there’s nobody in that house but Miss B. that I should suspect. None of the servants, certainly. I know ’em, every one. Old and tried stuff, all of ’em. But she—new!”

“What do you suggest?” asked Chaney.

“Well, I think we ought to make some investigations into her antecedents and so on. Just to make certain that—eh? Now, as you two are in town, I should think you could do all that, on the quiet, and leave me to work on the murder of this chap Jim Skate. Of course, we’ll post each other up.”

“Have to be done very quietly, the investigation business,” remarked Chaney. “It would never do to let the Canon know what we were after, and yet I see no way of starting out except from him.”

“Oh, you can think a way out!” said the Superintendent. “Well, that’s my notion, anyway. That description, I suppose, will get into the papers at once? All right—see you again soon, no doubt.”

He was turning away, but Chaney stopped him.

“What are you going to do first?” he asked.

The Superintendent tapped the pocket in which we had seen him place the spanner.

“Try to find out somebody who sold this to somebody,” he answered. “Nice job, too! Then have a careful look round about here—I expect this man or men came in a car. General inquiries—and about Skate’s doings last night, of course. Plenty to do, I can tell you.”

“Going to call in anybody from the Yard?” inquired Chaney.

“At present, no. I have some brains of my own,” replied the Superintendent. “And I’ve two or three men who are not without. So long!”

We left him at that and, going back to town, busied ourselves for the next hour or two with the press agencies. Announcements based on the particulars we supplied appeared in the late editions of the evening papers that night; the London dailies and big provincial journals were full of them next morning. And at ten o’clock Chippendale poked his sharp nose into my office, interrupting Chaney and me in a discussion as to our next proceedings, and announced that the Reverend Canon Effingham was outside and desired to see us at once.

Canon Effingham came in a minute later. He held a telegram in his hand, and he was obviously excited.

“I received this just before nine o’clock this morning,” he said breathlessly. “I had scarcely begun my breakfast, but the message seems to be so important that I ordered out my car and set

off to town immediately. And I thought—having reflected on matters during the journey—that I had better come to you before going to the place indicated."

He held out the buff envelope and I took it from him and drew forth the bit of flimsy paper. The message had been handed in at the Strand office at 7.50 that morning and received at Linwood three quarters of an hour later. And this is what it said:

> *Will the Reverend Mr. Effingham kindly call on Mr. Henry J. Atherton, at the Savoy Hotel, London, at once?*

I handed the message over to Chaney, Canon Effingham following the action and watching Chaney with anxious eyes.

"What—what do you think it means?" he asked.

Chaney made short work of that question.

"It means, sir, that we're going to learn something," he replied. "This is the first result of the publicity we gave to the matter yesterday afternoon. Is your car below, sir?"

"It is at your door," replied Canon Effingham.

"Then Camberwell and I will go with you, straight away, to see this Mr. Henry J. Atherton," said Chaney. "I happen to know who he is—a well-known American collector of pictures, books, objects of virtu, and so on, and, I believe, a multimillionaire, but whether in pounds or dollars, I don't know."

"But what should he know of our affair—" began Canon Effingham.

Chaney winked at me—behind our client's back.

"Ah, what indeed!" he said. "However, we'll soon know. There are some very strange things happen, sir, when a really clever crook gets to work. Tell your man to drive straight to the Savoy Hotel, if you please."

Within twenty minutes we had sent up our cards to Mr. Henry J. Atherton and were being conducted up lifts and along corridors to a private suite of rooms overlooking the river. There we found an elderly gentleman standing in the middle of his sitting-room and, save for ourselves, alone. As we entered, he regarded us with a quiet, speculative smile in which I seemed to see some signs of amusement. Looking at him more closely, I realized a well-set-up, very smartly dressed man, keen-eyed, watchful, who, in my opinion, would not be easy to get round or deceive; in short, a man of affairs and of business.

Mr. Atherton ran the three of us over; his eyes grew keener when he looked at Chaney and me. But he addressed his first words to the clergyman.

"Reverend Mr. Effingham?" he said. "Pleased to meet you, sir. Your friends—"

"I have taken the liberty to bring these gentlemen with me, Mr. Atherton," replied Canon Effingham. "Mr. Chaney—Mr. Camberwell. They are well-known inquiry agents—"

"Sure! I read their names in the newspaper in connexion with your loss. I might have communicated with Messrs. Chaney and Camberwell," continued Mr. Atherton, "but I thought I'd rather have you yourself right along—glad to see you all three, anyway. And of course you're wondering why I sent for you at all!"

"I am certainly wondering!" admitted Canon Effingham.

"Sure you are—but I dare say Messrs. Chaney and Camberwell never wonder at anything!" said Mr. Atherton, with something very like a wink at us. "Not in their line of business, no doubt?"

"Scarcely, sir," observed Chaney. "We see too much for that. Perhaps, however, you have news for us that—"

"That'll stir your admiration, eh?" interrupted Mr. Atherton. "Well, now, let's see—here is something Canon Effingham had better look at, at once, and then we shall settle one question

definitely. Step this way, gentlemen."

He led us out of the sitting-room, past a closed door or two in the suite, into a bedroom, wherein were conspicuous various travelling-trunks and suit-cases. One of the smaller suit-cases he picked up and laid on a table in the centre of the room. Selecting a key from a big bunch drawn from his trousers pocket, he opened the suit-case and, turning back a fold or two of paper, revealed two objects lying within, at the same time facing Canon Effingham with a sudden question.

"Are those the two volumes stolen from your church safe?"

Canon Effingham's lips opened; his fresh-coloured cheeks paled; he clutched at my arm, as I happened to be standing next to him.

"Merciful Heavens!" he gasped. "Yes! But—but—"

"But what?" asked Mr. Atherton, regarding his questioner with his characteristic, somewhat cynical smile.

"Where—how—did you get them?" replied Canon Effingham, still gasping.

"Sure, I bought them, yesterday morning," said Mr. Atherton. "Here!"

"Bought them! Yesterday morning? From whom?" demanded Canon Effingham.

"Well," replied Mr. Atherton, the smile deepening further, "he said he was the Dean of Norchester, but since hearing of your loss and the circumstances under which it was suffered, as narrated in the newspaper this morning, I conclude that he was not!"

"Your conclusion is not far from the truth, sir," remarked Chaney. "In fact, I should say it was the truth."

"The absolute truth!" exclaimed Canon Effingham, who was now purple with indignation. "The Dean of Norchester? The Dean of Norchester, sir, is Dr. Perrible-Browne; he and I have been close friends all our lives; we were at Winchester together and at Cambridge together. Certainly we don't often meet nowadays, as he is in the north of England and I in the south, but—dear me, the mere suggestion that he should steal our—"

"Well, nobody ever said that he did!" interrupted Mr. Atherton, smiling again. "What I said was that the enterprising person who sold me these dear old books said he was the Dean of Norchester, which, of course, was adventurous on his part and also highly improper, not to say wicked. But come back to my parlour."

He took the two old volumes from the suit-case and, shepherding us back to the sitting-room, motioned us to seats, and himself sat down facing us, the stolen property on his knees.

"Well, now, all about it!" he said, good-humouredly. "And a very pretty tale it is—now that I know more chapters of it than I knew yesterday. You gentlemen may not be aware that I have a little weakness for acquiring certain things, due, perhaps, to an undue development of my bump of acquisitiveness—quite harmless, though, and merely in the way of things like these, old books, old china, old pictures—"

"We are aware of your reputation as a collector, sir," remarked Chaney. "World-wide, I believe."

"Well, I have certainly bought pretty extensively in various European countries," admitted Mr. Atherton, "and so I suppose a good many people know about me. Well, now, about ten o'clock yesterday morning this highwayman, calling himself the Dean of Norchester, sent in his card to me—here it is, beautifully engraved. I saw him. He produced these two books. He said that they were making a great effort to restore Norchester Cathedral and wanted ready money badly, and with the approval of the Bishop and the proper authorities he and his Chapter had decided to sell certain valuable old things out of the Cathedral library and museum. He had come, in person, to me, knowing my interest in antiquities, to offer me these two ancient volumes, on the charms and glories of which he expatiated most eloquently and learnedly—a very clever fellow indeed! Well, I fell to his temptation, and I gave him a cheque for the price he

fixed. How much? Oh, well, five thousand pounds!”

“Cheque, sir?” demanded Chaney. “On a London bank? Crossed? Open?”

“Cheque on Marwood, Littledale & Co., Lombard Street. Open!”

With a sudden gasp Chaney leapt to his feet and made across the room to a telephone. But Mr. Atherton laughed and held up his hand.

“Exactly!” he said. “But that’s no good. The cheque was cashed at noon yesterday!”

CHAPTER V

THE ACCOMPLISHED IMPOSTOR

For a moment Chaney stood motionless, staring. Then, with a gasp, he dropped back into his chair, set his hands on his knees, and stared harder than ever—at Mr. Atherton. And Mr. Atherton laughed.

"Guess you're quite right!" he said, with a twinkle of his eye. "But I did it! You see, he gave some plausible reason for wanting the ready money—something to do with this restoration business—cash to be paid here in London, or some bunk of that sort."

Chaney drew a long breath and found his tongue again.

"You're sure he cashed the cheque, sir?"

"I phoned the bank just before you came in," replied Mr. Atherton. "He must have gone straight there, to Lombard Street, immediately he left me."

"We shall have to see the bankers," muttered Chaney; "they'll have the numbers of the notes. But—do you mind answering a few questions, sir?"

"Go ahead!" said Mr. Atherton.

"Well, sir, to begin with—can you give us a description of this man who called himself Dean of Norchester?"

"Sure! He was a fairly little, somewhat insignificant looking—"

Canon Effingham sniffed.

"The *real* Dean of Norchester," he said, with fitting emphasis on the adjective, "is a man of remarkable presence!"

"Well, so one would expect," remarked Mr. Atherton, "but I am not acquainted with the exalted hierarchy of this country, and when the man sent in his beautifully engraved card, I naturally supposed he was what he represented himself to be. And when he came in, in the flesh, I found no reason to change that supposition. I took it that he was the Dean."

"He'd the manners, I suppose, sir—the manners you expected?" suggested Chaney.

"I don't know what a dean's manners are expected to be," replied Mr. Atherton. "But he'd the manners of a gentleman, and he was certainly a scholar, and, I should say, a learned one."

"Gave you evidences, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, he quoted one bit of Latin with which I do happen to be very familiar," said Mr. Atherton, smiling, "for I see it pretty nearly every day at the top of one charitable appeal or another! *Bis dat qui cito dat*—and I reckon we all know enough to translate that!"

Canon Effingham groaned. The idea of a thief—and murderer—quoting from one of the classical languages was evidently most painful to his feelings.

"Ah, well!" said Chaney. "That shows that we're dealing with a superior type of criminal, a man of education. That's the worst sort—they're always full of resource. But I want more particulars of his appearance, sir—can you give them?"

"Well, I tell you, he was a smallish man—what you'd call medium height—and, as a man, not a great deal to look at," answered Mr. Atherton. "In age I should say he was anything from fifty to sixty. Nice, fresh complexion, hair going a bit grey, clean-shaven, wore glasses, but gave the impression that he'd got a pair of keen, wide-awake eyes behind them. Very loquacious—great talker—full of humour—"

"The real Dean of Norchester, my friend Dr. Perrible-Browne," remarked Canon Effingham, "is a man of the most reserved—and perfect—manners!"

"Yes, well, this fellow's manners were perfect enough, but you couldn't call them reserved," said Mr. Atherton. "He was what we should call a good mixer—made himself very friendly at once."

“He appears to have impressed you, sir!” observed Chaney.

“Oh, well, I don’t mind saying he did! Nothing that I’m ashamed of in that. He was good company—while he was here.”

“I suppose he was correctly attired?” suddenly asked Canon Effingham.

“Well, I can’t say—not being of that persuasion myself—what the correct attire of a dean may be,” replied Mr. Atherton. “But he wore what I should call small-clothes, and gaiters to continue them, and he’d a sort of apron with a sash round his middle, and a long-tailed coat on it, and as for his hat, well, the brim seemed to be tied up to the crown with strings. And I reckon that when a man calls on you who’s dressed up in that way and says he’s a dean, well, you’ve just got to believe him!”

“And you did, sir, and you parted with—five thousand pounds!” murmured Chaney.

Mr. Atherton glanced at the two old books still resting on his knee.

“For value received,” he replied softly. “Don’t forget that!”

“You consider those two articles worth that, sir?”

Mr. Atherton gave Chaney a sudden swift look.

“See here!” he answered. “I consider them worth a good deal more! And my advice to Reverend Mr. Effingham, now that he’s got them back—”

“Oh!” gasped Canon Effingham. “You intend to—to restore them?”

“Sure! Here they are,” answered Mr. Atherton, pushing the books over. “They ain’t mine, though they’ve cost me all that money—twenty-five thousand dollars! And my advice to you, sir, is—go put ’em straight away in the British Museum.”

In the midst of Canon Effingham’s almost incoherent expressions of gratitude, Chaney returned to his questioning.

“What do you propose to do, sir?” he asked. “I mean about trying to get hold of this man?”

“What do I propose to do?” repeated Mr. Atherton. “Well, I suppose I had better join in the hunt. I suppose the police are after him?”

“The police are after him, and we are after him,” replied Chaney. “But you can help, sir. Now, frankly, do you mind being laughed at?”

“I do not! But why?”

“I want you to give me your permission to retell your story to the newspaper men! Every detail of it!”

“You think that’ll help?”

“I think,” replied Chaney, “that in this case nothing but the very widest publicity will help!”

“You don’t want—as police so often do—to keep anything back?”

Chaney shook his head in a decided negative.

“My partner and I, sir, are not policemen, though, to be sure, I myself was once in the detective service,” he said. “We’ve got our own methods. In this case I want to get everything out—let the public know everything. You yourself don’t know everything. You don’t know how these things came to be stolen. Well, I’ll tell you, briefly.” He proceeded to give a rapid, condensed account of all that we knew so far. “Now,” he continued, “we want, through publicity, to know a lot of things. We want to know how Canon Effingham’s keys were got at and who got at ’em. We want to trace the ownership of the new spanner picked up in the churchyard. We want to know who the man is who brought you those two books. In fact, we want to know all about it, and for that reason we want to tell the public everything that we ourselves know up to now in the hope that somebody will be able to amplify our knowledge. You get all that, sir?”

“Sure!—and I’m with you. Tell anything you like of all I’ve told you. If the newspaper men want more, tell ’em to come along,” replied Mr. Atherton. “But I’ve told you everything that happened. Oh, yes, put it all in—I don’t mind being laughed at. But say!—although we’ve said nothing of it, there’s more than theft in this case—eh?”

“Sacrilege!” murmured Canon Effingham. “Sacrilege!”

“Well, I wasn’t thinking of that, either,” said Mr. Atherton. “I understand that a man was killed?”

“May as well say murdered, sir, and be done with it,” replied Chaney. “He was murdered, without a doubt.”

“By the thieves?”

“Our theory, sir, is that this dead man, one Richard Skate, commonly known thereabouts as Weasel Dick, a village ne’er-do-well and a confirmed poacher, was out on one of his nocturnal expeditions, around the churchyard, saw or heard the thieves, challenged or interfered with them, and was promptly cracked on the head for his pains,” answered Chaney. “And that is—murder!”

“Exactly!” said Mr. Atherton. “Then—the man who came to me as Dean of Norchester may have been the murderer!—may have come to me with his hands—so to speak—red with blood?”

“That’s so, Mr. Atherton,” agreed Chaney. “It’s so, all the time.”

Mr. Atherton began to look more serious than at any previous moment of the interview.

“Well, in that case,” he said slowly, “I should like to mark my sense of the evil of such proceedings, and I will therefore add a thousand pounds to the reward which has already been offered by Canon Effingham. Kindly make a note that I do so.”

“It shall be done, sir,” asserted Chaney, cheerfully. “Human nature is such, Mr. Atherton, that a little timely reward—eh?”

“There are certain human beings,” remarked Mr. Atherton, “who will never tell or do anything unless they are paid to do or tell it—we will hope to catch some of them! But now look here—the two ancient volumes are recovered, and I trust safe, in the hands of our reverend friend here. But are there not still the equally ancient gold cup and plate?”

“Chalice and paten!” corrected Canon Effingham. “Of the fourteenth century.”

“I wonder, now, that he didn’t offer me those,” remarked Mr. Atherton, ruminatively. “I suppose I should have bought them. Well, gentlemen, what do you do next?”

“Spread everything as wide and far as we can through the medium of the press, sir,” replied Chaney. “And then, tomorrow, I believe, the inquest on this murdered man, Skate, will be opened, and I’m just wondering whether you ought not to attend it? There can, of course, be no doubt whatever that the murder of Skate is mixed up with the theft from the church safe, and as two of the missing articles were offered to you, I think your evidence not only should be of interest, but will be considered necessary.”

“I will be there,” said Mr. Atherton. “I am deeply interested—I shall remain deeply interested until I meet my adventurous visitor of yesterday once more. Well, sir,” he continued, turning with a smile to Canon Effingham, “now that they are once more in your hands, what, may I ask, are you going to do with those two venerable tomes?”

But Canon Effingham had been reflecting, and he had his answer ready.

“I am going to place them in the keeping of my bankers—at least, with a firm of bankers with whom I do business here in London,” he said. “My London bank, in fact. I have two banks—one near home, at Havering St. Michael; the other here, in the City. I think the City bank will be safest?”

“An excellent idea, sir,” remarked Mr. Atherton. “You cannot be too careful in your disposal of those treasures. Well, now, I, too am going down to the City to see my bankers, and these gentlemen,” he added, turning to Chaney and me, “are also anxious to see them, so I propose we all go down together—shall I order my car to be brought round?”

“Mine is at the door,” said Canon Effingham. “It will accommodate four.”

We trooped down to the courtyard to the hotel and found the car, Canon Effingham clinging tightly to his marvellously recovered treasures. His bank, the Home Counties, was in the same street as Mr. Atherton’s—Lombard Street. We drove there first; Canon Effingham vanished

within its portals. Mr. Atherton turned to Chaney and me. His voice took a different tone.

"Say," he said, "what do you fellows make of this?"

Chaney answered that question with promptitude.

"Very carefully planned business, sir!" he said. "Thought out and prepared with a great deal of attention to detail, and would, I think, have been entirely successful but for the unexpected turning-up of the poacher."

"That's a queer business about the keys," remarked Mr. Atherton. "Seems to me that whoever the men were—or, if it was a single-handed job, the man was—who was outside, he had a confederate inside. Somebody who passed the church keys out to him, eh?"

"All that requires investigation, sir," said Chaney. "On the surface of things, your idea is justified. It has already occurred to several people. As for me, I'm by no means satisfied that Canon Effingham's private keys were ever used!"

Before Mr. Atherton could remark on this, the Canon returned from the bank, looking intensely relieved. He climbed into the car again, sighing with satisfaction—and we went forward amidst the surging traffic to Mr. Atherton's bank.

Marwood, Littledale & Co. is one of those solidly founded, intensely respectable private banks which, somehow or other, look as if they never did any business, and in reality do some very big business in silence and dignity. There was no difficulty once we were within, under Mr. Atherton's protection, in seeing and talking to the particular official who had cashed the cheque for five thousand pounds on the previous day. And within one minute we knew that the cheque had been presented by the man himself whom we were so anxious to find.

"You took him for the Dean of Norchester?" asked Mr. Atherton.

"I took him for what he said he was," replied the official. "Why not? I don't know the Dean of Norchester! Here is his card—he laid it before me with your cheque. And—his assured and confident manner, of course, was not what one would expect of an impostor. You say he was one? A very clever man, then!"

"How did he take the money?" asked Chaney.

"He took it in fifty hundred-pound Bank of England notes."

"Of course you have the numbers?"

"Of course I have the numbers! But—you must remember that if he's an impostor, or rather, as he is an impostor, it's extremely unlikely that those hundred-pound notes would remain in his possession very long. He'd get rid of 'em immediately if he was up to the game!"

"How?" demanded Mr. Atherton.

"Nothing to do but go over to the Bank of England and exchange them for one-pound Treasury notes. He'd find no difficulty in carrying five thousand one-pound notes. I noticed he had a dispatch or attaché case with him."

"Would they tell us at the Bank of England?"

"They would tell you—from my list—if those notes have come in, and somebody might remember a man dressed as a dean. Will you have the list?"

We had the list, and, Chaney taking charge of it, we all went out again and, bidding Canon Effingham's man take the car to a certain corner and wait for us, turned the corner of Lombard Street and made for the Bank of England. It was now the very height of noontide; in front of the Royal Exchange and the Bank and the Mansion House there was the usual crush of men, horses, cars, carriages, heavy traffic, light traffic. . . .

And in the very midst of this, Mr. Atherton suddenly let out a wild yell.

"There he is—that's he! Stop him—stop him—stop that man! Stop—thief!"

CHAPTER VI

AGAIN—WHO IS HE?

We all came to a halt—all, that is, except Mr. Atherton, who after his sudden, startling shout, rushed forward, still shouting and pointing an outstretched arm, after a little man in a dark-blue suit who, carrying a small suit-case, had just passed us at a smart pace. As a matter of fact, I had noticed that this man glanced at us as he edged his way past us; he glanced over his shoulder again as Mr. Atherton shouted. And then he was off, and Mr. Atherton after him, and therewith came one of those curious examples of what a crowd will do and will not do. The street was thick with men—some stood aside to let the fugitive pass; some remained motionless, staring first at pursuer, then at pursued. Suddenly a man coming in the opposite direction woke to his senses and sticking out a foot tried to trip the runaway. And then came something that for a second made me shut my eyes and turned me sick, and at my side I heard Canon Effingham let out a groan of horror. For the hunted man leapt to avoid the tripping foot, cleared it, lost his balance, crashed over the curb, and fell heavily beneath the great wheels of a passing motor-wagon. There was a cry—one!—that rang in my ears for hours and haunted me that night. And then—silence.

We fought our way through the crowd—all except Canon Effingham, who tottered to the nearest support and clung there, gasping for breath. Chaney, big and muscular, fought his way through. There were two policemen there already; a word to them from Chaney and they let him and me close in to where men were drawing the dead man from beneath the wagon. The great near-side wheel had gone clean over his chest. . . .

I went back to Canon Effingham, got him away to his car, put him in charge of his man, and sent him off. When I returned to the scene of the accident, an inspector of the City police had come up who knew Chaney well, and Chaney was telling him all about it from our angle.

“And you’ve no doubt about your recognition of him, sir?” concluded Chaney, turning to Mr. Atherton. “You’re sure of him?”

The dead man was lying close by, a sheet snatched from the wagon that had killed him stretched over his body. Atherton went up, lifted a corner of the sheet, and looked.

“Not a doubt!” he said, gravely. “That is the man!”

A street-ambulance came up; the police lifted the body on to it and moved off; Mr. Atherton, Chaney, and I followed with the Inspector, Chaney still explaining the story and circumstances. The Inspector was vastly interested.

“Think he’s the man you wanted for the Linwood Church affair, then?” he said when he had heard everything. “Well, well, I’ve always said that I didn’t believe in coincidences—reckon there’s some fate about things like this. You’d better come and see his clothing examined; we may find something important.”

“I’m anxious to see what’s inside that suit-case,” said Chaney, pointing to the article mentioned, which one of the policemen was now carrying. “I have an idea that we may find something there that will help.”

“Of course, you’ve no idea who he is?” suggested the Inspector.

“Not the slightest!” replied Chaney. “But whoever he is, he’s been a clever chap in his time. This gentleman here, Mr. Atherton, of New York—forget if I mentioned his name before—says that he’d all the style and manners of an accomplished gentleman and was a scholar into the bargain.”

“And dressed as a—bishop, was it?” asked the Inspector.

“Dean! Said he was the Dean of Norchester.”

The Inspector was profoundly impressed. He was also curious; but before he proceeded to any examination of the dead man’s clothing and the suit-case, he sent for the police surgeon.

There was only one thing that the police surgeon could say. The man had been killed instantaneously.

We stood by, watching, while the police searched the clothing—first noting that the blue serge suit, obviously new, was a ready-made one, but of good cut and quality; the sort of suit that you can get at certain shops where better-class ready-to-wear goods can be had at a few minutes' notice. The man who was conducting the search immediately drew our attention to something that he evidently considered important.

"See here!" he said. "There's been a tab, a label, inside this coat, with the maker's name on it. Cut out! And not so long since, either. Didn't want anybody to know where he'd got it. I reckon—from that—that we aren't going to find very much on him."

He was right in this supposition—as regards the clothing, at any rate. The coat contained nothing but a handkerchief—no mark or initials—a theatre play-bill, a brier pipe—new—a tobacco-pouch—also new—and a box of matches. In the left-hand pocket of the waistcoat was a cheap watch; one of the sort you can buy, with a guarantee that it will run for at least twelve months; it, too, was new, and so was the cheap silver chain which connected it with a buttonhole. In the right-hand pocket was a penknife and two bits of lead pencil. The left-hand pocket of the trousers yielded a few coppers; the right a handful of loose silver. But on the right hip there was another pocket, with a flap that buttoned down, and from this the searcher drew forth more likely and interesting things. One was a somewhat bulky envelope, evidently stuffed with papers; the other was a purse.

"The envelope first," muttered the Inspector. "See what's in that."

The contents of the envelope—a square, linen-lined thing—forced exclamations of surprise from Mr. Atherton and myself and even extracted a grunt from Chaney. For the dead man had cut out from every morning paper in London—*Times*, *Post*, *Telegraph*, *Express*, *News*, *Chronicle*, *Mail*, *Mirror*, *Sketch*, *Herald*, *Advertiser*—their accounts, long or short, of the Linwood Church affair. Each was cut out very neatly, with the name of its source at the head, written in a scholarly hand, and underneath that the date. And on one cutting there was a marginal comment, the importance of which, remarked Chaney, we might discover later on. One of the newspaper scribes, dilating at some length on the mystery of the theft from the safe in the vestry, concluded:

> The most mysterious feature of the case is that which centres round the keys. How did the thief obtain possession of the key—on Canon Effingham's private bunch—by which was opened the drawer in the desk in the study wherein the church keys were kept? Did he, somehow, enter the rectory in the dead of night and steal the private bunch of keys from the dressing-room? It is possible. Indeed, it looks probable. But in that case why, seeing that he left the church keys dangling from the chancel door, did he trouble to go back to the rectory and restore the private keys to the place whereat Canon Effingham found them in the morning? Why this piece of punctilious politeness? This mystery of the keys is a deep one!

On the margin of this, some hand—the dead man's, no doubt—had drawn two heavy upright lines, and against them an equally heavy note of admiration. And—about that note of admiration there was something which suggested that its maker was indulging in a cynical laugh as he made it.

"Put 'em all back in the cover," commanded the Inspector, "We shall want 'em as exhibits. Now see what's in the purse."

The purse—again something new—was one of those leather ones in which there are two pockets and an inner and outer flap. The bigger pocket contained a few Treasury notes: two or three twenty-shilling notes and as many for ten shillings. The smaller pocket held but one thing

only—a small key, dangling at the end of a bit of stout cord.

The Inspector looked round at the small suit-case, which we had previously found to be locked.

"Try that key on the lock there," he said. "Looks like fitting it."

The key did fit—both locks. The searcher snapped them open and threw back the lid. And there before our—I was going to write "astonished eyes," but I am not sure that all of us were astonished—before our eyes, anyway, lay, in neat rubber-banded bundles, piles and piles of Treasury notes, fresh, virgin, brand-new, crisp, clean!

"Ah!" exclaimed Chaney. "Just what that cashier at your bank said, Mr. Atherton! He'd have no difficulty in changing the big B. of E. notes, and he'd get 'em changed at once into these Treasury things. Evidently he did! Now, how much has he got there?"

But the police were already at work, counting. In a few minutes one of them snapped out the total.

"Twenty-five hundred pounds!"

"One half!" said Chaney. "Um!—now, who's got the other?"

The searcher turned again to the suit-case. There was a lot of loose paper in it which looked as if it had been torn from some periodical. He picked out a sheet or two, glancing at its heading.

"Wasn't that robbery at Linwood?" he asked. "Linwood Church, eh? Well, look at that? See? *Linwood Parish Magazine!*"

"Of which I saw a good quantity lying in the vestry," remarked Chaney. "Yes, that's right enough. He's used that to—good Lord, what's this?"

He had been rummaging in the suit-case as he spoke, and now from amidst the mass of crumpled parish-magazine pages he held up a small parcel that looked as if it might contain a saucer or a small plate. The next instant he had torn the paper away from it and revealed the stolen paten.

I think Mr. Atherton was the only person there who really appreciated this discovery. He took the paten from Chaney with almost reverential fingers, making a clicking noise with his tongue.

"Clk, clk, clk!" he murmured. "So this is—"

"I'll bet it is!" interrupted Chaney. "One of the two stolen pieces of plate. Two, I know the Canon said. Fourteenth or thirteenth or somethingth century—and priceless. A cup and a—what did he call this thing, Camberwell?"

"What was stolen was a chalice and a paten," I said. "Both considerably pre-Reformation and worth no end of money."

Mr. Atherton sighed deeply; he was still fingering and loving the paten.

"Worth no end of money!" he repeated softly. "I should think so!"

The Inspector took the paten from Mr. Atherton's unwilling hands, turned it over, and stared at it dubiously.

"No end of money?" he exclaimed. "What, this bit of a thing? What d'ye mean by no end of money?"

Chaney winked at Mr. Atherton.

"What would you give for it, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Atherton winked back—unseen by the Inspector.

"No end of money—as you say!" he answered. "Spot cash!"

The Inspector stared again. Then he suddenly shoved the paten back into the hands of the searcher.

"Lock it up again!" he commanded. "And all these Treasury notes! Seal the suit-case and have it locked up. No end of money, eh? Oh, well, the thing is that it's the article stolen from Linwood Church. No doubt of that, I suppose? None, eh? And not much, I should think, that this dead man stole it? Very well, then the next thing we want to know is—who is he?"

None of us attempting to answer that all-important question, the Inspector followed it up with another.

"Can't be nobody, can he?" he said, satirically. "And if he isn't nobody, he must be somebody, and have a name, and live somewhere, eh? Got to find all that out! And we'd better be getting to work."

Chaney, Mr. Atherton, and I remained in the City until we had been with the Inspector to the Bank of England and with some little trouble had ascertained that the dead man, still posing as the Dean of Norchester, had exchanged his fifty hundred-pound Bank of England notes for one-pound Treasury notes. The official who had effected the exchange was vague about the transaction—an ordinary enough one for him, no doubt. All that he remembered was that a clergyman in apron and gaiters and wearing a very big hat had asked for Treasury notes and had got them. Oh yes, he remembered another thing—he himself had remarked that five thousand notes would be rather heavy to carry, and that the clergyman had replied that he had a car outside.

"So he got the whole amount in small notes?" said Chaney, musingly. "Um—now where's the remaining twenty-five hundred pounds? Shared with somebody, no doubt. Well, it's a stiff business tracing one-pound Treasury notes. We could spend years at that game and be no better off!"

We parted then—the Inspector going back to his job, and Mr. Atherton returning to his hotel. But Chaney and I turned into a quiet saloon bar and over a sandwich and a glass of beer discussed matters.

"Publicity!—publicity's the thing!" affirmed Chaney. "Light!—bring all the light we can get hold of to bear on it. There'll be no end in the papers tomorrow, and a good deal this evening, but I wonder if we couldn't do something special that way? Is there one of these morning rags that would make a real flare-up of the story?—do it in such a fashion that every Tom, Dick, and Harry, Susan, Poll, and Kate would know all about it?"

I thought that idea over.

"I know a chap who might know," I said after considering possibilities.

"Who is he?" demanded Chaney.

"Old schoolfellow—Holford—who's on the *Daily Sentinel*," I replied. "But I don't think he's any very big position there."

"The *Daily Sentinel* is the paper!" said Chaney. "Could this chap get at the editor?"

"I suppose he could get at somebody," I answered.

Chaney swallowed his last crumb and drank off his beer.

"Come on!" he said. "*Sentinel* office!"

We sought Holford—an ingenuous youth whose admission to the ranks of journalism I had never been able to understand, considering his school record. And Holford put us on to the chief reporter, and the chief reporter secured an interview with a somebody who had a rare gift of silence coupled with a greater of listening, and the result was that for the next two or three hours we were engaged in giving the materials of what, as we gave it, seemed to be a chapter torn out of a volume of utterly improbable fiction.

There was a great deal about our affair in all next morning's papers, but none of them came near the *Sentinel*. The *Sentinel* had nearly two whole pages of the story. And it had pictures. Linwood Church, Linwood Rectory. Portrait of Canon Effingham. Portrait of Mr. Atherton. Picture of the two rare books. Picture of Marwood, Littledale's bank. Picture of exact spot near Royal Exchange where the supposed Dean of Norchester, then in mufti, was killed. And so on and so on. As to gigantic headlines, cross-headings, and sentences in thick type, the pages were full of them. Chaney sighed as he gazed and admired.

"If all that doesn't make somebody speak," he said, "then I don't know what will!"

CHAPTER VII

THAT IS THE MAN!

Chaney and I were both engrossed in copies of the *Daily Sentinel* next morning when Chippendale came into our room with a card. It was Chippendale's habit when bringing in anything of this sort, a card, a pencilled note, any scrap of paper heralding somebody, to accompany whatever he brought with a curt, and usually graphic, hint as to the personality of the sender. On this occasion he was unusually curt.

"Parson!" he said. "Young 'un."

I glanced at the card.

The Rev. Herbert Stecke

The card was printed—I concluded from that that Mr. Stecke was not conversant with the strict rules in such matters.

"Bring Mr. Stecke in," I commanded. "And then see that we're not interrupted while he's here."

I tossed the card over to Chaney. Chaney put down his paper.

"Linwood affair, no doubt," he said. "Find out where he's from, first. No address there."

Mr. Stecke entered. I took a good look at him as he came forward to the chair which I indicated at the side of my desk. He was a tallish, well-built, rather good-looking fellow about twenty-eight or thirty years of age, as far as I could judge. Rather sandy-coloured hair and eyebrows—blue eyes. Clean-shaven. Roman collar, black stock, black jacket and vest, dark-grey trousers, stoutly-soled shoes. Good specimen of average young curate. Watchful, somewhat eager expression. No particular feature, except that he had a rather long nose and that his eyes were a little too narrowly set. Later I observed that he had unusually large hands and feet.

Mr. Stecke advanced a little nervously, looking from one to the other of us. He spoke first.

"Mr. Chaney?" he said inquiringly. "Mr. Camberwell?"

"I'm Mr. Camberwell," I replied. "That is Mr. Chaney. What can we do for you, Mr. Stecke?"

Mr. Stecke took the chair I had motioned him to, and rested his big hands on the head of a big oak stick.

"I—the fact is I called to see you about this Linwood affair," he replied. "I should have called yesterday, but I was out of town. I—"

"Excuse me a moment," I said, drawing my note-book forward. "We like to know certain particulars about anyone with whom we have dealings. I see from your card Mr. Stecke, that you are a clergyman. Of what church or denomination?"

"I am a clergyman of the Church of England," he answered, looking a little surprised. "In priest's orders."

"Beneficed, Mr. Stecke?"

"No!"

"Curate—assistant priest anywhere?"

"Not at present. I—I am writing for another curacy—I have one in view. That was why I was out of town yesterday."

"You live in London, Mr. Stecke?"

"In the suburbs. My address? 247 Laburnum Villas, Newington."

"Thank you. And why have you come to us, Mr. Stecke, about this Linwood affair, instead of the police?"

"Because I learnt from the newspapers—the *Daily Sentinel*, I should say—that you are

inquiring into the matter on behalf of Canon Effingham. I therefore preferred to come direct to you."

"As representing Canon Effingham? Yes—why, now?"

"Because I know Canon Effingham, and Linwood. I took three Sundays' duty at Linwood for Canon Effingham last December and lived in the Rectory."

"Was Canon Effingham there, too?"

"Canon Effingham was there, but he was confined to bed most of the time and up to within a few days of my leaving Linwood."

"What was the matter with him? Anything serious?"

"Bronchitis. I believe he is subject to it. Anyway, I was sent there—Canon Effingham had asked a friend of his, Canon Telson, of Southwark, if he could find him some help for a while, and Canon Telson, knowing me and that I was unplaced just then, sent me down. I was there the first three Sundays in December—a little over a fortnight in actual residence."

"I see! But you didn't come here merely to tell us that, Mr. Stecke?"

"No! I came to tell you of something that happened while I was there. Since reading the accounts in the newspapers, and especially that in the *Daily Sentinel*, I feel sure that while I was at Linwood, I saw and had conversation with the man who passed himself off to the American gentleman, Mr. Atherton, as the Dean of Norchester."

"Indeed! That's good! Tell us the story, Mr. Stecke."

"There is really not much to tell. I had forgotten all about it until I read of these recent affairs, in the newspapers. But of course as soon as I had read the papers, the incident was recalled and I saw that it might be of great importance. It was something that happened when I had been at Linwood about a week or ten days. This man that I speak of came up to me in the church one afternoon and wanted to see the chalice, the paten, and the two ancient manuscripts preserved in the vestry. He—"

"Pardon me! You say you had only been at Linwood a week or ten days. Did you know of the existence of these valuables?"

"I should imagine that everybody—I mean every educated person—in the diocese knows of them! They are, I believe I might say, world-famous. Oh, yes, I knew of their existence long before I went to Linwood. You see, they have been written about a good deal. Canon Effingham himself has written about them. More than that, they have more than once been lent for exhibition—at the annual Church Congress and elsewhere. Oh, yes, I knew of them."

"Yes. When I went to Linwood, early in December, Canon Effingham was ill, but not sufficiently so to be confined to his room or even to the house, and—I think it was the second day after my arrival—he took me across to the church to show me the valuables; it was a day or two after this that he took to his bed. He told me at the time that he never, under any circumstances whatever, allowed anyone to open the safe in which they were kept but himself; he had never even permitted Mrs. Effingham to open it. I remember that he was most peremptory about that—people might inspect the church as freely as they pleased and it was always open to inspection—but his rule as regards the treasures was adamant. Only in his presence and under his personal supervision!"

"Well, this man, Mr. Stecke? What about him?"

"He came to me in the church, rather late one afternoon—I forget what I was doing there; I had gone across on some errand or other, anyway. He asked me if he could see the famous treasures; I think he particularized them. I at once told him it was impossible, for Canon Effingham's illness had developed and he was by that time confined to bed. The man pressed the point; he said he was an enthusiastic archæologist and had come a long way for the express purpose of inspecting these things, specially the chalice and paten. He suggested that I should go and tell this to Canon Effingham. I told him that was impossible and that I knew for a fact that

Canon Effingham would permit no inspection of the treasures unless he himself was present. He remained very persistent, and, with another expression of my regret, I left him."

"In the church?"

"In the church—yes."

"He couldn't get into the vestry, of course?"

"Oh, no—no one could enter the vestry unless Canon Effingham was there."

At this Chaney put in a question or two.

"You say nobody could enter that vestry unless the Canon was there," he said. "How did you manage, then, sir, while you were taking the duty for him? Didn't you require the use of the vestry?"

"No," replied Mr. Stecke, promptly. "There are two vestries, or, rather, three. That vestry where the safe is kept is sacred to the safe and to the various parish registers. There is another vestry—*the* vestry, proper—at the west end of the church, under the tower; the clergy robe in it, and next to it is the choir vestry."

"I see," said Chaney. "Then you might say that the vestry where the safe is is Canon Effingham's absolutely strict private preserve?"

"Precisely!"

"So you saw no danger in leaving this persistent gentleman in the church?"

"None at all! I knew that Canon Effingham had the keys of vestry and safe."

"I was going to ask you about that matter, Mr. Stecke," I said, resuming my examination of our visitor. "Did you, as a resident in the Rectory, know Canon Effingham's arrangements about his keys?"

"I only knew what I actually saw. When Canon Effingham said he would show me the treasures, he took a bunch of keys from his trousers pocket and with one of them opened a drawer in his desk in the study. From this he took three keys which were on a stout ring, and when we went across to the church, he used them there for the chancel door, the vestry door, the door of the safe. When we returned to his study, he restored the three keys to his drawer."

"You never had those keys in your possession, I suppose—as his locum tenens?"

"I? Never!"

"There's a thing that rather puzzles me, there," remarked Chaney. "You say, Mr. Stecke, that Linwood Church is always open?"

"From eight o'clock in the morning until six in the evening in summer; from nine till four in winter."

"Why, then, if it's open should Canon Effingham bother to let himself and you in by the chancel door when you could have walked in at the open door at the west end?"

"I can only suppose that he did so from habit—or, perhaps, because the chancel door is exactly opposite the little gate which admits from the Rectory grounds to the churchyard."

"I suppose that's it," muttered Chaney. "He took us in by the open door, though, didn't he?" he went on, turning to me. "Um!—well, Mr. Stecke, can you give us a description of this man who was so keen about seeing the valuables?"

Mr. Stecke's eyes turned towards the copy of the *Daily Sentinel* opened out on my desk.

"I think there is a remarkably accurate description of him in that newspaper!" he answered. "It is exactly what I should have written myself had I been asked to describe him for purposes of publication."

"Would you be able to identify him if you saw him again?" asked Chaney.

"I feel sure I could have identified him, unhesitatingly, had I met him again."

"The man who called himself Dean of Norchester and who undoubtedly had the missing paten in his possession is dead, as you know," said Chaney. "Now, if we take you to see his body, do you think you can identify it as that of the man you saw and talked to in Linwood

Church?”

“If it is the body of that man, yes,” replied Mr. Stecke, “I can!”

“Then we’d better go along to the City,” said Chaney, rising. “We—”

“Wait a moment,” I said. “There’s another question or two I want to put to Mr. Stecke before we go. Mr. Stecke, as you were an inmate of Linwood Rectory for between a fortnight and three weeks, you became, of course, more or less conversant with the doings of the household?”

“Oh, well,” replied Mr. Stecke, “I suppose I noticed things.”

“Have you noticed, then, in the papers that when Canon Effingham found out about this robbery, he about the same time discovered that a side-door in his house had been left open all night?”

“Yes, I read that.”

“Well, now, do you know anything about this—who saw to the locking-up every night at the Rectory? Canon Effingham himself?”

“No, the parlour-maid, Bleacher, saw to it. I remember all about that; it amused me. Bleacher is a very big woman—a grenadier of a woman! She used to go round the house every night at precisely ten o’clock with an enormous bunch of keys and lock the various doors.”

“A bunch of keys? Then—the keys were not left in the locks?”

“No—the keys were on her bunch.”

“What did she do with the bunch?”

“I can’t say—unless she gave it to Mrs. Effingham.”

That was all I had to ask, just then. We took Mr. Stecke off to the City in our car. And there in the mortuary to which it had been carried we showed him the dead body of the man who had called himself Dean of Norchester. After one steady look at the face Mr. Stecke nodded his head with a gesture of positive affirmation.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “that is the man!”

“You’re sure, sir?” asked Chaney. “It’s not a close resemblance—or anything like that?”

“No! That is the man. I recognized him at once. His is not a common type of countenance, is it? A fine head, too!”

“A good many of these criminals have fine heads!” muttered Chaney. “Seen some really remarkable headpieces amongst ’em in my time. Too much in the way of brains some of ’em have!—that’s my opinion. Well, just come and look here, now, Mr. Stecke.”

Mr. Stecke followed to where the dead man’s effects had been placed, neatly put together.

“Do you recognize that suit?” asked Chaney. “Was he wearing it when you saw him?”

“Yes—I remember the herring-bone pattern. Oh, yes!” Mr. Stecke began turning the three articles of the lounge suit over; I wondered why. Suddenly he pointed to something, a mark, two or three inches above the turn-up of the trousers.

“Chalk!” he said. “Linwood is on the chalk.”

“Um!” remarked Chaney. “It is chalk! Thank you for pointing it out, sir—I hadn’t noticed it myself. Well—now we know that much! This is the man you saw at Linwood Church one afternoon last December.”

Mr. Stecke nodded. It seemed to me that he still had something to say. And as we left the mortuary, he spoke.

“Now that I am certain that that is the man I have told you of,” he said, “I think I had better tell you something which I didn’t want to tell you until I really was certain. The fact is I saw the man again, near Linwood, next morning!”

CHAPTER VIII

WATSON’S COTTAGE

There was that in Mr. Stecke’s tone and manner when he made this announcement which caused Chaney and me to turn on him with some surprise. And Chaney’s glance, I think, had something of suspicion in it—not of Mr. Stecke, but of whatever lay behind Mr. Stecke’s words.

“Oh!” he said. “You—you haven’t told us everything, then?”

“Not quite,” replied Mr. Stecke. “I—as I said just now, I wished to be quite certain, positively certain, that this was the man.”

“Well, you are certain?” said Chaney.

“Quite!” assented Stecke. “That is the man. So—” he hesitated, looking round. “We can’t talk in the street,” he added. “There’s a good deal to say—”

Chaney looked round, too. There was a saloon bar close by—the one he and I had been in the day before. But there was also a tea-shop. Chaney made for the tea-shop.

“Come over here,” he said, leading us towards a quiet corner. “Now, Mr. Stecke! And just a word of advice. Don’t keep anything back!”

“I don’t wish to,” replied Mr. Stecke. “But, you see, I shall have to mention the name of another person. The name of—a woman!”

“A woman? Yes—well?”

“In fact, Miss Bolton,” said Mr. Stecke.

Chaney let out a whistle of astonishment.

“Oh, oh!” he exclaimed when the whistle had died away. “Miss Bolton, eh?”

“Canon Effingham’s secretary,” explained Mr. Stecke.

“Oh, we know!” said Chaney. “We’ve seen her. Well—and how does Miss Bolton come in?”

Mr. Stecke took a sip of the coffee which had been set before him. He shook his head, but not at the quality of his refreshment.

“I do not like to bring any woman’s name into an affair of this sort,” he said slowly. “But considering—”

“Considering that murder comes into it,” suggested Chaney, “I think you’d better put all scruples aside.”

Mr. Stecke hesitated.

“It may be all nothing,” he said, after a pause. “A mere coincidence! But the fact is that the morning after I had seen the man in Linwood Church, I saw him again, in conversation with Miss Bolton.”

“Where?” asked Chaney.

“Not very far away from the Rectory,” replied Mr. Stecke. “I had better explain. You don’t know the surroundings of church and Rectory?”

“Not beyond the very immediate surroundings,” said Chaney.

“Well, you may have noticed that between the grounds of the Rectory and the side of the churchyard there is a lane. That lane leads towards the woods which close in that side of Linwood village. About half a mile along that lane there is a solitary cottage. It is tenanted by Watson, the gamekeeper. At the time I am speaking of, Watson’s wife was ill in bed. On the morning after I had seen the man in the church, I went along to Watson’s cottage to ask how his wife was getting on. Watson himself was out, but the woman who was nursing Mrs. Watson asked me upstairs to see her; she was somewhat better that day. While I was up there, talking to the two women, I happened to glance out of the bedroom window and I saw Miss Bolton—with the man who had accosted me in the church the previous afternoon.”

“You’re sure it was he?” asked Chaney.

“Oh, quite certain! I recognized him at once.”
“Where were they? What were they doing?”
“Walking along the lane, in front of the cottage. The lane bends a little just there before the garden of the cottage. They came round the bend, from the direction of the village, passed the cottage, and disappeared round the corner towards the woods.”
“Were they in conversation?”
“I gathered that they were.”
“Walking alongside each other?”
“Yes.”
“Did you notice anything that led you to think they knew each other?”
“Well, you see, I only saw them for a moment. He was talking when they passed in front of the cottage; Miss Bolton was, well, just listening to whatever it was he was saying.”
“And that was all you saw?”
“That was all I saw.”
“Is it very lonely about there, Mr. Stecke?” asked Chaney. “Sort of place where people would meet who wanted to escape observation?”
“Oh, very lonely! Watson’s cottage is the only human habitation anywhere about there. The woods beyond it stretch for miles.”
Chaney reflected awhile in silence on this information. Then:
“I suppose Miss Bolton was there—at Linwood Rectory—when you went there?” he asked.
“Oh, yes—I gathered that she had been there some little time.”
“I suppose you saw a good deal of her?”
“No, not a great deal. She had her work, and I had mine.”
“Canon Effingham reposed a good deal of confidence in her, eh?”
“I don’t know. He only mentioned her to me once—said she was a very clever secretary.”
“Did he keep her constantly employed?”
“I believe so. He’s writing a history of the parish, and she had a great deal to do in copying authorities, making researches, and so on. Once a week she used to go up to town for the night.”
“On his work?”
“No, I think it was—yes, I’m sure it was—a sort of weekly holiday. I heard her speak of it once, jokingly, as her night out.”
Mr. Stecke appeared to have nothing further to tell us, but I still had two or three questions to put to him.
“Did you ever tell anyone about the man who came to you in the church and who wished to see the treasures kept in the safe?” I asked.
“No, I never told anyone—until now,” he replied.
“Why?”
“I—really, I can’t say!”
“Why didn’t you mention it to Canon Effingham?”
“Oh, I can explain that! Canon Effingham, as I have already told you, was ill. I had already realized that he is a very nervous and excitable man, and I felt that if I told him about the stranger’s evidently strong desire to see the church treasures, it might upset him. So I said nothing.”
“And nothing to Mrs. Effingham?”
“No—nothing to her.”
“Nor to Miss Bolton?”
“I did not speak of it to Miss Bolton.”
“That strikes me as a bit odd, Mr. Stecke,” I remarked. “You saw this man with Miss Bolton. I should have thought—”

He held up his hand as if to check me.

"You forget," he said, "that perhaps Miss Bolton would not have liked it to be known that I, or anybody, had seen her with this man. Anyway, I did not mention the matter to her. As I said just now, I have not mentioned it to anyone previous to telling—yourselves."

"Well," I said, "you realize, Mr. Stecke, that, in view of your identification of the dead man, you'll have to give evidence at the inquest on him?" I said. "And not only at the inquest on him, but at the inquest on Skate—which begins tomorrow. Are you aware of all that?"

"Why at the inquest on Skate?" he asked.

"Because, in view of the evidence accumulated so far, the presumption is that the man whose dead body you have just seen is the man who stole the treasures from Linwood Church safe and who also murdered Skate in Linwood churchyard," I answered. "We shall have to tell the police authorities of your evidence, and it'll save time and trouble if you can give me your promise to be at Linwood for the opening of the Skate inquest tomorrow afternoon."

"Very well," he said. "If you say it is necessary, I will be there. What time?"

"Two o'clock tomorrow afternoon, at the village schoolroom, Mr. Stecke," I replied. "Probably there'll be a good deal more evidence than yours."

"And what am I to say—to tell?" he asked.

"All that you have told us," I answered.

"And—about Miss Bolton, too?" he said, hesitatingly.

"Most certainly! We shall want to question Miss Bolton about that," I answered. "We want to know, we and the police, who this dead man is."

"I will be at Linwood," he said.

Then he went away, but for a few minutes Chaney and I remained talking over what we had heard. The result of our conversation was that we went back to the office, got our car from the garage close by, and ran out to Linwood. We felt that it was necessary to tell Canon Effingham there and then all that Mr. Stecke had just told us. The introduction of Miss Bolton into this case had made a difference to everything. And before we reached Linwood we had further decided that we would bring Mrs. Effingham into our councils—for obvious reasons. Mrs. Effingham, as a woman, would be much more likely to have an intimate knowledge of Miss Bolton than Canon Effingham, a man, possibly could have, in spite of the fact that she was his private secretary.

Up to then we had never been brought into contact with Mrs. Effingham. We were a good deal surprised to find that she was very much younger than her husband. I was not impressed by her appearance—a tallish, somewhat ungainly woman of florid complexion, sandy hair, pale-blue restless eyes, badly or, perhaps I should say, untidily dressed. She gave one the impression of being both suspicious and watchful; certainly she passed the first few minutes of our interview with Canon Effingham and herself in inspecting me and my partner as if we had been some rare specimens of zoology or entomology and she as a scientist previously unacquainted with such examples. Although I took a dislike to Mrs. Effingham—and I was not surprised, a little later, to find that my first surmise concerning her—that she was not of the same class as her husband—was correct. She had, in fact, been a professional nurse who had attended upon Canon Effingham during a serious illness which attacked him while on holiday in the west of England. Canon Effingham had returned from that holiday, or, rather, from the period of convalescence which followed it, bringing a wife.

Husband and wife were, of course, by this time acquainted with what had happened in London after I had bundled Canon Effingham away from the scene of the accident; the *Daily Sentinel* lay open on the Canon's desk. But they did not know of Stecke's interview with us, or what he had told us. Neither said anything until, retailing this to them, I came to the episode connected with Miss Bolton. Then Mrs. Effingham let out an exclamation.

"There!" she said, with something like a note of triumph. "What have I always told you,

Wilford? Haven't I always said she was sly? Now, why didn't she tell you that?"

Canon Effingham shook his head in remonstrance.

"My dear, why should Miss Bolton tell me that?—and tell me—what? What I am astonished at—very, very much astonished at!—is, why did not Stecke tell me about the man who wished to see the church treasures? Most unaccountable!"

"No, Wilford, nothing of the sort!" protested Mrs. Effingham. "Mr. Stecke knew that you were ill, and that the doctor had given strict orders—and so, too, had I—that you were not to be bothered about anything. Mr. Stecke did quite right; you'd only have been worrying yourself and bringing on a temperature. But Miss Bolton—"

"But, my dear, what do you expect Miss Bolton could have told me?" protested Canon Effingham. "Supposing the very worst suspicions we could form were true—and I, personally, refuse to hear one word against Miss Bolton—supposing, I say, it were true, and that Miss Bolton was in league—an unbelievable thing!—with this mysterious man—"

"As no doubt she was!" muttered Mrs. Effingham.

"Stuff and nonsense, my dear! But supposing she were," continued the Canon, "do you for one moment believe that she'd have come and told me? What are you thinking of? Her policy, of course, would have been one of concealment!"

"As it is, no doubt," said Mrs. Effingham, muttering again. "I've always said, from the very first—"

We had had enough of that, and Chaney interrupted Mrs. Effingham without apology or ceremony.

"Is Miss Bolton about, sir?" he asked. "Can we have a word with her?"

"Miss Bolton is not at home today," replied Canon Effingham. "She has a weekly holiday—"

"And always goes up to town and spends the night there," added Mrs. Effingham. "And goes in very different costume from what she appears here in. I've always said, Wilford—"

"My dear, you have always said a great deal, and you are now saying too much," interrupted Canon Effingham, at last becoming testy. "I am sure these gentlemen—"

"All we want, sir," said Chaney, "is just to get at the truth of things. Now, Mr. Stecke will be present at the inquest on Skate, at your village schoolroom tomorrow, and he will have to retell the story he told us, and Miss Bolton's name will come in. I want to impress upon you and Mrs. Effingham the necessity of not telling Miss Bolton anything whatever of what we have told you, and also the equal necessity of seeing that she is present at the inquest in your company. We want to see the effect on her of Mr. Stecke's evidence. If you need an excuse, sir, you can tell her you wish her to take a shorthand note of the proceedings."

"I don't like all this," said Canon Effingham. "Is it really necessary?"

"Absolutely necessary, sir!" replied Chaney. "And—you must see that it is in the young lady's interest that she should be there."

We left at that. When Chaney and I were half-way to our car, Mrs. Effingham, coming out of the porch, alone called to us and hurried across the lawn.

"We just wanted to know something," she said. "The dead man—the man who called himself the Dean of Norchester—has anybody identified him yet?"

"By name, ma'am?" replied Chaney. "No! No one."

"The police—and you—have no idea who he is?" she asked.

"Not the remotest idea, ma'am!" said Chaney. "So far—absolutely unknown."

Mrs. Effingham made no further remark. She nodded, turned, and went back to the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE IRATE LADY

Chaney and I went down to Linwood next day in good time for the inquest on Skate; we wanted to talk matters over with the local police in view of all that had happened since the theft of the church treasures and Skate's murder. We were hoping, too, that the local police would by that time have secured some further information. But the local police so far had found out next to nothing. There was nothing surprising in the fact that they had acquired no knowledge of Skate's movements on the night of his death; Skate in his lifetime had been essentially a night-bird, a sort of hermit, living in what was little better than a hovel on the outskirts of the village, and no one knew anything of his comings and goings. In his case the first presumption was doubtless correct—he had gone out that night on one of his poaching expeditions, seen a light in the church or seen somebody coming away from it, hailed or laid hands on the person seen, and reaped the reward of his temerity by getting a crack on the head which had proved fatal.

But as to the identity of the man who dealt that blow, the local police knew nothing, had found out nothing. According to the Superintendent at Havering St. Michael, they had made the most searching and exhaustive inquiries and had failed to hear even a whisper of news about the presence of any stranger, suspicious or otherwise, in the village or district. The Superintendent felt sure that the miscreant, or miscreants, had come to Linwood by car, but he had not been able to ascertain that any strange car had been seen waiting about or left in any lonely place or quiet by-lane. In short, he was as wise as ever—which means that he was no nearer a solution of the mystery than when we had last seen him. But he knew what had happened in London, and he and ourselves mapped out to the Coroner, before the evidence was taken at the inquest, the line on which it should run. Matters shaped themselves thus:

> 1. There was no doubt that on the night into the events of which the Coroner was inquiring, the famous treasures of Linwood Church were stolen from the safe in the vestry.
>
> 2. There was no doubt, either, that on that night Skate was killed in Linwood churchyard.
>
> 3. Nor was there any doubt that next morning a man calling himself the Dean of Norchester offered and sold to Mr. Atherton at the Savoy Hotel the two old books stolen from Linwood.
>
> 4. It was certain, too, from the mere fact that the man killed in the City on the following day had the missing paten in his possession, and from the further fact that Mr. Atherton positively identified him as the supposed Dean of Norchester, that he was concerned in the theft and was in all probability Skate's murderer.
>
> 5. All evidence concerning this man was, accordingly, permissible at the inquest as an aid to the coroner and his jury in their effort to determine the question: how did Richard Skate come by his death?

The village schoolroom was packed to its doors when the Coroner opened the proceedings; it seemed as if everybody in the neighborhood had flocked, open-mouthed, to Linwood. I was only interested in making sure that our witnesses Atherton and Stecke were both there and in making sure that Miss Bolton had come with Canon and Mrs. Effingham. Glancing round, however, just before the proceedings began, I became interested in a man who, I felt sure, was a stranger. He was a tall, spare, ramrod of a man, gaunt, stern of face, who sat in an excellent position for seeing the various witnesses, and once one of them was in the box, never took his eyes off him or her as

long as he or she remained there.

The story of the double crime unrolled itself beautifully, in clear sequence—the Coroner, a local solicitor, had arranged it in proper order after his talk with us and the Superintendent of Police. Some villagers who knew him well identified Skate's dead body. I told how I discovered it. A medical man testified as to the cause of death. Then came Canon Effingham to tell of the theft from the safe in the vestry. That evidence took some little time to give; the Coroner and one or two of the jurymen had several questions to ask, especially about the all-important matter of the keys. And when Canon Effingham had been got rid of, Mr. Atherton filled the picture with his dramatic and sensational story of how a man calling himself the Dean of Norchester had come to him the morning after the theft and by means of a plausible story had sold him the two missing volumes for five thousand pounds. He told also how, being with Chaney, Canon Effingham and me in the City next day, he had suddenly recognized his man in a passer-by, had chased him, and had seen him knocked down and killed on the spot by a heavy motor-drawn vehicle. And—amidst a silence which was almost awe-stricken—he further told how he saw the City police, examining the dead man's dispatch case, take from it, wrapped in pages of the *Linwood Parish Magazine*, the stolen paten.

It was easy, at that stage of the proceedings, to sense the general feeling of the excited spectators. Every man and woman there was silently asking a question: *Who was this man?*

This made an excellent background for the appearance of the Reverend Herbert Stecke. When he modestly advanced into the witness-box, I glanced at Miss Bolton. I saw her flush a little; I noticed a slight puckering of her forehead, as if she were wondering what Mr. Stecke was doing there. She made some remark to Mrs. Effingham; Mrs. Effingham behaved as if she had not heard it.

Mr. Stecke, quietly, lucidly, told the story he had told us. He was precise, methodical, sparing of words. And he concluded his story—as regards the first part of it—at exactly the right place, his leaving the mysterious man in the church.

For leaving it there brought the obvious question from the Coroner, the question which could not have been more aptly put if we had deliberately planned the putting of it:

"And I suppose you saw no more of him—never saw him again?" asked the Coroner.

Mr. Stecke hesitated. He hesitated so long that the Coroner stirred him up.

"Did you?" he said.

"Well—I did," replied Mr. Stecke, reluctantly. "Yes—once!"

"When—where?"

"Next morning. I saw him from the window of a cottage in the wood—Watson, the gamekeeper's cottage—where I was paying a sick-call."

"What was he doing?"

"Walking along the lane," replied Mr. Stecke. "Towards the woods."

"Alone?"

Mr. Stecke hesitated again.

"N—o," he said at last. "No, he was not alone."

"Who was with him? Anyone you knew?"

Mr. Stecke tapped the ledge of the witness-box, as if perturbed and nervous.

"I—I do not like to mention names," he said. "I—"

"I'm afraid you'll have to," said the Coroner. "Who was it?"

"Well," replied Mr. Stecke, more nervously than ever, "Canon Effingham's secretary, Miss Bolton. I regret that—"

He got no further than that. An excited murmur broke out all round him and rose to unchecked exclamations. I heard some of these and knew from what I heard that Miss Bolton had been suspected in the village. But my attention was fixed on her. When Mr. Stecke pronounced

her name, she sat up in her place with a sudden incredulous stare at him and flushed crimson. The next instant she turned first to Mrs. Effingham and then to Canon Effingham, as if to ask them what on earth all this meant. But Mrs. Effingham kept a fixed and stony gaze elsewhere, and Canon Effingham had his hand shading a bent head—Miss Bolton comprehended and suddenly leapt to her feet, fronting the Coroner.

"May I speak?" she demanded eagerly. "I can't—"

"A moment, if you please," interrupted the Coroner. "I have not finished with the present witness." He motioned to Mr. Stecke. "Tell what you saw," he said.

Mr. Stecke told—what he had told us. When he had finished, the Coroner waved him away. But before he could move, Miss Bolton was on her feet again.

"My name has been mentioned!" she exclaimed. "May I ask this man—this witness—two or three questions?"

The Coroner looked at Miss Bolton. Then he looked at Mr. Stecke—and from Mr. Stecke to Miss Bolton again.

"Yes!" he replied.

Miss Bolton turned a look on Mr. Stecke which I felt thankful was not directed on me.

"Why are you—a clergyman!—endeavouring to put me in a false position?" she demanded. "Why are you—for that's what it is!—lying about me?"

"Oh, no, oh, no!" protested Mr. Stecke. "I—"

"It is a lie!" broke in Miss Bolton. "You are leading the court to believe that I was walking and talking with the man you have described. That is a downright lie! Mr. Coroner!" she continued, turning away from the witness-box, "I will tell you the real truth! One morning during Canon Effingham's illness I was walking in the lane near Watson's cottage when a gentleman—a stranger—overtaking me asked if I was not the Canon's secretary? On my replying that I was, he said that he was very sorry to hear of his illness and hoped it was not serious and that he would soon recover. He passed me and went on, and that was all that happened. I was neither walking nor talking with the man, as the witness implies—"

"I merely said that I saw you from the cottage window," protested Mr. Stecke. "I did not say how long the conversation lasted—"

"You implied that I was in company with the man, and you are a liar!" interrupted Miss Bolton. "And you did it for a purpose—out of sheer desire to revenge yourself because I resented and refused the unwelcome attentions you tried to force on me while you were at Linwood Rectory—"

The hubbub in court broke out in worse fashion than ever at that. In the midst of it and the demands for silence and order from the officials, Miss Bolton left her place between Canon Effingham and his wife and made her way to the door. As for Mr. Stecke, he stood in the witness-box, angry, white, protesting. Mr. Atherton, sitting next to me, whispered:

"Say! I don't like the looks of that fellow! Guess the little lady hit him good and straight. What's going to happen now?"

What happened, there and then, was an exhibition of good common sense on the part of the Coroner, who, without reference to what had just taken place, and with a few quiet words of advice to the jury, adjourned the proceedings for a fortnight. We all trooped out into the open. Mr. Stecke came up to Canon Effingham, who was talking to me.

"I trust, sir—" he began, "I sincerely trust—"

Canon Effingham gave his former assistant a look.

"I prefer Miss Bolton's word to yours, Stecke," he said quietly. "I think you had better go away."

Mr. Stecke went. But Mrs. Effingham came across his path, and he spoke to her. And I saw that Mrs. Effingham's reception of him was very different—they moved off together, talking

earnestly. When I turned again from watching them, Canon Effingham was speaking to Chaney and the Superintendent, while Mr. Atherton stood by, listening intently.

"I do not attach the slightest importance to Stecke's evidence," the Canon was saying. "I have no doubt whatever that some man did speak to him about the church treasures when I was ill—probably someone interested in such things, who had, as he said, come a long way to see them. But I do not believe he was the man who stole them and who afterwards posed as Dean of Norchester."

"But, my dear sir, Mr. Stecke identified the dead man, the man who said he was the Dean, as the man he saw in your church!" said Chaney. "His identification was positive!"

Canon Effingham shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't believe Mr. Stecke's identification is to be trusted!" he said, dryly. "If it is no more trustworthy than what he said about my secretary—whose every word I trust implicitly—it is not to be depended upon for an instant."

Therewith he turned and went off, alone, towards the Rectory. And, happening to glance after him, I saw the tall, spare man whose presence had attracted me before the inquest opened, following in his footsteps. He walked swiftly and caught up with the Canon; he addressed him; the Canon turned, paused, replied; they exchanged a few words. Then Canon Effingham raised his old-fashioned umbrella and signalled to me. I went along, wondering.

"Mr. Camberwell," said the Canon, "I want you and Mr. Chaney and the Superintendent to join me and this gentleman in the Rectory. Will you come over at once?"

He turned away, the tall man accompanying him. I went back to where Chaney, the Superintendent, and Mr. Atherton stood in a group; Mr. Atherton was talking. And he was accompanying his talk with a glance of extreme disfavour in the direction of Mr. Stecke and Mrs. Effingham, who were still in close conference some little way off.

"I don't like that fellow!" Mr. Atherton was saying. "I don't like his looks; I didn't like his evidence; I did not like the way in which he brought in that girl's name! And I incline to the opinion expressed by Reverend Mr. Effingham that the young lady's word is more to be relied on than this parson fellow's."

"He said no more than that he'd seen her talking to the man whom he'd seen and talked to in the church the previous afternoon, sir," remarked Chaney.

"He said a great deal more, begging your pardon!" retorted Mr. Atherton. "There are more ways than one of saying a thing! His tone and manner suggested a great deal more than the mere words. That girl was honestly indignant—and where you get honest indignation, you get truth. I am not so sure about this Stecke person's truthfulness—after that."

"He couldn't invent all this about the dead man," said Chaney.

"Why couldn't he?" asked Mr. Atherton. "You've only his word that the man we saw killed and whom he viewed is the man he met in that old church! He may have met somebody there—but you don't know that that somebody really was the fellow who called himself Dean of Norchester. If I were you, I should want to know a lot about Reverend Mr. Stecke!"

With this Mr. Atherton said good-bye, got into his car, and was driven off to town, and having given Chaney and the Superintendent Canon Effingham's message, I took them to the Rectory and into the study. To my surprise, we were no sooner inside the room than Canon Effingham locked the door. Then he pointed to the tall stranger, who was seated in a chair on the hearth.

"This gentleman," said Canon Effingham, "is Inspector Jalvane, of Scotland Yard. He wishes to speak to us—to all of us—in strict confidence."

CHAPTER X

REVELATIONS

Inspector Jalvane—whose name was known to me as that of a prominent detective who had recently distinguished himself in the pursuit and capture of a notorious criminal—acknowledged our salutations with no more than a quiet nod; he might wish to speak to us, to all of us, as Canon Effingham had said, but he showed no particular interest in the Superintendent, or in Chaney, or in me—it was to the Canon that he addressed himself. And he began to do that as soon as the four of us had seated ourselves round him.

"Now, Canon Effingham," he said in tones remarkable for their curious combination of gentleness and firmness, "I shall be much obliged if you will answer a few questions which I want to put to you. I want to know more about your two sets of keys—the bunch which—so I gathered from your evidence just now—you carry in your pocket, and the bunch which is comprised of the church key, vestry key, and safe key. I want to be clear about these keys."

"I don't know that I can tell more than I have told," said Canon Effingham. "And I have told it so many times—"

"Never mind, sir—just tell it again—tell *me*," replied Jalvane. "Or, rather, answer my questions. Now, to begin with—"

He went on to put a lot of searching questions to the Canon, one or two of which it had not occurred to us to put. But when he had finished his examination, the position, so it seemed to me, was just the same. It could be summarized like this:

> 1. On the night of the theft the church keys, when Canon Effingham went to bed, were safely locked up in the left-hand top drawer of the big desk-table in his study, their usual place.
>
> 2. The key which opened that drawer was on Canon Effingham's private bunch of keys, which he deposited in its usual place on the table in his dressing-room.
>
> 3. The private bunch of keys lay next morning exactly where he had placed it the night before.
>
> 4. But the church keys were gone from the drawer in the study and were found hanging from the outside of the chancel door.

It was thus that Jalvane did summarize the matter when he had finished questioning the unfortunate Canon. And suddenly there came out of his rat-trap of a mouth a few words which made Canon Effingham gasp.

"Now, sir—what does all this amount to? This!—that the thief, or thieves, had an accomplice in this house! Sir, who is it?"

Canon Effingham threw up his hands and groaned. When he had groaned two or three times, he looked at Chaney and me imploringly. I fear we—or our faces—gave him little comfort; he groaned again, more deeply than before.

"There is no one, no one!" he protested. "We have gone into all that—I and these gentlemen—previously. There is no one that could be suspected—possibly."

"Anyone can be suspected," said Jalvane imperturbably. "No one is safe from suspicion. Your servants, sir?"

"I would stake my own honour on their probity!" declared Canon Effingham. "I have already explained to these gentlemen—"

"I don't think any of the servants could be suspected," remarked Chaney.

"No!—no more do I," added the Superintendent. "And I know them all—well!"

“Then—the young lady, your secretary?” demanded Jalvane. “Remember, sir, what we heard this afternoon! True, she endeavoured to put a different complexion on it, but the fact remains that Mr. Stecke’s evidence was unshaken—”

“I am as convinced of Miss Bolton’s honesty, truthfulness, probity, as I am of—well, as I possibly can be!” asserted Canon Effingham. “I had the most excellent testimonials—”

“Testimonials, sir, are things that I give no heed to,” interrupted Jalvane. “They were, no doubt, testimonials to Miss Bolton’s powers as a private secretary. But—what do you know of Miss Bolton’s private life? Her father? Her connexions? Her past? Do you know anything, sir—anything?”

“I—I’m afraid I do not,” admitted Canon Effingham sorrowfully. “It never occurred to me—such a very well-bred, estimable—”

“Ah!” said Jalvane, allowing himself what I may describe as the fractional part of a thin smile. “I have known estimable and well-bred young ladies who—but we won’t waste time on *that*! The fact is, sir, beyond her capabilities as a typist and secretary, you know nothing whatever about Miss Bolton?”

“I—I do not know anything about Miss Bolton’s private affairs,” replied Canon Effingham. “No!”

Jalvane drew himself still more erect in the straight-backed chair on which his tall figure was perched. He looked round our circle of faces as if to command our attention.

“Just so!” he said. “Well—I do!”

I heard Chaney draw in his breath as if he was going to whistle. He didn’t—he remained silent. But the Superintendent started—apprehensively.

“I do!” repeated Jalvane. “Something!”

Once again he drew himself up, looking from one to the other. It was not a look of vanity or complacence or smug satisfaction, but, rather, the sort of look which you see on the face of a man who is sure of his facts. None of us made any remark, and presently Jalvane spoke again.

“The truth is,” he said, “I have seen this young lady before; I recognized her as soon as she came into the schoolroom with you and your wife this afternoon, sir. I have a remarkable gift of memory for faces—and up to now I never remember being mistaken. I repeat, I knew this young lady secretary of yours at once.”

“Yes?” said Canon Effingham, feebly. “You had seen her before?”

“Yes,” replied Jalvane, “five years ago. At the Central Criminal Court!”

This announcement affected Jalvane’s four hearers in different ways. As for me, I jumped, involuntarily. The Superintendent of Police said: “Dear, dear, dear—oh, dear!” in a whisper. Canon Effingham said nothing, but I saw his hands shake as he spread them out as if to ward off a blow. And this time Chaney did whistle—and then snapped out one word.

“Dock?”

“No!” replied Jalvane. “Neither dock nor witness-box. But—there!”

“What as?” asked Chaney.

“I’m going to tell you,” answered Jalvane. “Nothing unusual about it. It was not a case of mine, I wasn’t concerned in it at all. But I happened to be down there—at the Central Criminal Court—one morning when a case was put forward which rather interested me, and I sat down to hear it through. Very ordinary case. A solicitor—City solicitor, in, I should say, a rather small way of practice—was charged with fraud. He was found guilty and sentenced to five years’ penal servitude. So he will now have been out for a few months. His name was Bascombe—I remember it very well. And the young lady you know as Miss Bolton, and whom I saw in court at his trial, is his daughter.”

“You may be mistaken,” said Canon Effingham.

Jalvane smiled—pityingly.

"Ask her, sir!" he retorted.

Chaney became business-like and practical.

"Remember the personal appearance of this Bascombe?" he asked.

"Quite well," replied Jalvane. "Tallish, good-looking man, about forty-five; brown hair and eyes; well made; well set up."

"Then you aren't suggesting that this man we've heard about as being seen with Miss Bolton was her father?"

"Not at all—nor that—which, of course, I couldn't suggest!—that the man who called himself Dean of Norchester was Bascombe, either."

"What are you suggesting, then?" asked Chaney.

"Perhaps something like this. The story of the church treasures here may have been told to Bascombe by his daughter. Bascombe may have entered into a scheme to get them with an ex-convict like himself—the man who called himself Dean of Norchester. And—to put things in a nutshell, the girl may have handed out Canon Effingham's keys from her window, having previously taken care to see that the side-door of which we have heard was left open."

"That would make her an accomplice!" said Chaney.

"Well?" remarked Jalvane. "Why not? Anything remarkable in that?"

Canon Effingham moaned—once, twice. He lifted his hands again.

"I cannot believe it!" he said. "I cannot—cannot believe such a thing possible!"

Jalvane put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket and pulled out an old-fashioned snuff-box. Having tapped the lid once or twice, he opened the box and helped himself to a generous pinch of its contents.

"Humph!" he said. "I can believe anything—that's likely!"

The Superintendent of Police suddenly got out of his chair. For the last five minutes he had been manifesting unmistakable signs of unrest; now he began to walk about the room. He looked as if he wanted to speak—and didn't know whether he ought to speak.

"Something wrong?" asked Jalvane, laconically.

The Superintendent came back to his chair, threw himself into it, thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers, looked down at his toes, and showed still more signs of unrest and uncertainty.

"Better out with it!" said Jalvane.

The Superintendent looked up.

"I've never liked saying anything against anybody," he blurted out, desperately. "And especially if it's a woman! But—circumstances being what they are—"

"And circumstances always altering cases!" murmured Jalvane quietly.

"—it'll perhaps be better," continued the Superintendent, "if I admit that I happen—just happen, you understand—to know something!"

"About the lady in question?" asked Chaney.

"Exactly! Information acquired, you know, accidentally," replied the Superintendent. "Quite accidentally! Something—well, something I saw, with my own eyes. And should never have mentioned to a soul—and never have mentioned till now—if the Inspector here hadn't said what he has said. And, of course, there may be, and probably is, nothing whatever in it, nothing at all. Still—"

"Still, you'd better tell us what it is," suggested Jalvane.

"This, then! Some few weeks since, I was having two or three days' holiday, in London," continued the Superintendent. "And a friend of mine asked me one evening if I'd care to go to a night-club, just to see what it was like, you know; I'd never even seen the outside of one. So I said I would, leaving it to him where we went. He took me to the Glass Slipper."

"Ah!" murmured Jalvane. "A good choice!"

“So he said,” assented the Superintendent, who appeared to be possessed of a refreshing innocence in these matters. “Typical!—that was the word he used. Didn’t think much of it myself, once we’d got inside—seemed to me to be a bit dull, though to be sure there was music and dancing—”

“And drinks at an exorbitant price!” interrupted Jalvane.

“We only had one, and my friend paid, and I don’t know what he paid—we weren’t there long,” continued the Superintendent. “The fact was that I saw somebody there that I didn’t want to see me, and we cleared out.”

“Who was the somebody?” demanded Chaney. “You don’t mean—”

“Miss B.,” said the Superintendent, dropping his voice to a whisper. “Miss B.!—she came in soon after we’d got there. But she never saw me—I didn’t want her to see me! You see, everybody about here knows me, and though I was in mufti, of course, I was afraid she’d recognize me. And I didn’t want it to be known that the Superintendent of Police at Havering St. Michael had been seen in plain clothes in a night-club in London!”

“You wouldn’t—in a private capacity,” agreed Jalvane. “Well, this young woman? Was she alone?”

“She was not. She’d a young fellow with her who was in evening dress—just as she was. They were both in very fine feathers. And I knew him—by sight, anyway. I recognized him as a young gentleman who’s occasionally stopped at the Squire’s here—Sir Bartle Shardale’s.”

Canon Effingham, who had been listening to this with strained attention, punctuating the Superintendent’s statement with occasional groans, leaned forward.

“His name—you know his name?”

“No, sir, I did not!” replied the Superintendent. “Only knew him by sight as one of Sir Bartle’s occasional guests—I’ve seen him hereabouts several times.”

“The name can easily be ascertained,” observed Chaney. “Well, what about these two, Superintendent. She didn’t see you?”

“Neither of them saw me—my friend and I, we were in an alcove. They passed on to where dancing was going on. I saw ’em dancing,” continued the Superintendent. “Then I cleared out. I did not want her—or him—to see me at the Glass Slipper.”

Jalvane rubbed his chin.

“The Glass Slipper,” he remarked, “is not exactly the sort of place where they hold Dorcas Societies or mothers’ meetings. Still, we can’t say, because a young lady goes there to hop a bit, that—” He broke off his reflections and turned to Canon Effingham. “I think, sir,” he went on, “that you must see that in view of all we know, Miss Bolton’s antecedents should be inquired into, and the references she gave you examined, and—”

Canon Effingham lifted his hands in protest.

“This is most distressing!” he exclaimed. “I am more pained than I can express. I cannot believe—”

“Let me put this to you, sir,” said Jalvane. “It is in Miss Bolton’s own interest that this should be cleared up. It would be unfair to her not to clear it up. I suggest that as you are employing these two gentlemen, Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell, you hand over to them the references you received and let them use their discretion about them. That, at any rate, can do no harm.”

Canon Effingham reflected a minute or two; then he rose, went to his desk, opened a drawer, and, taking from it some papers, placed them in Chaney’s hands.

“You will find them exceptional testimonials,” he said. “I hand them to you in confidence.”

“That’s good, sir,” said Jalvane. “And now—just let us see Miss Bolton herself for two minutes. I won’t frighten her—all I want is to ask her a question about what she said about the Reverend Mr. Stecke.”

Canon Effingham hesitated, but he rang the bell. The parlour-maid, Bleacher, appearing in

answer, he sent her for Miss Bolton. Some minutes passed by; Miss Bolton did not come. Then—more minutes having elapsed—Bleacher reappeared.

“I don’t know where Miss Bolton’s got to, sir,” she reported. “She isn’t in her room; she isn’t anywhere in the house; she’s not in the garden. Cook says she saw her come in from the inquest and go out again, almost immediate!”

Jalvane took out his snuff-box and quietly opened its lid.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. PENTRIDGE'S LODGER

No one spoke until Jalvane had taken his pinch of snuff. And it was Jalvane who spoke when that had been satisfactorily accomplished.

"Humph!" he muttered. "Now I wonder if she recognized *me*? I haven't changed much in the last five years—if any."

Bleacher was still standing in the doorway, watching her master. Canon Effingham suddenly waved her away.

"Dear, dear, dear!" he said, when she had closed the door. "This is most distressing! Do—do you think this—this annoying episode—has sent her away?"

"That," replied Jalvane, "is precisely what I do think, sir! Pre-cise-ly!"

"But," began the Canon. "But really—"

Chaney interrupted him by springing to his feet and pointing to the telephone.

"What's the number of your local railway station, sir," he demanded. "Linwood, 231? A moment, then."

He picked up the receiver; within a minute or two he was talking.

"Linwood station? Yes—speaking here on behalf of Canon Effingham. Do you know Miss Bolton, Canon Effingham's secretary? Yes—have you seen her at the station this afternoon? Yes—what train? Thank you."

He replaced the receiver and turned to the rest of us.

"Miss Bolton left by the 5.19," he said. "That's a Waterloo train. She'll be there by now. In London—amongst seven million other people. Got any address of hers in London, sir?"

"I—I think I have an address, somewhere," replied Canon Effingham, who was obviously becoming more and more upset. "Really, this is becoming a very serious matter—very serious indeed!"

"It's all that, sir," assented Jalvane. "Serious is the word!"

"I referred to the fact that my secretary and I are in the middle of a most important chapter in my book," said Canon Effingham. He rose, went to his desk, and, opening a drawer, shuffled about amongst its contents. "I wish," he continued pettishly, "I wish you had warned Stecke not to mention Miss Bolton's name! She is a high-spirited young lady, and—dear me, now where did I put that particular letter? Ah, here it is! That is the only address—private address—of hers which I know. You had better take it with the references—and please do your best to find Miss Bolton at once and get her to return to her work."

He handed a letter to me, and after glancing at the address—a street in Bayswater—I put it away with the other papers. We all rose; there was nothing more to be done. Chaney offered Jalvane a lift back to town in our car, and we went out to the lane by the churchyard, where we had left it. Mrs. Effingham and Mr. Stecke were still walking about there, talking; they were there when we drove off.

Late that evening I went down to Bayswater and to the address from which Miss Bolton had written when, some months previously, she had been in correspondence with Canon Effingham about the secretaryship. It turned out to be a typical Bayswater private hotel; Miss Bolton, said its manageress, had certainly lived there for a few weeks the previous autumn. But she had never been there since, and the manageress knew nothing more about her. Had I carried out Canon Effingham's last expressed desires, I should have resumed my task of searching for Miss Bolton early next morning, but, in my opinion, Chaney and I had something more important than that in view. The inquest on the dead body of the man who had called himself Dean of Norchester was to be opened that day, and we felt it necessary to be present; indeed, it was possible that our

evidence might be called for. So at eleven o'clock we went along, and at the Coroner's court found Canon Effingham, Mr. Atherton, and Mr. Stecke, together with certain bank officials and the Inspector with whom we had already had some dealings. The Inspector drew us aside.

"I've got a witness that knows this dead man," he said. "Knows, at any rate, what he called himself to her. Woman who lets lodgings—he lodged with her for a while. Came forward through reading the paper accounts. I'll get her called as soon as the American gentleman and the parsons have done their bits."

This idea, however, apparently did not suit the Coroner and his immediate officials; the woman of whom the Inspector had spoken to us was called as soon as an eyewitness account (furnished by a City policeman) of the accident which resulted in the man's death had been given. She was a middle-aged, washed-out bit of a thing, timid, pathetic in the attempt to present a decent appearance in this public ordeal. Mrs. Pentridge—Eliza Pentridge—Number 257, Star Street, Paddington. Widow. Yes, had been shown the body of the dead man now lying in the mortuary.

"Do you recognize it as that of someone you knew, Mrs. Pentridge?" asked the Coroner.

"Yes, sir. A gentleman as has lodged with me, recent."

"What was his name, Mrs. Pentridge?"

"He give me his name as Seward, sir—Mr. Seward."

"How long has he lodged with you?"

"It'll be all about six months, sir."

"How did he come to lodge at your house? Did you know him at all before he came there?"

"No, sir. He came through the card in the window, which, since my husband was took, I've always had a lodger, having one good room to spare."

"I see—so you put a card in your window?"

"Yes, sir. Lodgings for a respectable gentleman."

"And this man, Mr. Seward, applied to you?"

"Yes, sir—which he knocked at the door one morning and asked to see the accommodation. And then wanted to know what my charges was. Which I told him ten shilling a week, just for the room."

"And he took it, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, and paid the first week then and there. Which he always paid, regular, to the minute, every Saturday morning, it being a Saturday when he come in."

"What did he do about his meals, Mrs. Pentridge? Did you cook for him?"

"No, sir, I never did nothing for him, that way. He had a spirit stove, sir, and he made himself a cup of tea when he happened to want it, mornings and afternoons. He took his dinner at a place close by, sir—a resty-rong."

"Didn't give you much trouble, then?"

"None at all, sir. A very quiet, peaceable gentleman. Never had no trouble with him at all, sir."

"What did he do, Mrs. Pentridge? Any work?"

"Not that I know of, sir. He never mentioned no work to me. He went out every day, but it seems as if it was for no more than a look round. He was a great hand at reading, sir. The boy from the news-agent's shop left him *The Times* every morning. And he had a shelf of books, sir, and read in them a great deal. I brought two of them along, sir, as they have names wrote in them, and I thought the police gentlemen might—"

"Very proper, Mrs. Pentridge. Have you got the books there?"

Mrs. Pentridge produced two small, fat volumes, bound in vellum, much stained by use, and handed them over. The Coroner fixed his spectacles and inspected these exhibits with interest.

"Um!" he remarked. "He was evidently a classical scholar. This, gentlemen, is a copy of

Horace, in, I should say, a somewhat rare edition; the other is a volume of Plato. Both are in the originals. It is evident that this man, whoever he really was, was familiar with Greek and Latin. As the witness says, there are names on the fly-leaves of both books. They are different, and neither of them is Seward. We will go into that later." He turned to the witness-box again. "You say he had more of these books, Mrs. Pentridge?"

"A small shelf full, sir—all like them. In foreigneering languages, sir."

"What other property had he in the room you let him?"

"Nothing very much. I made bold to go through what he had after reading in the papers about his misfortune, sir. He'd a portmanteau—it's not locked, sir—and a few things in it—what you might call a change of linen, sir. There's another suit of clothes there, too, and an extra pair of boots, and his toilet things, sir, and that's about all he had."

"He hadn't any clothes such as clergymen wear?"

"No, sir, never while he was with me."

"You never saw him in such clothes?"

"Never, sir. Never see him in anything but the suit what they showed me in the police station and the one that's in his room now."

"Well, now, about his habits again, Mrs. Pentridge. You say he lived a very quiet life. Did he ever have any visitors?"

"Never one, sir, from first to last!"

"Nobody ever dropped in on him?"

"No, sir."

"Nor inquired for him?"

"No, sir."

"Did he ever have any letters?"

"Not oft, sir. Now and then."

"Can you remember how they were addressed?"

"Mr. Seward, sir, or Mr. Henry Seward."

"Well, now, Mrs. Pentridge, a very important question. You say he lodged at your house some six months. Was he ever away from his room during that time?"

"Never until a few days ago, sir. Then he went away one afternoon, telling me he should be away that night and next day and possibly the second night. I never see him again after that, sir," added Mrs. Pentridge, "until I see him just now—where he is, sir."

"He never returned?"

"No, sir."

"How was he dressed when he went away?"

"In that suit what the police has shown me, sir."

"Did he take any luggage away with him?"

"Oh, no, sir—nothing."

"Went out just as he was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I think that's all, Mrs. Pentridge. One more question, perhaps. Did he ever tell you anything about himself—what he'd been, before he came to lodge at your house, and so on. Anything of that sort?"

"No, sir, never! He never tell me nothing. Which, beyond passing the time of day, and remarking on the weather, he never exchanged no conversation. He was a very quiet gentleman, sir, and always the gentleman. A decayed gentleman, sir—that's what I considered him," continued Mrs. Pentridge, who, the longer she occupied the witness-box, became more inclined to talk. "But his money being always there to the minute, and him giving not the least of trouble —"

“You regarded him as a model lodger,” said the Coroner. “Very well, Mrs. Pentridge.”

Mrs. Pentridge retired, conscious that she had done her duty. Mr. Atherton succeeded her in the witness-box. His evidence was a repetition of that he had given the day before at the inquest on Skate at Linwood; it was brought forward here to form a connecting link between the crimes at Linwood and the man into the cause of whose death the Coroner was inquiring. To us, of course, there was nothing new in it, or in that of Canon Effingham, who followed Mr. Atherton and proved that the solid gold paten, found in the dead man’s possession, was the paten stolen from the church safe. Then came an official from Mr. Atherton’s bank, and afterwards another from the Bank of England. Then, just as we were expecting to hear Mr. Stecke’s evidence again, came an interruption. The Inspector with whom we had had our dealings so far was fetched out of court; presently he returned and fetched out another—and higher—police official. This man, coming back a few minutes later, approached the Coroner and made a whispered communication to him. He appeared to be suggesting something, and, the Coroner evidently assenting, he went away again—just as Mr. Stecke was called into the witness-box.

Stecke’s story, of course, was precisely that which Chaney and I had heard at least twice. He said just what he had said at the inquest on Skate; he described his interview with the strange man in Linwood Church and his accidentally seeing that man and Miss Bolton walking and talking together in the wood next morning. His manner, it seemed to me, was more confident than ever; he had evidently recovered from Miss Bolton’s attack on him of the previous afternoon. Confident as he appeared, however, Stecke found the Coroner rather more inquisitive than the Linwood Coroner had been.

“I want to ask you two or three questions, Mr. Stecke,” said he. “Did you tell Canon Effingham of your meeting with this stranger in the church?”

“No—I did not,” replied Stecke.

“Why?”

“Canon Effingham was ill at the time. I did not wish to upset him.”

“Why should that have upset him?”

“I considered—knowing that he was ill—that it would. I exercised my own judgment in the matter.”

“Why didn’t you tell Mrs. Effingham?”

“Mrs. Effingham would probably have told her husband.”

“Well, you have told us that you saw this man in conversation with Canon Effingham’s secretary, Miss Bolton, next morning. I want to ask you a particular question about that. Did you think the fact suspicious?”

“Not then!”

“If you had, I suppose you’d have mentioned it?”

“Probably.”

“When did you think it suspicious?”

“I won’t say that I think it suspicious. After learning what I have learnt during the last few days, I considered it my duty to tell all I know.”

“What have you learnt—in particular—during the last few days?”

“That the man who stole the plate and books is the man who spoke to me in the church and whom I saw next day speaking to Miss Bolton!”

“You mean the man whom we now know as Seward?”

“Yes!”

“You have seen Seward’s dead body. Is Seward the man you are referring to?”

“Unquestionably! There is not the slightest doubt of it.”

The Coroner paused and glanced across the court. The police official who had recently spoken to him came forward, leading an elderly, quietly but, very well-dressed man who,

confronting the Coroner, paused and made a polite bow.

“I understand,” said the Coroner, “that you wish to give some evidence? Why?”

The new-comer smiled gravely.

“Because,” he answered, “I am the man who spoke to Mr. Stecke in Linwood Church one afternoon, and to Miss Bolton in the woods next morning!”

CHAPTER XII

MR. ATHERTON LAUNCHES FORTH

To say that this sudden and dramatic intervention raised a sensation in court would be to understate things. The court was closely packed, and from every corner rose excited murmurs; people elbowed and jostled each other in an effort to see the man who had come forward at this—as it were—eleventh hour. But of all the people present none could possibly be so much surprised as those of us were who had actually seen the man now lying dead in the neighbouring mortuary. For this man, standing before us alive, and quietly watching the Coroner, was so like him that out of Mr. Atherton's lips issued the exclamation which I, too, had been out to make.

"Double—his double!"

The Coroner was calling for order; so were his officials and the police. A hush fell on the court; the Coroner spoke.

"You had better go into the witness-box and say what you have to say on oath," he suggested. "You have no objection?"

"None whatever!" replied the stranger. "It is what I came for."

We waited—some of us breathlessly—to hear what this new witness had to say; to know who he was; what he had to tell.

Francis William Sewell. Retired bank-manager. Residing at Harfordness, near Spalding, in Lincolnshire. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries—member of some well-known archæological societies.

"Why are you here, Mr. Sewell?" inquired the Coroner.

"Because first thing this morning I read in my newspaper the account of the proceedings at the inquest held at Linwood yesterday, regarding the murder of the man Skate, and especially the evidence of the witness Mr. Stecke," replied the new-comer. "And as I knew that I was the person who had spoken to Mr. Stecke in Linwood Church one afternoon last winter, and next morning to a young lady who, I knew at the time, had some connexion with Linwood Rectory and whom I now understand to have been Miss Bolton, Canon Effingham's secretary, I ran straight off to the station and caught the next train for London, so that I could come here—I knew from the paper that this inquest was to be opened today."

"We shall be much obliged to you for any information you can give us, Mr. Sewell," said the Coroner. "You read Mr. Stecke's evidence given at Linwood yesterday, you say?"

"All of it! And I have just heard him repeat that evidence—I was at the back of the court there, just now, while he gave it."

"And you suggest that Mr. Stecke is mistaken? He has already positively identified one man—the man into whose death we are inquiring—as the man he saw and spoke to at Linwood. He is mistaken in that?"

"I don't know—I can't say, of course—if Mr. Stecke ever saw and spoke to the dead man at Linwood. But I do know that I am the man who approached him in the church one afternoon last winter and did his best to persuade him to show me the treasures which have lately been stolen from the safe in the vestry. I also know that I am the man who spoke to the young lady I have referred to—next morning, in the woods behind Linwood Rectory."

"Perhaps you can give us particulars, details, Mr. Sewell?" suggested the Coroner. "How you came to be there, for instance?"

"Willingly! I am, as I said at first, retired from business, and I spend my leisure time in antiquarian and archæological pursuits. There are certain very interesting things in the immediate neighbourhood of Havering St. Michael, which is the market town of the Linwood district. As it was very fine weather for the time of year at the period I am speaking of, I went down to

Havering St. Michael for a few days, to look round—I stayed at the Havering Arms Hotel there. I knew of the treasures of Linwood Church before going to Havering St. Michael; their existence is well known to antiquaries. Of course I went to see them. I found Mr. Stecke in the church. He told me that Canon Effingham never allowed anyone to see the treasures except in his presence and under his own personal supervision, and that, as Canon Effingham was ill in bed, my wish could not be gratified. I tried persuasion, but it was no good, so I had to return to my hotel disappointed. But I had seen that the country round about Linwood was well worth inspection, so next morning I went back there, to explore a little. I turned up the lane which runs between the church and the Rectory, and as I did so, I saw a young lady come out of the Rectory grounds and go up the lane in advance of me. Near a cottage on the right-hand side I caught up with her and, asking her if she was from the Rectory, said that I had been sorry to hear of Canon Effingham's illness and hoped that it was not serious. She replied that Canon Effingham was only laid up for a few days and would soon be about again, and we parted. And—that is all."

The Coroner turned to where Stecke was sitting. Since the appearance on the scene of Mr. Sewell, Stecke had sat motionless, watching him as if fascinated, and when the Coroner addressed him, he started as if frightened.

"Mr. Stecke," said the Coroner, "you have heard what the witness says? Will you look closely at him? Is he the gentleman you saw in Linwood Church and afterwards speaking to the young lady, Miss Bolton?"

Stecke looked more fascinated, amazed, thunderstruck, than ever. There was something in his mind that was producing a mental cataclysm.

"I—I do not know what to say!" he faltered. "If—if this gentleman says—but then—is it possible for two men—"

He got no further than that. The Coroner turned to the witness-box.

"Mr. Sewell—you see what Mr. Stecke suggests? That the man—the dead man—he identified is so much like you that—you follow me? Now I want to ask you a very particular and perhaps a very delicate question. Have you seen the dead body of the man we are alluding to?"

"No—not yet."

"This is the delicate question. Have you, from the fact of the likeness just referred to, any idea as to who this dead man really is?"

Mr. Sewell nodded, gravely.

"I have!" he replied.

"Will you go to the mortuary and look?" suggested the Coroner.

Mr. Sewell left the court, accompanied by the two police officials with whom he had previously entered. He was not long away; when he returned, he re-entered the witness-box with as much show of composure as when he had left it. And the Coroner simplified matters by immediately putting a direct question.

"Have you recognized this man, Mr. Sewell?"

Mr. Sewell inclined his head.

"Yes!" he replied.

"Who is he?"

"He is my twin brother, Henry Sewell!"

"You positively identify him?"

"Positively!"

"You could give proof of that?"

"I can give it now. He and I are, as I said, twin brothers. Each bears a certain birth-mark on the left arm—identical in both cases. I have satisfied these two police officers on that point."

"Can you give us any information, Mr. Sewell?"

"The only information I can give is that until just now, when I saw him dead, I had not seen

my brother for eleven years. During the whole of that time I have never heard one word of him. I have never known his whereabouts during that time. I have often wondered if he was dead. He completely passed out of my ken about eleven years ago. None of our family—there are another brother and two sisters—have ever heard of or from him since then."

"You can give us his exact age, of course, Mr. Sewell?"

"We are fifty-six years of age."

"Then eleven years ago he would be forty-five. What was his occupation at that time?"

"He was a private tutor."

"Where?"

"That I can't say. He came down to see the rest of us in Lincolnshire eleven years ago and told us he was engaged in that way—private teaching. We believed it to be in London. He had always been doing something of that sort—ever since he left Oxford."

"He was an Oxford man, then? Clever?"

"He was a very clever man; he took a very brilliant degree at Oxford. Classics."

The Coroner hesitated a little, fingering his papers.

"I don't want to question you too closely, Mr. Sewell," he said. "After all, we are here only to inquire into the cause of your brother's death. But from the evidence we have had it looks as if he came by his death in flying from arrest. Do you wish to say anything more—in view of that? About his—character, for instance?"

"I see no object in concealing the truth," replied Mr. Sewell. "I am afraid he was a man of no principles. Brilliantly clever, but—I don't know that I need say any more."

One of the police officials approached the Coroner and appeared to make a suggestion.

"One more question, Mr. Sewell," said the Coroner. "Do you know if your brother ever fell into the hands of the police—the law?"

"Not to my knowledge. It must have been within the last eleven years if he did. We had a good deal of trouble with him previous to our last seeing anything of him, in the way of periodically paying off his debts, but I know of nothing worse than that. As to what he did, where he was, during the last eleven years, I repeat that I know nothing whatever."

This episode then came to an end. So, a few minutes later, did the inquest. As the Coroner had remarked, all he and the jury were there for was to inquire into the cause of the man's death. Presently, on the Coroner's direction, the jury found a verdict of accidental death, and we all left—to discuss what had happened and to consider what to do next in the light of our newly-acquired knowledge.

Mr. Stecke stood outside the court, in conversation with Mr. Sewell. Since Mr. Sewell's appearance in the witness-box, Stecke had shown all the signs of absolute mystification; he was staring at Mr. Sewell now as if he could scarcely believe that he saw him. And when Chaney and I and Jalvane—who had turned up just after the opening of the inquest and had listened with grim watchfulness to all that went on—joined them, he was questioning his companion as if to test his veracity. Mr. Sewell listened to him with an amused air. Suddenly he interrupted him.

"My dear sir!" he said. "Do you really doubt the evidence I have just given—on oath?"

"I—I certainly should not dream of doubting the word of any gentleman!" protested Stecke. "But really I—everything is so very extraordinary!"

"There is nothing so very extraordinary in the fact that twins—especially male twins—closely resemble each other," said Mr. Sewell. "I have known some remarkable instances in my time. I know two twin brothers so much alike that when they were young men and became engaged, their sweethearts had—for a time, at any rate, until one distinguished himself from the other by growing a beard—the greatest difficulty in knowing which was which! This may seem a very exaggerated case, but I dare say others have occurred."

"I have known of one such case, myself, sir," remarked Jalvane. "We had two men in my

division at one time, Irishmen, brothers, who were so exactly alike that until we got into the trick of it, we never knew which was Pat and which was Tim! But I will say this, sir—as such men approach middle age, a difference becomes noticeable—as a rule.”

Stecke stood listening and still staring at Mr. Sewell. His wondering gaze travelled from Mr. Sewell’s face to his clothes; he appeared to be making a close study of their cut and texture. Suddenly, with a shake of his head, and without a word, he turned and went off.

“Beats him, completely!” remarked Jalvane. “Well, I don’t wonder. But now I want a word with you, sir, if you please,” he continued, turning to Mr. Sewell. “This brother of yours—”

“Who is it that’s questioning me?” asked Mr. Sewell, with a good-humoured glance at Jalvane’s odd features. “Police?”

“Inspector Jalvane, Criminal Investigation Department, sir, watching this case. This brother of yours, now—you know literally nothing about his doings for some years?”

“Literally nothing, Inspector! Never seen him, heard from him, heard of him! None of us—I mean the family—have.”

“Do you think he’s been out of the country?”

“May have been. I have no idea.”

“Is he—was he, I mean—the sort of man who’d adopt aliases?”

“Well, you know he’d adopted one, anyway—Seward. He may have had several, for anything I know.”

“Adventurer?”

“I should scarcely call him that. It’s difficult to classify him. He was decidedly eccentric. And, I regret to say, he’d no principles. He never had—even as a boy. And he’d a love of sheer, unadulterated mischief.”

“Um!” Jalvane began to finger his queer jaw. “There’s another thing I want to know about,” he went on, presently. “Canon Effingham can perhaps inform me. Those church treasures, now? Were they well known, famous, and so on? I mean, had they been written about, talked about?”

“Both!” said Canon Effingham, with emphasis. “They have frequently been written about; I have written two or three special articles about them myself. Also they have been exhibited in public—twice at the Church Congress; once at South Kensington. They are—you may say famous.”

“Then there’s nothing remarkable in the fact that an educated man like this gentleman’s brother should know of their existence and value?” said Jalvane.

“Nothing!” agreed Canon Effingham.

Jalvane nodded. Then his snuff-box came out and occupied his attention for a minute or two. Refreshed, he suddenly snapped out a brief sentence with all the force of an *ex cathedra* pronouncement.

“Seward had an accomplice!”

No one said anything. Jalvane took another pinch of snuff and spoke again.

“He—or she!—has got to be found!”

Mr. Atherton found his tongue at that point.

“That is what I hoped you were coming to,” he remarked. “Now I wish to come in there! Put it down, if you like, as a little fancy, a little whim on my part. But I am so deeply interested in the solving of this mystery that I intend to see it through. Now, Canon Effingham has already offered a thousand pounds’ reward in this affair, and I have offered the same amount. I have just now persuaded Canon Effingham to withdraw his offer and to allow me to take the whole thing on my shoulders. I want to know how Seward effected that robbery, and how Skate was killed, and who was Seward’s accomplice, male or female, for I, like Inspector Jalvane, am sure he had one, and a very clever one; I also want to know where the missing chalice is. And to that end I will give five thousand pounds cash down to whosoever—but you can fill in the phraseology. Mr. Chaney,

I put this in the able hands of yourself and partner, Mr. Camberwell. Get busy on it during what remains of this very day!”

CHAPTER XIII

WE BEGIN TO HEAR NEWS

Canon Effingham and Mr. Atherton left us at this point, and Mr. Sewell turned to Jalvane.

"I don't know what you official people intend to do next," he said, "but as for myself, I propose to go to the house where my unfortunate brother lodged, for the purpose of examining his belongings. There may be something there, papers, for instance, which I ought to know of."

"I was thinking of doing the same thing, sir," replied Jalvane. "If not just now, certainly tomorrow. But we may as well go now."

"Any objection to Camberwell and myself going with you?" asked Chaney.

"None!" said Jalvane. "We're all in the same boat. Where can we find a taxi?"

I went into the street to look round. A man, obviously a constable in plain clothes, passed me in the doorway. A moment later Jalvane called me back; when I turned, the man was speaking to him.

"All right," I heard Jalvane say. "Be there in twenty minutes. Don't let him go." He turned to me. "Got a taxi?" he asked. "Get one, then. But we're going to the Yard; there's a man turned up there who thinks he can tell something about the supposed Dean of Norchester. As all this is in my hands, they sent for me. Better come with us, sir," he concluded, glancing at Mr. Sewell. "We'll hear what this man has to say and we can go on to Star Street afterwards."

The four of us got into a taxi-cab and went off to New Scotland Yard. There, in a waiting-room, we found a man of respectable appearance who, on our entrance, rose to his feet and stood to attention.

"Ah!" remarked Jalvane. "Old soldier, eh?"

The man smiled.

"Late King's Own, sir," he answered.

"Name?" asked Jalvane.

"Robert Evison, sir. Now employed at Paddington railway station. We have dressing-rooms there, sir. I'm in charge of them."

"I understand you can tell something about the man who's been going about calling himself the Dean of Norchester," continued Jalvane. "Can you?"

"Well, sir, I've read a lot in the newspapers about him, and I firmly believe that I've had a bit of business with him," replied Evison. "That's my convinced impression, sir, and why I came here."

"Quite right," said Jalvane. "Sit down, my lad. Now, then, tell about it."

Evison resumed his seat; we took chairs and listened.

"Well, sir, it was like this. The other morning," began Evison, "Tuesday morning it was—"

Jalvane stopped him and turned to me.

"Let's get things in order," he said. "What night was it that the stuff was stolen from Linwood Church?"

"Monday last," I answered.

"What morning was it on which the so-called Dean of Norchester went to the American man?"

"Next morning—Tuesday," I replied.

"Go on!" said Jalvane, nodding at Evison. "On Tuesday morning last—"

"Tuesday morning it was, sir, about nine o'clock, a gentleman came up to me and said he wanted a dressing-room. I supposed, of course, that he'd just come off a long-distance train. He'd two suit-cases with him; one of 'em a deep, square one; the other a small one, perhaps eighteen by twelve. He—"

"Old or new?" asked Jalvane.

"Well-worn, both of 'em, sir. I showed him into a dressing-room and followed him in to see if there was anything I could get him. He was a pleasant, chatty sort of gentleman—"

"Better describe him before you go any further," said Jalvane. "What like?"

Evison looked across the room—at Mr. Sewell.

"Well, sir, begging the gentleman's pardon, he was the very spit of your friend there!" he answered. "Never seen two gentlemen more alike in my life!"

"That'll do," said Jalvane. "How was he dressed?"

"Dark-grey tweed suit, sir. But as soon as he got into the dressing-room, he opened the big suit-case and I saw black clothes in it which he began to take out. 'You'll see a—a'—he used some long word, sir—"

"Metamorphosis," suggested Mr. Sewell.

"I think that was it, sir, by the sound. Yes—'metamos'—whatever it is, 'when I come out, my friend,' he said. 'The fact is, I never travel in my clerical clothes—I prefer to put them on when I reach town.' Then I gathered he was a clergyman of some sort. So when I'd got him something he'd asked for—fresh soap, or something—I left him. In about a quarter of an hour he opened the door and called me in again. And of course I shouldn't have known him. He wasn't dressed like an ordinary clergyman, but like one of these—I don't know if they're bishops or what—gaiters on their legs, and a big top hat with strings, and so on. He'd put his other suit in the case, and he was locking it when I went in. 'Now look here, my friend,' he said, 'I shall be coming back to change my clothes again before leaving town this afternoon—what shall I do with this suit-case? Shall I put it in the cloak-room, or do you think you could keep an eye on it?' 'Leave it with me, sir,' I said, 'I'll see to it.' And with that he paid me for the dressing-room, gave me half a crown for myself, and went away, carrying the little case."

"What did you do with the big one?" asked Chaney.

"Put it in my own place, sir—I have a bit of a spot there where I keep things."

"Did you notice if it had any lettering on it?" inquired Chaney.

"I looked particular for that, sir—I thought it would perhaps say Bishop of somewhere. But there was nothing of that sort; only two initials. H. S. It was an old suit-case, dark-brown leather; and the letters were a good deal worn."

"Well," said Jalvane. "And—did he come back?"

"Yes, sir—about four o'clock that afternoon."

"Still carrying the small case?"

"Yes, sir. He'd the same room. He changed back into the dark-grey suit, paid me, gave me another halfcrown, and left. I wanted to get him a porter to carry his things, but he wouldn't let me."

"Did he say anything about where he was going?"

"No, sir—not a word. And, of course, after he'd left me, I saw nothing more of him. But when I read the papers this morning, and the evidence of that American gentleman, I told my boss all about it, and he said I'd better come here and tell all I knew."

"Quite right, Evison, and what you've told will be very useful," said Jalvane. "And now just keep all that to yourself till you're asked to repeat it—and tell your boss to do the same thing."

Then Evison went away, and we who had listened to his story went out and got into another taxi-cab and set off for Star Street, Paddington.

"Damned clever, that!" murmured Chaney as we moved away. "I'd been wondering where he got into his dean's clothes! And what I'd now like would be to find 'em—we might trace something."

"We shall find them," remarked Jalvane. "Only a question of time—and patience."

Mrs. Pentridge came to the door of her humble dwelling with a mouth full of tea and toast;

she'd just sat down to a quiet cup on returning home, she said. And of course she'd expected the police gentlemen would come, and was truly thankful—and much obliged—we weren't in uniform, not wishing to draw attention. And this was Mr. Seward's room, which it was just as he left it, excepting that it had been tidied up and the bed made.

We found ourselves in a ground-floor bed-sitting-room; drab, dismal, but clean. There was a bed in a corner; a chest of drawers that also served as dressing-table; a small writing-table in the window between the dingy lace curtains; an easy chair, a sofa. In a recess were two shelves; the top one was filled with books; the lower one with piles of newspapers—back issues of *The Times*, chiefly—and magazines. Under the bed was a suit-case—empty. The chest of drawers contained clothing and linen, but an examination of its contents yielded no information. There were no private papers anywhere in the room.

The books, as Mrs. Pentridge had said in her evidence, were all in what she called foreigneering languages; they were, as a matter of fact, almost without exception, Greek and Latin classics. We examined every volume separately; there were plenty of pencil notes on margins, but no name on fly-leaves. The books themselves were chiefly the working editions of the classics issued by the university presses; my own opinion was that they had one and all been picked up at the second-hand bookstalls.

Chaney made the first find. From the midst of a pile of magazines and reviews—all of the serious and heavy sort, and all, like the books, second-hand—he suddenly extracted something which he at once held up between finger and thumb as a notable acquisition.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed. "Back number of the *Linwood Parish Magazine*, with article on the stolen goods. See? 'The Treasures of Linwood Church,' by the Reverend Wilford Effingham, M.A., Rector of Linwood and Canon of the Diocese of Southwark. What's the date? October 1919. Two years old, this. And look!—the article's marked in blue pencil. Pictures of the treasures—photographs. The cup and saucer—I mean chalice and paten—and the two old books. Significant we should find this—eh?"

I made the next discovery. Rooting about amongst the papers, I found a shipping list—announcements of sailings to American and Canadian ports. And against one departure—from Liverpool, at a very near date—somebody, Seward presumably, had made a mark, also in blue pencil.

And then Jalvane distinguished himself. He had been poking about in nooks and corners of the room. From a bracket on the wall he had taken down a hideous yellow and purple ornament, a sort of vase; turning this up in his hand, he shook out a bit of folded paper which he picked up and unwrapped.

"There we are!" he said. "I thought we should find something. Cloak-room ticket for a suit-case. Date April the—well, last Tuesday. So there we are!"

"What station?" demanded Chaney.

"Paddington!—and I'm going there, straight off," replied Jalvane. "It's close by. You wait here, all of you—have another look round. I'll be back—with the suit-case—in no time."

He was actually back within twenty minutes, and when he came, he had the suit-case in his hand and set it down, triumphantly, on the table. We gathered round, staring at it and wondering, no doubt, what it contained.

"Old, well-worn stuff, you see," remarked Jalvane, tapping somewhat frayed leather. "Had its travels too—see the foreign hotel labels on it? Of course we haven't the keys, but it's a very ordinary lock, and I've no doubt I've something that'll do." He produced a bunch of keys and selected one that looked likely. "There you are!" he continued, raising the lid. "Now, what have we here?"

What we had there was, without doubt, the garments in which Seward had presented himself to Mr. Atherton at the Savoy Hotel—everything that a dean should wear, down to the black

gaiters and up to the broad-brimmed, stringed hat.

“Wonder how he got all this stuff?” mused Jalvane. “None of it new, you see. I suppose, though, that deans and bishops sometimes get rid of their old clothes—all this stuff is pretty well-worn, and the hat is anything but new. Well, there doesn’t seem to be anything else.”

Chaney, however, was going through the various garments, one by one, and presently he found and held up a card, duly engraved.

“Apparently armed himself with two or three of these,” he observed. “Unless after giving one to Mr. Atherton he picked it up again. What I should like to know is—did he have these cards specially engraved for him, for this job, or have they been stolen from the real Dean of Norchester?”

“That’s one thing we ought to find out,” said Jalvane. “And the other is—where and when did he get these clothes and the hat? The last thing rather licks me. Supposing a real, genuine dean’s toggery did somehow get into a second-hand clothes-shop, who’s likely to want to buy it? It would be no use to an ordinary clergyman, and a dean’s costume isn’t exactly the thing for a fancy-dress ball. Yet—he must have got it somewhere.”

Mr. Sewell left us at that stage. He should stay in town for a few days, he said, to make arrangements about the burial of his unfortunate brother’s remains, and he gave us an address at which we could find him. And after some further discussion with Jalvane as to future procedure we all parted, leaving Seward’s belongings, by arrangement with Mrs. Pentridge, locked up in the room. During the next day or two Chaney and I were busy in giving proper publicity to Mr. Atherton’s munificent offer of five thousand pounds. Chaney attached more importance to that than to any other efforts on the part of ourselves or of the police to unravel the mystery; I myself was not very sanguine about it. It seemed to me that if Seward had an accomplice, there would now, as Seward was dead, be only one person in all the world who would know of it, and that would be the accomplice himself—or herself. And it was not likely that the accomplice would reveal his identity.

Then, two or three days later, we received a communication from the Superintendent of Police at Havering St. Michael. He enclosed for our perusal a copy of a statement just procured, he said, from a man who had voluntarily come forward to make it. It appeared, he continued, to settle the question: had Seward an accomplice? If Seward was the man mentioned in the statement, there was no doubt that he had. The enclosure ran as follows:

> Statement of Henry Charles Marsden, garage-proprietor, Pennydoon Corner, near Kingston, Surrey: About dusk on the evening of Monday, April—, I was standing at the door of my garage when a small car, coming from London way and going south, passed me. It was travelling slowly. There were two men in it. About forty or fifty yards from my garage, it pulled up, and both men got out. Something seemed to be wrong. One of the men came back along the road, to me. He was a smallish, spare man, fresh-complexioned; a gentleman by his speech. He wore a leather motoring-coat, but it was slightly open and I noticed his dark-grey tweed suit. He asked if I could sell him a spanner? I fetched a new one and asked if I could do anything to help. He said no, it was a mere nothing—something wanted tightening up; the spanner would do it. He paid for the spanner and went back, and within a few minutes they were off again. At the distance between them and me, I could not see the other man’s face, but he was a tallish, well-built man. The man in the leather coat who bought the spanner drove the car. I have seen a spanner shown to me by the police at Havering St. Michael and am confident that it is the one sold by me to the man I have just described.

“Um!” said Chaney when I had read this over to him. “Well, we always thought it would take

two to carry Skate’s body into that old pew. That’s outside help. But what about inside help, Camberwell? Was there any? And don’t forget that Canon Effingham is pestering us for news of Miss Bolton.”

That was true. Canon Effingham was ringing us up two or three times a day with inquiries on that point. For Miss Bolton had never been heard of since she walked out of the Rectory.

CHAPTER XIV

BRICK WALLS

Chaney left the job of searching for Canon Effingham's missing secretary to me; we had some other work in hand at the moment which was more in his line. I was not particularly pleased with my task. My opinion was that Miss Bolton had left Linwood Rectory in a fit of temper. I did not believe for one moment that Miss Bolton had anything whatever to do with the theft of the church treasures, and I was only going to look for her to please her late employer.

The difficult thing was where to look. Canon Effingham had given me these references; they were all of a business nature; that is to say, they were all from past employers. The first was from a lady who ran a typewriting and secretarial agency in the West End; I went to her first. She knew nothing about Miss Bolton's present doings; had never seen or heard of her since she left her employment two years previously. An excellent worker; unusually intelligent and very conscientious, Miss Bolton; that was all this lady had to say. The second was a publisher; Miss B., as he called her, had been his private secretary for some months, and he had much regretted that she didn't stay with him, for she was just what he wanted. But the hours and the work had been too much for her; she wanted lighter work. Did he know where she was, now? Not he!—knew nothing. Had he read the newspaper account of the inquest on Richard Skate, believed to have been murdered at Linwood? No—never read such things. Miss Bolton's name mentioned at that inquest? Good Lord!—he'd send out at once for back issues of the newspapers. Disappeared? Hm!—well, she'd no doubt good reason. Not the sort of young woman who would do anything without some reason. Level-headed! And, like the lady who ran the typewriting and secretarial bureau, he didn't know any private address of Miss Bolton, and never had known.

The third reference had originated with a lady who was famous as a novelist and who lived in a flat in Mayfair. Having sent up my professional card to her, she deigned to see me, there and then. Shown into her sanctum, I found her to be a biggish woman, middle-aged, who was chiefly noticeable for a mop of auburn hair, a florid complexion, light-blue eyes, scarlet lips, and a powdered nose. Dressed in what I took to be a kimono, she sat cross-legged on a sort of low divan, a jewelled cigarette-holder between her fingers, and the ugliest beast of a small dog I have ever seen, nuzzling at her side. There was a lot of manuscript on the floor at her feet, a writing-pad on her unoccupied flank, and a box of cigarettes within easy reach. She inspected me from top to toe when I walked in; evidently I found some favour in her eyes, for they softened, and she smiled as she waved the cigarette-holder at a seat immediately in front of her.

"Well, young man!" she said, in a not unfriendly voice. "What do you want? Some sort of a detective, aren't you? Are all your sort like you? Much too good-looking I think you are for that sort of thing! But what is it?"

"I am a private inquiry agent," I replied. "My partner and I specialize in criminology."

"Criminology, eh?" she said. "What's that? Murders and so on?"

"Anything relating to crime," I answered. "From murder to petty larceny. I don't think we should deal with petty larceny, however."

"Haven't the remotest notion of what you're talking about, my lad!" she said. "What is petty larceny? Never mind—what do you want? Did you come here to look at me? Because, if you did, here I am!"

"I came to ask for information, if you can give it," I said. "I want to know if you know and can tell me anything about a young lady who was at one time your secretary—Miss Bolton."

Her expression changed suddenly. Her face became watchful, suspicious. Just as suddenly she picked up my card which lay where she had thrown it on the divan.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "I only looked at the corner of your card—my maid merely

said there was a young and good-looking gentleman—Ah, I remember—yes, I've heard of you, through the newspapers, in connexion with the Linwood affair. Which are you? Chaney—or Camberwell?"

"Camberwell—at your service," I replied.

"I'll employ you, when I've a job for you," she answered, her eyes softening again. "Um—so you want to know about Miss Bolton? Why?"

"I'm inquiring on behalf of Canon Effingham," I said. "Miss Bolton left Linwood Rectory very suddenly, and he's anxious about her. Do you know anything?"

She extracted the end of her cigarette from the holder, fitted in another, and put a match to it. When the smoke had begun to curl about the auburn mop of hair, she spoke.

"Lots!" she said.

"Will you tell me—a bit?" I asked.

The auburn mop shook vigorously.

"Not the leastest bit!" she answered. "I'm not going to tell you anything. All the same, you needn't run away. Talk!"

"What about?"

"Anything! I'm studying you. I'm going to put you in my novel."

"Thank you," I said. "But my time is valuable. And if you won't tell me anything—"

"Well, be good, and I'll tell you just one thing. Leave Pamela Bolton alone! There!"

I stared at her, in silence, for a minute. She stared back until the corners of her lips began to curl into a smile.

"Is that all you're going to say?" I asked.

"About Pamela? All! Absolutely all!"

"Then I'm going," I said, picking up my hat. "Thank you—"

She pointed, imperiously, to the seat I'd vacated.

"I said—talk!" she exclaimed. "Sit down again! Talk!"

I looked at her, a bit wonderingly. Then I sat down again.

"What about?" I repeated.

"Anything! Murders. This murder. Wasn't it you who found the dead man in the queer old pew?"

"It was!"

"Lovely! Tell about it!"

I told.

"And you saw the—the man who said he was Dean of somewhere or other killed on the spot in the City?"

"I saw that!"

"Splendid! Tell about that!"

I told about that.

"Can you tell lots of things like that?" she demanded.

"Some!" I said. "A few."

"Come again and tell them. Go away now!—I want to write. Come some afternoon—ring me up first, though, and I'll be sure to be in. Will you?"

"No!" I said. "You won't tell me anything—"

"Oh, but I can't!" she answered reproachfully. "At present, anyway. And I have told you something!"

"Told me something?" I retorted. "What?"

"To leave Pamela Bolton alone. I say!—you're not dense, are you?"

"I hope not!" I said indignantly.

"Then go away and reflect on what I've told you," she answered. "I'll repeat it. Leave—

Pamela—Bolton—alone! Bye-bye—and do come again.”

I went away feeling certain that the auburn-haired lady knew something—something that Chaney and I would have given a good deal to know. But I felt still more certain that, whatever it was, she wouldn’t tell.

I tried the Glass Slipper next. It was a lady that I interviewed there. She was a pretty lady, and very charming, and very beautifully gowned, and after inspecting me closely she treated me as if I had been her dear boy-cousin, just emerged from his last term at school. But when it came to brass tacks, she asked me, plump, if I really expected her to remember all the people who came to dance and frivol at her night-club? Not . . . likely! She stuck in an adjective between the likely and the not.

So I drew that covert blank, too. But the Glass Slipper reminded me that the Superintendent at Havering St. Michael, in telling us that he had seen Miss Bolton there, had also said that she was in the company of a young gentleman whom he had recognized as an occasional guest of Sir Bartle Shardale’s, at Linwood Hall. Now, Sir Bartle Shardale, in addition to being Squire and Lord of the Manor of Linwood, was also a great financial magnate and had offices in the City. And with considerable trepidation I ventured to approach him. My heart was somewhere beneath the top of my socks when I was shown in to him, but within two minutes I had a stroke of good luck—Sir Bartle turned out to be an old friend of my own father.

“I saw your name in connexion with the Linwood affair, young fellow,” he said, genially. “But it didn’t strike me that you might be my old friend’s son. What made you go in for this?”

I told him how I had fallen into it by accident.

“Rather an interesting occupation, isn’t it?” he said. “And exciting, too. But you don’t want me for anything, do you?”

I told him what I did want, frankly. He nodded, comprehendingly.

“Ah, that’ll be a young kinsman of mine, Hugh Gibbs!” he said. “He’s in my office here. I do have him down at Linwood occasionally, and I dare say he’s met this girl there—I know we’ve had her up at the Hall now and then, playing lawn tennis and so on. Of course I know her!—know everybody at Linwood. Well, want to see Gibbs?”

This was making things easy and I blessed my luck and said I should be only too glad to have a word or two with Mr. Hugh Gibbs. Sir Bartle rang a bell. A clerk appeared.

“Take this gentleman to a private room and fetch Mr. Gibbs to him,” he commanded. “Well, good-bye, Camberwell, and good luck—work hard!”

I was shown into a waiting-room. Mr. Gibbs was brought to me. He was a typical young City man, reticent, cool in manner, sparing of speech; the sort of man who is going to hear all you have got to say without saying very much himself. I told him everything I knew, frankly, including the statement of the Superintendent about the night-club. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh, well, we only went there once!” he said. “Just a lark. Miss Bolton happened to be dining with me one evening when she was in town, and we were talking about night-clubs, and she said she’d never seen even the outside of one, so we went to the Glass Slipper. Rotten hole, after all—dull as ditch-water!”

“Do you know where Miss Bolton is?” I asked, coming to the point. “Canon Effingham is very anxious to know her whereabouts.”

But he shook his head.

“Can’t say,” he answered. “Sort of idea she was going to stay with friends.”

“You’ve seen her, of course, since she left Linwood?”

He appeared to consider a possible reply to that.

“Just for a minute or two, one day,” he said: “She was going to write. I—if I were you, I should just tell Canon Effingham to—well, not to bother himself. Miss Bolton is—” he hesitated

at that, boggling at the next word.

“Quite capable of minding her own business, eh?” I suggested.

“Just about that,” he said, smiling. “He—no need to be alarmed about her, you know. All right!”

I saw he would say no more, and I thanked him and went away. But I felt absolutely sure of two things. The lady of the auburn hair and jewelled cigarette-holder knew where Miss Bolton was. And Mr. Hugh Gibbs knew where Miss Bolton was. And both of them knew why she was where she was. And I was equally certain of something else. Neither of these two were going to tell anything.

CHAPTER XV

FACTS AND GOSSIP

We were now at something of a dead-lock. Nobody itching for the feel of Mr. Atherton's good money had come forward so far, though I had no doubt that somewhere or other there were people who were cudgelling their brains as to how they could get hold of it. Seward was dead and buried; there was nothing to be got out of him. If he was the man who had bought the spanner at the roadside garage on the night of the robbery—and there seemed to be no doubt that he was—and the man with him was subsequently his accomplice, we knew nothing as to where they met, how they made their plans, effected the theft of the church treasures, and got away after killing Skate and depositing his body in the Squire's pew. We hadn't the ghost of an idea as to who the accomplice was. Nor was any information forthcoming as to where Seward procured the dean's costume. And as Chaney remarked more than once, it was of no use to theorize; what we wanted was some hard and fast knowledge. Still, theories were in the air, and we could not forget what Jalvane had told us about Miss Bolton's father in the study at Linwood Rectory. And so I pointed out to my partner.

"Well, well, and that comes to this," replied Chaney, "and it's all theory. Theory according to Jalvane. Miss Bolton's father is an ex-convict—that is, if he's out, as Jalvane thinks he is, by now. Perhaps Seward was an ex-convict, too—there's a lot of perhapsing about it! Perhaps Miss Bolton's father—real name Bascombe—was at the same retreat as Seward. That's nearly half a dozen perhapses. Then comes another. Perhaps Miss Bolton told her father of the wondrous treasures of Linwood Church, and how much Canon Effingham said they were worth. Perhaps Seward heard, too, from Bascombe. Perhaps he and Bascombe put their heads together as to how they could lay hands on the treasures. And then comes a perhaps which I don't believe in at all and knocks the bottom clean out of the structure!"

"And what's that, Chaney?" I inquired.

"Perhaps Miss Bolton handed 'em out the keys from her bedroom window," said Chaney. "No, no—don't believe it at all! I don't believe Miss Bolton had anything whatever to do with it! Wrong tack, my lad!"

"What's Miss Bolton made herself scarce for?" I asked.

"Her business—not mine, Camberwell," he said.

"It's our business to find her—we're commissioned to do so." I reminded him. "Canon Effingham's phoned twice this morning to ask if we've any news of her."

"Umph!" grunted Chaney. "Well, we haven't. And I don't expect any until—"

"Until—when?" I asked as he paused.

"Until it suits her to give us some," he said. "I think that girl's up to something."

"How do you mean?" I demanded. "What's the use of being cryptic?"

"Don't know that word, Camberwell! Cryptic—what's it signify?"

"Oh, secret—just that."

"No secret! What I say—up to something. Run away to get married, maybe."

"Oh, rot, Chaney!" I exclaimed. "Her disappearance has something to do with this affair! Of course it has! Good Lord!—how can anybody think otherwise? She walks out of that inquest—"

"Hoity-toity, nose in the air, highly indignant! Well?"

"—goes straight to the Rectory, goes straight from there to the station, and catches the next train to town! Why? Come, now!"

Chaney twiddled his thumbs over his ample waistcoat.

"Ah!" he said. "When you've reached my age, Camberwell, you'll never waste one minute in speculating on a woman's reasons for doing anything. You'll just accept whatever she does. I'm

not going to puzzle my poor brain over Miss Bolton's disappearance. What I say is—wait! Miss B. will turn up. Probably when least expected, and with some news!"

"News?" I said. "What the devil do you mean?"

Chaney closed one eye and looked at me out of the other.

"What impression did you gain from your interview with the novel-writing lady, Camberwell?" he asked.

"I told you! That she knew quite well where Miss Bolton is."

"And from the young gentleman in the City?"

"I told you that as well. That he knows where she is, too."

"Very well! Then what more do you want? All that goes to substantiate what I say—that she'll turn up, some day, with—news!"

"Hanged if I know what you mean, Chaney!" I said. "We want what you call news before that!"

"Before what?" he asked, mischievously.

"Before she turns up!" I retorted.

"She might turn up tomorrow," he said. "Or today."

Then he laughed and went off, to give Chippendale some instructions. But I had to fetch him back in a few minutes, for Jalvane came in and wanted to see the two of us together.

Jalvane, in spite of his grim looks, was a good-natured fellow; up to then he had shared with us whatever information he had acquired. And now, he said, he had got more.

"About Seward, or Sewell," he proceeded when Chaney had come in and we were all there in conclave. "I've traced him—a bit, anyhow. He was convicted, under the name of Shepherd, at Guilford Assizes, six years ago, and got five years' penal servitude."

"For what?" asked Chaney.

"Burglary—at a country-house, in Surrey. He was caught in getting away—fell from a window. There were some rather odd features in the case. He gave his name as John Shepherd —"

"Thinking of Jack Shepherd, of course!" I remarked.

"No doubt—bit of fun on his part," assented Jalvane. "But he refused to give any address or any particulars about himself, and from the time of his arrest—with, of course, the stolen stuff, jewellery, on him—he preserved a stolid, and, to the police, very annoying and baffling silence. They couldn't, or didn't, succeed in finding out a single thing about him—his past, I mean. It was very evident—I'm quoting from information supplied to me—that he was an educated man, and probably of superior position, but he kept his mouth shut as much as possible. And of course after he'd been found guilty, the police had no record of his past to bring forward before sentence, for they couldn't trace him in any way, and he himself refused to say a word. He evidently proved a model prisoner and got his full marks and, after his release, completely disappeared again—until this affair."

"Sure it's the same man?" asked Chaney.

"Oh, dead certain! I've worked it all out—you can have all the details whenever you like. But to stick to the general line—you remember what I told you about the girl's, Miss Bolton's, father? Well, as far as I can ascertain, there's never been, and never could have been, any connexion between him and Seward. You know, I suggested that perhaps she'd told her father about the church treasures, and he'd told Seward, and—"

"I know!" said Chaney. "Your—possible—theory. Well?"

"It's knocked clean out. To begin with, Shepherd, or Seward, was not at the same convict prison with Bascombe, which, you'll remember, is Miss Bolton's father's name—and, of course, hers. To end with, I've found out that immediately on his release Bascombe and his wife, by the help and kindness of some old City friends, were sent out of this country. He's been living in

New Zealand ever since."

"Oh!" said Chaney. "Then that's—exploded?"

"Clean!" assented Jalvane. He replaced some papers which he had taken from his pocket and turned to me. "Miss Bolton?" he asked. "Found her?"

"No!" I answered.

"No news of her? None at all?"

"Not a scrap!"

"Bit queer!" he said. "What's her game, now? Got some game of course."

"That's what Chaney says," I remarked. "I don't know what you mean—or what he means! What d'you mean by a game?"

Jalvane looked at Chaney; Chaney looked at Jalvane. No doubt they understood each other, but neither replied to my question. Jalvane turned to me.

"Have you cultivated Linwood?" he asked.

"And again I don't know what you mean!" I answered.

"Try to make it clear then," he said good-humouredly. "Linwood is a village, and a small one. In small villages the people talk about small things. Lambs with two heads; gooseberries as big as peaches; hailstones the size of walnuts. In other words—local gossip."

"Well?" I said. "What then?"

He rubbed his queerly shaped jaw and smiled at Chaney.

"If I know anything about village life," he continued, "and I ought to, for I was born and bred in a village, there'll be a great deal of talk going on at Linwood just now. Nine days' wonder business, you know. Theft of the church treasures. Murder of Skate, the poacher. Disappearance of the pretty secretary. And—so on."

"Well?" I repeated. "And—"

"And I think—if I were you—I should acquaint myself, as far as possible with the details of that gossip," he answered. "Good tip! Picked up no end of valuable information myself, one time or another, while I was having a pint of ale and a crust of bread and a bit of cheese in a country inn. A stray word—a chance hint—eh, Chaney?"

"Good business!" agreed Chaney. "Oh, yes—I reckon they're wagging their chins down there at Linwood."

"Sure!—as your American gentleman would say," said Jalvane. "And speaking of him, is it known down there that Mr. Atherton's offered five thousand pounds reward?"

"I should say," replied Chaney, "that there isn't anywhere in this country where it isn't known. We've taken good care to make it known. Papers, posters, handbills—oh, yes, it's known, right enough."

"Well, there'll be somebody down at Linwood whose palms are itching to handle it," remarked Jalvane, "Take my tip and do something to find out what's been said—and thought, too—in the neighbourhood. You never know what valuable information you mayn't get from country-folk—they're very shrewd, and they've an uncanny way of seeing through things. Try it! My job's elsewhere."

When Jalvane had left us, Chaney and I talked over his suggestion. I am afraid I was still too much of a neophyte at my job to see the advantages of the course which Jalvane recommended; I, too, knew something of village life, and I knew that the gossip of rustic firesides and country inns is mostly of a non-dependable nature. Still, we did not want to neglect any opportunity, and after discussing matters we decided to send Chippendale down to Linwood for a few days to see what he could do. He had never been there and so was not at all known, and if there was anything to be learnt, he was the one to learn it.

I had noticed, in the course of our own visits to Linwood, that there was quite a decent inn at the centre of the village, the Linwood Arms, overlooking the Green. We decided that

Chippendale should go there, in the character of a young gentleman just recovering from an illness and desirous of enjoying the benefits of country air for a week or two. Thither Chippendale duly repaired, properly fitted out for the character he was to assume and provided with the necessary funds and an admonition from Chaney to be hospitable to any Gileses and Timothys who were inclined to talk. And for ten days we neither saw nor heard of Chippendale, but on the eleventh he turned up with the observation that he thought he'd about worked that bit out and saw no use in staying there longer. Then he proceeded to give us a succinct account of his mission.

Chippendale's report, summarized, came to this:

> 1. The general opinion in Linwood was that there was a great deal more in the case than anybody had realized so far.
> 2. That there was a lot in it that didn't meet the eye.
> 3. That the theft of the church treasures was a put-up job.
> 4. That there were those who could tell a lot if they would.
> 5. That it was a main queer thing that the Rector's secretary should cut and run as she did.
> 6. That she knew something.
> 7. That the mystery about the parson's keys wasn't, perhaps, such a mystery as had been made out.
> 8. That Weasel Dick knew who it was that he found in the church and that if he hadn't known, he'd never have been killed.

The last suggestion seemed to me the most valuable of the lot. It impressed Chaney, too. Skate *knew* the thief, or thieves! Therefore—

"We never thought of that, Camberwell," said Chaney. "Good idea! Skate had to be quieted because of his knowledge. If the thieves had been utter strangers to him—see? But he knew 'em! Or one of 'em! That's a valuable idea. Well, what next? But I expect something will turn up."

Something did turn up. It turned up in the shape of a letter, marked "Private and Important," bearing the Linwood postmark, and addressed to Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell in the most eccentric handwriting I have ever beheld.

CHAPTER XVI

ENTER MISS BLEACHER

The letter—written on a sheet of the Linwood Rectory private note-paper—turned out, when carefully deciphered, to run as follows:

> Miss Bleacher presents compliments to Mr. Camberwell and Mr. Chaney and would be obliged by interview of private and confidential nature on Wednesday afternoon next when she will be in town. R. S. V. P., to Miss Anne Bleacher, Linwood Rectory, Havering St. Michael, Surrey.
>
> P.S. Miss B. feeling it high time she should make a certain communication.

I handed this remarkable epistle over to Chaney. It appeared to awaken great interest in him.

“Ho-ho!” he exclaimed. “Anne Bleacher, eh? That’s the grenadier woman, isn’t it?—party about seven foot high?”

“Say six and a bit,” I replied. “The parlour-maid, anyway.”

“Tell her to come,” he said. “Any time she likes, Wednesday. We’ll be in for her—and I dare say we shall learn something. She’s on the spot, anyhow.”

I sent a courteous reply to Miss Bleacher, assuring her that anything she might have to say would be received in the strictest confidence, and in due course she turned up at our office. As I have mentioned previously, she was a very tall, gaunt woman, something past middle age, a bit of a character, and inclined, I fancy, to cherish a very good opinion of herself. We had only seen her in her parlour-maid’s rig-out up to then; now she presented herself very well and smartly dressed; she might indeed, as Chaney afterwards remarked, have been an elderly duchess rather than a domestic servant. But—as she let us know in the course of our conversation—she had at one time or another served in noble families and in the establishments of the higher clergy, such as deans and bishops, and there was much grandeur circling about her personality. The black, silver-mounted stick which she carried had been, we learnt, the gift of a dowager countess, and while it was there, it lent distinction to our office.

Bleacher began by drawing off her gloves, into which she blew before depositing them on the edge of my desk.

“There’s a great deal to be said, gentlemen,” she remarked, surveying us severally and conjointly, “and it’s difficult to decide on where to begin saying it. But this I will say and without fear of contradiction: Linwood Rectory is full of mystery! M-y-s-t-e-r-y! Which, I believe, is the one and only word to use under these circumstances.”

I glanced at my partner. Chaney, I felt, was the man to undertake the examination of Miss Bleacher. And Chaney sailed in, willingly.

“I can see you’re a very observant person, ma’am,” he remarked. “You possess great powers that way.”

Bleacher made a gracious acceptance of this little tribute.

“I have eyes in my head, and I have ears,” she answered. “And I have a tongue in my mouth and can keep it as quiet as the grave if I so choose and circumstances require. But circumstances alter cases, and the time comes when silence should no longer be kept. Such is my opinion!”

“And in your case the time’s come, eh, ma’am?” suggested Chaney. “You feel you ought to speak?”

“I feel that there are things that have got to be said,” replied Bleacher. “And I am the person to say them—private and confidential, of course.”

“Oh, of course!” assented Chaney. “Anything said to me and to my partner, ma’am, is of an

absolutely confidential character—I mean, is regarded as such. Now about this mystery, ma'am? You refer to what has recently happened—the theft of the church treasures, the murder of the man Skate, and—"

Bleacher waved her black stick.

"Those affairs," she said, "are what you may term incidentals. They come in, of course. But I refer to what went before them, and what has come after them. And, of course—to use words over again which cannot be avoided—the Canon, he knows nothing at all. Nothing! Being as innocent as—as a lamb!"

"Knows nothing at all about—what, ma'am?" asked Chaney.

Bleacher planted both hands on top of her stick and stared from above them at both of us, steadily, for a half minute of silence.

"His wife!" she said in a deep, sepulchral voice. "Mrs. E."

"Oh!" remarked Chaney. "Ah! Knows nothing about his wife, eh? Rather serious, that, isn't it, ma'am? You mean—"

But Bleacher had her own way of telling a story, and she was not to be put off her line and methods.

"The Canon," she said, "is what I call a lit'ry man. Books—papers—suchlike, which is all very well for playthings, but no good when it comes to practical purposes. And, of course, he was no doubt taken in about his marriage. You see, he was all by himself. If I'd been there, I should have made so bold as to tell him to count twenty. But this woman—I refer to Mrs. E.—she nursed him when he was away ill, and lo and behold! when he comes back, she comes, too, elevated to her present position. Which the Canon, he is a gentleman, if ever there was one, but she—well, I know a lady when I see one, having served many ladies of title. I wouldn't abide in that house, gentlemen," continued Bleacher, becoming assertive, "not for a pension, if it weren't for the Canon! I put up with her for his sake. But the time has come when one must speak. And what I have to say is this—Something there is, of what nature I know not, neither imply, between Mrs. E. and Mr. Stecke!"

"Oh?" said Chaney, affecting great surprise. "What, Mr. Stecke, the clergyman? Dear, dear!"

"Which, of whatever nature, would not surprise me, gentlemen," replied Bleacher. "Me, in my time, having seen much of the clergy, from bishops to curates, and knowing that the human heart beats similar in all men, though some goes in black coats and some in coloured. But I make no remarks as to the precise nature of whatever there may be between Mrs. E. and Mr. S."

"Still—you think it's there?" said Chaney.

"There it is!" repeated Bleacher, with emphasis. "As I well know and am in a position to affirm. During the Canon's illness, when Mr. S. came to officiate for him, Mrs. E. and Mr. S. became very thick, and were always together—"

"We got the impression that Mr. Stecke made up to Miss Bolton at that time," interrupted Chaney. "Miss Bolton suggested that at the inquest."

"Mr. S.," said Bleacher, "did no doubt cast his eye over Miss B. when he first came to the Rectory, and tried to make up to her, but my impression is that she gave him one for himself very quickly, not being able to abide the looks of him. And however that may be what I do know is that he spent all his spare time with Mrs. E. and was for ever going out motoring with her and sitting with her of an evening and suchlike and now and then accompanying her to town. And upon that there last point I also wish to speak, for, in my opinion, Mrs. E. visits town—which, of course, is another name for London—far too often. A clergyman's lady should be in her husband's parish instead of trapesing up here at every opportunity."

"Oh, Mrs. E. comes up a good deal, does she?" inquired Chaney.

"Never been a week passed since I've known her that she doesn't come up here," replied Bleacher. "It's a regular practice of hers to come up for one night a week—"

“A night?” exclaimed Chaney. “Not for the day—shopping and so on?”

“Shopping,” said Bleacher, solemnly, “has nothing to do with it. Mrs. E.’s custom is to come up by a late afternoon train and to return next morning. She’ll arrive here after the shops close, and leave next day before they open.”

“Theatres?” suggested Chaney.

“I know no more than the man in the moon whether it’s theatres or mothers’ meetings,” replied Bleacher, “though highly improbable that it’s the latter, Mrs. E. not being given to piety and suchlike. But this I do know: whatever it may be that she comes for, it has a queer effect on her temper, her coming back sometimes in good spirits and sometimes as if she’d a black dog on her back, as those of us in service there is well aware.”

Chaney began to rub his chin.

“Ah!” he said, ruminatively. “Oh? Hm! Sometimes up and sometimes down, eh? Well, well! And—did Mr. Stecke ever accompany her on these visits, at the time he was at Linwood Rectory, ma’am?”

“He did once,” replied Bleacher. “Leastways, he once went up to town when she did, and he didn’t return until next day. And once or twice besides that, as I said before, he accompanied her to town, but in those cases it was just a run up in the car and back again, all in the day. Of course Mr. S. hadn’t much to do.”

Chaney remained silent for a minute or two. Then he suddenly faced Bleacher with a sharp question.

“Do you think that Mrs. Effingham knows anything about the theft of the church treasures?” he asked. “Is that what you’re suggesting?”

Bleacher hesitated. It was the first time in our conversation that she had shown any signs of hesitancy, and several minutes elapsed before she answered Chaney’s question.

“I couldn’t say as to that,” she replied at last. “What I say is that she’s mixed up in some way with Mr. S. And, in my opinion, Mr. S. is a crawling serpent!”

“You don’t like him, eh?”

“And never did from the moment he set foot in that house,” asserted Bleacher. “He was the sort that’s always looking out of his eye-corners! A sneak—that’s what he was.”

“You don’t know anything that would connect either him or Mrs. Effingham with the affair of the treasures and the murder?”

“I don’t!” said Bleacher. Then, as if by a flash of inspiration, she exclaimed: “But I know that she and him call each other by their Christian names—which isn’t proper in a married woman and a young man!”

“Sounds pretty familiar, doesn’t it?” agreed Chaney. “Um! Well, now, will you just let your mind go back to the night on which the treasures were stolen?”

“I remember it!” said Bleacher.

“I’m sure you do,” continued Chaney, “and I’m sure nobody can tell more about it—as regards what I’d like to ask you—than you can, ma’am, and I’ve regretted, more than once, that I’ve never had the opportunity of having a little chat with you on the subject.”

“Well, you’ve got it now!” remarked Bleacher. “Of course, I could say a good deal, but I’ve never been asked.”

“Well, now, about those keys of your master’s,” said Chaney. “His private keys. Do you know where he put them at night?”

“Course I do!” exclaimed Bleacher. “Do you think I have been parlour-maid and confidential servant to the Canon all these years without knowing all his little ways? He puts them on a small tray on the dressing-table in his room.”

“Bedroom?”

“No, dressing-room. Keys—watch—purse; all on that tray. Same place every night. The

Canon," said Bleacher, "is a gentleman of fixed habits."

"Where is that dressing-room?" asked Chaney. "Where, I mean, in relation to his bedroom?"

"Next door. It's a small room between his bedroom and Mrs. E.'s."

"Is there a communicating door between his bedroom and his dressing-room? Do they open one into the other?"

"Yes. And there's a door between her room and his dressing-room. It's what you might call a suite of three rooms, overlooking the garden."

"Then she could enter his dressing-room?"

"Nothing to stop her if she wanted," asserted Bleacher.

"Well, another question: is there any way of getting into that dressing-room except from the two bedrooms?"

"Oh, yes; you can get in from the passage at the back."

"Then there are three doors to that dressing-room? One from his bedroom; one from Mrs. Effingham's bedroom; one from the passage?"

"That's right."

"The passage, I suppose, runs along the whole of the floor, communicating with the various rooms?"

"In that part of the house, yes. There's three wings. Our quarters, the servants', is in another part."

"You never heard anything that night?"

"Me? No!"

"Where was Miss Bolton's room?"

"At the far end of the passage, overlooking the churchyard."

"And where was Mr. Stecke's when he stayed there?"

"Next door to the Canon's—in what we call the Blue Room."

"Well, there's still a bit more information you can give us, ma'am," continued Chaney, after a pause. "I've heard that you always locked up the house at night?"

"I did—always."

"Just tell us how. Did you merely turn the keys and push the bolts in or—what?"

"No! None of the keys were left in the locks. I'd a big bunch of keys on a heavy ring. I went round at ten o'clock, locked the doors, bolted them where there were bolts, and took the bunch of keys up to Mrs. E.'s bedroom."

"What about that door that Canon Effingham said he found open the morning after the things had been stolen from the church—the side-door?"

"Well, the Canon said he found it open when he came back from the church—he went out to the church by his study window, as he generally did! it's a French window, opening to the ground—but all I know is that I locked it the night before. It's a door that has no bolts—nothing but just a big, old-fashioned lock. Oh, yes, I locked it all right the night before. Yet, when I came down with the keys next morning, the Canon said he'd found it open."

"Very odd, very queer!" said Chaney. "Well, we're very much obliged to you—is it Mrs. or Miss—"

"Miss—Miss!" I hastened to say. "Miss Anne Bleacher!"

"Beg pardon—my fault, of course," continued Chaney. "Miss Bleacher—very much obliged to you indeed. But—er—I scarcely gather what you want us to do."

Miss Bleacher played with the silver-mounted ebony stick.

"Well," she said at last, "I wondered if the Canon oughtn't to be told—"

"Ah, I think not, I think not, at present, Miss Bleacher!" interrupted Chaney, hastily. "Just wait awhile, keep your eyes and ears open, and continue to confide in Mr. Camberwell and me. Now there's just a little thing you might tell us. Is there some particular day in the week on

which Mrs. E. comes to town, or—”

“Always comes the same day, regular,” said Bleacher. “Fridays—by the 4:17 from Havering to Waterloo. Regular as clock-work!”

Presently Bleacher went away, and Chaney turned to me and clapped my shoulder.

“Camberwell,” he said, “that’s the best stroke of luck we’ve had in this case! I’ve got a notion!—and I’m not going to tell you what it is, my lad. Anyway, not today!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE CLUB IN COMMA STREET

I knew Chaney well enough by that time, his reticence meant that he wanted to think things over before he spoke about them; I knew, too, that he would speak about them when his mind was made up. And next morning he spoke.

"Camberwell!" he said when we were alone after dismissing Chippendale with a handful of letters to answer. "Do you remember any particular thing that our queer visitor told us yesterday?"

"I remember all she told us," I replied.

"Ay, but did anything strike you particularly?" he asked. "Think!"

"No!" I said, after reflection. "Can't say that anything did. I was struck by the general trend of it, though. But you refer to some particular thing, eh?"

"I do!" he replied confidently. "Do you remember that she told us that Mrs. Effingham on her return home after these visits to London was sometimes in very good spirits and sometimes in a bad temper?"

"I do," I answered.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

But I shook my head. "Do you make anything of it?" I inquired.

"Yes!" he said. "I make this of it. She's been gambling!"

This was a bit beyond me, and I looked my surprise. He laughed.

"In our trade—or profession, if you like to give it a high-sounding name," he continued, "it's a very useful thing to be able to put two and two together in the firm belief that they'll make four. Let's put two and two together in this case. Once a week Mrs. Effingham comes to town. Nothing in that, you know—lots of ladies living within a thirty-mile radius of London pay a weekly visit to town. Shopping. Visits to friends. Sightseeing. All that sort of thing. But—it's usually in the day-time. When it isn't in the day-time, it's an evening visit to the theatre or to a concert. But theatre-going and concert attendance on the part of these suburban folk doesn't usually imply staying the night in town. There's a splendid series of late trains, run for the special benefit of theatre-goers. But—Mrs. Effingham always stayed in town, returning home early next morning. Now, as, according to Bleacher, she didn't arrive in town until late in the afternoon and left again early next day, it's plain that she didn't come up to shop. What did she come for? And why was she sometimes bad-tempered and sometimes—t'other thing? Plain to see, that!—in my opinion. She was good-tempered when she'd had a good night; bad-tempered when she'd had a bad one. In a word—Mrs. E.'s a gambler!"

"And you think her sole purpose in making these weekly visits is to gamble?" I said.

"Just that!" he replied, confidently. "What her particular form of excitement is we don't know—but I mean to find out. It may be bridge—in my time I've known dozens of women who've been ruined, body and soul, especially soul, by bridge. It may be chemin-de-fer—plenty of places where you can indulge yourself in that, and in roulette, and in baccarat—or, yes! Opportunities in this little place for doing any mortal thing you like, Camberwell—as long as you've the wherewithal in your pocket."

"You mean to find out—what?" I asked.

"Where she goes, what she does," he answered. "We'll get on with that at once. We don't know what mayn't come of it."

"Mrs. Effingham is very well acquainted with both of us," I remarked. "Outward appearance, anyway."

"No doubt—but she isn't acquainted with our little friend in the next room!" he replied.

“We’ll set Chip on to her. He’ll follow her wherever she goes—night or day. All we have to do is to give him his instructions, point the lady out to him, and leave the rest to his own judgment.”

“How can we point her out without attracting her attention?” I asked. “I should say she’s a suspicious woman.”

“Easy!” he answered. “You go down to Waterloo with Chippendale. You point her out, taking care to keep out of her way. Once you’ve shown her to Chip, you can put your hands in your pockets and go home—he’ll track her!”

The next day was Friday, on which day, according to the interesting Miss Anne Bleacher, Mrs. Effingham always came to town by the 4.17 from Havering St. Michael. I gave Chippendale full instructions in the morning, and in the afternoon, after he had been home and attired himself for the part he was to play—which, in his opinion, must be that of a young gentleman just let loose on the town—I accompanied him to Waterloo, where we posted ourselves in a position from whence we could see the passengers of the 4.17 on their leaving it at five o’clock. There was very little danger of Mrs. Effingham’s seeing me; those suburban trains were always full by the time they reached London. The difficulty was to spot her; but spot her I did, though she was attired in much more fashionable style than when I had seen her at Linwood; and when I had made sure that Chippendale had taken her all in and was fairly on the scent, I did precisely what Chaney had said I might do—put my hands in my pockets and went, not home, but into the refreshment room, for a cup of tea. Chippendale, I knew, once on the trail, would keep his nose to the ground till he ran his quarry to earth.

What adventures befell Chippendale we, of course, heard from his own lips next morning. They were not so much exciting as notable, in that they afforded us new ground for suspicion and speculation; indeed, when we had heard all that he had to tell, Chaney and I began to consider the advisability of starting out all over again. It was just one more example of the fact, said Chaney, that in these cases you set off on what appears to be the straight road and get a long, long way upon it only to discover that what you really wanted was some obscure by-path on right or left.

Chippendale followed Mrs. Effingham out of Waterloo. Mrs. Effingham walked down the inclined way into York Road; Chippendale sauntered behind. Mrs. Effingham hailed and boarded a bus; she went inside; Chippendale mounted the same bus and rode outside. The bus in due course reached Piccadilly Circus; Mrs. Effingham left it, and so did Chippendale, taking care that she didn’t notice him. Mrs. Effingham went along Piccadilly and turned into a noted tea-shop; Chippendale thanked his stars that it was of such dimensions that he could follow her and watch her without being seen himself. At a respectful distance he watched her while she ate cakes and sipped tea; he himself being, as he put it, partial to such things, consumed muffins and coffee. Up to that time Mrs. Effingham had been alone, but before she had come to her second cup, she was joined by another lady; Chippendale’s belief was that there had been an appointment between them. He watched the two ladies chat until an hour had gone by; when they rose and departed, he departed too and followed them.

Mrs. Effingham and her companion went out into Piccadilly and hailed a taxi-cab from the nearest rank. Chippendale hailed another and said a word in season to its driver, who was sharp-witted enough to comprehend what his fare was after and played his part like a man and a brother—so Chippendale said, describing his adventures. He followed the first taxi to the respectable quarters of Bayswater and into a quiet street sacred to private residential hotels and first-class boarding-houses. At the door of one of these the first taxi drew up; the ladies dismounted and entered the hotel. But their taxi did not go away; it remained there; obviously its driver had received orders to wait. So Chippendale’s driver went slowly by and halted a little further along the street, and from its back window Chippendale watched—until Mrs. Effingham and her lady friend, some twenty minutes later, came out again.

“And who d’ye think they had with ’em?” said Chippendale at this point of his story. “That

chap that came here—the parson! Stecke!”

“Stecke!” I exclaimed.

“Stecke! Reverend Mr. Herbert Stecke, Mr. Camberwell,” replied Chippendale. “Oh, I knew him, at once! But this time—last night, I mean—he wasn’t in his professional toggery. Not he! He was in mufti. Grey suit—soft grey hat, black band—smart enough he was.”

“You’ve no doubt about it, Chippendale?” I said.

“No more than that I see you, sir,” he answered. “It was Stecke, dead certain. I never forget faces, Mr. Camberwell.”

“Well, he came out, you say, with Mrs. Effingham and the other lady. What then? Got into the waiting cab, I suppose?”

“Just so, sir. And off it went, and we after it. Down into the Bayswater Road it went, and back to Oxford Street, and then to Regent Street—do you know a little side-street there, Mr. Camberwell, called Comma Street? Well, I do, if you don’t—anyhow, the taxi turned in there. We slipped past as it pulled up, and I did a bit more squinting through our back window. I saw all three, Stecke and the two ladies, get out and go into a house there. So I paid off my driver then and took a quiet look at the outside of the place they’d entered.”

“Well?” I said, as he paused.

“Name plate on side of door,” continued Chippendale. “Brass plate; well polished; quite smart. *Bessington Club.* Just that!”

“Never heard of it,” remarked Chaney. “Wasn’t there in my time. I know Comma Street.”

“Well, it’s there now, anyhow, Mr. Chaney,” said Chippendale. “One entrance in Comma Street, and another in Point Street, round the corner. And that’s where they went in. Let ’emselves in, I fancy—I thought I saw Stecke at the latch. Anyhow, the door was tight shut, and so was the other door in Point Street. I hung about a bit, but I didn’t see any other people enter. Then a policeman came along, and I got talking to him—told him just enough of what I was after. ‘What sort of club is this?’ says I. ‘Said to be a bridge club,’ says he. ‘Gambling-hole, I expect.’ ‘Any complaints about it?’ I asked him. ‘Not up to now,’ he says, ‘but it’s only been on tap a few weeks. Used to be called the Arabian Nights Club.’ ”

“Oh, that’s where it is, is it?” remarked Chaney. “Ah, I knew the Arabian Nights. And a nice spot it was, and came to a very pretty end.”

“Well, what else?” I asked, turning to Chippendale.

“That’s all, so far, Mr. Camberwell,” he replied. “I saw no use in hanging about there until the small hours of the morning, as I probably should have had to, and I’d found out where the lady betook herself. However, I know a chap who’s pretty well up in these shady West End places, so this morning, before coming to the office, I just looked him up. He says the Bessington is supposed to be a club for bridge, anchor bridge, and poker, but that it’s pretty well known in his circles that you can get other games there and have a nice flutter—in short, it’s what the policeman suggested, a gambling-resort. Queer spot for a respectable clergyman’s wife, isn’t it, Mr. Camberwell?”

“Keep that moral reflection to yourself, my lad!” said Chaney. “We aren’t inquiring into Mrs. Effingham’s private affairs—in that direction at any rate,” he added. “We just want to know where she goes when she comes up to town. Well, we know where she went last night—to the Bessington Club. Perhaps she’ll go to a May meeting—missionary endeavour or Hottentots Improvement Movement—next time. But now just think again, my lad, on one very important point. Are you dead certain that the man you saw with Mrs. Effingham and her lady friend was the Reverend Mr. Stecke?”

“Dead certain, Mr. Chaney!” asserted Chippendale. “Shouldn’t say so if I weren’t.”

We both felt certain of that, for Chippendale was a model of sureness and of caution, and when he had left us, we began to debate the meaning of this discovery.

“I don’t make much of the fact that Chip saw Stecke in mufti,” said Chaney. “That’s nothing—if, or, rather, as he was going to this club, he’d be sure to be going in a layman’s clothes. And I don’t attach much importance to the other fact that he was going to and did go to the club—he may be a confirmed bridge-player, and even parsons must have some amusement. What I do attach significance to is the fact that he went with Mrs. Effingham, and what I should like to know is: how long has that been going on?”

“There’s a thing that struck me while Chippendale was talking,” I remarked. “Did Stecke know Mrs. Effingham before he went to Linwood to take the duty during Canon Effingham’s illness? Had he met her at the Bessington Club?”

“Good idea!” said Chaney, quick to see the point. “Wish we could find that out! And there’s another thing—who is Stecke? Parson, yes; we know that much. But who is he? What’s his origin? What’s his past? What have you got down about him?”

He was referring to my habit of keeping a sort of register of all the people with whom we did business or came in contact: I considered the keeping of it a highly useful thing.

“Not much,” I answered, getting out my book. “Very little, indeed. Here we are—‘Reverend Herbert Stecke. Clergyman of the Established Church. Took duty for Canon Effingham at Linwood for three Sundays in December last. Recommended to Canon E. by Canon Telson, of Southwark. At present without benefice or employment as curate. Address 247 Laburnam Villas, Newington.’ That’s all.”

“Not enough,” said Chaney, “but as he’s a C. of E. man, there’ll be something in the official books about him. Where’s your library—I mean, haven’t we got anything?”

One of my first cares when we started our business had been to form a small library of highly necessary reference books—I went to it now and took down the current Crockford.

“What is he?” continued Chaney, seeing what I had got. “Oxford? Cambridge?”

“He’s neither,” I replied, presently arriving at what I sought. “He’s no degree from either, anyway, nor from Durham, nor from anywhere—he’s not even an A. K. C. Nor was he educated at any well-known school; at any rate, there’s no mention of it here. He must have been ordained as a literate. Anyhow, he was ordained four years ago, but he only seems to have held one curacy since—at St. Modwen’s, Esterham, two years since. We might enquire there about him.”

“If he’s only had one curacy since he went into the Church, what’s he live on?” asked Chaney. “Earns a bit by doing odd jobs, I suppose, like that he did at Linwood. Well, but you’ve got him down as living at—where?”

“Newington. 247 Laburnam Villas,” I replied.

“But now—at least last night—he was at some address in Bayswater. We must get to know more about that, Camberwell. Let’s have Chip back.”

I rang my bell; Chippendale poked his nose in at the door.

“Chippendale,” said Chaney, “you said that it was a private residential hotel that Stecke and the two ladies came out of. Any name—or merely a number?”

“Artemis Hotel, Ulster Gardens,” replied Chippendale promptly. “Smart place—exterior, anyhow.”

“Big?” asked Chaney.

“Sort of spot where they have accommodation for fifty or sixty guests,” said Chippendale. “You know the type—five or six guineas a week, all in.”

“Well, you listen,” continued Chaney. “We want to know next if this Reverend Mr. Stecke lives there now, and what he’s doing. You’re not to do that job yourself—you can put one of the staff on to it. Post him up—and see he does it thoroughly.”

We got Chippendale’s report on this within the next two or three days. Obviously, the Reverend Herbert Stecke now resided at the Artemis Hotel. Obviously, too, he had completely given up the wearing of clerical costume.

While we were wondering why he had, more light was thrown on this gentleman.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LITTLE JEW TAILOR

Chippendale’s face, thrust suddenly into my room one morning, gave notice of something important if not unusual.

“There’s a chap outside who wants to see the principals,” he said in a stage whisper. “Won’t have anything to do with me. I tried to pump him; told him you were only seen by appointment—no good!”

“What’s he like?” I inquired.

“Jew!” replied Chippendale. “East End type. Of course I know what he’s after! That five thousand pounds reward.”

“Did he say so?” I asked.

“Not he!—knows better. But I’ll lay anything it’s that. Will you see him?”

Chaney was out and not likely to be in for two or three hours. Still, the man outside might have some valuable information which ought to be in our possession at once.

“Bring him in, Chippendale,” I said. “I’ll soon find out what he wants.”

Chippendale vanished; a moment later he flung the door open again and ushered in a little man who, despite the fact that this was an unusually warm spring day, was buttoned up to the chin in a long black overcoat very shiny at the shoulders and elbows and becoming green with age. Either his boots were too big for him, or the feet within them were of a size incommensurate with his height; his trousers hung in festoons about his ankles; what could be seen of his linen was of a decidedly dingy hue. He presented a very pale, sickly face, a mass of dead-black, slightly curling hair, very full, red lips, and a large nose; I half expected to see him lay his dirty forefinger alongside it as he came into the room, as a hint to me that he desired secrecy. Instead of that, however, he pulled himself up and made me quite a courtly bow.

“Mr. Camberwell?” he said inquiringly, pronouncing the first word with a decided lisp, which I am not going to attempt to represent in writing. “Partner with Mr. Chaney?”

“Exactly!” I answered. “Who—”

Before I could get the next word out, he produced from somewhere a card and handed it over with another polite bow.

“My card, sir,” he said. “Please you to read it.”

I read it.

Solomon Cohen,
Ladies’ & Gentlemen’s Tailor & Outfitter,
528 Newington Causeway, S. E.
Parties’ Own Materials Made Up.

I put the card down on my desk and pointed my visitor to a seat. Already I had an idea of what was coming. Stecke, before migrating to the Artemis Hotel in Bayswater, had lived in Newington.

“Yes, Mr. Cohen?” I said, reseating myself at my desk, “What can I do for you?”

He put his hat—a disreputable old billycock—on the floor at the side of his chair and, plunging his hand into some recess of his coat, pulled out what seemed to be a bundle of newspaper cuttings. He selected one and held it out to me.

“Mr. Camberwell,” he said in a soft, ingratiating voice, “I make bold to ask, sir, if the offer made here is a genuine one?”

I glanced at the bit of newspaper. As I had expected, it referred to Mr. Atherton’s offer of five thousand pounds.

"Quite genuine," I replied. "Why—can you give any information?"

He made no reply to that question. Instead, he repossessed himself of the scrap of newspaper, returned it to the bundle, and put the bundle back in his pocket.

"I take your word for it, Mr. Camberwell," he said quietly. "I understand that whoever can give information which would lead—how should it be put, sir?"

"To the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the murder of Richard Skate at Linwood, and for the theft of certain valuable articles from Linwood Church, will receive the reward mentioned, or such part of it as they are entitled to," I answered. "That's about it."

"Part of it?" he said. "I—what does that mean, Mr. Camberwell?"

"It means this. Suppose you give some information. Suppose somebody else gives some equally valuable information. Well, you'd both expect to be rewarded; but you wouldn't expect five thousand pounds each, would you?"

"I see," he replied softly. "I may take it, however, that anybody who gives really practical information—"

"Will be well rewarded, Mr. Cohen," I interrupted. "You can take my personal assurance for that. Now—do you know anything?"

I already felt sure that my visitor did know something; I felt sure, too, that, in spite of his untidy and almost poverty-stricken appearance, Mr. Solomon Cohen was an intelligent and possibly a clever man; he spoke like an educated one, and his manner, though quiet, was confident and assured.

"Yes, Mr. Camberwell," he answered, after a pause. "I do know something, and I will tell you what it is, feeling confident that if it is of any use to you in your investigations, you will see that I am suitably rewarded."

"You may depend on me, Mr. Cohen," I answered him.

"Well, sir, it is just this," he continued. "I am, as you see, a tailor and outfitter, in Newington. I have a fairly good business. And one of my customers during the last two years has been the Reverend Herbert Stecke, whose name has appeared in the newspaper accounts in connexion with these affairs at Linwood. I have at one time or another made a good deal of clothing for Mr. Stecke, clerical clothes and layman's clothes—he wanted the latter for holiday purposes—and at the end of last year he was owing me what—for me, Mr. Camberwell—was really a lot of money —"

"How much?" I asked.

"Well, it was nearly a hundred pounds," he replied. "The fact was, he had never paid me anything. He had always put me off by telling me that he was going to have a very good post—a living, he called it—presented to him; one that would bring him in several hundreds of pounds a year. I believed him—I knew, of course, that he was a clergyman of the Church of England. But I was put off and put off, and after the end of the year I began to press him for the money—I was obliged to do so, Mr. Camberwell. However, I could not get anything out of him—no, not a penny. And some weeks since—at the beginning of April it was—I told him that I should have to put him in the court. He still persisted that he had no money, but should have some soon. I didn't believe him—he'd said that so often. But all of a sudden, sir, he came to my shop and paid my account, every penny of it! I was never so surprised in my life. Yes—he came and paid the full amount, all at once. But, sir, I began to think, soon after, and I have been thinking ever since, thinking so much that now I must say to somebody, to you, what I think about! Sir, Mr. Stecke, who had previously said that he hadn't one penny to rub against another, paid that money, nearly one hundred pounds, to me two days after the affair at Linwood. And, sir, he paid it—ninety odd pounds—in brand-new Treasury notes!"

For the moment I failed to catch his meaning. He saw that, and once more he pulled out his

bundle of newspaper cuttings and selected one.

"You may remember, sir," he went on, "that when the American gentleman, Mr. Atherton, paid for the two old books which he bought from the man who represented himself as being the Dean of Norchester, he gave that man—afterwards identified as one Sewell, alias Seward—an open cheque which the man immediately cashed, receiving Bank of England notes, and that he at once exchanged those for Treasury notes. And you'll also remember, perhaps, that when the so-called Dean was accidentally killed in the City next day—I think you were present, Mr. Camberwell?—twenty-five hundred pounds' worth of brand-new Treasury notes were found in his possession—that is, in his bag or suit-case or attaché case?"

"Yes!" I said. "That's so. And—"

"Well, sir," he continued, "do you think there's any connexion between those two facts?—one that Seward had this big stock of brand-new Treasury notes, and that Mr. Stecke just about the same time—I believe the same day—paid me in similar notes? Because—I do!"

I made no answer to this question. Instead I asked a question of him.

"Have you ever seen Mr. Stecke since?"

"No, sir. But I know something about him. This—he no longer lives where he did. He used to lodge at Laburnam Villas, Newington, which is not far from where I live. But he has left."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"No, sir; I have no idea."

"Did you happen to keep any—I mean, have you any—of those notes he gave you—the brand-new notes?"

"I have not, sir. I had a heavy payment to make for cloth just at that time, and I paid them away at once—all of them. You see, sir, I hadn't read the newspapers then as carefully as I have since."

I remained silent a minute or two, thinking. Then a notion occurred to me.

"If you've read the papers so carefully, Mr. Cohen," I said, "you'll have noticed that the man who called himself Dean of Norchester—Sewell, or Seward, as we now know him to be—wore the correct attire of a dean. I suppose you didn't have anything to do with its supply—through Stecke?"

"No, sir—I never made but one clerical suit for Mr. Stecke," he answered. "And that was just an ordinary black serge—lounge-jacket style."

"Can you give me any idea as to where or how Seward could get those things?" I asked. "You know how a dean dresses?"

"I do, sir—from pictures. No—I've no idea where he could get a costume of that sort. Peculiar costume, sir—there's the apron and the gaiters and so on. He might get them second-hand. But I doubt that. There are certain clerical costumes, sir, which are of no use to any but those entitled to wear them—bishops, archdeacons, deans. I know, because I have worked for a clerical tailor in my time. Is the information I have given of any value, sir?"

"Considerable value, and very interesting, Mr. Cohen," I replied. "I shall discuss it with my partner as soon as he returns."

"You think I stand some chance of sharing in the reward, sir?" he inquired, a little anxiously. "I am a poor man, Mr. Camberwell."

"A very good chance," I said. "Of course, you must remember that it may be a mere coincidence that Stecke paid your account with a lot of brand-new Treasury notes—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir, but there's another perhaps significant fact that I omitted to mention," he said. "When I counted the notes Mr. Stecke gave me, I noticed that they ran consecutively."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "That is certainly significant! Well—you've kept this to yourself so far—all of it?"

“I have not even mentioned it to my wife, sir,” he replied.

“Keep it to yourself a bit longer, Mr. Cohen—in fact, until I send for you,” I said. “I’ll see to your interests.”

He thanked me profusely and went away, and before very long Chaney came in and I told him all that Cohen had told me. Chaney grew more and more attentive and thoughtful as the story progressed.

“This is a damn queer business, Camberwell!” he said at last. “Let’s suppose for the moment that Stecke is mixed up in this affair and that he was one of the principals—”

“And probably the second man in the car, seen by the chap who sold Seward the spanner,” I suggested; “which is likely—if we adopt your supposition.”

“Well, we’ll adopt yours, too, then,” he continued. “Stecke is a principal. He knows from having lived the better part of a month at Linwood all about the church treasures and their value. He enters into a plot with Seward—never mind just now how they became acquainted—for securing them. They go down to Linwood—never mind, too, how they got the keys—and annexed books and vessels. Skate—who would recognize Stecke—interrupted them. They settled Skate and put his dead body in the Squire’s pew. They got safely away then. Seward sold the books to Mr. Atherton. Then Seward got accidentally run over and killed. Previously he’d shared the Atherton money with Stecke. And now comes the question to which I want an answer: *Why did Stecke come forward to identify Seward as a man he’d once seen in Linwood Church?* Eh?”

“If you’re asking me for an answer, Chaney,” I said, “all I’ve got to say is, I haven’t got one! Why, indeed?”

“What was his object?” continued Chaney. “Stecke was clean out of it. We’d never heard of Stecke! Nobody’d ever heard of Stecke—in connexion with this case, anyhow. Why did he suddenly walk on the stage and have the limelight turned full on him? Why, if the first supposition is right, and he’d got his share, should he emerge from his obscurity and draw attention to himself—even if it was only as a witness? He was safe as houses! His partner was dead and so couldn’t speak, and nobody else knew—”

“Ah!” I exclaimed. “But how do you know that somebody else didn’t know? How do you know that there isn’t somebody who does know! For I think there may be!”

“Who, then?” he asked.

“Perhaps—Mrs. Effingham!”

“Of the theft—and the murder?”

“Possibly. We know from what Chippendale told us that Mrs. Effingham and Stecke are—shall we say friends?—and visit a bridge club together. We know—at least I remember—that on the day of the inquest on Skate at Linwood Mrs. Effingham and Stecke were in close conversation in the Rectory grounds. I think Mrs. Effingham knows a good deal that she’s never let out.”

“Very likely—and we’ll have to get it out of her,” assented Chaney. “But, still, that doesn’t answer my question: *Why did Stecke come forward?* What object had he in coming forward? What good did it do him to come forward? He’d nothing whatever to do—I’m still supposing him to have been a partner in the affair of the theft—but kept still, for Seward was silenced. No!—I can’t make out, can’t think of any reason why Stecke, of his own free will, barged in to tell us what he did! Licks me altogether.”

“Well, you can be certain of one thing, Chaney,” I said. “He’d an object!”

“Yes, but what object?” he demanded. “What?”

“To pull the wool over our eyes,” I answered. “Just that! To trick us!”

“Yes, yes!” he said impatiently, “I’ll grant that—but that isn’t telling me anything. I still ask—why?”

“Well, there is this to be thought of,” I remarked, after thinking a bit: “perhaps Stecke was

after the first reward. Perhaps he thought we should be satisfied, through his story, that the dead man, Seward, was the one and only originator and accomplisher of the dual crime, that no more inquiries would be made, and that the reward would be paid over to him. How’s that strike you?”

“Um!—may be something in it,” he answered. “It’s possible. But I still think—”

At that moment Chippendale opened my door and looked in. His face was absolutely impassive, but I caught a curious gleam in his eye as he opened his lips.

“Miss Pamela Bolton!” he announced. “And Mr. Hugh Gibbs!”

CHAPTER XIX

WHO STOLE THE CARDS?

I told Chippendale to bring in these unexpected visitors and turned to Chaney. Chaney made a grimace, but it was neither of surprise nor wonder; what it really did express, I think, was a patient acceptance of the fact that one never knows what is going to happen next in this world.

"What now?" he muttered. "Watch 'em both, carefully, Camberwell. They're up to something or other!"

The two came in; Miss Bolton first. She was very smartly dressed; her manner was alert, vivacious, confident. Mr. Gibbs followed; he looked a little sheepish; it needed very little observation on my part to see that Miss Bolton was the senior partner in this amalgamation.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Miss Bolton. "Let me introduce my fiancé—Mr. Hugh Gibbs. But ah, I'm forgetting! I believe you've met Mr. Gibbs before."

"For a few moments," I said, Chaney offering no remark. "Literally a few moments. We called on Mr. Gibbs, at Sir Bartle Shardale's suggestion, to ask if he knew where you were. He didn't."

"Oh, well, yes, of course!" said Miss Bolton, sinking into the easy chair which Chaney had drawn forward. "Oh, yes, I remember hearing of it, now that you mention it. Well, of course, you're wondering what brings us here, aren't you?"

"I'm not!" grunted Chaney. "Not at all!"

Miss Bolton turned and looked at him wonderingly.

"No?" she said. "What, then?"

"The hope of getting or sharing in that five thousand pounds reward," replied Chaney, promptly. "That's about it, I think!"

Miss Bolton's pretty face grew a little pink, but she laughed bravely.

"Well, that's very clever of you," she began, "very clever—"

"Not a bit!" said Chaney. "Obvious!—considering the circumstances. But you were going to say—"

"I was going to say," continued Miss Bolton, "that you're quite right. We are after that five thousand pounds reward, or as much of it as we can get—for value given. We should be very pleased indeed, Mr. Gibbs and I, to receive the whole lot, but we've no objection to a good lump of it. You see, Mr. Chaney, we want to marry, and a few thousand pounds would come in handy for taking and furnishing a house. And if we do know something—eh?"

"Do you know anything?" demanded Chaney.

"More than you think, perhaps," retorted Miss Bolton. "But—to be perfectly frank with you—we have come to a point where we need help; we have carried our bit of detective work as far as we can. The time has come when we've got to tell what we know, and we've been debating whether to approach you or to go to Scotland Yard. Finally—this morning—we decided to come to you. And here we are!"

"Depends on what you know—or think you know," said Chaney. "It may be—"

I thought it high time for me to intervene; Chaney, for some reason or other, was not being sufficiently sympathetic.

"I am quite sure that Miss Bolton would not even think she knew something unless she did know something," I said, "and something of real importance. And," I added, turning to her, "I am equally sure that I need not assure Miss Bolton and Mr. Gibbs that whatever they care to tell us—"

"Oh!" interrupted Chaney, taking my cue, "that, of course, goes without saying. Everything within these walls is strictly private, confidential, and all the rest of it." He twisted round in his

chair and gave Miss Bolton a keen look. “But we like plain dealing, so—where have you been all this time?” he asked.

“Lying low—trying to find out something, Mr. Chaney!” she answered.

“Have you found what you wanted?” he demanded.

“I tell you, we’ve got to a stage at which it’s necessary to seek help. That’s why we’re here—confiding in you and Mr. Camberwell rather than in the police.”

“You suspect somebody? Let’s be clear. You think you know who stole those things from Linwood Church and—incidentally—murdered Skate? Is that it?”

“Partly,” admitted Miss Bolton. “What we do think is this—we think we have grounds—sure grounds!—of suspicion against two people as having had some share—we don’t know and can’t say precisely what—in the theft of the church treasures. The murder is—outside.”

“Who is it—who are the persons you suspect?” asked Chaney.

Miss Bolton paused a moment. Then she looked from Chaney to me, and from me back to Chaney.

“Well,” she said slowly, “Mr. Stecke and Mrs. Effingham.”

She looked from one to the other of us again, questioningly; I think she wanted to see if her reply surprised us. But I am sure she saw no surprise on either face.

“Of course,” she went on, “we have grounds—strong grounds. They seem so to us, at any rate.”

“Yes?” said Chaney. “Well—let’s have them.”

Miss Bolton hesitated a moment. But she was only marshalling her forces.

“I was just wondering where to begin,” she said. “I think I’ll begin at the morning of the day on which the inquest was held at Linwood—the inquest on the poacher, Skate. That morning—you’ll remember that the inquest was held in the afternoon?—that morning Mr. Stecke came to the Rectory at a fairly early hour—ten o’clock. He saw Canon Effingham for a few moments only; Canon Effingham and I were very busy with proofs and things that morning. Then he was handed over to Mrs. Effingham, and he was with her, in the drawing-room or in the garden, until lunch-time; as soon as lunch was over, it was time to go across to the schoolroom, to the inquest. Now I might tell you here that while he was taking the duty at Linwood during Canon Effingham’s illness last winter, Mr. Stecke and Mrs. Effingham became very close friends—inseparables. When Mr. Stecke first came there, he condescended to pay his addresses to me—as I was impulsive enough to remark at the inquest—but as I literally loathed the very sight of him and let him see it, he transferred his attention to Mrs. Effingham. And I happen to know that after he left the Rectory, he and Mrs. Effingham used to meet, and not only to meet, but to attend a certain bridge club here in London together.”

“How do you know that?” I asked.

Miss Bolton turned to Mr. Gibbs, who up to then had preserved a strict silence.

“Hugh can prove that,” she said. “Hugh sometimes stays at Linwood Hall; he knows Mrs. Effingham and Mr. Stecke quite well by sight. And Hugh has sometimes gone to a certain bridge club called the Bessington and seen these two there. Haven’t you, Hugh?”

Mr. Gibbs, releasing his lips from the top of his walking-cane, nodded.

“Seen ’em there three or four times,” he assented. “Together.”

“Before or after the theft and murder affair?” asked Chaney.

“Before. Never been there myself lately.”

“Do they know you?” inquired Chaney.

“Can’t say. Never went to church at Linwood,” replied Mr. Gibbs. “Saw Mrs. Effingham sometimes in the village, but I don’t know if she knew me—don’t think she did. Only saw the parson chap, Stecke, once at Linwood, last winter. But he’s good to remember—spotted him at once at the Bessington when he came in with her.”

“Not in clerical clothes, I suppose?” suggested Chaney.

“No—mufti. Evening dress.”

“What were they doing at the Bessington Club?” I asked.

Mr. Gibbs turned his somewhat inexpressive countenance on me. A gleam of—something—came into his eyes.

“Oh, well, it’s called a bridge club, you know,” he answered. “But you can play two or three other little things there, you know.”

“Gambling-club, really?” I suggested.

“That’s about it,” assented Mr. Gibbs. “Pretty high play, too, sometimes.”

I turned to Miss Bolton.

“Yes?” I said. “Go on, please.”

“Well, I go on to the inquest now,” she continued. “You may remember that after making my protest against Mr. Stecke’s evidence, as far as it concerned me, I hurriedly left the village schoolroom. Now, do you know why?”

“Not the faintest idea,” replied Chaney. “Felt angry, I suppose.”

“There you’re wrong—partly, anyway,” said Miss Bolton. “I was angry, certainly; but when I left, I was cool enough, for I’d got a sudden notion. I’d read the newspapers carefully that morning and had particularly studied what was said about the so-called Dean of Norchester calling on Mr. Atherton at the Savoy Hotel. I had noticed that this impostor sent in to Mr. Atherton what Mr. Atherton described as a beautifully engraved card bearing the proper inscription. Now, as I sat there at the inquest, I remembered that the real Dean of Norchester whenever he was in London always ran down to Linwood to call on his old friend Canon Effingham, and that on the card-tray in the hall of the Rectory there were two or three of his cards, left there during the preceding winter. And the real reason why I hastily left the village schoolroom and the inquest was to go across to the Rectory to see if the Dean of Norchester’s cards were still there!”

“Good!” muttered Chaney. “Good—very good! And—were they?”

“No!” replied Miss Bolton. “Not one of them! They’d—disappeared! Now, Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell, there’s not a doubt that the man Seward got possession of those cards. *Who gave them to him?*”

“Good—good!” chuckled Chaney. Miss Bolton, it was evident, was going up in his estimation by leaps and bounds. “Go on! What else?”

“Nothing more of that, but now something of another thing,” said Miss Bolton. “As soon as ever I’d made this discovery, I resolved to leave Linwood Rectory there and then. I had a hazy idea of the devilry that was afoot, and I felt that I might be incriminated, and I made up my mind to get away; also, I felt certain that both Mr. Stecke and Mrs. Effingham were concerned in, at any rate, the theft of the church treasures. I ran straight up to my room, made some hasty preparations, took what money I had from the drawer in which I kept it, and left the house without saying anything to anyone. And now comes in the next important thing. You will remember that in the newspapers that very morning there was reference to and stress laid on the fact that Seward after getting Mr. Atherton’s cheque cashed into Bank of England notes went straight across to the Bank of England and changed these notes into Treasury notes of one pound each? Very well—on my way to the station, after leaving the Rectory, I turned into the post office at Linwood to send a telegram to Mr. Gibbs asking him to meet me in town. I had nothing less than a five-pound note in my purse and had to offer that in payment for the telegram to the postmistress, Mrs. Summers. Now, Mr. Chaney and Mr. Camberwell, you listen and pay attention!—Mrs. Summers gave me in change eighteen shillings and sixpence in silver, and four absolutely brand-new one-pound Treasury notes! As far as I remember, I’d never seen a quite new Treasury note before—such a spick and span one, anyway. And I recollect that I said as

much to Mrs. Summers. ‘No, miss,’ she replied, ‘and I don’t know that I ever have; they’ve generally been pretty well thumbed and fingered by the time I set eyes on them. But I’ve a stock of ’em this afternoon,’ she continued, ‘I got them from Mr. Stecke, the curate. He came in here just before dinner and asked me if I’d got a couple of five-pound notes I could let him have, and he gave me these new one-pound notes in exchange.’ There. Mr. Chaney!—What do you think of that?”

“Good—good!” muttered Chaney, smiling. “If ever you want a job, come to me! What did you do next?”

“Went up to town, met Mr. Gibbs, and told him all about it,” replied Miss Bolton. “We decided to put our heads together and see what we could do—I mean, what we could find out. I’m bound to admit,” she continued, “that we haven’t found out as much as we hoped to find out; still we’ve found out a few things.”

“Such as—what?” inquired Chaney.

“Well,” replied Miss Bolton, “I’ll tick them off. First, since the Linwood affair Stecke appears to have become possessed of funds. Second, he has discarded his clerical clothes and goes about as a layman. Third, he has left his old lodgings at Laburnam Villas, Newington, and now lives at a private residential hotel, the Artemis, in Bayswater. Fourth, he and Mrs. Effingham still frequent the Bessington Club. And fifth, and perhaps not unimportant, he’s changed his name.”

“How do you know that, Miss Bolton?” I asked.

She gave me a knowing look.

“I’ve been trying a bit of detective work, Mr. Camberwell,” she replied, archly. “And one day, when I’d carefully watched Stecke off the premises and safely away in a taxi, I walked into the Artemis Hotel, told them that I was searching for an American friend of mine who was staying or ought to be staying somewhere in Bayswater, and asked if I might look at their register. They fell to it readily and I searched the register. There is no Reverend Herbert Stecke there, nor Mr. Herbert Stecke, but, you see, I know Stecke’s peculiar handwriting, and there it is. He is now Mr. Hildebrand Stocker.”

I glanced at Chaney, who, during Miss Bolton’s last two or three sentences, had sat smiling and silent, twiddling his thumbs—a trick of his when he was pleased.

“Well?” I said. “What do you think, Chaney?”

“That we’re very much obliged to Miss Bolton for confiding in us,” he said, becoming unusually polite. “Most useful, I’m sure. Every little helps, in these cases.”

“But—what will be done?” asked Miss Bolton. “And what about our chance of the reward?”

“As to the reward, ma’am,” replied Chaney, “you may take it from me that whoever assists in solving the mystery will be rewarded—in due time. The precise amount offered by our enterprising—and inquisitive—American Crœsus may have to be shared—but all who have a just claim will be considered. Now as to what you have told us, I think Mr. Camberwell may have an observation or two to make. You see, ma’am”—Chaney, when he became bland and professional, styled all women “ma’am,” whether they were old or young—“you see, some of the information you have given us was not new—eh, Camberwell?”

“No,” I asserted. “Some of it, Miss Bolton, we certainly knew. But some of it we didn’t know, and your information has, of course, its value. I think you can rely on getting the furniture!”

With this remark—intended to be a pretty compliment—I got rid of Miss Bolton and Mr. Gibbs and turned to business with Chaney.

“Well—what of that?” I asked. “Anything?”

“Good deal on one point, Camberwell,” he replied. “That young woman has brains! She’s cleared up one matter that’s puzzled me a lot—the question of those visiting-cards. There’s no

doubt now that the cards with which Seward was armed were taken from the tray at the Rectory. Now, then, how did Seward get them? Did Stecke—who, I feel certain, has tricked us no end about Seward—supply them to him? Or did Mrs. E., who's another tricky person, hand them over to Stecke? We've a lot to find out about Mrs. E. and Stecke, Camberwell. And there's one thing that must not be overlooked; we must see to it at once. Stecke, this young woman has discovered, is now living at that hotel under the name of Stocker. Now, it's absolutely necessary for us to keep a constant watch on him. We can't set Chip on him—he knows Chip. But this is certain—we've got to shove somebody into that hotel who knows him and whom he doesn't know!"

CHAPTER XX

PROGRESS—AND REGRESS

I was not quite sure of Chaney's exact meaning, nor of what scheme or plan he had in view, and before going further I wanted some explanation; I wanted, in fact, to know just what he thought of our present position. For Chaney, though always willing to share opinions with his partner, chose his own time for voicing them.

"I wish you'd tell me—before we go into that matter—exactly where you think we've got to, Chaney," I said. "It's time we took stock. Now, what is your considered opinion about things?"

"Oh, well, I'll tell you," he answered, readily for him. "I don't think there's the slightest doubt, now, that Stecke and Mrs. Effingham are mixed up in this business—I think Stecke was the second man in the car; the man that the garage-proprietor saw when he sold the new spanner to Seward; I think, too, that Mrs. Effingham's share was to abstract the keys from her husband's dressing-room, get the church keys from his study, and hand them out to Stecke and Seward, probably by that side-door which Canon Effingham found open next morning. What we have not cleared up and shall find difficulty in clearing up is the question: how did Stecke come into communication with Seward? And there's still another: why did he come to us and identify Seward?"

"In the last matter," I replied, "I feel certain that in coming to us with the story he told he was bluffing us. Seward was dead! Seward couldn't contradict!"

"What was there to contradict?" asked Chaney. "Stecke, in my opinion, did believe that Seward was the man he'd met in Linwood Church—believed it firmly till the real man, the brother, turned up at the inquest in the City!"

"But—but how can that be?" I said, incredulously. "If Seward and Stecke met subsequently, as they seem to have done, and Stecke believed that he was the man he'd seen in Linwood Church, Seward would have corrected him; Seward, at any rate, knew he wasn't the man Stecke had seen."

Chaney smiled and then laughed.

"You're a bit green yet, Camberwell," he said. "Never mind—you'll improve. Now, hasn't it entered your head, Seward being what we know him to have been, that it was Seward's game to let Stecke abide in his belief? We'll suppose they met, here in London, accidentally. Stecke says: 'Oh, we've met before—in Linwood Church. Sorry I couldn't show you the treasures.' What was there to stop Seward—a wrong 'un—from quietly sizing up the situation and letting Stecke talk until Seward knew all about it? That's how it's been—in my opinion. Somehow or other, Stecke and Seward got in touch with each other and persuaded Mrs. E. into handing over the keys. I say persuaded—but it may be that the correct word is forced. Forced her into it—through fear."

"Of what?" I asked.

"Lord knows! Exposure to her husband of her mania for gambling, perhaps. Anyhow, that's my opinion. Seward, without doubt, was the man who bought that spanner, and I think that Stecke answers to the description of the man who was with him in the car. Well, Seward's dead—but Stecke's alive, and we want him. But—not immediately. We want first to know more about Stecke and Mrs. E."

"What's the notion of sending somebody into his hotel?" I inquired.

"To keep an eye on him in case he suddenly departs for climes unknown," replied Chaney. "Which is a likely contingency. We must have him under continual observation now. And, as I said before, Chip's no good—he knows Chip."

"Chippendale may know of somebody who would do," I said, "Let's have him in."

Chippendale, summoned to our presence, listened, knowingly, to Chaney's remarks and

showed his absolute understanding of them.

"You'd be no good, you know," concluded Chaney. "He's seen you. So—do you know of anybody, my lad? Somebody that could play the part of temporary visitor to a place like that?"

Chippendale nodded—there was decision in the nod.

"Yes, sir—the very person," he answered promptly. "My fiancée."

"Your—what?" exclaimed Chaney, taken aback.

"Young lady—sweetheart—whatever you like to call it, sir," said Chippendale.

"Didn't know you had one—at your age, too!" muttered Chaney. "But—any good?"

"I reckon!" declared Chippendale. "Wouldn't suit me if she wasn't, Mr. Chaney."

"Smart girl, eh? Tell about her," commanded Chaney.

"Twenty-one. Good-looking. Clever. Knows her way about. Eyes on all sides of her head," replied Chippendale. "Just the sort you want. Cool as a cucumber—when it's necessary."

"Name and occupation?" asked Chaney.

"Name, Fanny Pratt," answered Chippendale. "As to occupation, has earned her own living ever since she was sixteen—five years' business experience. Cashier in the City until recently—left that to look after her mother, who's been ill. Mother just getting round again, and Fanny's going back to her job. But she could spare two or three weeks."

"We'd better have a look at her," said Chaney. "Can you get her here, my lad?"

"At once!" replied Chippendale, and went out to the telephone in his room. Chaney turned to me.

"That'll do very well—if she's all he makes out," he said. "A smart young woman who can keep her eyes and ears open is just the thing we want for a job of this kind. Of course Chip may have exaggerated the girl's powers—we'll see."

We saw—within the hour. Precisely fifty minutes after he had summoned her by telephone, Miss Fanny Pratt presented herself, Chippendale proudly hovering in the background, in my room. Chippendale had been modest about her appearance—she was not merely good-looking, but pretty. One glance at her showed that she was intelligent, alert, shrewd; all there, as Chaney put it. Also she was well dressed and knew how to wear her clothes.

Chaney did the necessary talking, after catechizing Miss Pratt as to her abilities and powers. Furnished with proper funds—and no stint in them—Miss Pratt was to take a room—one of the best—at the Artemis Hotel in Bayswater. Settled in there, she was to keep an eye on a gentleman resident, Mr. Hildebrand Stocker. Without obtruding herself on him, or on anyone else's notice, she was to note his comings and goings as far as ever she could, to observe his visitors, guests, callers, to make herself acquainted with his doings as much as possible. And one thing above all—if she saw anything which led her to believe that Mr. Stocker was about to shift his quarters or to set out on a journey, she was to acquaint us on the instant. In short, her job was to watch, and to watch punctiliously.

"Get it all, my dear?" inquired Chaney in conclusion. "All clear?"

"I get it!" replied Miss Pratt. "Clear as a Frosty night! Anything else?"

"All right about—clothes and that sort of thing?" asked Chaney, glancing at Miss Pratt's smart costume.

"Quite! Well equipped, thank you," said Miss Pratt.

"When can you start?" inquired Chaney.

"Just now," responded Miss Pratt. "I shall go along there at once, make inquiry, book the room, pay 'em a week in advance, and go in with my things this afternoon."

"Good!" said Chaney. "Well, now, you'll want an accurate description of the man—"

"Oh, no, I shan't!" interrupted Miss Pratt. "I shall know him. Besides, I've seen him."

"You've seen him?" asked Chaney. "Where?"

"Oh, of course I know who it is you're putting me on to," answered Miss Pratt. "It's that

parson fellow—Stecke. I saw him at the inquest in the City—I got two or three hours off to go to that. And I've read all the newspapers, Mr. Chaney, and Pip—that's what I call him—" she broke off, pointing to Chippendale—"Pip and I have discussed this case, and I know all about it. You leave Mr. Stocker, alias Stecke or Stecke, alias Stocker, to me, Mr. Chaney—I'll watch him! But now you listen to me a bit—there are two things on which I must insist, if you want me to do any good."

"Go ahead, my dear!" said Chaney, now full of admiration. "Name 'em!"

"Well, the first is, Pip here must arrange to meet me somewhere every evening to get my report, even if it's only to hear that there's nothing whatever to report," continued Miss Pratt. "And the second—much, much more important—is that while I am in residence at the Artemis Hotel, you must have somebody in constant attendance here day *and* night, so as to be ready if I phone a message. That I must absolutely insist on, because I might want you in a great hurry."

"That's easily settled, Miss Pratt," I said. "There is always somebody here all day long, and as I live here—in rooms over these offices—I get any night call. Make yourself easy on that point—the other you can arrange with Chippendale."

"Very good," replied Miss Pratt. "Then make yourselves easy. From the moment I settle in at the Artemis, Mr. Stecke-Stocker is under my very nose—as long as he's there. And if he hops it—well, I shall hop after him!"

"Good—good!" exclaimed Chaney. "Excellent! Camberwell, write her an open cheque for expenses."

Miss Pratt presently received her cheque, and Chippendale went off with her to transform it into cash. Two hours later she phoned us to say that she had fixed things at the Artemis Hotel and was moving in there at once. Chaney rubbed his hands over this piece of engineering; he appeared to consider that Stecke already had his neck in a noose, the ends of which we could pull at any time.

But next day Chaney got a smack in the face—a nasty smack, as he himself fittingly described it. Jalvane turned up at our office, and from an inner pocket drew forth a formal-looking document.

"I've got a bit of news for you," he said. "This thing has been sent on to me by the Superintendent of Police at Havering St. Michael. Interesting stuff, very—I thought I'd bring it along to you."

"What is it?" asked Chaney. "Statement?"

"Well, that's just what it is," replied Jalvane. "A statement made by a man at Devonport, who's been reading all about this Linwood case in the papers. What does he know about it? You'll see when you read this. He thinks he knows something, anyhow—in fact, he's so certain of it that he went to the police at Devonport and made this statement to them—they took it down and he signed it. Read it—both of you."

I took the document which he handed to me—a double sheet of foolscap—and spread it out on my desk; Chaney and I bent over it and read it together:

> This is a statement, voluntarily made by me, Walter James Massie, at present residing at 31 Childhampton Place, Devonport, in the presence of John Alistair Colquhoun, Superintendent of Police at Devonport, and of Martin Sellers, an Inspector of Police at the same place.
>
> I am by trade a fitter and up to the end of March last was employed in the workshops of Jones, Charlesworth & Co., at Wolverhampton. Owing to bad trade several of us were thrown out of work there, and I went to London in search of a fresh job at a place I had heard of down East Ham way. As I failed to get anything, I determined to try Portsmouth. I had enough money to keep me going for a few weeks.

> As it was fine weather and I am fond of walking, I decided to go to Portsmouth on foot, stopping at various places on the way. I left London one morning in April—as near as I can remember, it would be about the 11th of that month—with the intention of walking as far as either Havering St. Michael or Horsham the first day—one was about twenty-five miles, and the other some ten miles farther, according to a map I had. However, I did not get on as fast as I had meant to do, and about seven o'clock in the evening I was still some miles short of the first place I have just mentioned. I turned in to a roadside inn, near a village, the name of which I don't know, to get some refreshment before continuing to Havering, where I now meant to sleep. While I was in the bar-parlour, a man drove up in a small car, left it at the door, and came in. He was a medium-sized man, a bit over middle age, I should say, fresh-complexioned, well dressed, what you'd call a gentleman. He asked for a whisky and soda. While he was drinking it, we got talking. I happened to mention that I was going to Havering and had meant to get as far as Horsham. He said: "I can give you a good lift—I've got a case between Havering and Horsham; you can get down at which you like, Havering or where I'm going." I thanked him for his offer; we each had another drink, and then went out to his car. From what he'd mentioned about a case, I took him for a doctor; he looked that sort; I noticed too that he'd a bag, or case, in the car, of the sort that doctors carry. He didn't say he was a doctor: I just thought he was. We set off along the main road; I sat by him; we talked a bit about the scenery. Some little distance along—I can't say where exactly, for that district was all strange to me—something went wrong with the car. (I might have mentioned before that the car was an old one, looking as if it had seen plenty of wear.) He pulled up at the roadside and began to examine it—he seemed to know all about cars. I don't, though; my work's been in other directions. Then he opened a tool-box, and after pottering about in it a bit, he said he hadn't got a spanner. We'd just passed a roadside garage; he said he'd go back and get a spanner. I offered to go, but he said no, I shouldn't know what he wanted. He went back and soon came again, with a brand-new spanner. He did something to the car's machinery with this and put the spanner in his pocket. I am confident that he did not put it in the box; he put it in the right-hand pocket of the leather coat he was wearing. Then the car was all right, and we went on till we came to a town which he said was Havering St. Michael. He asked me if I'd get out there or would I go on as far as he was going, a few miles farther. I asked how far it would be from where he was going to Horsham, and he said not many miles, so I said I'd go on with him. We went on a few miles until we came to a village where there is a big church with a high square tower. We passed right through this village. At the far end he pulled up at the roadside near a lane that turned into woods on the right hand. He said he'd got to go up that lane, so I got out, thanked him, and bade him good-night. It was then nine o'clock—perhaps a bit more. I walked on south, but before losing sight of him, saw him turn the car up the lane. Having read the newspaper accounts, I feel sure that this man was the one about whom I have read and who was afterwards killed in London.
>
> (Signed) Walter J. Massie

I stood up from the desk and looked at Chaney. Jalvane, too, was looking at him. But Chaney still read—he was re-reading. When at last he, too, straightened himself and looked at us, he seemed puzzled and discomfited.

"If that's all right," he muttered, "and it seems to be so, it knocks my theory into a cocked hat! Stecke wasn't the man who accompanied Seward to Linwood!"

CHAPTER XXI

A ONE-MAN JOB

Jalvane, who until then had been standing watching us while we read, dropped into a chair and pulled out his snuff-box; sure sign that he wanted to talk and to be talked to.

"You've come to suspect Stecke?" he said. "Just why? We haven't discussed this for a while—I've been engaged elsewhere. Tell me where you've got to."

I left it to Chaney to explain matters, and Chaney epitomized the story up to the point we had arrived at, bringing it down, in fact, to our commissioning the services of Miss Fanny Pratt.

"It just comes to this," he concluded, preparing to check off his points on his fingers. "We know certain facts about Stecke now which indicate guilt of some sort, whether it's direct or whether it's complicity. Just consider them:

> 1. We know, beyond doubt, that there's some sort of intimacy, friendship, partnership, call it what you like, between Stecke and Mrs. Effingham.
>
> 2. We know that previous to the theft of the church treasures Stecke was very hard up and couldn't pay his tailor, and that immediately after that he was in funds and paid up.
>
> 3. We know that he paid in new Treasury notes, never used before. Also that he got rid of similar notes at Linwood post office. Now, as we all know, absolutely brand-new Treasury notes are not so common as all that—you can get 'em now and then at a bank, but as a rule Treasury notes have been well thumbed and creased before one handles them; I scarcely ever remember having new ones. Is it mere coincidence that Stecke should be in possession of a lot of such new notes just after Seward got five thousand pounds' worth of them at the Bank of England?
>
> 4. We know that Seward, when he called on Mr. Atherton, professing to be the Dean of Norchester, sent in a card which seemed to be genuine. Now, the real Dean of Norchester, when in London or the south of England, used to call on his old friend Canon Effingham at Linwood, and there were three or four of his visiting-cards on a tray on the hall table at Linwood Rectory. There's no doubt, to our mind, that those cards were handed to Seward. By whom? Stecke had opportunities of abstracting them.
>
> 5. But that brings us to another, a critical point—Has all this been a put-up job between Stecke, Seward, and Mrs. Effingham? Mrs. Effingham is a gambler—she may have been in debt. She could hand over those cards; she could put the church keys where Seward and Stecke could get them. We do know, anyhow, that she and Stecke are continually meeting, since the affair at Linwood, and frequenting the Bessington Club. That argues—something. What is still unsolved is: were the three I've mentioned joint conspirators in the matter of the theft? The murder of Skate I take to have been—well, an accident. Skate happened to turn up at the wrong moment."

Jalvane listened to all this in silence, occasionally treating himself to a pinch of snuff. Eventually, he closed his box and put it away.

"You've been going on the notion, the supposition, that Stecke was with Seward at Linwood on the night of the theft and murder?" he said. "Eh?"

"Ye—es, I suppose so," admitted Chaney. "I thought he was the man in the car. But now—"

"Now you know who the man in the car was—this man Massie," said Jalvane. "So that point is settled. Stecke was not the man in the car spoken of by the garage-proprietor who sold Seward the spanner."

“Still, for all that, Stecke may have been at Linwood that night,” suggested Chaney. “He may have met Seward there by appointment. There must have been two of ’em at the game. One man couldn’t carry Skate’s dead body from the churchyard to the church and put it in the old Squire’s pew, in which Camberwell found it.”

“I don’t know whether you’re quite right in assuming that, Chaney,” I said. “Skate was a very small-built man—a mere little rat of a chap. I should say—well, I know that I myself could easily have carried, or at any rate dragged, his body into the church.”

“No—at least I’m not saying you couldn’t,” replied Chaney, “but in my opinion there were two men at work—Seward and another. And considering the points I’ve just mentioned, the other seems likely to have been Stecke.”

“This is where I come in, with some fresh news,” said Jalvane. “It was not Stecke. Stecke was not at nor near Linwood that night!”

“How the devil do you know that?” exclaimed Chaney.

Jalvane’s queer mouth and chin relaxed in a knowing grin.

“Ah!” he said, “you two are not the only persons in the world who’ve been doing a bit of investigation into these matters! We’ve done a little that way, you know—elsewhere. But we don’t mind your knowing, Chaney—all in the same boat, eh, and it all helps? Well, you see, I do know that Stecke was not at Linwood on the important date—the night of the theft and murder.”

“What was the exact date?” asked Chaney, interrupting Jalvane and turning to me. “You’ve got it down somewhere, Camberwell—look!”

But there was no need for that—the date was fixed in my memory.

“April 11,” I answered.

“April 11 is right,” agreed Jalvane. “Night of April 11. On the night of April 11 the Reverend Mr. Stecke was not within a hundred miles of Linwood!”

“And again I ask: how do you know that?” demanded Chaney.

“Well, the fact is,” replied Jalvane, “that after first hearing of him and about him and seeing him and listening to his evidence I came to the conclusion that, whatever else he might be, the Reverend Mr. Stecke was, or had it in him to be, a somewhat shifty person. And, taking everything into consideration, I thought there was something fishy—I don’t know what—about his story. So after that second inquest I managed to get into conversation with him and led things round to what he’d told us about the meeting with Seward in Linwood Church. ‘It’s a pity, Mr. Stecke,’ I said, ‘that you didn’t come forward, either to Scotland Yard or to Chaney & Camberwell, as soon as ever you saw anything in the papers—you let a day or two go by, didn’t you?’ ‘Oh!’ says he, ‘but I couldn’t, Mr. Jalvane—I wasn’t in town—I was away in the country, and—’ ”

“Wait a minute, Jalvane,” I said, interrupting him. “That reminds me of something. Let me look at my diary.” I got the book out and turned over its leaves until I came to my notes about Stecke’s call on us. “Yes,” I continued, “that’s in accordance with what I’ve got here. Stecke said when he first called on us that he should have called the day before but for the fact that he was out of town.”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed Chaney, impatiently. “But what’s that amount to? Nothing! Linwood is out of town. Besides, he would say he was out of town whether he was or not. And if he was out of town that day, what’s that got to do with where he was on the night of the 11th?”

“Wait a bit,” said Jalvane. “He then went on to say that he’d been away in the country taking duty for a few days for a clerical friend at Hegsworthy, in Devonshire, and hadn’t returned to town until early on the morning he called on you. ‘I lost no time,’ he said. ‘I went straight from the train to Camberwell & Chaney’s.’ Then he wanted to know what difference a day or two would have made. I put him off by saying that in these cases every minute is precious, and no detail too small, or some fudge of that sort, which of course he swallowed.”

“Yes, but you don’t know he was in Devonshire,” said Chaney, still cynical and suspicious.

“Oh, yes, I do!” retorted Jalvane. “Because I made secret inquiries at Hegsworthy. Stecke was there on the days and nights of the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th of April. So there you are!—he couldn’t have been at Linwood.”

Chaney made no answer; at any rate, none beyond a dissatisfied grunt. So I turned to Jalvane.

“Do I understand that you’re—practically—dismissing Stecke from this?” I asked.

“From the events of the night of the 11th at Linwood—yes,” he answered.

“You think he’d nothing to do with the theft of the church treasures?”

“Nothing!” he replied with emphasis. “Nothing!”

“Or with the murder of Skate?”

“Nothing at all!”

“Didn’t even know of them until he read of them in the papers?”

“Come, come! How could he know of them if he’d nothing to do with them?”

“You think he’d no dealing or relations with Seward?”

“None!”

“Do you think he was honestly deceived about Seward?—that he really believed Seward was the man he’d seen in Linwood Church?”

“Yes! I believe all that.”

“And that it was a genuine surprise that he showed on hearing that it wasn’t Seward at all, but Mr. Francis Sewell?”

“I believe that, too.”

Chaney jumped to his feet and began to pace the room.

“Oh, damn it all, Jalvane, ask us to believe that black’s white!” he burst out. “Are you meaning to say that Stecke knew nothing about it?”

“I’m meaning to say that I don’t think Stecke knew anything whatever about either theft or murder until he read of ’em—yes!” declared Jalvane, with emphasis. “I do say so!”

“What about his possession of Treasury notes, brand-new ones, that without doubt were part of the five thousand such notes got by Seward at the Bank of England in exchange for the Bank of England notes he presented?” said Chaney. “Come, now!”

Jalvane laughed. Something in his laughter roused an idea in my mind.

“Stop a bit, Chaney!” I said, as my impetuous partner was about to hold forth again. “I haven’t done with Jalvane. Look here, Jalvane,” I went on, “tell me another thing. Do you seriously say that Stecke has nothing to do with all this?”

Jalvane shook his head. “I haven’t said that,” he replied cautiously.

“You’ve said that it’s your belief that until he read of them in the papers, Stecke knew nothing of either theft or murder. Do you think he knew something—got mixed up in something relative—*after*? Come, now!”

“Well—between ourselves—yes!” he replied. “Oh, yes!”

“That’s something, anyway,” I said. “Well—how?”

“No!” he said, firmly. “No! I’m not going to say—I’m not yet in a position to say. Perhaps I oughtn’t to have said as much, but—”

“All between friends, you know, Jalvane—old friends, you and me,” said Chaney.

“That’s right enough, my lad!” agreed Jalvane. “Still—enough said for the present. I don’t want to say more until—”

“You know more,” I broke in. “But you can say this—do you think we’re justified in believing that the new Treasury notes of which Stecke has been in possession came from what we’ll call Seward’s stock?”

“Yes,” he said, slowly. “Ye—es, I think you can say that.”

“Then how on earth did he get hold of them?” I exclaimed, beginning to share some of

Chaney's feelings. "How?"

"Got to do a bit more working out yet," answered Jalvane. "Enough said—on that point." He pulled out the snuff-box and refreshed himself. "Mazy bit of work, of course! But as regards the theft and murder, my lads, take it from me—one-man job. Seward—solus!"

We both stared at him, in silence, while he toyed with his snuff. Suddenly he put the box away and spoke again.

"And I was going to tell you," he said, "we've found out another thing. Where's the statement that fellow—what's his name?—Massie—sent on from Devonport? Here—you see what he says there? That the man who gave him a lift that night was driving an old car, one that looked as if it had had a lot of wear. Well, we've traced the car."

"You have!" I exclaimed.

"We have—set to work on that long since; soon as we were put in possession of certain facts," he answered. "I've had a lot of men at work on that business—you didn't think of it, perhaps, but then, to be sure, it wasn't exactly in your line. Well, we found the car in a South London garage—yesterday."

"How do you know it's *the* car?" asked Chaney.

"Well, I think you'll see when I tell you," replied Jalvane, with a dry chuckle. "First of all, the garage people's description of the man who left it there on the morning of April 12 corresponds with Seward. Secondly, it's an old, much worn car—which accords with what Massie says in this statement. And, thirdly, in a pocket in the lining we found a book, Latin, similar to those we saw at Seward's lodgings. How's that for evidence?"

"Good enough for me, Jalvane!" I said. "But—have you ascertained if it was his own car, or—anything else about it?"

"As to that," he answered, "the garage people say that they knew him. For some time he'd been in the habit of leaving this car with them, at odd times. Sometimes he'd leave it for a month and never come near it—sometimes for a day or two. They attached no importance to the fact that until yesterday it had remained there since April 12. They knew him as Mr. Swann—all the name he ever gave. When he left it there on April 12 it was at a very early hour of the morning. Of course, they never saw him afterwards—they'd never even thought of him or connected him with our man. But there's no doubt Mr. Swann was Seward, or that this old car is the one he used when he went to Linwood that night."

"Well," I said, "you seem to be finding out a lot of things, Jalvane—and no doubt you think we're on the wrong tack?"

"I haven't said so," he replied. "I think we shall all land in the same port."

"But we've been following up our ideas about Stecke—" I began.

"Continue to follow 'em!" he said.

"And we think that he and Mrs. Effingham—"

"Um!" he interrupted. "I dare say you can find out a good deal there. Perhaps not what you think, but—"

He broke off abruptly, shaking his head.

"What do you think?" I asked, pointedly.

"I?" he said. "Oh, I think that though she's no beauty—good figure, though—Mrs. Effingham is a great many years younger than her husband, that life at Linwood Rectory is probably as dull as ditch-water, and that an occasional evening at the Bessington Club comes as a very welcome relief!"

"In the company of the Reverend Herbert Stecke, eh?"

"As you say—in the company of the Reverend Herbert Stecke," he assented. "He—I suppose he's a man, even if he is a parson. And—as I remarked before—Mrs. Effingham's husband is—an old gentleman!"

He got up and buttoned his coat tight up to his throat.

“Queer business!” he said, smiling from one to the other of us. “Interesting! Go on with what you’re after, you two. What is it, now?”

“Our job at present, Jalvane, is to watch Stecke,” I said. “We’re doing it!”

He nodded two or three times, smiled, and in silence went away.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRIENDLY GREENGROCER

When Jalvane had gone, Chaney sat for some time in silence, his legs stretched out across the hearth-rug, his hands thrust in the pockets of his trousers, his chin sunk on his waistcoat, his eyes fixed on the points of his boots. I knew the signs: Chaney was up against a brick wall. And, knowing the signs, I let him alone; he was thinking of how to climb over the brick wall, or break through it, or find a way round it.

He lifted his head at last and looked at me, questioningly.

“What is it that these scientific chaps talk about?” he asked. “What do they call that—you know—the—the thing they want to find between men and monkeys?”

I laughed out loud at that.

“What’re you after, Chaney?” I said. “The missing link?”

“Ah, that’s it!” he said. “I never was much of a reader—in those things, at any rate—but I thought I remembered it. The missing link, eh? Well, that’s just what we want, Camberwell!”

“If we’re as slow in finding it as the scientific chaps, we might as well give the thing up!” I replied. “Give it clean up!”

“Give up nothing!” he declared, with emphasis. “Not my way, my lad. No! But, now, is there anything we’ve left undone? Anything we’ve half done?”

I had notions of my own on that point.

“Well, there is something,” I answered. “I’ve thought, more than once, that the examination we made of Seward’s things at that room of his in Star Street wasn’t thorough enough. It was only a surface examination.”

He jumped from his chair, alert and ready again.

“Good business!” he exclaimed. “It was a bit perfunctory, no doubt. Well, we can make another. Let’s see, we got the old woman—relative term, but I call all landladies old women—to lock the place up, didn’t we? What was the precise arrangement?”

I pulled open a drawer in my desk and produced a labelled key.

“The precise arrangement,” I replied, “was that we locked up the room and took the key, promising payment of the rent at ten shillings a week as long as we retained the key. This is the key.”

Chaney reached for his hat and stuck it firmly on his head.

“Come on!” he said. “Leave whatever you’re doing and we’ll go straight there. It may result in nothing, but at any rate we shall be doing something.”

So for the second time we descended on Star Street and Mrs. Pentridge. Star Street looked as drab and shabby as ever; Mrs. Pentridge, in her working trim, showed an immediate appreciation of our presence, which was further heightened when I handed her some current coin of the realm.

“Which I’d been wondering how much longer you’d be for keeping the room on, gentlemen,” she remarked. “Me having had various applications from gentlemen, the card still being in the window of Mr. Seward’s room and me not being able to get at it, you having the key of the door, and tenants thereof, so to speak, but immaterial to me how long you please to retain same—”

“As long as the rent’s paid, eh, ma’am?” said Chaney. “Oh, well, we’re just going to have another look round, and when we’ve finished, we’ll tell you if we shall want to lock up again or if we shall hand the key over.”

“Whichever you pleases, gentlemen, will be quite agreeable to me,” said Mrs. Pentridge with characteristic affability. “Might I make so bold as to inquire if anything fresh has come to light, gentlemen?”

“You might, ma’am,” replied Chaney. “And I’ll reply in two words. No end! But for what it

is, you must wait—you'll be getting a nice bit of spicy reading in your favourite Sunday paper before long. But has anything fresh occurred with you, ma'am, about this business? Any letters come for Seward? Anybody called to ask after him?"

"Which there ain't been nothing at all of that nature, sir," replied Mrs. Pentridge. "The poor gentleman never had no letters, and as far as I reck'lect, nobody ever did call to see him—he was a lone man, gentlemen, was Mr. Seward. All the same there was an inquiry about him made to me in the street the other morning."

I was just then in the very act of fitting the key into the door of the late Mr. Seward's room. Chaney laid a detaining hand on my arm.

"Oh?" he said. "Who made it, Mrs. Pentridge?"

"Which it was Mr. Perkis, sir, the gentleman what keeps the greengrocer's shop at the corner, where you turns up to Praed Street, sir," replied Mrs. Pentridge. "Of course, I buys my vegetables there, as a rule. And when I was in the other morning, a-buying of a few little things, Mr. Perkis, he says: 'What's come of that fresh-coloured gentleman as used to lodge at your place?' he says. 'I never knew his name, but I seen him a-coming out of your door frequent,' he says. 'Where's he got to?' And of course, gentlemen, remembering your request not to say nothing, I says nothing. Leastways, what I did say was: 'Mr. Perkis!' I says, solemn-like, 'you'll excuse me, but that there is a subject on which I can't express myself. It's a delicate matter, Mr. Perkis,' I says, 'and one that can't be referred to, at present.' 'Oh, just so!' says he. 'I only wondered where he was, 'cause I hadn't seen him at our club lately.' And there was no more passed between us, gentlemen."

"At his club?" said Chaney. "What club did he mean?"

"Which I cannot say, sir, me having no more idea than the man in the moon," replied Mrs. Pentridge. "Though, to be sure, I am aware there is such institutions, the late Mr. Pentridge having belonged to one, though what good it ever did him I never could make out, and made him smell very strong of beer and tobacco, if you'll excuse me for referring to such things."

"Who's this man—Perkis, greengrocer, end of the street?" asked Chaney. "Um!—we'll just step along and have a word with him, I think. See you later, Mrs. Pentridge—and in the mean time, keep your tongue still, eh?"

"Trust me, sir," said Mrs. Pentridge. "Which I never mentioned the name to Mr. Perkis."

"And Perkis didn't mention a name to you, eh?" asked Chaney, pausing with his hand on the door.

"He did not, sir," replied Mrs. Pentridge. " 'The fresh-coloured gentleman'—that was the term he used."

Chaney said no more and we went out into the street and turned towards the corner. The greengrocer's shop came in sight before we had taken half a dozen steps.

"What're we after, Chaney?" I asked as we drew near it.

"Anything we can catch!" he answered. "Evidently this chap Perkis knew Seward as a member of some club or other, even if he didn't know his name. Club is a wide term! I don't suppose Perkis meant the Carlton, or the Reform, or the Army and Navy, and I shouldn't think he was referring to a slate club. But he may have meant one of these little political clubs, and if he did, I want to know what Seward was doing there. But we'll soon see—or hear!"

We came up to the shop—a typical establishment of that quarter, with a lavish display of the cheaper and more popular fruits and vegetables. There was a boy at the door bawling his wares, a stoutish woman busy inside, a little man in an apron with a pen behind his ear doing something in the writing line at a stand-up desk. He looked up as we entered.

"Mr. Perkis?" inquired Chaney.

"Same, sir, at your service," replied Mr. Perkis, accentuating the preposition. "What can I do for you, sir? Not sell you any vegetables, I'll bet!" he went on, with something like a wink.

“What is it—politics?”

“Scarcely!” laughed Chaney “Just a minute’s talk—in private.”

Mr. Perkis took us both in at one swift glance and ushered us into a dingy little room behind his shop. Then he looked at us again.

“Police?” he asked laconically.

Chaney drew out a card and passed it over.

“You asked Mrs. Pentridge who lives in Star Street about a recent lodger of hers, to whom you referred as the fresh-coloured gentleman—”

“Never knew his name,” interrupted Mr. Perkis.

“—And you mentioned that he belonged to your club—”

“So he did! We called him the Gentleman. Secretary and manager may ha’ known his name, but nobody else did, I’ll swear.”

“What club is that, Mr. Perkis?”

“The Harmonial, sir. Whether there is such a word I don’t know,” said Mr. Perkis, “but as it expresses the feelings of our members, let it stand! Social club, sir—to be found in Harrow Road—Number 5873—up two flights of stairs, and there you are!”

“Social club, eh?” suggested Chaney.

“That’s it, sir—and a very pleasant one.”

“And you used to see this man there?”

“Occasionally. Two or three nights a week. He’d drop in for an hour or so. And, as I said before, we called him the Gentleman. Very affable, very polite, very sociable. Could tell a good tale better than any man I ever heard. And if he did pop a bit of Latin or Greek into his talk, well, it was like a sprinkle of pepper and salt on a tomato; it brought out the flavour.”

“Just so!” agreed Chaney. “Well, now, do you think we could get a talk with the secretary or manager of the Harmonial?”

Mr. Perkis snatched up a business card and scribbled something on the back of it.

“If you give him this—he’s secretary, manager, and steward all in one,” he said—“you can talk as long as you like with him. But,” he continued, looking from one to the other of us. “What’s it all about? Is he wanted?”

Chaney assumed his most mysterious expression. He gave Mr. Perkis a wink.

“Dead!” he whispered. “We’re making some inquiries on behalf of his relations. Big mystery behind it!”

Mr. Perkis’s lips shaped themselves into a compressed circle.

“O—oh!” he said. “Oh, I see! Duke in disguise, or something of that sort, eh? Well—well! But you go and see our steward.”

“What name?” inquired Chaney.

Mr. Perkis scratched his head and then shook it.

“Well, now, there you have me!” he said. “Been a member there this five years, I have, and never known his name! Surname, I mean. Leastways, if I ever have known it, I don’t now. We call him William—Sweet William. Ask for William and hand him my ticket. Mystery, eh? Ah, I always thought there was something o’ that sort about the Gentleman!”

Leaving Mr. Perkis in the midst of his cabbages and cauliflowers, Chaney and I went away and, skirting round by Praed Street and Paddington Green, entered on the long dreary stretches of the Harrow Road. We had walked a mile up that when we came to the Harmonial Club—the presence of which was denoted by a neat board affixed to a side-door flanking a furnishing emporium. The side-door was open; we entered and, walking up two flights of stairs, according to Mr. Perkis’s instructions, found ourselves confronting another door, on the upper panels of which was a second neat board, bearing the inscription “*Harmonial Club. Members Only.*” This appeared to deny entrance to outsiders, but Chaney pushed boldly in, and I followed at his elbow.

We found ourselves in a little hall, or lobby, from which two or three doors opened—all were then closed. But, one suddenly opening, there presented himself before us a smart-looking young fellow of twenty-five or six, who, I would swear, had been a waiter before he became what he was. He gave us a sharp, comprehensive, examining look and for some reason or other was immediately bland, suave, and at the same time watchful.

"Yes, gentlemen?" he said.

Chaney held out Mr. Perkis's card.

"Mr. Perkis," began Chaney, "was good enough to say you'd give us a bit of information. You're the manager, I reckon?"

"Manager, steward, secretary—anything you like, sir," replied the other, with a ready smile. "What is it, sir?"

"Private and confidential sort of stuff," said Chaney with a wink. "Here—my card!"

The steward took Chaney's card, inspected it, looked up, and winked back. Stepping across the lobby, he opened another door and revealed a small room which was half-office and half bar—that is to say, there were the appurtenances of an office on one side, and the apparatus of a bar on the other.

"Come inside, gentlemen," he said. "All private here—there's no one comes very much to this place before night. What is it, now?"

"We want to know if you can tell us anything about a member of yours of whom we've been talking to Mr. Perkis just now," began Chaney. "A member who, he says, was known amongst you here as the Gentleman. All the name, Perkis says, that he himself knew him by."

"All he was known by," said the Steward, nodding. "The Gentleman!"

Chaney remained silent a second or two. Then he gave our host another wink.

"I'll bet you knew him by a name;" he said. "Come, now!"

The steward laughed.

"Oh, well, of course!" he admitted readily. "He had to give a name when he signed the book—members' book, you know."

"I'm not going into your terms of membership," said Chaney. "I know a bit about these social clubs. Name and address, eh?"

"Address is—not necessary," replied the steward.

"Name, then," continued Chaney. "And in this case—what was it? All between ourselves, you know, my lad!"

"Nemo!" replied the Steward. "Mr. Henry Nemo."

Chaney turned on me.

"Latin?" he asked. "What's it mean?"

"No man—nobody—no one!" I answered.

"Knew how to label himself," muttered Chaney.

The steward was watching us both, closely. He smiled.

"What's it all about?" he asked. "As you said—all between ourselves!"

"This, then, my lad," replied Chaney. "Read the famous Linwood Church robbery and what followed? And about the man who'd posed as Dean of Norchester being killed? We saw it, my friend and I—in the City. Well—that's your man! Nemo here—Seward somewhere else—and something different elsewhere! Got it?"

The steward whistled.

"Never struck me till now!" he said. "So—he's dead?"

"As last year's roses!" declared Chaney. "And we want to know a few things. We know where he lodged, in Paddington; we know what he had there. Now, then, this is what we came here for. Had he anything here—any effects? Ever leave anything here? A man like that might use a quiet place like this for stowing away a bit of property. Is there anything of his on your

premises? If there is, better let me see it—because you'd rather deal with me than with the official police. And it's got to be one or the other!"

But the steward made no bones at that question. He smiled knowingly and, thrusting a hand in his pocket, drew out a bunch of keys.

"Come this way," he said, leaving his seat. "Mr. Nemo had a locker here."

CHAPTER XXIII

SEWARD'S SAFE

There was—to me, at any rate, who had never been in quite such a place before—an atmosphere of mystery about this Harmonial Club, and it was further deepened when the accommodating steward, who, for some reason best known to himself, seemed particularly anxious to please Chaney, led us from that room into an inner one, the chief features of which were a big safe in a corner, and, ranged along one side, a series of lockers, all numbered in black figures. He turned, glancing at Chaney—of me he took next to no notice—and smiled as he pointed to a number—23.

"Some of our members—the better sort," he said—"like to have lockers wherein they can keep a few little odds and ends which—eh?—it mightn't be quite convenient to keep at home. You understand?"

"Perfectly!" responded Chaney. "Perfectly, my lad! And—"

"And Mr. Nemo had one," continued the Steward. "That's it—Number 23. Of course, he had the key. But," he added, with a meaning smile, "I have a master-key to—in fact to the whole lot of these little receptacles. You want to take a look inside Mr. Nemo's—shall we call it 'safe'?"

Chaney gave the steward another of those winks of his which always seemed—to me—to exercise some profound influence on certain people.

"Well, my lad!" he answered. "Between you and me—and my partner here, of course!—it's a case of which you prefer. Either it's me—or it's Scotland Yard! Which do you fancy?"

The steward laughed and moved towards the locker.

"I prefer you!" he said, and put a key in the little door. "There you are!"

Chaney and I rubbed shoulders as we bent forward and peered into the eighteen-inch-square cavity. There was just one object inside—a box, some 12 x 12 x 8—which, drawn out, proved to be locked. The box itself was interesting; it may have been a work-box, fashioned for some early Victorian lady; the rosewood of which it was made was dull now, but had once been highly polished; the brass corners were tarnished. It weighed fairly heavy in one's hand; shaken, it seemed to be pretty well full of something soft, papers, something of that sort.

Chaney turned to the steward.

"Ever seen this before?" he demanded.

"Once! I saw him put it in there."

"When was that?"

"When he rented the locker. Soon after he joined the club."

"Say anything to you about it?"

"Not a word! He'd seen that other members had lockers; he asked me if he could rent one, and next time he came, brought that box with him, got the key from me, and put the box inside."

"Well," said Chaney, after a pause, "I'm going to take this box away. See?"

For answer the steward turned to the locker, turned his key in it, withdrew the key, and dropped it in his pocket. He smiled at Chaney.

"Personally," he said, "I've no objection. And as Mr. Nemo's dead, he can't have any. And as nobody else knows—eh?"

"Got a scrap of brown paper about?" asked Chaney.

The steward produced what was wanted, and Chaney wrapping up the rosewood box, tucked it tightly away under his left arm. He gave the steward a nod which that functionary seemed to comprehend exactly.

"All right, my lad!" he said, moving towards the door. "Much obliged to you—far better to deal with me than with—"

“Oh, much pleasanter, much pleasanter!” interrupted the steward, laughing softly. “Some people ask so many questions that are—inconvenient.”

“I don’t!” said Chaney. “But I’ll drop in and tell you how I get on with this—” tapping the box—“a bit later.”

“Do!” said the steward. “Interesting! And, of course, all the rest is—*entre nous*, eh?”

“In plain English, all p. and c., my lad,” said Chaney. “Bye-bye!”

We went down the two flights of stairs and out into the street. That was not the sort of districts in which you can pick up a taxi-cab by holding out a finger, and for a little distance we walked along the pavement. Then a bus came by, going in the direction of Edgware Road, and we hailed and boarded it. The lower part was empty; Chaney and I had one end to ourselves.

“What did you make of that place, Chaney?” I asked as we moved away. “You seemed to understand its atmosphere—I didn’t.”

He laughed softly, transferring the box from his armpit to his knee.

“Gambling-hell!” he said. “Just that!”

“But—if that’s so, it’s odd that Perkis should have let us go there, isn’t it?” I said. “You’d have thought—”

He laughed again at that.

“Perkis would know nothing about it,” he said. “Perkis’ll be an ordinary frequenter, to drink his pint, smoke his pipe, pass the time o’ day, and go home to bed at a Christian hour. There’ll be at that place what the French call a *cercle privé,* Camberwell! And that’s why we found that chap we’ve just left so amenable! He’d have let us do anything we liked, being who we are, private inquiry agents, rather than that we should have gone away and told the regular police—what I could have told ’em. He didn’t want any C.I.D. men round there—not he! They’d ha’ been nosing things out!”

“What are we going to do with that?” I asked, pointing to the box.

“When we get to our office, we’ll phone Jalvane and tell him to come,” he answered. “I’ve a notion we may—it’s only may, of course—find something here that’ll throw a bit more light on Seward and possibly on the present position of things, and as Jalvane has helped us, we must help him. And—if there is anything, Camberwell, we’re bound to bring the police authorities in. So—there we are! We must get Jalvane—and open this old box.”

We left the bus when it reached more civilized quarters and, taking a taxi-cab, hurried to our office, where I at once got in touch with Jalvane. Within half an hour he was with us and listening to our story.

“Well,” he said, as Chaney finished, “then the next thing is—a key.”

We all tried whatever keys we had on us, but in the end, rather than spoil what was really a fine bit of cabinet work, Chippendale had to fetch a locksmith. He contrived to open the box without damaging the lock or lid, and presently, locksmith and Chippendale out of the room, we lifted the lid and looked inside. And Chaney immediately pointed to a discoloured bit of parchment, pasted strongly to the left-hand upper corner of the inside of the lid. There was an inscription on it in a delicate feminine handwriting, the ink faded by age: “*Henry Sewell, the gift of his Mother, on his 15th birthday.*”

“Sort of box for a boy to keep his odds and ends in at school,” muttered Jalvane. “He seems to have stuck to it pretty well. Well, let’s see what there is.”

A fold or two of soft paper was laid over the other contents. Beneath these lay a miscellaneous collection of what I can only describe as odds and ends. My own impression about the box and its contents was that the various things found in it had been placed there years previously and never touched—that is to say, unpacked—since, and that Seward, for some reason best known to himself, had preferred to keep the box in the club locker rather than at his lodging in Star Street. Described briefly, the contents were as follows: Papers, showing his connexion

with the Sewells of Spalding. Letters, some of them from famous people, chiefly relating to matters and questions of scholarship; several were from eminent classical scholars of world-wide reputation. Several very rare postage stamps, enclosed in a Mulready envelope. A roughly drawn map, with queer signs, figures, and indications on it; of this none of us could make head or tail. Several coins, Roman and Byzantine, tightly wrapped up in a fold or two of wash-leather. A very old leather purse, of the sort known as Portsea, containing in one pocket a quantity of the long obsolete fourpenny pieces; in the other a Jubilee medal, in silver, of 1897. There were more oddities and curiosities; some of them of such a trifling nature that it was difficult to understand why any man should have bothered to preserve them. And then, at the bottom of the box, tightly wedged in, side by side, lay two books; one, a copy of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, full bound in crimson calf and bearing the arms of Spalding Grammar School on the side (evidently, and as we saw, later, from the inscription inside, a prize book); the other a copy of the Greek Testament, in full morocco. Both these books were as fresh as when they left the hands of the binders and had apparently never been used.

While Jalvane occupied himself with the papers, and Chaney examined the letters, I, to whom any printed book has an irresistible attraction, picked up the two beautifully bound volumes and examined them more closely. The *Golden Treasury* was a first prize for Latin, awarded to Henry Sewell at Spalding Grammar School (Mr. Francis Sewell, it will be remembered, had said in his evidence before the City Coroner that his was a Spalding family). The Greek Testament—with the Greek and English in parallel columns—was a birthday present to Henry Sewell from his mother. It was so fresh and clean that I doubted if Henry Sewell had ever opened it. But suddenly I knew that he had—once, at any rate. For as I turned its immaculate pages over, there dropped out from amongst them a folded paper, somewhat creased, somewhat yellow with age, and fell on the table by which we were all standing. Chaney's sharp eyes caught the flutter.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Fell out of that book!"

I laid the Greek Testament down and, picking up the folded paper, smoothed it out. For a second or two I scarcely comprehended what I was looking at. Then I saw that it was a marriage certificate; the thing commonly known as marriage lines.

"It's a marriage certificate," I said, "An old—"

"Marriage certificate?" interrupted Chaney. "Whose marriage certificates are—here, let me look!"

He half-snatched the paper out of my hand; within a second he hit the table with a great thump of his fist and let out a cry.

"By God, we've got it!" he almost shouted. "Got it as safe as—as anything! This is *it*!"

"What's it? What're you talking about?" demanded Jalvane. "What—"

"Look, look!" said Chaney, laying the paper on the table, and pointing to a certain place in the faded writing. "Look! This is a certificate of marriage between Henry Sewell and Clarice Turner! Clarice Turner!"

"Well?" said Jalvane. "And what—"

Chaney turned on me.

"Clarice Turner—Clarice!" he repeated, nodding at me. "Clarice!"

"What do you mean, Chaney?" I asked, quietly. "Explain!"

"Explain?" he shouted. "Lord, Camberwell, where's your memory? *Mrs. Effingham's name is Clarice!*"

I think I began then to see what he meant. I remembered, too, that he was right. Several times, in our conversations at Linwood, I had heard Canon Effingham address his wife as Clarice; once she had sent some formal communication to me on his behalf and had signed herself *Clarice Effingham*.

"Yes, Chaney," I said. "Mrs. Effingham's name is Clarice. But—"

Jalvane laid his papers down and came nearer to Chaney.

"Make it clear, my lad!" he said. "What's the notion?"

Chaney was excited; more excited than I had ever seen him before. He spread out the certificate of marriage.

"I'll make it clear, right enough!" he said, with a sharp laugh. "Look at this! It's a certificate of marriage between Henry Sewell, bachelor, and Clarice Turner, spinster, celebrated October 5, 1907, fourteen years ago. He's described as a tutor; she as a nurse. His address is given at 31 Penberthy Villas, Notting Hill; hers as St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington. Now, then, put a few things together. We know that between the date of this marriage and the present, Henry Sewell, as Henry Seward, has had at least one dose of penal servitude; he may have been in prison, too. We also know that Canon Effingham, returning home from a spell of convalescence some time since, brought with him as his wife the woman now known as Mrs. Effingham, who had been his nurse, and whose Christian name is certainly Clarice. Very well—I don't call it jumping at conclusions (considering all that's happened!) what I say that Clarice Turner, Clarice Sewell, Clarice Effingham are all one and the same woman! Establish that, and the mystery's solved."

He stamped the table again with his fist, looking challengingly from one to the other of us. And for the moment I had nothing to say; I was looking back over things. As for Jalvane, he pulled out his snuff-box and helped himself to a big pinch. It seemed a long time before he spoke.

"I dare say you're right!" he said at last. "That would, of course, solve things."

"Beyond question!" declared Chaney. "I tell you—we've got it!"

I found my tongue then.

"Just how Chaney?" I asked. "I don't quite see—"

"Listen, Camberwell!" he answered, enthusiastic as a boy over his discovery. "I put it like this. Of course, we've got to suppose something to start with, and that is that Clarice Effingham is Clarice Sewell, and that both are Clarice Turner, or were originally Clarice Turner. Very well! Clarice Turner marries Henry Sewell. Henry Sewell is a bad lot; he gets into trouble and vanishes to Dartmoor or Portland or where the devil you please! Clarice, left to fend for herself, reverts to her old profession of nursing. She hears no more of Henry—when he emerges from his temporary seclusion Henry goes his own way. She meets a simple old clergyman in the shape of Canon Effingham, and—she marries him. She settles down at Linwood Rectory; she expects, hopes, never to see or hear of Henry Sewell again. But Henry Sewell turns up! When he turns up, where he turns up, we don't know. But he does turn up! Probably Henry, like his brother Francis, has heard of the treasures of Linwood Church; possibly he goes to spy out the land. But, however that may be, Henry materializes. He and Clarice meet—and from the moment of this meeting, Clarice is in Henry's power!"

"I take you!" muttered Jalvane. "You've got it!"

"In Henry's power!" continued Chaney. "And so are the old Canon's keys and the church treasures! Good Lord! I see the whole thing now as—well, never mind, I see it! Mrs. Effingham handed out the keys to Henry; Henry did the rest, and cracked Skate's skull in doing it. Oh yes, yes—that's been the way of it! The instant Henry clapped eyes on Clarice again and found out she was now Mrs. Effingham, church doors and vestry doors and safe door—flew wide open!"

There was a moment's silence. Then I ventured one word—a name.

"Stecke?"

Chaney spread his hands and made a grimace.

"That'll come a bit later, Camberwell," he said. "I've a theory about all that. But the first thing is—Mrs. Effingham. What do you say, Jalvane?"

"Ditto!" replied Jalvane. "And—at once!"

Chaney carefully folded up the marriage certificate, placed it in a stout envelope, and secured

the envelope in his pocket-book. He swept all the other things into the box and put the box away.

“Camberwell,” he said, “get the car! Jalvane’ll come with us. We’ll be at Linwood in an hour. Give Chip his orders about being here in case that girl of his rings up. And—hurry! We’re in sight of the end!”

An hour and a quarter later Chaney, Jalvane, and I walked up to the front door of Linwood Rectory. Everything was very quiet there, but my heart was distinctly thumping with excitement. Then the door opened and revealed the grenadier-like figure of Bleacher.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ARCHDEACON

This, in my opinion, had been so far a day of surprise and mystery, and Bleacher's behaviour seemed to indicate that both mystery and surprise were to continue. She had no sooner caught sight of us than, lifting a finger to her lips in sign of silence, she stepped back into the hall and, beckoning us to follow her, showed us into a small room facing the study. Closing the door on the four of us, she turned and spoke—whispering.

"I'd an idea you'd come," she said. "I'd expected every ring to be yours. There's something going on here! What, I don't know, but it seems to me that there's—well, we'll call it the end coming. So I think!"

"End of—what?" asked Chaney.

"That I can't say," replied Bleacher. "End of all this—this mystery. Things have happened. The Canon's gone away. He's gone north—to visit the Dean of Norchester. The Dean, he wrote asking him to go—he wanted to know all about it, and of course they're old friends. And last night—or evening—that Stecke was here. I think he and the missus had a difference—I heard high words. He looked—well, sore angry and put out when he went away, and I could see that she'd been crying. And this morning she was busy at the telephone for some time, and then this afternoon the Archdeacon came—two hours since, that is—and he's been with her ever since, in the study. I say something's up."

"Who's the Archdeacon?" asked Chaney, who was not much up in ecclesiastical matters. "Where's he from? And who and what is he?"

"It's the Archdeacon of Havering I'm talking about," said Bleacher. "A very great gentleman—next to the Bishop. And if I know anything of faces, a stern gentleman, too—I shouldn't like to get across with him!"

"An archdeacon, Chaney," I explained, "is the business man of a diocese—learned in practical matters. Probably Mrs. Effingham sent for him."

"Well," said Chaney, "but we've got to see Mrs. Effingham; we must see Mrs. Effingham. It might be well if we could see her while this Archdeacon is in the house. Jalvane, give me your professional card. Here!" he continued, handing Jalvane's and our own professional cards to Bleacher, "you take those to your mistress, say that we're here, and that it is imperatively necessary that we should see her as quickly as may be convenient to her."

Bleacher took the cards and departed, shutting the door on us. We all looked at each other. Jalvane produced his snuff-box and helped himself to a hearty pinch. He snapped the lid with emphasis before restoring the box to his pocket.

"She'll not see us!" he said. "She'll use this Archdeacon chap as—deputy. Well—I'd rather deal with a man, even if he is a parson."

"But we've got to see her!" exclaimed Chaney. "This is no time for—"

"Umph!" interrupted Jalvane. "The woman's coming back."

Bleacher opened the door—threw it wide open.

"Will you come this way?" she asked. "The study."

She preceded us across the hall to the closed door of the study; tapped; threw that open, too, motioning us to walk in. We entered, Chaney leading, I bringing up the rear.

There was no Mrs. Effingham there. But posted on the hearth-rug, his gaitered legs set well apart, his hands unseen behind his broad back, stood the Archdeacon, a very fine figure of a man, one glance at whose face was quite sufficient to show that there was one of those men who neither suffer fools gladly nor stand any nonsense. I think we all three recognized that at once and did obeisance to a superior brain in our bows—I know I made mine several inches lower

than I usually did!

The Archdeacon brought a strong, shapely hand from behind the small of his back. It held our cards, and after a sharp glance at them he bestowed an equally sharp glance on us.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said, in a staccato, business like tone, “which of you is Inspector Jalvane? And which Mr. Chaney? Then the other is Mr. Camberwell. Very well! Sit down. Now, why do you wish to see Mrs. Effingham?”

My two elder associates, usually quite ready to speak, turned to me. Chaney spoke.

“Mr. Camberwell will explain matters, sir,” he answered. “There—there is a great deal to explain.”

The Archdeacon smiled a little as he turned his attention to me. I had been sizing him up and had set him down as a bit of an autocrat in his own domain. And it was a very autocratic tone which characterized the one word of invitation which issued from his lips.

“Yes?”

So I was in for it. But I was not going to be browbeaten.

“Mr. Archdeacon,” I said, “may I ask if you are conversant with the history of this case?”

I saw at once that he was not the sort of man who cares to be questioned. But he replied directly enough.

“I am!”

“Deriving your information, I suppose, from the newspapers, and possibly from Canon Effingham, and perhaps from—Mrs. Effingham?”

He frowned at that and began to give me some particular attention.

“I am quite conversant with the case, from its inception,” he said. “I don’t care to be questioned. I asked you a question. Why do you wish to see Mrs. Effingham? That is the question!”

“I am going to answer it, Mr. Archdeacon, in very plain fashion,” I retorted. “But first I am going to show our credentials. Mr. Chaney and I are responsible private inquiry agents, commissioned by Canon Effingham to discover the truth about this mystery—the theft of the Linwood Church treasures. And we are working in association with Inspector Jalvane, of the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard. Will you please understand all that?”

“Your credentials are approved!” he answered, with a slight smile. “I am not aware that they were questioned.”

“It is well to lay stress on them, Mr. Archdeacon,” I said, “especially in view of what I am going to say. From certain information which has come into our hands we are something more than doubtful if Mrs. Effingham, as she represents herself to be, is Mrs. Effingham at all. I put that plainly to you. For you, Mr. Archdeacon, may—know!”

He still stood in his original position on the hearth-rug, looking down on me from his six foot two, his eyes as steady, his mouth as set, as when we had first seen him. For a second or two he was silent. Then, disregarding my last remark, he spoke.

“If she is not Mrs. Effingham, who is she?” he demanded. “Who do you say she is?”

“We say she is the wife—or, rather, the widow, now—of Henry Sewell, alias Henry Seward, the man who stole the church treasures here and who probably killed the man Skate,” I answered. “We say she is not Clarice Effingham at all, but Clarice Sewell, nee Turner.”

“What proof have you of that?” he asked. “Any?”

“Yes, Mr. Archdeacon! A marriage certificate, which I shall now show you. Chaney!”

Chaney pulled out his pocket-book and extracted the all-important document. He handed it over to the Archdeacon. And the Archdeacon stood, stern and rigid, and read, his face as fixed as that of an image. Suddenly he folded the paper up and, passing it back to Chaney, relaxed. Thrusting his hands into the pockets of his archidiaconal breeches, he leaned back against the mantelpiece and, regarding us with a look which was rather more friendly and human than

heretofore, began to talk.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, with a wry smile, "the game is up! That, I think, seems to be the correct thing to say. You are quite right in your supposition. Mrs. Effingham (let us call her so still for the purpose of this discussion) is not Mrs. Effingham, and she is the widow of the man Henry Sewell! The fact of the case is, gentlemen, Mrs. Effingham has made a full confession to me, this afternoon, of all she knows in connexion with the robbery and the subsequent events, and she has empowered me, since you are here, to give you the substance of it. I am now prepared to do so."

Chaney found his tongue at last.

"That will be a very good thing to do, sir," he said. "A very wise thing, too, on the lady's part. But—does she understand the—er, consequences?"

"I think Mrs. Effingham is prepared to face any consequences rather than undergo any longer what she has been going through of late!" replied the Archdeacon. "But, at any rate, as soon as she knew that you were here, she authorized me to tell you everything she had just told me. It is fortunate that Canon Effingham has gone away; we must spare him all we can."

"He knows nothing of this, then, sir?" asked Chaney.

"Nothing whatever! But now," continued the Archdeacon, dropping into the nearest chair and facing the three of us, "now I want to tell you the real truth, as told me by Mrs. Effingham—I am convinced that she has kept back nothing. It is a sordid, pitiful, nasty story—but I suppose it is one which will not shock or surprise you. Anyhow, gentlemen, it is this: Mrs. Effingham, as a single woman, named Clarice Turner, met Henry Sewell. She was earning her living as a trained nurse; he, as a private tutor. They married. Almost from the first she discovered that her husband was a man of strange behaviour and odd principles. Sometimes she never saw him for weeks together; always she was earning her own living; she assures me that he never contributed one penny to her support. Eventually he disappeared altogether, and for years and years she never set eyes on him. She believed he was dead—and in that belief she married Canon Effingham, whom she had just nursed through a period of convalescence."

"Pardon me, sir, but did she tell Canon Effingham anything of her past?" asked Chaney. "Anything about Sewell?"

"No," replied the Archdeacon. "There she made a grave mistake. But she did not. According to her own account, she firmly believed that Henry Sewell was dead. She, of course, encouraged that belief in herself. But, gentlemen, Henry Sewell was not dead! And one day last winter he and his wife came face to face—here in Linwood Church!"

By this time Chaney had got out his note-book and was jotting things down in the curious shorthand which he had devised for himself; as for Jalvane, he had long since produced his snuff-box and was from time to time deriving mental aid from its depths. Both paused from their occupations at the Archdeacon's last words and looked up at him with renewed interest.

"Ah—in the church, sir?" said Chaney. "One day last winter, eh? Did she tell you what particular day—or month?"

"No," replied the Archdeacon, "except that it was on a Sunday, during service."

"On a Sunday, during service!" repeated Chaney. "Accidental, I suppose?"

"Purely accidental! She suddenly caught sight of Sewell in the congregation," continued the Archdeacon. "It gave her a great fright, of course. And, equally of course, she knew that Sewell would not rest until he had had speech with her."

"Naturally!" observed Chaney, with a dry laugh. "Naturally, sir."

"Sewell contrived to speak to her—on pretence of asking some question—as the congregation left the church," the Archdeacon went on. "He made an appointment to meet her that evening, after dark."

"She kept it?" inquired Chaney.

“She kept it. She assures me,” continued the Archdeacon, “that from the first moment of seeing Sewell she was in what one calls mortal terror of him, knowing the man with whom she had to deal. And after their first meeting she was absolutely under his control, knowing that a word from him—you understand?”

“We understand quite well, sir,” replied Chaney. “He held her secret! But what we want to know is—what happened?”

“At first,” continued the Archdeacon, “he contented himself with blackmail, getting from her various sums of money. Canon Effingham had always been most generous to her; she had a good deal of money laid by. Sewell got it from her, little by little. But eventually he began to fly at higher game. At the beginning of this spring, in one of their secret interviews, he told her openly what he was after and that he was relying on her to help him to—the famous church treasures of Linwood.”

“Had she told him of them?” asked Chaney.

“Quite unnecessary!” said the Archdeacon. “I used the word ‘famous.’ Everybody knows of them. They have been written about, placed on exhibition, talked of—”

“We’re very well aware of all that, sir,” interrupted Chaney. “I asked what I did for a certain reason of my own, but now I come to think of it, you couldn’t possibly have given me an answer. Well, he wanted her help—and got it?”

“I suppose he forced her to do what she did,” said the Archdeacon. “At any rate, she has confessed to me that at Sewell’s suggestion she took the private keys from her husband’s—”

“From Canon Effingham’s,” corrected Chaney, imperturbably.

“From Canon Effingham’s dressing-table one night, got the church keys from his study drawer, and handed them to Sewell at a side-door of the house,” continued the Archdeacon. “And that is all the share she had in the robbery. Of the death of the man Skate she knows nothing. Nor, of course, did she ever see Sewell again—he was, as you are aware, killed—”

“We saw him killed,” said Chaney dryly. He closed his note-book, put it and his pencil away, and suddenly turned sharply on the Archdeacon. “Why, sir, has Mrs. Effingham told you all this?” he asked.

“Because the strain of preserving the secret has been too much for her,” replied the Archdeacon. “She wishes me to acquaint Canon Effingham with the truth, and she will throw herself on his mercy.”

“But did she commission you to tell us, sir?” asked Chaney. “I want to know that!”

“Yes! when your cards were brought in, I suggested to her that it would be best to let the police authorities know the truth, and she consented that I should tell you what I have told you,” replied the Archdeacon. “I feel convinced that now—now!—Mrs. Effingham, as we will continue to call her, does not desire to conceal anything.”

Chaney, Jalvane, and I looked at each other. I think each was inviting the other to speak. But it was Jalvane who spoke—for the first time since we three had entered the study.

“The lady throws all the blame on Sewell, sir?—and claims that whatever she did, was done under compulsion?” he asked. “Is that it?”

“That is precisely her case,” replied the Archdeacon.

“And she has no further knowledge of—anything—after the moment in which she handed the keys to Sewell?” continued Jalvane.

“So I understand,” said the Archdeacon.

“Then I wish to ask you a question, sir,” concluded Jalvane. “What has she told you about the Reverend Mr. Stecke?”

The Archdeacon started and stared.

“The Reverend Mr. Stecke?” he exclaimed. “Nothing! What do you mean?”

CHAPTER XXV

BLACKMAIL

The Archdeacon repeated his question twice without eliciting any reply from Jalvane or from either Chaney or me; we were all watching him, wondering if he was the sort of man to whom we could tell all that we knew. Suddenly Jalvane jumped to his feet and, motioning Chaney and me to follow him, walked over to a far corner of the study—an unusually large room—and motioned us to a conference. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the tall figure left silent and amazed on the hearth-rug.

"I think it may be well," he said hesitating, "well—eh?—to tell him. Evidently she's playing some game—not to have told him herself. But if he knows—a business-like man, I think—he may be useful."

"I say, tell him by all means!" agreed Chaney. "Of course, for some reason of her own, she's bluffed him, somewhere. Told him half the tale. But the other half!—that's what's of importance now. She and Stecke! And—no time to be lost, in my opinion. Stecke was here last night. Why? Oh, yes, let's tell him. Camberwell, you do the talking. Put it short and straight—you know!"

We went back to the hearth, the Archdeacon watching us with a speculative frown, as if we had been hatching some plot. I sat down again, facing him.

"Mr. Archdeacon," I said, "Inspector Jalvane asked you if Mrs. Effingham had told you anything about Mr. Stecke. You replied that she had not and asked what was meant by the question. What was meant was this: we know that in some way or other Mr. Stecke is mixed up in the matters we have been talking of, and we feel sure that Mrs. Effingham knows a great deal which she has kept back from you. In fact, we feel sure that for some purpose of her own, probably not unconnected with Mr. Stecke, she has wilfully deceived you when she says that her knowledge of the theft and the subsequent happenings is confined to her having handed the keys over to Sewell!"

He was staring at me in genuine wonder, and as he made no attempt to speak, I went on.

"We have found out a great many facts in the course of our investigations, Mr. Archdeacon, and I am going to tell you some of them. Only a few—but they are facts! We know that for some time Mrs. Effingham and Mr. Stecke have been in the habit of frequenting a certain gambling-club in the West End. We know that Mr. Stecke has been in possession of Treasury notes which, without doubt, were paid to Sewell, or, as we know him, Seward, at the Bank of England in exchange for the notes given him in cashing Mr. Atherton's open cheque, handed to Seward in his assumed role of Dean of Norchester. We know that since the theft of the church treasures Stecke's doings and movements have been of a very suspicious character. He has, for instance, thrown off his clerical attire and is going about dressed as a layman, and, under another name, he has been living recently at a Bayswater private hotel, where, Mr. Archdeacon, we are having a strict watch kept on him. Altogether there are some very, very suspicious facts known to us in respect of Mrs. Effingham's friendship, intimacy, or whatever it may be with Mr. Stecke, and our suspicion is added to by the fact that, in telling you what she has, she has not mentioned him."

"Not a word of him!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Not one word! But—what is it that you really think?"

"We think that there is a secret between Mrs. Effingham and Stecke as to the events of the night of April 11—the date of the theft of the church treasures and the murder of Skate—and as to subsequent events," I replied. "And the time has come for that secret to be divulged. We hoped to hear it from you, but it is quite evident, from what you say, that Mrs. Effingham has only told you half the story. Now, sir, we want the other half!"

He had listened very attentively to all I said, nodding his head now and then, and now, as I

finished, he seemed to make up his mind to something. He gave the three of us a searching, comprehensive look.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “it is quite evident that you know a great deal more about this matter than I do. Now, can you suggest Mrs. Effingham’s motive in telling me what you describe—correctly, no doubt—as half a story?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “Probably her motive was to direct attention from herself and Stecke. It may be that she has some idea that something about Stecke and herself was being discovered. Or it may be that she has become frightened and wants to sever whatever connexion there is between Stecke and herself, and at the same time wishes to conceal the fact that there has ever been any connexion.”

“But why have revealed anything?” he asked. “Perplexing!”

“No, Mr. Archdeacon,” I said. “She wants to throw the entire blame of everything on Seward, or Sewell—a dead man! Hers has been—in my opinion—an attempt, through you, to put everybody on a wrong track—exactly why, I don’t know. You see, sir, Mrs. Effingham does not know that we—my partner and I and Inspector Jalvane—know anything; at least, we are not aware that she knows. But we do know things, and we have opportunities of knowing, of which she isn’t aware. For example, she would doubtless be very much surprised if she knew that we know that Stecke was here last night.”

The Archdeacon started at that.

“Stecke here—last night!” he exclaimed. “How do you know that?”

“Will you take my word for it, Mr. Archdeacon? We do know it.”

He nodded and, taking a step or two about the hearth, seemed to be thinking hard. For a minute or two he was silent; then he turned on us again, sharply.

“It is very evident that there is far more behind all this than I had dreamed of,” he said. “Mrs. Effingham sent for me in her husband’s absence, told me what I have told you, and asked me to intercede for her with Canon Effingham. Her object—”

“Seems pretty plain to me, sir,” interrupted Chaney. “She no doubt hopes that, as Sewell is certainly dead and she’s a widow, Canon Effingham would remarry her!”

“That may be,” said the Archdeacon. “I was, of course, intending to do my best to smooth matters out. But—”

“Things must be cleared up, sir,” I said firmly. “Mrs. Effingham has no doubt told you part of the truth. But we must have the whole. We must know the truth about her relations with Stecke—I mean, of course, as relates to the original theft. In plain words, Mr. Archdeacon, we must have the other half of the story.”

“I know—I know!” he said. “Well, now, will you let me make a suggestion?” He pulled out his watch. “It is now four o’clock,” he continued. “Will you three gentlemen go down to the inn and get some tea and return here about, say, half past five? In the mean time I will see and talk to Mrs. Effingham again—I have, I believe, sufficient influence with her to persuade her to tell everything. And—she will talk more freely to me than she would to you.”

“You’ll give us your word, sir, that she won’t leave this house?” I asked. “We must be assured of that!”

“You may rely on me, Mr. Camberwell,” he answered. “She shall not leave this house. Now go away—and come back as I have indicated.”

We left him then and, going out of the Rectory, walked down to the village inn. None of us said anything until we were out of the Rectory grounds. Then Jalvane let out a word or two.

“Useful man! He’ll get it out of her. Better than we should.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” muttered Chaney. “But—what was Stecke after last night? I’m getting a bit uneasy about Stecke.”

“You needn’t be, Chaney,” said I. “Miss Pratt is responsible for Stecke. She’ll watch him.”

“He was here—Linwood—last night,” he retorted. “I wonder if she was watching him then?”

“May have been, for anything we know,” I said. “What I do know is that if Stecke makes the slightest show of bolting from that hotel in Bayswater, Fanny Pratt will be all alive to his movements. She’s sharper than Chippendale—and that’s saying a good deal.”

“Oh, well,” he said resignedly, “I think it’s coming to an end, somehow. But I do not want Stecke to slip us. And what’s bothering me is—what are we going to bring against him? If Mrs. E.’s first half of the tale’s right, Stecke had nothing to do with either the theft of the church treasures or the murder of Skate—so what have we against him?”

“Wait till we hear the second half of the story,” I said. “Time enough to consider matters when we’ve heard that. Here’s the inn—let’s get some tea.”

We got some tea—and were very silent over it; I think we were all wondering what was going on in that big, book-laden study. And we were all glad and relieved when the time jogged on to half past five, at which hour we once more knocked at the front door of Linwood Rectory.

Bleacher, silent—and obviously inquisitive—admitted us again, but this time took us straight to the study. There stood the Archdeacon, solid and towering and alone—but now he stood by Canon Effingham’s desk, and his first action as we approached him was to lift a large sheet of paper and point us to something which till then it had concealed.

“There, gentlemen!” he said, with a sort of ironic smile. “What you see there will show you at once that I have been—successful!”

We looked at the desk. On the big blotting-pad, each secured by a rubber band, lay four bundles of brand-new Treasury notes, pound notes. I think that all three of us, even Jalvane, started at the sight of them.

“There is a thousand pounds there, gentlemen,” continued the Archdeacon. “Four parcels of two hundred and fifty one-pound notes each. You will observe that they are all unused, absolutely fresh from the press—and I dare say you already have a pretty good idea as to their origin?”

Nobody made any reply to that, and the Archdeacon, dropping into Canon Effingham’s chair at the desk, motioned us to sit round him.

“Mrs. Effingham has told me everything,” he began. “The fact is—I made her! I assumed—I was obliged to, after what you had told me—a very stern and determined manner—”

“Nobody, I am sure, sir, could do it better!” murmured Chaney. “Not even the Lord Chief Justice himself!”

“Thank you, Mr. Chaney,” said the Archdeacon, smiling. “I am usually supposed to be a very mild-mannered person. However, I felt that there was no use in beating about the bush, and I told Mrs. Effingham that you were in possession of certain facts about Mr. Stecke and herself, and that the only thing she could now do was to tell me the plain truth—the whole truth. And—I honestly believe I have got it!”

“Without reserve or concealment, Mr. Archdeacon?” I asked.

“I think so. I think she has now told me everything,” he answered. “And,” he suddenly added, with a singularly unclerical and knowing glance at us, “between you and me, gentlemen, I wish I had Stecke firmly grasped in one of these hands and a stout hunting-crop in the other! But come, come, that is not business! Now I am going to tell you all I have learnt. And as a preface to the very first thing, you had better bear in mind that the man Henry Sewell, alias Henry Seward, was evidently an eccentric being.”

“I think we’ve had some slight evidence of that, sir, in our investigations,” I said.

“Well, he undoubtedly was!” continued the Archdeacon. “Now let us be orderly and systematic in our narration. On the night of April 11 Mrs. Effingham, acting under compulsion and threats, handed Henry Sewell out of the side-door of this house the church keys. She heard and saw no more of him that night. On the morning of April 13 Mrs. Effingham received two

registered parcels. They were taken up to her room in the ordinary way, and of course no one but herself had the slightest idea as to the nature of the contents. One parcel contained twenty-five hundred pounds in new one-pound Treasury notes; it also contained a letter from Henry Sewell (I grieve to say that Mrs. Effingham destroyed it), in which he told her that she no doubt had better facilities for keeping money safe than he had, and asked her to take care of the accompanying notes until he wanted them."

"Good—gosh!" said Chaney, hastily substituting a harmless expletive. "Eccentric? I should think!"

"Odd, certainly," agreed the Archdeacon. "But not, I think, so odd as a subsequent clause in the letter—I wish I had seen that letter, but, as I said just now, she destroyed it. This told her that in another parcel, safely packed, he was sending her the stolen chalice; the paten, he said, he had some present use for, but the chalice she was to put carefully away until he sent for it. Now this, gentlemen—this procedure on his part stamps Sewell, I think, as one of the most eccentric criminals I have ever heard of! But then, you see, he had a hold over this unfortunate woman—she was his wife."

"He was building on that all through, sir," remarked Chaney. "However, whether she knew it or not, she was free of him very soon after."

"She did know it—I mean, she knew who it was that had been killed in the City when she saw the newspapers," continued the Archdeacon. "She knew, of course, it was Sewell. And then she made the greatest mistake of all. I am not going to mince matters, gentlemen—you are probably as well acquainted with the frailties and vagaries of human nature as I am. During the time of his stay here as assistant to Canon Effingham, Mr. Stecke and Mrs. Effingham had become very friendly—that is all the term she used, and we will leave it at that. When Stecke came down here for the inquest on Skate, Mrs. Effingham took him into her full confidence and told him—everything. She told him, thinking she could trust him. The result has been that from that day to this, Stecke has steadily and consistently blackmailed her! He is—a scoundrel!"

None of us said anything. We were all wondering—and wondering the same thing. And that was how we could get hold of Stecke—what charge we could bring.

"Blackmailed her from first to last!" continued the Archdeacon, with a thump of his fist. "He began by helping himself to a share of the notes sent by Sewell. He has made her give him more of these notes from time to time. In fact, all that is left of the twenty-five hundred pounds sent by Sewell is the thousand pounds you see here. Stecke has had all the rest. Last night he came demanding this final thousand pounds. Mrs. Effingham refused to give it. She had begun to be frightened, and also to see through Stecke. And—that is all, gentlemen! I advise you to see to Stecke."

"One word more, sir," said Chaney, quietly. "Where is the stolen chalice?"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the Archdeacon. "I was forgetting! Stecke has it!"

"Stecke has it?" repeated Chaney. "Ah!" He got up, nodding at Jalvane and me. "We will get to work," he said. "On Stecke!"

We all rose. Jalvane turned to the Archdeacon.

"The—lady?" he asked. "Mrs. Effingham?"

The Archdeacon, who was bundling the Treasury notes into Chaney's hands, nodded.

"All right, my friend!" he said. "Although I am an Archdeacon, I am, I hope, a Christian man. I am taking Mrs. Effingham home with me—not far off. My wife and I will be responsible for her. Now you go away and get hold of Stecke!"

We shook hands with him, solemnly, and hurried out to our car. At the village post office I jumped down and got to the telephone and on to the Artemis Hotel in Bayswater. I asked for Miss Pratt. Miss Pratt was not in. Then I dared a bold question.

"Is Mr. Stocker in?"

The answer came prompt and clear.
“Mr. Stocker, sir? Mr. Stocker has left the hotel.”

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS PRATT TAKES CHARGE

Stecke gone?—left!—and Miss Pratt out? That, in view of all we had learnt that afternoon, was disconcerting news. A second's hesitation and I hailed my unknown colloquist again.

"Who, please, is that speaking from the Artemis Hotel?" I asked.

"Reception clerk, sir."

"Can you tell me when Mr. Stocker left?"

"Yes, sir. Just after five o'clock."

"And when did Miss Pratt go out?"

"A moment, sir; I'll inquire. . . . The hall-porter says just before five, sir."

"Sorry to trouble you, but has Mr. Stocker definitely left—for good?"

"Yes, sir. Continent, I fancy."

"Thank you. Will you give a message to Miss Pratt on her return? Say Mr. Camberwell wishes to see her at once."

"Mr. Camberwell wishes to see Miss Pratt at once—very good, sir."

I rang off and went out to the car. I dare say Chaney saw from my expression that something was wrong. He snapped out a sharp question.

"What is it?"

"Stecke's off!" I said. "And Fanny Pratt isn't there and doesn't seem to have been about when he left. He went off—for the Continent, they think, just after five o'clock, and she'd gone out just before five."

"If she did, I'll lay a thousand to one it was with some design on him!" exclaimed Chaney. "I'll back that girl to see it through. Come on, Camberwell!—back to town and the office as fast as we can. Hopped it, has he? Ah, that's the result of his visit here last night. Well, you remember what Fanny said in our office? 'If he hops it, I shall hop after him!' Get on with it, Camberwell—let's get back."

I drove that car of ours back to town faster than I had ever driven it before, taking all sorts of risks; within the hour we were in the office. And there, calmly writing, sat Chippendale, utterly unaware, of course, of anything that might be happening to Miss Fanny Pratt. Chaney was on to him as he set foot across the outer room.

"Heard anything from Fanny, Chip?" he demanded. "Sharp, my lad!"

"No!" snapped Chippendale, staring. "Nothing!"

Chaney turned to me.

"Tell him!" he said.

I told Chippendale what I had learnt on the telephone at Linwood. He shook his head.

"I've heard nothing," he said. "She's never rung me up. I was going round to meet her at the usual place as soon as you got back; I couldn't leave the office till you came. But—if Stecke's off, you can bet your stars, Mr. Camberwell, that Fanny's after him! She'll follow him!"

"Ay," said Chaney. "But—where? Give me a Bradshaw, Chip."

He took the railway guide in his hand, and motioning me and Jalvane to follow, went into the inner office and began a consultation of the pages in which particulars of cross-channel boat-sailings are set down.

"Thought he'd gone for the Continent, didn't they?" he said. "Well, five o'clock is a queer time to set off for the Continent. There's nothing after the four-o'clock from Victoria, Dover and Calais way."

"Yes, there is," said Jalvane. "There's the 8.20 from Victoria, by the Newhaven-Dieppe route. I've been by that, often. And there's the 10.30 from St. Pancras, by Tilbury and Dunkirk."

“He wouldn’t leave his hotel at five o’clock to catch either of them,” objected Chaney. “Nor to get the nine o’clock from Waterloo to Southampton for Havre.”

“How do you know that he wouldn’t, Chaney?” I asked. “There’s three evening trains and boats available! We ought to be stirring things up. Waterloo—Victoria—St. Pancras—all three ought to be watched.”

“Um!” he muttered. “He’ll not turn up at any one of them. Something else in his head. If only we knew what that girl was after and what she was doing! What time is it?”

“Quarter past seven!”

“Give her another three-quarters of an hour. If we don’t hear anything by then, Jalvane, you’d better set some of your people to work at the three stations, though I don’t believe that’ll do any good. Still, we must get him, now that we know so much—know, at any rate, that he’s got that chalice,” concluded Chaney. “That’s warrant enough for anything.”

“Why waste three quarters of an hour, Chaney?” I said. “Let’s get to work at once—on something! He’s had two hours’ start now! You know what a slippery customer he is—full of tricks. If he gets fairly off—”

“Give the girl three quarters of an hour more!” interrupted Chaney. “If we don’t hear from her before eight o’clock, I shall be surprised.”

“But she was out when he left the hotel!” I said. “So—”

“Umph!” grunted Chaney. “May have been motive in that, Camberwell. Anyhow—”

At that moment Chippendale, who, pen in hand, had followed into our room to stare and listen, heard footsteps running up the stairs and hurried out—to return with a telegram which he shoved into Chaney’s outstretched fingers.

“There you are!” said Chaney, triumphantly. “Told you we should hear! This is from her, of course,” he went on as he tore out the message from its cover. “Handed in at Sevenoaks at 6.51. Listen:

> *Stecke is on 6.12 train Cannon Street to Dover I am on same follow me there at once ask for me at Police Station Pratt.*

“There you are!” he repeated. “She’s on to him! Now, then, full speed ahead, my lads! Camberwell, is the car all right—plenty of stuff for a seventy-mile run? Chippendale, you come, too—you may be useful. Jalvane, of course you’re coming—you’re the man to lay hands on him. And now let’s be off. Seven twenty? We ought to be in Dover by—when, Camberwell?”

“Ten, if we’re lucky,” I answered, “but it means that you’ll all have to go without your dinners till we get there.”

“Oh, damn the dinners!” said Chaney. “Midnight supper’ll be more in our line. Come on, now! Hurry up, Chippendale.”

The car was down at the outer door, and in a few minutes we were packed into it, and I was threading my way through the crowded streets towards the south-east and Dover. Chippendale sat by me; he had contrived, in the minute or two before our start, to shoot into a tea-shop close by our office and had there become possessed of a big parcel of buns and pastry; for the first stage of our journey his jaws worked steadily on these comestibles, and he made no remark to me except that he had had no lunch or tea. Satisfied at last, he leaned back in his seat and watched the Kent landscape unfold itself; now and then, as we came to town or village, he pulled out his watch and made some mental calculation. Behind us Chaney and Jalvane kept up a perpetual chatter; the bits of it that reached me showed that they were indulging in reminiscences. As for myself, I was wrapped up in the car, getting all out of it that I dared. But I had a certain wonder in my mind, and once, when we had gone some distance in the spring twilight, I voiced it.

“What do you suppose Miss Pratt’ll be doing, Chip?” I asked.

“Don’t know, Mr. Camberwell. Ain’t even thought of it,” he answered. “Business, I’m sure!”

“Won’t she be frightened—after that chap, alone?”

“Not her line, sir! Never knew her to be frightened—ain’t in her make-up, that. What d’yer call that gadget there, Mr. Camberwell?”

So Chippendale had no fears for his lady-love; it was all in the day’s business. Just once he allowed himself a personal remark.

“You need have no fear about Stecke’s getting away, Mr. Camberwell! If Fanny’s after him —and we know she is—she’d follow him off the end of Dover Pier if need be. He’ll not slip her!”

So that was that, and we raced on through the evening towards I scarcely knew what, except that I hoped it would end in handing Stecke over to the law’s firm clutch. The towns and villages came and went—Blackheath and Bexley, Dartford and Rochester, Sittingbourne and Canterbury, appearing in front, vanishing behind. And at last the drop down into Dover and its still somewhat busy streets, and the smell of the sea, and the town clocks striking ten. I had done the seventy miles in just about twice as many minutes.

We pulled up at the police station and, leaving the car outside, trooped in, headed by Jalvane. The sergeant in charge, looking up from his desk, stared wonderingly at our procession.

“Inspector Jalvane, headquarters,” said our leader, offering his card. “Have you got a Miss Pratt, from London, here?”

The sergeant’s face betokened instant comprehension. Getting off his stool, and showing the way, he led us down a passage and, throwing open a door, ushered us into a small room, half sitting-room, half office. A man in the uniform of an inspector stood with his back to the fire; there was an expression of amusement on his face. And his face—until our entry diverted his attention—was turned on Miss Pratt. Miss Pratt, very smartly dressed, sat at the centre table. She had a plate of sandwiches and a bottle of stout in front of her, and she seemed to be very much at home. And she took our arrival without a sign of surprise.

“There you all are!” she said. “Haven’t lost any time, have you? He’s all right—safely bottled for the night, I think!”

“Where is he?” demanded Chaney.

“Lord Warden Hotel,” replied Miss Pratt. “He’ll not run away.” She nodded at the local inspector. “You’re seeing to that, aren’t you?” she added.

“We’re seeing to that,” said the inspector, smiling. He turned to Jalvane and Chaney. “Your young lady friend seems to have a natural taste for this sort of thing,” he went on. “Which of you’s Jalvane?”

Jalvane nodded; he, the Inspector, and Chaney drew apart and talked for a minute or two. Miss Pratt went calmly on with her sandwiches and her stout; Chippendale, who, after one glance at her, showed no more interest in her presence than if she had been a lay figure, began to roll a cigarette; as for me, I confess I stared at Miss Pratt, reflecting on her performances and her possibilities. The other three men came back; Chaney pulled a stool up to the table at which Miss Pratt was now finishing her supper.

“Now, my dear!” he said. “All about it!”

“Yes,” replied Miss Pratt. “I’m ready. Better now—I was a bit hungry when I came in here. Well, here’s the tale, Mr. Chaney, and all of you. You know what I promised?—that I’d keep a strict watch on Stecke, and that if I saw the slightest sign of his bolting, I’d act accordingly. Well, of course I knew that the sure sign of his bolting would be the removal of his luggage—I may tell you that I managed to get a peep into his room at the Artemis once, and he’d a fair lot of luggage. As long as that luggage was there, I knew he was safe, and I didn’t bother much about his ordinary goings in and out. Last evening, for instance, he was away from the hotel for some time —I didn’t bother about it; he was there all right this morning. But this afternoon things changed,

all of a sudden. About a quarter to five the porters began bringing down Stecke's things—two cabin-trunks, two suit-cases. He himself was messing about—superintending. I saw him tie on labels. Then he went up in the lift for something or other, and I contrived to get a look at the labels. Dover! And then I had to think jolly quick. I didn't dare ring you up—there were people about, and, besides, he might have been back any minute. I had to make up my mind what to do. Fortunately, I was all ready dressed for going out—just as you see me. So I went out. There's a taxi-cab rank not far off; I went there. As I reached it, the first cab went off; the Artemis porter was whistling for it. I got hold of the driver of the next and told him what I was after and begged him to use all his wits. He was a smart man; he understood. And in a second I was in his cab and was watching. Give me a cigarette, somebody. No, Chip, not one of yours—they're rank bad!"

Miss Pratt accepted one of my cigarettes and, having puffed it for a second or two, resumed her story.

"Well, they stuck Stecke's stuff on and in his taxi, and off he went," she continued. "And so did we, at a safe distance—safe in both senses. I don't know much about this part of the world, nor where it is exactly, but I'd an idea that he'd make for Victoria. However, where he made for first—the cab, that is—wasn't that way at all. The cab went to Comma Street, off Regent Street, and pulled up outside a place there into which Stecke went. He was some little time in there, and that gave me and my cabby some bother, because the police won't let you hang about. However, we managed things, and when Stecke came out and set off again, we were there all right, and we followed. But it wasn't Victoria, nor Waterloo, nor anywhere where I'd thought it would be—it was Cannon Street. I got out of my cab before he was out of his, and from then I gave up all idea of phoning you and devoted such brains as I have to dodging and watching him. And I did it so well that he never got a glimpse of me. But I got plenty of him. I watched him get his things labelled. I contrived to see the label, *Dover*; when he'd got his ticket—a first—I got mine—a third—and when he finally got into the train, I wasn't very far away from him, and I knew exactly where his luggage was. The two cabin-trunks were in the van; the two suit-cases in his compartment. And so we went off!"

Miss Pratt helped herself to another cigarette before commencing the next chapter of her story.

"Well," she resumed, "there we were! I knew I'd got him safe. The next thing was to let you know what was happening. That was easy. I wrote out a message, and when the train stopped at Sevenoaks, I handed it to a porter with half a crown and told him to wire it off at once; so, evidently, he did. I settled down then—there was nothing to do till we got here. Well, we got here, and of course I exercised the greatest care that he shouldn't see me. And now here comes in some stuff for you that'll perhaps give you an idea of what you're dealing with. When Stecke got into the train at Cannon Street, he was wearing a fancy grey suit, with a coloured neck-tie, and all that sort of thing—looked like he was going on a holiday. But when he got out of the train here at Dover, he was dressed as a parson, all black, round collar, you know. The only thing left of what he'd had on when he boarded the train was his hat—pearl-grey slouch hat, black band. All else—parson!"

"Then he's gone to the Lord Warden as a parson?" exclaimed Chaney.

"That's it, Mr. Chaney," replied Miss Pratt. "I watched him safe in there, with his cabin-trunks and his suit-cases, and then I came along here and made friends."

"He's safe there for the night," observed the local Inspector. "I made sure about him. He's registered as the Reverend Henry Simpson; his room number is 387. And I've got a special man looking after him who'll see, anyhow, that he doesn't give you the slip between this and morning. It's for you to decide whether you'll do anything tonight or not till tomorrow."

"I'd like to know what he's after," said Chaney. "If it's the Continent, how's he got his passport in the name of Simpson? And if it's not the Continent, what's he doing here at Dover?

The main thing is, of course, if he's got that chalice in his possession. If he has—"

At that moment the door opened and the sergeant looked in, addressing his inspector.

"There's an American gentleman here, sir, who wants a word with you, particular," he said. "Mr. Atherton!"

CHAPTER XXVII

STEEL BRACELETS

Mr. Atherton came hurrying in—to pull himself up short at the sight of the surprised and expectant group awaiting him. A smile of high gratification stole over his spectacled face as he looked from one to the other.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "Chaney—Camberwell—Jalvane! Well, now I guess that there are no other three men in the world whose presence is so desirable at this present moment as yours is, all three! Talk of coincidence!—but, then, I don't believe in what people call coincidence. I believe that all these things are the result of some unknown law which works—"

"What's the trouble, Mr. Atherton?" interrupted Chaney. "Something wrong?"

Mr. Atherton took off his spectacles, polished them, put them on again, and dropped into a chair. He looked from one face to another, finally winding up with the Inspector.

"Guess you're the officer in charge here?" he said. "Well, I came along to see you, to find out if you could get in immediate touch with friend Jalvane there, at headquarters in London, or with these two other gentlemen at their office. There are people who would assure you that this is a direct intervention of Providence! I refer to the fact that they are here at the very moment they're wanted. Marvellous!"

"What are we wanted for, Mr. Atherton?" I asked.

"I'm going to tell you," replied Mr. Atherton. He glanced at Chippendale and at Miss Pratt. "One may speak freely?"

"This young lady is our assistant, Mr. Atherton," I said. "This is our clerk, Chippendale, whom I think you've met before. Say anything you please."

"Very good," he continued. "Well, now, I am at the Lord Warden Hotel in this town."

"Yes, Mr. Atherton?"

"That man Stecke, the parson, is there also."

"We're aware of it, Mr. Atherton. That's why we're here."

"I guessed that, five minutes ago. Well, now, I'm going to tell you. I arrived at the Lord Warden Hotel yesterday, from Paris, on my way to London. But never having seen Dover, except in coming and going across the Channel, I concluded to stay a day or two here and take a look round. Well, now, this afternoon there came into the hotel, from the Calais boat, a man whom I know very well indeed by sight, though I am happy to say he doesn't know me by even as much as that. He is a man I used to see in New York, a man named Moskievitch, though he isn't registered at the hotel in that name—he's registered as Moscus, Mr. Alfred Moscus. Now I'll tell you what I know of this man. As far as I am aware, he has not shown his face in New York for some six or seven years, and probably will never dare to do so again; I am not sure that the New York police wouldn't be pleased to see him. When he was over there, he represented himself as an agent—an agent for buying and selling antiques, curiosities, pictures, old books, all that sort of thing. But what he was in strict reality was what you call a fence—anyway, he was convicted, to my knowledge, of being in possession of and of disposing of stolen goods. He got a lightish sentence, somehow, and then made himself very scarce. Well, as I say, this afternoon he walks into the Lord Warden Hotel here—and there he is—probably fast asleep in his bed."

Mr. Atherton paused for a second or two; no one asking any question, he resumed his story.

"Well, I tell you this fellow Moscus, to call him by what he now calls himself, came in, registered, was given a room—near my own—and went up there with his baggage; this I saw, for I was walking about the entrance hall when he arrived. I saw him again, writing letters in the lounge, a little later on; I saw him again at dinner. Let me impress upon you, now, that this man does not know me—that is to say, I never met him personally. And of course he knew nothing of

who I was when he saw me this afternoon or evening. If he'd examined the hotel register, he would have known, for my name is well known to everybody of his sort who has anything to offer. But my name was on a page preceding his, and no doubt he never turned back to see who might be there. And so things went on quite smoothly. But after dinner they began to get interesting. This way—after dinner I was sitting in a quiet corner of the lounge, alone, of course, smoking my cigar. This man Moscus, also smoking, sat in the centre of the lounge, in a position from which he could look right along the entrance hall. I, too, could see the length of that hall. And about half past eight I saw enter a man whom I perceived from his attire and collar to be a clergyman, and who had a quantity of luggage, light and heavy. I saw him busy at the reception office for a few minutes; then, after handing over his overcoat and hat to the hall-porter, he came along towards the lounge. And as he drew nearer, I recognized the Reverend Mr. Stecke!"

Mr. Atherton paused, to give this announcement its due effect. Everybody showing rapt attention, he proceeded.

"The Reverend Mr. Stecke!" he continued. "Well known to me, of course, through his association with the Linwood Church affair. Came along, I say, towards the lounge, large as life, hands in pockets, very self-assured. And a moment later I knew two things. Reverend Mr. Stecke had come there to meet Mr. Alfred Moscus; Mr. Alfred Moscus had come there to meet Reverend Mr. Stecke. Another half-minute and they were clasping hands like brethren."

"Knew each other, sir, eh?" asked the local inspector.

"I should say, not until that particular moment," replied Mr. Atherton. "But it needed but an inquiring glance and a shake of the hand, and they were as thick as thieves—a saying of yours, I believe, and probably particularly appropriate in this instance. Well, they sat down. Fortunately Reverend Mr. Stecke sat with his back to me. Mr. Moscus produced his cigar case; Mr. Stecke summoned a waiter. They smoked. They drank. And—they talked. Long and earnestly. And at last, rising together, they vanished in the direction of the elevator."

"Went upstairs, eh?" asked Chaney.

"So I concluded," assented Mr. Atherton. "However, before very long I had assurance of that. And now I am coming to possibly the most important point of my story. After these two had left the lounge perhaps a quarter of an hour, and it being then just on ten o'clock, I decided to go to bed; I am given to early hours, both for retiring and for rising. Now I mentioned that Moscus had been given a room very near my own; I had to pass his door. That door was very slightly open. And as I passed, I heard Stecke's voice speaking certain words which made me think. Those words were these: *Absolutely pre-Reformation work; probably fifteenth century.*"

"Ah!" exclaimed Chaney. "Just that?"

"Just that," assented Mr. Atherton. "And no more; I heard no remark from Moscus. I passed on, wondering. What was pre-Reformation work? What was probably fifteenth century? Then I had an illumination. Looking back, I remembered that the Linwood Church chalice, stolen with the rest of the valuables, was still unrecovered, untraced. Was it possible—you see what I mean?"

"We see!" said Chaney. "Possible that it had come into the hands of Stecke, and that he was trying to sell it to—"

"That, gentlemen, is precisely what I thought," said Mr. Atherton, "and the more I thought, the more I felt convinced that it might be so. I recalled all the events of the theft. The two old books I myself restored to Canon Effingham; the paten, found in Seward's bag when he was killed, was handed back to the Canon, too—am I right?"

"Quite right, sir," said Chaney. "It was."

"But of the chalice nothing had ever been heard," continued Mr. Atherton. "Well, it didn't seem an improbable thing that it should have come into Stecke's hands. And, after worrying a lot, I left my room again, went down, asked my way, and came here to see the authorities and to

consult with them about phoning you three. And—here you are! And now what's to be done?"

Jalvane and the local Inspector looked at each other with a meaning smile; the Inspector pulled out his watch.

"Ten minutes to eleven," he remarked. "I suggest we go along."

"Yes!" said Jalvane. "Better take one or two of your men, though. Not necessarily to go inside. But to be—handy."

The local Inspector left the room; Jalvane turned to Mr. Atherton.

"I suppose you left those two upstairs?" he said. "Didn't see anything of them when you came down?"

"I heard them still talking in Moscus's room as I passed on my way out," replied Mr. Atherton, "but by that time the door was closed. Oh, I guess they're quite safely housed for the night. They never saw me at all, upstairs or downstairs."

The Inspector came back with two men in plain clothes.

"Ready!" he announced. "Who else?" He turned and looked at Miss Pratt. "This young lady?" he continued, questioningly. "She ought to be in bed. There's a quiet hotel close by—"

But Miss Pratt was on her feet and buttoning her coat.

"Thank you," she said. "But after all I've done, I'm going to be in at the end. Don't you bother about me—I'll see to myself when we've finished the job. Chip and I are going on there, to see what happens."

"We can't all crowd into the hotel," said the Inspector. "You'll have to wait outside—if you must go."

"That'll do," said Miss Pratt. "We'll hang around and see what you bring out."

So there was something like a procession along the deserted streets and wharves to the Lord Warden Hotel. But before we reached its portals, Jalvane and the Inspector had formed a plan of campaign. They, Atherton, Chaney, and I were to enter and go to Stecke's room; the two plain-clothes men, with Chippendale and Miss Pratt, were to remain outside, close to the hotel, in case they were wanted. And here Chaney put in a word of warning.

"Don't be surprised if Stecke puts up a fight!" he said. "From what I've seen of him, he's the sort of fellow that may turn ugly. Not only that, but he may be armed."

Jalvane and the Inspector whispered together for a moment. Then Jalvane touched the side-pocket of his overcoat—a garment which I had never seen him without, and from the pockets of which he produced all sorts of things—and I heard a faint, metallic click.

"All right—as long as you're prepared," said the Inspector. "Well, let's get in. The night-porter knows me well enough."

All the same, the night-porter, opening the door for us, showed his surprise, and it deepened when, glancing beyond us, he saw the four reserves hanging about on the pavement.

"Something afoot, Inspector?" he asked. "Want somebody?"

The Inspector motioned him to precede us into the inner hall. Everything was very quiet there; everybody, staff and guests, appeared to have gone to bed.

"We do want somebody!" whispered the Inspector. "And with as little noise and fuss as possible. You've got a parson here—youngish man?"

"Reverend Mr. Simpson, from London," said the night-porter. "Number 271."

"And a man named Moscus—"

"From Paris," assented the night-porter. "Number 269."

"We want to see them both," continued the Inspector. "Mr. Simpson first. Now take us up there. We'll avoid all the disturbance we can; whether there's any noise, fuss, or bother depends on—him. The two rooms are close together, eh?"

"Close," said the night-porter. "This gentleman," pointing to Mr. Atherton, "has one near by. Well, keep things as quiet as you can, Inspector. This way."

He led us round a corner to the lift; we all crowded into it. Presently we were all out of it and in a softly carpeted corridor. Everything was as quiet as could be; the only sound I heard was that of the sea in the harbour outside. The night-porter went a little way along the corridor and, pausing, pointed to a number.

“Here you are!” he whispered. “271.”

“Knock—and wait a minute,” said the Inspector.

The night-porter knocked—once, twice, again. At the third knock we heard Stecke’s voice.

“Who’s that?”

“Tell him you want to speak to him—say who you are,” ordered the Inspector.

“Night-porter, sir. Can I have a word with you?”

We heard a key turned, a bolt drawn back. Jalvane and the Inspector edged as close as they could get to the door. It opened—an inch—two inches. The next instant they were inside and we after them. And there was Stecke, in his pyjamas. . . .

At the first glimpse of his visitors Stecke made an acrobatic leap sideways and backwards towards the bed he had just left. But, quick as he was, Jalvane was quicker. Before I could realize what he was after, he had both arms round his man, and the next I saw was Stecke rolled on to the side of the bed with his wrists secured in a pair of shining handcuffs. He lay back, panting, glaring.

“This—this is an outrage!” he burst out. “You shall—”

Jalvane tossed a pillow aside and picked up a revolver. Holding it up for a second before the rest of us, he calmly dropped it into a pocket of his overcoat. Then he motioned me to shut the door. But, a sudden thought occurring to him, he opened it again and called to the night-porter, who until the door had been closed had watched our proceedings.

“Go down and outside,” he said. “Tell these two men—not the youngster nor the girl—to come in. Bring them up here quietly and post them outside Number 269 and bid them wait there.”

Then Jalvane closed the door again and took a silent look round. We were all silent—for a moment. Stecke lay where Jalvane had thrown him, glaring like a trapped beast; the rest of us watched him. We were waiting for Jalvane; Jalvane, somehow, had assumed command of the entire situation. Even Chaney kept silence, waiting, watching.

Jalvane turned from his inspection of the room to Stecke. There was a new note in his voice when he spoke; his tones were those of a man who is not going to be trifled with.

“Now, Stecke,” he said, “where is the Linwood chalice?”

I saw a look of surprise come into Stecke’s angry eyes; a second, and it changed to one of fear. But Stecke made no answer.

Jalvane pointed to two cabin-trunks and two suit-cases, piled up at one end of the room. “We don’t want the bother of opening and searching those,” he said. “So you’d better speak. Where is that chalice? It’s hopeless to keep things back, Stecke. You took it from Mrs. Effingham, and it’s been in your keeping ever since. Where is it now?”

Stecke’s lips opened slightly, but no reply came. He was still panting for breath after his short struggle with Jalvane.

“Well, then,” continued Jalvane, “if you won’t speak—” He suddenly tossed the remaining pillows aside, as if he had expected to find something under one of them. There was nothing. He turned to Stecke’s clothes, thrown over a chair, and, pointing Chaney to the trousers, picked up the coat. A moment later he turned to us with a pocket-book in his hand. There were papers in that pocket-book which, subsequently examined at leisure, were of importance and interest. Letters from Mrs. Effingham—cuttings from newspapers which showed how Stecke had kept himself informed about matters relating to the Linwood Church affair—notes made by himself which gave one the impression that after discovering Mrs. Effingham’s secret he had concocted

some scheme of his own for benefiting by the discovery. But nothing was so interesting or important as a slip of paper which Jalvane unearthed from an inside pocket of the book and silently placed before Atherton, Chaney, and me—a cheque on the London house of a famous French bank for fifteen hundred pounds, drawn by Alfred Moscus in favour of Reverend H. Simpson.

Jalvane bundled cheque, papers, and cuttings back into the pocket-book and, opening the door, signed to the two plain-clothes men waiting in the corridor. They came in.

"Keep your eye on this man," said Jalvane. "He's to stay there until I want him further."

Then, followed by the rest of us, he marched out of the room to the door of Number 269. This time he knocked with his own fingers. And when a voice from inside demanded to know who was there, Jalvane answered in one plain word:

"Police!"

I don't know what the exact nationality of Mr. Moskievitch, alias Moscus, may have been—whether he was a Pole, or a Hungarian, or a Czecho-Slovakian, or a mixture of something stamped, for lack of particulars, American. But I do know that he was a very frightened man when Jalvane, Chaney, and I walked into his room without let or ceremony. (Mr. Atherton drew back from that job; there was the chance, he said, that Moskievitch might know him, and he did not wish to be regarded as *deus ex machina* in this matter.) He was a little, swarthy man, and his face turned a bluish white, and I believe his knees knocked together in his beautiful silk pyjamas. Certainly his teeth chattered.

"Wh-wh-what is this?" he stammered agitatedly. "Gentlemen, I—"

"Mr. Alfred Moscus, I believe, according to the register downstairs," said Jalvane. "But otherwise Mr. Moskievitch, formerly of New York. Now, Mr. Moscus, I have just found a cheque of yours, made out on this date, in favour of the Reverend Henry Simpson, whom I have just arrested. What did you hand Simpson that cheque in exchange for? A plain answer, if you please."

Mr. Moscus spread his hands.

"But, sir, I have purchased certain articles from Reverend Mr. Simpson!" he protested. "What I have bought I have bought in good faith. If I have been deceived—"

"What have you bought?" demanded Jalvane. "Show the goods!"

Moscus hesitated, wrung his hands, tried to speak; I am not sure that tears did not come into his eyes.

"No nonsense, now!" said Jalvane. "If you're in possession of stolen goods—"

Moscus turned suddenly and, going over to a chest of drawers in a corner of the room, pulled one open and took out a package done up in much soft paper. He began to unwrap the paper and to protest all at the same time. No one took any notice; we were all watching. And the last wrappings fell away, and there, before us, on the dressing-table, stood the missing chalice—resting on the paten!

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Chaney. "There's the—what d'ye call it?—the paten, too! The chalice we knew of, but the other thing—"

"I think I know how he got hold of it, Chaney," said I. "After the death of Seward, and the discovery of the paten in his suit-case, it was given back by the City police to Canon Effingham. Well, we know that Stecke has been going to Linwood now and then since, and that he was there last night. Either he stole it from there or he forced Mrs. Effingham to hand it over to him. Anyhow, there they both are—chalice and paten. Better ask this man to give his account of the transaction between himself and Stecke."

But that was not Jalvane's way. Jalvane collared the stolen goods, bade the trembling Mr. Moscus hold himself at the disposal of the police in the morning, and, returning to Stecke's room, sternly commanded him to dress. Stecke, relieved, for the time being, of his handcuffs,

obeyed orders and made his toilet under the close supervision of the plain-clothes men. After which he was marched downstairs and out into the night, where, escorted by Jalvane, the local Inspector, and the two men in mufti, he disappeared in the direction of the police station.

So that was over, at last, and there, standing outside the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover, at nearly midnight, were Chaney, myself, Chippendale, and Miss Fanny Pratt. What next? Mr. Atherton solved that question with characteristic generosity.

“Well, now,” he said, as the echoes of the footsteps of guard and prisoner died away, “I reckon that we shall now be all the better, all of us, for a little refreshment and a little sleep, and I have already told the night-porter that you are all coming in with me as my guests, and that he is to give the young lady a particularly nice room. I do not know,” he added, as we trooped into the hotel at his heels, “if Mr. Stecke will sleep on a plank bed tonight, but I am sure that he will sleep with his own conscience!”

It is a little known fact that besides being one of the foremost writers of detective-mysteries in the world, J. S. Fletcher is possessed of talents that might have rendered him equally famous as an historian, a straight novelist, a journalist, or a sportsman. His reasons for turning to the field in which he is now a master are best expressed in his own words: “I believe I got my interest in criminology right from the fact that a famous case of fraud was heard at the Quarter Sessions at a town where I was at school—its circumstances were unusual and mysterious and the truth hard to get at; oddly enough, I have never yet used this as the basis of a story. Then, when I left school, I meant to be a barrister and I read criminal law and attended a great many queer trials for some time. But turning to journalism instead, I knew of a great many queer cases and mysteries, and now and then did ‘special commissions’ for various big papers on famous murder trials. Also, I learnt a good deal about criminology in conversations with the late H. B. Irving, the famous actor, who was an expert.”

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[The end of *Murder in the Squire's Pew* by Fletcher, J. S. (Joseph Smith)]