

THE REVELATIONS OF
INSPECTOR MORGAN

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CONTENTS

•GENTLEMAN COGGINS: ALIAS TOWERS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	CAPTAIN TOWERS	1
II.	THE GREAT JEWEL ROBBERY AT BALIN ABBEY	27
III.	THE CIRCLE AT BALIN ABBEY	38
IV.	THE FIRST DISCOVERY	50
V.	SERGEANT SMITH: HIS OPINIONS AND ADVENTURES	53
VI.	THE NEW BEATER	59
VII.	FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS	79
VIII.	COGGINS' CROWNING EFFORT	82

THE FLYING MAN

I.	THE JOURNALIST	97
II.	A COUNTRY TOWN	103
III.	THE SCENE OF THE MURDER	111
IV.	DR. SOLANDER	119
V.	PONTREGIDDION	126
VI.	SPRING-HEELED JACK	139
VII.	THE NATURALIST'S STORY	142
VIII.	THE HONOURABLE JAMES PRICE	159
IX.	THE OLD LIMEKILN	169

THE MURDER AT JEX FARM

I.	CHARLES JEX	195
II.	MAUD LEWSOME AND HER DIARY	206
III.	FRESH EVIDENCE	213
IV.	MORE FACTS IN THE CASE	217

CHAP.	THE KIDNAPPED CHILDREN	PAGE
I.	HOW IT HAPPENED	241
II.	"THE DETAINER"	252
III.	THE PRIVATE SECRETARY AT WORK	260
IV.	THE MILLIONAIRE AT HOME	266
V.	CONFEDERATE, OR TOOL?	276
VI.	MR. PURDY'S COMMISSION	283
VII.	A CLUE	293
VIII.	SMART DETECTIVE WORK'	300
IX.	ADA VACHEL AT BAY	305

THE REVELATIONS OF INSPECTOR MORGAN

PRELIMINARY

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR MORGAN

A STRANGE delusion has been growing up among us in regard to our Detective Police. We have come to believe that, in matters of crime detection, the Amateur is superior to the Professional. Though we all hold that the professional soldier, sailor, lawyer, artist, doctor, and even the professional footballer and billiard player, is a better man than his amateur rival, we make an exception in the case of the detective policeman.

Two famous French writers of sensational fiction set the fallacy going. A literary genius, Edgar Allan Poe, lent it his authority, and, more recently, a master writer among ourselves, Sir Conan Doyle, has preached the new doctrine with such skill and charm that the heresy has popularly grown to be considered sound dogma.

Clever fiction can accomplish miracles. It can make us accept Poe's preposterous Monsieur Dupin, profound philosopher and private detective, who solves the criminal

problems that had puzzled all the detective wisdom of Paris. It makes us triumph over the English Police with that delightful analytical amateur, Sherlock Holmes, when he leaves his pipe, his metaphysics and his harmless private hobbies, to lay bare the mysteries which have baffled Scotland Yard.

I do not set up to be cleverer than my neighbours, and I should, no doubt, have continued to believe with the rest of the world in the superior wisdom of Monsieur Dupin and Mr. Holmes, and the imbecility of the Paris and London Police, but for an accidental circumstance.

A post held by me at one period of my life led to my having to do some official work in collaboration with Scotland Yard.

Our Detective Service is necessarily composed of heterogeneous elements. A body of men whose business it is to set their wits against the most cunning and criminal among all sorts and conditions of men must necessarily be recruited from every class of society. There are soldiers, sailors, civil servants, lawyers and business men in the upper ranks of the Force, and, if contemporary criticism is sound, there should be still more outsiders than there are among the members of the Force.

In the course of my official business with Scotland Yard, I had the pleasure and privilege of making several acquaintances among the higher members of the Detective Services, and one life-long friend, Inspector Morgan. The talk of these gentlemen convinced me that crime is not so often tracked by purely logical and analytical methods as our literary crime detectors would have us suppose. When

a crime is committed by an intelligent criminal, his first and obvious care is to block the afterway of the logician and the analyst. It may astonish the readers of popular fiction to be told that, when a well-planned crime is traced to its source, it is either by what seems to the outsider to be pure accident, or to some play, or by-play of the personal equation involved in the case.

The marvellous success in crime-detection of Scotland Yard,—for, let its detractors, literary and journalistic, say what they will, our Detective Service is easily the first in the world—its success, I say, is due to the fact that, on one hand, our detectives keep their net constantly wide-spread, thus multiplying the chances of catching the criminal in its meshes; on the other hand, by employing careful study of the character and various types of the criminal, they take him at unawares in the trap of his personality.

So regarded, and seeing what the art of crime detection and suppression really means to the community, seeing that it means one field of that great struggle that is always going on between good and evil, between public right and private wrong, its study and profession at once assume higher and more human scope, development and possibilities than some of our instructors have seen fit to allow.

These opinions and conclusions are not, I admit, original. They derive, as I have hinted, from the many talks I had with my friend, Inspector Morgan.

Mr. Morgan has had a varied career. He has held the rank of Captain in a smart cavalry regiment, after having served in India and the Colonies. Leaving the army, he

was, for a short time, engaged in journalism, not without success. He is a man of the world in the best sense of that word, courteous, genial, a good companion and a good fellow.

Captain Morgan, now Inspector Morgan of the Detective Police, has told me the story of some of the most interesting experiences that befell him in the course of his detective duties. They were nothing less than revelations to me, and, I think, they will likewise come as revelations of the truth, in the matter of our Detective Service, to the general public. It is accordingly under the title of "The Revelations of Inspector Morgan" that I now venture to lay them before the public. I begin with the story of "Gentleman Coggins : *alias* Towers."

GENTLEM^{AN} COGGINS
ALIAS TOWERS

GENTLEMAN COGGINS:

ALIAS TOWERS

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN TOWERS

"I HAVE always considered," said my friend, Inspector Morgan, to me one day, when he had paid me a late after-dinner visit, "I have always considered that the greatest help a detective can have in following up and finding out about a crime is to know something beforehand of the criminal's own private and particular way of looking at things."

"To prove that, I should like to tell you the real story of the great jewel robbery at Balin Abbey, and how the place was broken into by Ikey Coggins, commonly called Gentleman Coggins, *alias* Towers. You read about it, I dare say, at the time, in the newspapers?"

"I did," I said; "I remember the case vaguely."

"You only read part of the real story; for the general public never got to know more than a little bit of what actually happened. The real story is a very curious one."

"I should like to hear it from you."

"You shall," said the Inspector, "only you must let me give you the story from the beginning, and in my own way."

Inspector Morgan then told me the following story:—

"My first years of services in the army were passed in India and in the Colonies, and when I got my company

and came home, I exchanged into a smart cavalry regiment. From that time, things went wrong with me. I had meant, being a comparatively poor man, and very ambitious, to work hard and make a serious career of my profession, and, so far, I had done so ; but when I got into the — I confess I led a fool's life. Few men can fight against their environment. The regiment was a sporting regiment, and it was quartered in Ireland. Unfortunately for me, I had a fair seat in the saddle, a light hand on the re'ns, and I could ride under ten stone. My fellow-officers were good fellows and sportsmen. The talk at mess was of nothing but polo, drag hunts, and steeplechases. I fell into their way. Anything like serious study was impossible. I bought two polo ponies. I had part ownership in a famous steeplechaser which I had ridden more than once to a win. I lost a good deal more than I could afford at cards. My polo stud was expensive. I was running fast into debt, but I looked to pull myself free at a great race meeting in our near neighbourhood. The two chief events of that meeting were the Hunt Steeplechase, in which I was to ride a friend's hunter, and the Great West of Ireland Handicap, in which my mount was the horse in which I held a part ownership, a very famous steeplechaser, named The Leprochaun. On both events I had laid to win heavily.

“ Now, I have every reason to believe I should have won both races, paid my debts, pulled myself together, seen what an idiot I had been making of myself, changed into a quieter regiment, and made the army a career and perhaps a successful one. I say I might have done all this, but for one man, my evil genius, Captain Towers, who, about this time, came into our regiment. He had done service in the Colonies. No one knew much about him, but he brought with him a reputation as a sportsman and a rider. Towers was never liked at mess. He was a cold, quiet, cynical fellow, with a pale, sinister face, and a horseman's build,

broad-shouldered, clean-limbed, strong, spare, and wiry. I saw at once that I had a rival in the saddle, and I was not sorry, for, in point of fact, I had had it too much my own way for the last year or two, being the only man in the regiment who fulfilled all the requirements of a race rider, seat, hand, experience, nerve, and low weight.

• “The regiment was at that time mad upon bridge, and Towers played a good, quiet game. He had certain rare advantages as a bridge player; he never abused his partner, or made cynical remarks, he won without triumphing, and he lost gaily. Not that he lost often, and it was soon observed that no man ever enjoyed so consistent a run of good luck as Captain Towers.

“He and I having so much in common were thrown together—but we were never friends. Indeed, I disliked him and distrusted him from the first. He was not a genial fellow. He was a man who never lost a chance of sneering at the four or five things on which men at large do not care to listen to cynical speech—religion, politics, women, social honour, and social honesty. He and I sometimes quarrelled, as two men will when one is quick-tempered and the other coldly cynical. I was fool enough to lend him a hundred pounds when he first came to the regiment, and he had the impudence to look upon my loan to him as the act of a fool. ‘Why,’ he said, ‘you never expected to get it back, did you?’

• “‘You are chaffing, Captain Towers,’ I said stiffly.

• “‘Oh,’ he said, ‘you may call it chaffing if you like; You won’t get the money out of me! You haven’t my I.O.U.’

• “‘Then,’ I said, losing my temper, ‘you’ll allow me to have my opinion of your conduct, and to let my friends know what I think.’

• “‘Do, and be hanged to you!’ he said.

• “We parted uncomfortably. What an infernal black-

guard! I thought. The great race was still in the far future, when one day Towers came to me and said, overlooking the bad terms we were on, 'Captain Morgan, I want your opinion on a matter in which you know more than I do.'

"'What can that be?' I asked, rather amused, for Towers was not, as a rule, over-modest.

"'The points of a horse.'

"I said nothing, but I thought, What is he driving at now?

"If I had been able to give the right answer to that question, my life would perhaps have been a different life to what it has been.

"'The fact is,' he said, 'I am in rather a hole. I got a letter from a friend in Dublin, last week, offering me a chaser for sale—the price was reasonable, the mare young and untried, but she could jump and she could gallop, and I was tempted. "Send her down," I wired. Well, she has come; she is standing at Simpson's, and, to look at her, she is the greatest brute I ever saw. Come and look at her.'

"A lover of horses does not lose a chance of seeing something out of the way in the horse line. Certainly I never saw a less promising animal than the mare in Simpson's stable; ewe-necked, a huge, ugly head, vicious eyes, looking round at us with the whites showing, as we came near the stall.

"'Do you see any points about that mare?' asked Towers.

"'She has big quarters,' I said, 'she ought to gallop, but her shoulder is straight.'

"'She's the devil's own of a temper, your honour,' said the groom, 'when a man's on her back, and she cries out if she's vexed, like a woman. We call her The Squealer.'

"'The Squealer!' said Towers. 'I'll christen her that—she's unnamed as yet—that is if I keep her. But shall I?

Shall I pay her journey back to Dublin and send a fiver and try to be off the bargain ?'

"Irish grooms are free with their opinions.

" 'Begorra, sir, I'd send a tenner wid her and make sure !'

" 'Better see what she can do first,' I said, 'hadn't you ?'
'Take her out with the drag-hounds to-morrow.'

" 'Put a saddle and bridle on her now, Pat, and we'll try her in Simpson's field.'

"Irishmen resent the general use of that common patronymic which Englishmen think it knowing and friendly to apply to every Irishman they meet.

" 'Me name's Terence, with yer honour's leave,' said the groom.

" 'Is that so ? Then, Terence, my man, if you can manage to sit astride of a horse, perhaps you won't mind putting the mare round the field ?'

"The groom was offended. Every Irishman, in or near a stable, can ride, and it was clear that Terence had the seat and the hand of a good workman when he was on the mare's back, shoulders well set back, knees forward, hands held low on either side of the mare's withers. Perhaps the ill-humour of the man communicated itself to the mare—for there is no sympathy so close as that between horse and rider—or perhaps, as Terence had said, she had a bad temper of her own. Certainly a more cantankerous mount no man ever had. While she walked, the whites of her wicked eyes and the wrinkling of her nostrils were the only sign, but when Terence put her to a canter, she went short, she bucked, she threw her head up, then put it down to nearly between her knees, and she stopped in her stride to kick.

" 'By Jove,' I said, 'that fellow can keep his seat !'

" 'Now we'll try her over the fences,' said Towers.

"The outer circle at Simpson's field was a lane or green

turf. An inner circle was set with fences to represent the obstacles in a steeplechase or the hunting-field, and was used to test Mr. Simpson's hunters.

"The groom put the mare at the first fence. She went at it at ninety miles an hour, stopped suddenly as she came close up, gave a squeal of ill-temper such as I never heard from a horse before, and reared badly.

"Towers laughed heartily, while the man was, I could see, in imminent danger of a broken neck.

"'Drop the curb, Terence!' I shouted, but the advice came too late. The mare was standing nearly bolt upright, her head straight up in the air. 'Slip off her, man!' I called out, and he did so, just in time to save himself from being crushed. Relieved of his weight, the mare fell to her fore feet again.

"'I knew she'd rear if he touched the curb, that's her way,' Towers said, with a broad grin.

"'What! You knew that, and you let him ride her on the curb?'

"'Pooh! What does a fellow like that signify?'

"The groom had seized the reins and led her back to us.

"'Sure the mare's got an imp of Satan inside her to make her want to kill the two of us that way!' said Terence.

"'Put on a plain running snaffle,' said Towers, 'and I'll try her.'

"'You're risking your neck, Towers, for no good. She's a brute, and you'll make nothing of her for hunting or racing. Send her back, even if you lose money by it.'

"He did not listen to me, and presently he was on the mare's back.

"'I want to let her extend herself and see if she can gallop.'

"She went freer in the snaffle as Towers galloped her round the outer circle. She seemed though to go a little

short for a racer, showing no indications whatever of any remarkable turn of speed. I have had good reason since to suspect that Towers, a clever rider, took particularly good care not to put the mare, as the saying is, 'on the stretch.'

"When Towers rode at the fences, the mare's behaviour was quite changed. She went round the ring at a slow canter, taking every fence, large and small, in her stride, and taking them well and easily.

"What do you think of that?' said Captain Towers, as he brought the mare back to us.

"'Bedad, sir,' said Terence, putting in his say, 'when she's in that humour she'd be the very mount for a nervous old gentleman who loves a quiet day with hounds.'

"'What do you think of her, Captain Morgan?'

"'I agree with Terence, and I don't think she has the making of a racer in her. Did you try to extend her just now?'

"'All she'd let me,' said Towers.

"'I'd send her back to Dublin, if you'd care to have my advice,' said I.

"'Wid fifteen golden sovereigns tied to her tail!' suggested Terence.

"'I'll take your advice, Morgan.'

"When I next spoke to Towers about the mare it was three days afterwards, and he looked vexed.

"'Would you believe it? they've stuck me with that infernal mare! The man refused to be off his bargain at any price, and now I've got her on my hands.'

"'A white elephant! Shall you put her in training?'

"'Is she worth it?'

"Towers never did put the mare into regular training—he never even let her be properly clipped or singed, and, as the winter came on, her coat grew ragged and her fetlocks were left untrimmed. He took her out once or twice with the hounds, and he entered her regularly at the drag meets, but

though she jumped cleverly she was never forward with hounds, and she never came near winning the drag.

"Needless to say he and his unfortunate purchase came in for a good deal of chaff at mess. He took it in fairly good part, and defended the mare. 'The more I know her,' he said, 'the more I like her. She has a temper and is too lazy to gallop, but I believe she can.'

"'Not with that shape, my dear fellow,' said Major O'Gorman, a keen sportsman, but too stout to ride his own horses on the turf. 'A horse wants shoulders to land him as well as hind legs to send him forward, and your mare has shoulders like a sheep's.'

"'You know more of horses than I do,' said Towers almost humbly.

"'Not difficult,' said O'Gorman behind his moustache. But Towers did not hear, or pretended not to hear.

"'I'd back her even now,' said Towers, 'over a stiff course against some horses I could name.'

"The weakness we all have for our own property blinds the wisest of us! and we were a little sorry even for Towers when we saw O'Gorman's eagerness to take him at his word. It was a little over-sharp of O'Gorman, we thought, upon the newcomer.

"'Do you mean any of my lot, Captain Towers? because if you mean that, I'll do business with you.'

"'I suppose it's cheek of me, but I did mean The Clipper.'

"There was a peal of laughter at the mess table.

"'Owners up?' suggested Towers, and the laugh turned against the red-faced, burly major.

"'Certainly not,' said O'Gorman; 'you know I never ride my own horses. I'll put Morgan up.'

"Then I must choose the course!' said Towers, sharply and decisively.

"O'Gorman suspected a trap and hesitated. 'Four miles of fair hunting country?' he suggested.

" 'Quite so,' answered Towers, 'and I to choose it.'

" So the matter was agreed upon for £100 a side. The Clipper was a clever chaser who had won many a hurdle race and many a local steeplechase. He was thought even to have a good chance against The Leprochaun for the Great West of Ireland Race, having to receive no less than 11 lbs. from that famous crack. The Clipper could gallop and could jump, and if his jumping was not always very free, that would not matter in a match when he could follow a lead over every fence, for his great turn of speed would enable him to beat nearly any horse in the last run in.

" There was little betting till the last, so hollow a thing did the race seem, and so foregone a conclusion its result. At the last, among the few hundred of sporting men from the neighbourhood and officers from the garrison, almost any odds could have been obtained against Towers' mare. He himself, already in the saddle, in his jockey cap and jacket, went among the crowd and was received with chaff and laughter. 'What odds do you want?' they asked him.

" 'What offer?' Towers called out.

" One man in derision offered ten to one. Towers shook his head and laughed. The other raised his offer to 25 to 1, and the Captain, saying 'Done with you!' booked the bet in tenners.

" Others followed half in fun, half in the wish to make a sovereign or two out of the match, and before Towers and I stood at the starting-point he must have booked over a thousand pounds in bets. He asked me, as we stood waiting for the start, if I would give him the current odds, but I wouldn't take advantage of him.

" A match between a fast horse who is not a safe and ready fencer and a slower horse who can jump is generally a very dull affair. My riding orders were simple. 'Follow Towers' lead over every fence and race in from the last,'

O'Gorman had said. I did as I was bid, and the race was conducted mostly at a walk. The fences were big and various; doubles, bullfinches, a stiff post and rail. A big flying leap at a brook, the last jump before the finish was also a brook, but quite a narrow one, not more than 12 feet of water with a good take off and landing. The brook lay at the bottom of a slope, so that, coming at it, we had a good view of the water, and it looked bigger than it was. I could see why Towers had insisted upon choosing the course. The Clipper, like most horses, preferred any kind of jump to water. If he refused anything, he would refuse a water jump, but O'Gorman's riding orders had provided for this, and with a lead over the fences there was no danger of his refusing anything. The most refusing of jumpers will always follow another horse over a fence.

"Towers and I went over the course at our ease, chaffing each other. He gave me a good lead over the big brook, and then pulled up in the middle of the field to let me follow and rejoin him. •

"'There's no use my trying to get away from you,' he said, 'is there? By Jove, The Clipper is a clipper, and no mistake; and my last chance is gone, I suppose, if he can do water like that. Come along!'

"I really thought the race was over and was admiring Towers' pluck. He was always a good loser.

"We were coming back in a great four-mile circle to the starting-field where the crowd stood and where also was the winning-post not more than 300 yards from the last fence, the brook before mentioned.

"We rode pretty fast at it, and nearly side by side, The Clipper only half a length behind Towers' mare. I could see the green winning flags, beyond the two red ones which marked the spot where we were to take the brook, and I was already pulling myself together for the effort to race in.

•

"We were within five yards of the water when Towers' mare showed her temper—or perhaps was made to. She stopped dead short at the edge of the water, gave the strange squeal I had heard before, and began to rear.

"I jammed The Clipper at the little brook, but the sight of the water, or more probably the unexpected refusal of the mare whom he had been following, scared him. He stuck his fore feet obstinately together at the take off, and then swerved suddenly some twenty yards to the left.

"As I made a half circle to put my horse again at the jump, I could not well see what Towers was about, but they told me afterwards that what happened was this:—The mare almost immediately came down from her rear, and Towers, who, by-the-bye, carried no whip and wore no spurs, without turning back, urged his mare to take the brook standing. She did so at once, with so big a bound as surprised the lookers on, and then she began to canter very slowly up the slope towards the winning-post.

"I put The Clipper fast at the brook; he took it splendidly, and, seeing the slow pace of The Squealer, I made no doubt of overtaking her, but Towers, looking round, saw me coming up and manded his own pace. We raced in, I was overtaking him fast, I had reached his mare's quarters, then the saddle, then her neck, amid shouts of 'The Clipper wins! The Clipper wins!' but Towers squeezed past the post, a winner by half a head! There was a moment's silence among the onlookers, so unexpected was the issue of the race. Then in a moment came a great huzzaing for Captain Towers. He became at once the hero of the crowd and his win the cleverest bit of jockeyship ever seen on an Irish racecourse.

"Was it accident, or was it design? Had the mare's temper prevailed for a moment, or had Towers induced it at the critical moment? The crowd never doubted but that Towers had managed the whole thing, nor, to be sure, did I

or any one who saw the race run and knew Towers, have the slightest doubt on the subject. The ethics of horse-racing are not very strict, and a trick of this sort is held to be fair by the majority of racing men. Even O'Gorman laughed over his loss, like the good sportsman and gentleman he was, and was seen to shake hands openly on the course with the winner of the match—whereat the Irish crowd cheered both gentlemen heartily.

“This affair, however, did not increase Captain Towers' reputation in the regiment. The race might be all right, but that long-continued belittling of an animal that if she could only gallop fairly well, could at least jump superbly. Many of us, too, had lost considerably to him at cards. Good as his play was, it was not enough to justify his almost constant winning at bridge, and some of the more suspicious among us began to make unpleasant remarks, and one or two of the heaviest losers were so convinced of the unfairness of his play that they set themselves to watch him. They found, of course, nothing. Towers was a most scrupulous player, he always called attention to a player who held his hand carelessly. His own eyes never travelled beyond his own hand and the cards on the table. It was noticed that he was clumsy in handling the pack, that he shuffled and cut awkwardly, dealing slowly, and carrying his hand, as some old-fashioned players do, with every card dealt, and dealing them into four regular little heaps on the table. The watchers noted all this, and then gave up watching him as a bad job.

“‘It's all luck,’ said some of us. ‘He'll make up for his run of luck some day, somehow’—a prediction which came true in the end, but not quite in the way the prophets had meant.

“Rather to our surprise, after the exhibition of lack of speed which The Squealer had made in the match with The Clipper, Towers had entered his mare for the two chief

events in the Great West of Ireland Race meeting—namely, for the Hunters' Sweepstakes, for which The Squealer had qualified, and for the Great West of Ireland Race. We could not quite make this out, for the mare could not have a chance in the Hunt Steeplechase even though no better horse than The Clipper ran in it, and I had every reason to believe The Clipper would win the race. I had backed him heavily. That Towers should put his mare into the Great West of Ireland Handicap, that he should enter such an animal as The Squealer against all the best chasers in Ireland, and among them against the famous Leprochaun, seemed nothing short of madness. Yet there were some of us who, after Towers' exploit against The Clipper, were quite willing to take long odds against The Squealer for both races. Towers was one of them. He said he thought he might win. He laid freely against any horse in the race, and took all the long odds that he could get against his own mount. By the day of the race he had a book which must have totalled over ten thousand pounds.

"I will not tell you the story of that day's racing," said Inspector Morgan. "Even now the memory of it is too unpleasant and the feeling I have against that swindling scoundrel too bitter. Enough to say that Towers won both races.

"When he appeared on the course in his preliminary canter, on his ragged-coated mare, with her ewe neck, her ugly head, and her shambling, lurching gallop, a shout of derision went up among the racecourse crowd, and the usual cheap wit was indulged in.

"'How much the pound, Captain?' 'What price cat's meat to-day?' 'Take her home and cut her hair, sir, do!'

"When the race began and they saw her take every fence as if it was playtime with her, keep her place in

the first rank, and that although the race was being run at the usual break-neck pace of modern steeplechases, an unaccustomed silence fell upon the crowd. Towers and I were again alone, every other horse in the race having either fallen or been outpaced. This time we rode abreast, and I took no lead. The Clipper was full of go to-day, and full of courage, facing every jump and clearing everything safely and well. We raced hard over the last sweep three fields off the finish, and took the last three jumps simultaneously and abreast. I could not shake off the mare: we were neck and neck. I plied whip and spurs, and the brave beast responded, but I could not get past Towers, and, almost at the post, The Squealer forged ahead, and won the race by a narrow half length.

"Amid the shouting of the crowd and the congratulations of brother sportsmen, Towers kept his usual cool cynicism as he was being led back to the weighing yard. He caught sight of O'Gorman's red face in the lane of sportsmen through which he was being led.

"I told you, O'Gorman," he said quietly, "that I thought the mare might have a turn of speed in her."

"The history of the great race of the day was the history of the Hunt race over again. The mare never made a mistake at her fences, never seemed to exert herself, and Captain Towers drew alongside of me on The Leprochaun, and raced that famous chaser over the last few hundred yards, beating him as he had beaten The Clipper by the narrowest of distances at the post.

"That race was the end of my army career. I was in debt far beyond my solvency. I had lost some hundreds at cards, and my chances of recouping myself at the race meeting had been hindered by Captain Towers and his mysterious mare.

"It was not quite the end of Towers' career, but it was the beginning of the end. It was not till all racing debts

had been paid to him and done with, that something happened which was to solve the problem of The Squealer and how she had come to beat the best horses in Ireland, but another rather startling event was to happen first, and this also led to unexpected developments.

"Captain Towers' exploits on the turf had made him famous, and in sporting circles outside our mess he was even popular, for he had other claims to society success. He was musical and had a capital voice, and he was beyond compare the best amateur actor I have ever known. His speciality was what on the stage is known as character parts, old men, particularly foreign old men, when he would make up and talk in a way to make one entirely forget his own individuality. The complicated Jew nature he seemed to have studied as few men have—when and where I could never guess. He impersonated Shylock once in the trial scene from the *Merchant of Venice*. Portia, the Duke, Bassanio, and Antonio were all forgotten. We had eyes and ears for him alone.

"In a silly melodrama which the Amateur Dramatists of the garrison town played in for a charity, Towers had been asked to choose his part. He chose, to the surprise of every one, the character of 'Ikey Moses,' a young Cockney Jew, dealer in old clothes, who, in some way, comes into collision with the noble Christian hero of the piece and gets the worse of the encounter. His part consisted only of a dozen or two of words, but they were delivered at rehearsals with such an unctuous roll of the lips, such a broad and humorous accent, half Cockney, half Yiddish, that our stage-manager—a professional—suggested a little writing up of the part. At the next rehearsal Towers had put in a few lines and delivered them with marvellous effect. The whole company applauded and entreated him to work on, upon the same lines. At every rehearsal the part grew. Ikey Moses was from the first a ridiculous,

somewhat hateful character—mean, subservient to his superiors, a bully to his inferiors—spurned by the low-born heroine, to whom he presumes to offer his obnoxious addresses. Towers with great skill preserved all the mean and ridiculous elements in the character, but he converted the Jew's presumptuous courting of the heroine into a genuine love. The better elements in the man were seen to be fighting against his baser side. There was the true dramatic struggle and contention of passion with passion. Pathos and even tragedy were latent in the struggle. The part extended day by day till at last it literally filled the play. It *was* the play—the parts of the leading gentleman and lady were ruthlessly cut down, and when the piece came to be acted, Ikey Moses, with his comic lisp, his mixture of knowingness, knavery, and simplicity, was on the stage during nearly the whole of the four acts, and there was a scene between him and his sweetheart while he pleads, and she half pities, half despises him, and finally rejects him, which stirred the house to unwonted tragic depths. Towers was cheered when he came on and when he went off, and when the curtain fell it was amid a tumult of applause.

"I mention this to show what a versatile and accomplished fellow Towers was, and also because his mimetic powers have a distinct relation to something I shall have to tell you presently. With all these talents, enough to raise any man to a pinnacle of success in almost any line of life, there was in Towers an instinct towards evil, that demoniac tendency which drives men to their doom, that mysterious, little understood impulse which lies deep at the heart of every great criminal, the tendency to set evil above good which finally destroys the man's soul.

"Now," Morgan went on, "I must tell you of the incident which led to the first of a series of catastrophes in Towers' military career. I have told you how he

systematically won at cards, and how, though we all began to suspect him of foul play, we never could find anything to justify any suspicions. The cards he played with belonged to the mess, and were procured in the usual way by the mess committee for the time being. Towers went on winning, and we had no excuse but to go on playing with him.

"There was one young fellow among us who did not take it so calmly—Terence O'Grady, a hot-headed young Tipperary giant—a good fellow, popular among us all, and a distant relative of my own, and a man whom I loved as a brother. He had lost night after night when he played against Towers, and won only when he found himself Towers' partner.

"'I know the beggar cheats!' he cried out.

"'Hush!' said an older officer. 'You can't prove it, whatever you think, and you'd best hold your tongue till you're sure.'

"'Then I'll make sure!' said O'Grady. 'I'll pin him, sir, never fear but I'll pin him!'

"We laughed at this vague threat—not for a moment guessing what he meant by his vague threat of pinning Captain Towers.

"That night O'Grady and I played against Towers and O'Gorman. It happened that every one of the three of us had already, in previous play, lost heavily to Towers—O'Gorman in particular, and O'Grady far more than he could afford. Towers dealt. We watched with an ill-defined suspicion the slow and deliberate movements of the dealer. We always expected something fantastic in the way of a declaration when Towers dealt, but this time it surprised me to find that he declared no trumps, for, sitting third hand, I held seven hearts to the Quart Major in my own hand. I immediately redoubled, and, to my surprise, Towers redoubled again. Knowing that my partner

would follow the 'heart convention' and play me a heart, I doubled again, and on a seeming certainty, and so it went on to the extreme limit. Eventually we stood to win or lose 100 points on each trick.

"What was my surprise when O'Grady failed to lead a heart. He had none. Towers easily discarded the few hearts in his own hand, kept the lead, my hearts never came in, and we lost the whole thirteen tricks, Grand Slam!

"'Now,' thought I, 'how could Towers possibly have dared to redouble and to continue to redouble, unless he had felt sure that O'Grady, with the blind lead, had not a single heart in his hand? How could he have known this by any fair means? He could not even have caught a chance glance at O'Grady's hand, for that young Irishman is short-sighted, and never holds his cards more than three inches from his nose.

"I looked at O'Gorman, who is a fine player. He wore a very grave look. I saw he had arrived at the same conclusion as I had. Indeed, it was too obvious to miss. O'Grady's face worked. I thought he meant mischief.

"The score was marked down, Towers cut for O'Grady and the game went on with varied success till the turn came again for Towers to deal.

"'Hearts!' said Towers, after a glance at his hand.

"He laid his cards in a neat heap on the table, sat back and waited for developments; as he did so, he rested both hands for a moment on his knees. It is an ordinary action which I have seen many an innocent bridge-player adopt, but it suggested foul doings to O'Grady.

"'May I play?' he asked me, but his voice was choked with some strong emotion.

"'Yes,' I answered, and Towers raised his hands from the table and proceeded to take up his cards. In the moment of his doing so, and before he could touch the

cards, O'Grady shot out his right hand and grasped Towers by the wrist so strongly that he could not move it. O'Grady was a fellow of prodigious strength.

"Poor O'Grady's feat was a poor parody of the old story of the man who pierces the sharper's hand to the table with a dagger and offers to apologize if there is not a card beneath it.

" 'I'll make you my apologies, Captain Towers,' says O'Grady, 'if you don't hold a false card in your hand.'

"As is usual in such catastrophes, there was a moment's silence. Towers, though he could not disengage his hand, could turn it, and he did so, and showed that it was empty.

" 'You young idiot !' O'Gorman called out. 'Let go ! No one cheats at bridge that way.'

"O'Grady, out of countenance, withdrew his hand, but, before he had quite done so, Towers had clenched his left hand, and, half raising himself from his seat, brought his fist with prodigious force full on O'Grady's temple. As the young Irishman's right arm and shoulder were extended, his head inclined somewhat away from the shoulder, and the temple lying flat to the blow, received it full and without a glance. O'Grady groaned, his head dropped forward—he had been felled, as an ox is felled, by the terrible force of the blow delivered by an angry man.

" 'You brute !' I said, but I felt, as I said it, that the provocation almost justified the assault.

" 'I presume the rubber is over for the present,' said O'Gorman, cold-bloodedly. 'I'll gather up the cards,' he added, and he proceeded to put them together in the order they lay on the table and placed them in his pocket.

"Towers had left the room.

" 'Do you feel better yet, O'Grady, my boy?' asked O'Gorman, but the young Irishman lay still. 'Give him

time,' said O'Gorman, 'and a spoonful of whisky, but I say, what a biceps that fellow must have to deliver such a smasher, eh!'

"I was dragging O'Grady's lifeless form to a sofa, helped by O'Gorman, and presently we forced a drop or two of raw whisky between his lips.

"He opened his eyes.

"'I pinned him, didn't I?' he asked, 'and then I seem to forget. What happened then?'

"'What naturally would,' said O'Gorman. 'You lay hold of a man's hand and suggest that he cheats, and he hits you hard over the ear.'

"'I'll have him out for it!' says O'Grady.

"'No you won't, my boy. It's tit for tat, and that's good law all the world over.'

"'My head aches infernally,' muttered the young man, 'but I'll have him out on the field and shoot him.'

"'We'll have the blackguard into court first, and get him time and hard labour for cheating at cards—'

"'Then we've found him out.'

"O'Gorman went to the door and locked it. 'Look here, you two,' he said, and he took the pack of cards out of his pocket and spread them, face up, on the card-table. He counted out the first thirteen. 'There, that was Towers' hand. This is O'Grady's,' and he counted a second thirteen. 'This is mine, his dummy, and this is Morgan's. Now you heard him call hearts, didn't you? Let us see what he did it on. See here, Captain Morgan, he had just three hearts in his hand, knave, ten, and four, with some strength in the three other suits. Does any sane man declare hearts with only three of the suit in his hand? Never. But he might if he happened to know that his dummy holds five hearts.'

"'How could he guess that?'

“By some devil's cantrip, sir! That's his secret, Captain Morgan, and Satan's, his master!”

“The thing had gone beyond a mess scandal. It was made a matter of regimental inquiry. Just about this time, too, ugly rumours began to circulate as to Towers' doings on the turf. The colonel had received anonymous letters, of which he took at first no notice, alleging that Towers' mare, entered under the name of The Squealer as a six-year-old, was in fact a well-known steeplechaser named The Scapegoat, who had run in the Grand National at Liverpool two years before, and had come very near to winning that important event. A letter from a friend of the Colonel's, a well-known Irish sportsman, testified to the same effect. He had had his suspicions aroused, he said, on the day of the race, but not being sure, for the mare's coat was ragged and her appearance changed, he had held his tongue. It was not till some time had passed that he and a companion had examined the mare in Simpson's stables and he had found his suspicions confirmed. It was The Scapegoat sure enough. The mare's teeth had been tampered with, she bore 'mark of mouth' at variance with the length of her teeth, and that mark had evidently been 'faked.' Moreover, there was a conspicuous scar on the coronet of the off hind leg of The Scapegoat which was hidden by the unusual growth of hair on the fetlocks of Captain Towers' mare. This mark was looked for and found on the animal in Simpson's stable.

“On this evidence Towers was summoned before a Regimental Court of Inquiry and required to give an explanation. He was also called upon to explain the incidents during the bridge rubber, interrupted by the action of Lieutenant O'Grady. He had no excuse to offer for his redoubling “No Trumps” and declaring “hearts” with only three of that suit in his hand, except that he always played a forward, dashing game, and found it a winning one. As

to his mare, he denied that she was anything but a young mare 'rising six,' and declared that a friend had picked her up for him in a Dublin livery stable.

"The inquiry was adjourned for further expert testimony. A Dublin vet. deposed that the mare's mouth had been 'faked,' that the length of the mare's teeth indicated her age to be not less than eight. At that age the depression in the corner teeth of a horse, known as 'mark of mouth,' has disappeared for more than a twelvemonth. The mare indeed possessed "mark of mouth," but it was easy to see that it was a mark which had been produced by artificial means.

"Captain Towers being asked to explain why he had failed to singe or clip the mare and thus let her run at disadvantage to herself with half her winter coat on, replied that he was opposed to excessive removal of a horse's natural covering.

"Asked if the growth of hair allowed to grow on her fetlocks was not designed by him to conceal a scar or blemish on the mare's coronet, Captain Towers said the same answer would apply as he had made to the court's former question.

"An eminent detective officer had been brought from Scotland Yard, an expert in the ways of card-sharping. On being told of the circumstances of the last rubber played by Captain Towers, the detective asked for the packs that had been used. He examined the cards carefully, picked out sixteen cards from each pack, looking only at the backs, and dealt them into two heaps, face downwards on the table, at which the officers on the inquiry were sitting.

"We looked at Captain Towers. For the first time his assumed smile left him and he showed some emotion. He had turned pale. 'You will probably find, gentlemen,' said Inspector Medlicott, 'that these two heaps consist of the

whole suit of hearts and the three remaining aces. He turned up the cards and it proved to be as he said. There lay exposed all four aces and all the hearts in each pack.

"He handed the bundle of sixteen cards to the President.

"You will see nothing, sir, in these cards unless you look with a powerful magnifying glass, and you will feel nothing, but the man who takes the precaution of slightly rubbing down the skin of the ball of the thumb and of his second finger with pumice stone and so increasing the sensibility of the skin, can perceive in handling the cards that each ace has received the prick of a fine needle point, moving from face to back, and all the hearts similar pricks, from back to front—the pricks in the case of the hearts varying in number according to the value of the card. Now that supplies information enough to a good player to enable him to win heavily on every rubber."

"Inspector Medlicott gathered up the cards of one pack into his hand, shuffled them and turned to the President.

"If you will allow me, sir, to deal this pack, as if I were the dealer at a game of bridge, I will show you the *modus operandi* of the swindler at the game of bridge."

"Certainly, Mr. Inspector," said the Colonel from the head of the board table, "do as you say."

"Every one in the room was a bridge player, and we watched the movements of the detective with deep interest. I glanced at the accused.

"He had turned to a death-like pallor.

"This," said Inspector Medlicott, "is how a card-sharper, using these needle-marked cards, would probably deal."

"He dealt the cards and, to my astonishment, he exactly repeated the slow method of dealing practised by Captain Towers—the hand in each case following the card and laying each card, in its turn, on its respective heap.

"'By so doing,' said the inspector, 'the ball of the thumb and of the second finger have time to come into contact with the prick marks on each card.'

"The cards now lay in four heaps on the table.

"'I am able now to tell you, sir,' said Inspector Medicott, looking to the President, 'that I have dealt two aces to my dummy and one to each of my adversaries. I have, as it happens, given myself four good hearts and two aces; there are five small hearts in my dummy's hand, and my adversaries have each two. I should accordingly declare hearts on this deal though I have only four in the suit, and am quite sure to win heavily.'

"He turned up the cards and showed that he had correctly described them.

"The evidence was conclusive.

"We looked at Captain Towers. He had covered his face with his hands. A report of the inquiry was forwarded to headquarters, and Captain Towers was ordered to submit himself to a court martial or quit the service. But Towers did not wait for any instructions from headquarters. He disappeared suddenly from our midst. The day following the inquiry he was gone. He had left numerous creditors behind, which we thought the more iniquitous, as his short career among us had left him a winner at cards and on the turf of over £15,000. He had never repaid advances made by O'Gorman, O'Grady, and myself. Simpson had an unpaid bill of £50 against him with the mare as set-off, but a steeplechaser whose teeth have been tampered with is not a very realizable asset, and he was glad to take £100 from Major O'Gorman for the animal, with the understanding that the balance was to be paid to any legal claimant who might turn up.

"I will observe that the mare's bad temper was a fiction of Towers'. She had nothing wrong with her but a delicate mouth, and the touch of the curb was an agony to her that

caused her to rear. She became O'Gorman's favourite hunter, and won him many a race, but she had to carry weight in consideration of her previous performances as The Scapegoat, her old name, which was honestly restored to her.

"A terrible catastrophe followed Towers' disappearance. If he had not entirely ruined me, he was the actual sole cause of the ruin of my poor young kinsman, Lieutenant O'Grady. He had borrowed money from O'Grady when he had any to lend, won from him at cards and, we now knew, cheated him, besides inducing him to make absurd books on horse-races with him. O'Grady was irretrievably insolvent. He came of a family of good and honourable soldiers. He felt that honour soiled and sullied, and on the day following Towers' departure, O'Grady blew his brains out.

"I shall never forget our meeting after the funeral. We swore among us that if ever the chance presented itself we would be even with the cold-blooded villain Towers. It has happened that I alone among us was able to redeem that oath.

"I cannot lay all the blame of my own misfortunes upon Captain Towers. Some of it at least was due to my own stupidity and my own extravagance.

"I could only just pay my debts and I was nearly a pauper, with no chances left. My purpose was to enlist in some regiment going to India or the Colonies. I mentioned my intention to Inspector Medlicott, as a man of wide experience, to whose society I had taken a fancy.

"‘Don't do anything so rash with your life, sir,’ he said. ‘Don't waste it—you've had your lesson. You've learnt a lot without knowing that you've learnt anything. Go where you can use what you have learnt.’

"‘And where's that, Mr. Inspector? I am too old and ignorant of business for an office, and I don't know any

situation where they have any use for the sort of thing I know.'

" 'Come to us,' said the Inspector, 'work your way up from the ranks. It's more interesting than soldiering, and quite as dangerous.'

" This is how I came to enter the detective force, and I never have regretted taking Inspector Medlicott's advice. Nevertheless, I did not take it quite at once. It is a big jump from being an officer in a smart cavalry regiment to the rank and file of the Force at Scotland Yard. I hesitated for a time and tried other ways, but I need dwell no longer at present upon that interval in my career."

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT JEWEL ROBBERY AT BALIN ABBEY

"You began, Mr. Morgan," I said, "by telling me that you would give me some account of the great jewel robbery at Balin Abbey, and the burglar you call Gentleman Coggins."

"I have been telling you about Gentleman Coggins," said Inspector Morgan, "all along. Captain Towers and Gentleman Coggins are one and the same person."

"What!" I said, "an officer in the army turned London burglar! Towers sank so low as that, did he?"

"Don't say 'sank,'" said Morgan, laughing, "say rather he rose. There is rank in crime as in every other profession. No man stands so high as Coggins—Ikey Coggins. Captain Towers, who cheated us all at cards and won those thousands of pounds on the turf and then let himself be found out, is not to be named in rank and social position with Ikey Coggins—*alias* Conkey Coggins—*alias* Gentleman Coggins. He stands at the head of his profession in Great Britain. He has been suspected and watched by the police for years, and never once been nabbed, never once been sent to gaol, never once even been brought before a court of justice. It is a proud position!"—The Inspector smiled.

"Did he go at once from soldiering to burglary?" I asked.

"No," said Morgan. "Captain Towers went first to America. After a short and successful career in that country, finding it got too hot to hold him, he got killed in an accident."

I laughed—"A sham accident, I presume."

"No, the accident was serious enough. One of the biggest things of the kind in America of that season. Sixty drowned, forty burned to death, and over a hundred injured for life, but I don't suppose Towers was anywhere near the place where it happened. I have kept the announcement of his death in the *Morning Post*. It is a curiosity."

The Inspector drew from his pocket a newspaper cutting and read aloud:—" *Obituary Notice*. We regret to announce the death, in the recent accident on the Wabash & Susquehanna Railway, America, of Captain Towers, late of H.M. The great success of Captain Towers as a gentleman rider on the Irish Turf, his fine horsemanship and his phenomenal winnings will be in the recollection of our readers. Captain Towers was not only a gentleman rider of remarkable skill, but a sportsman of rare integrity. His winning of a fortune on the Irish Turf was the immediate cause of his honourable retirement from the British Army. The sudden melancholy demise of Captain Towers has cut short what promised to become a very brilliant sporting career in the United States, where he leaves many admiring friends.'

"The fact is," said Inspector Morgan, "that Pinkerton's police were hot upon his scent, and he bolted over here, under a false name, just in time to save himself. He had won quite a lot of American money."

"He must have been a rich man with his winnings on both sides of the water."

"Yes, but not too rich for the position he aspired to take up in the profession."

"What!" I said. "It takes capital to set up as a London burglar?"

"A very large capital. That is, if you have ambition to take rank. Recollect, too, it is one of the most lucrative

professions in the world. Great lawyers, great surgeons, great jockeys, are not in it with great burglars. When you may look to net from £50 to £200,000 a year, you must not stint in preliminary expenses."

"I don't really see, Mr. Morgan, what a burglar can require beyond a set of burglary tools, a pair of list slippers, a mask, a dark lantern, a revolver, and perhaps a few skeleton keys and centre-bits."

Morgan smiled. "That is not enough for the modern professional. It was all very well for the old-fashioned cracksman. The modern burglar leads a double life. He passes half his time in society—of a kind—the other half among his pals. He has to keep in his pay an army of retainers as large as a mediæval baron. Some of them are his agents, some his spies, half the criminal classes in town are his pensioners, and good pay, too, they get, for if he gives less than the police offer, the rascals would betray him at once. Then he has to pay for the defence in court of his agents when they get caught. I calculate that a man in the position of Ikey Coggins, lately Captain Towers, does not pay away less than twelve or fifteen thousand a year."

"And it pays him to do that?"

"Handsomely. Why, a single haul like the one at Balin Abbey must have brought in not far short of £100,000. Even the papers said £60,000, but ladies, we find, invariably lessen their losses in these cases."

"Was Towers' name mentioned in the case? I don't remember his name in the papers."

"He was only known among us as Coggins. His identity with Captain Towers did not come out at the trial. No one but four or five persons can know the truth about it. Of course, my chiefs at the office know, for I told them."

"Is it to be a secret still?"

"I don't see that it's any use making a secret of it any longer. It's ancient history now. Certainly not to you who are, if you will allow me to call you so, a brother official and something of a colleague.

"You honour me, Morgan, by calling me so. But tell me this story of the jewel robbery if it's fresh in your memory. It's anything but fresh in mine."

"It is in mine. It was my first big job, and it won my inspectorship for me."

"Then, please, Mr. Morgan, tell me the story, and tell it in your own way. I don't know a better. You give the length and breadth and look of things and let me see their working out, so that I could do it all myself if I wanted to. I never get that sort of thing in books. I suppose it's a detective's way of telling a story to his brother detective."

"I suppose it may be that," said Inspector Morgan. "We know the importance of detail. One nail-hole in a foot-print on a dusty road may make all the difference between finding our man or losing him."

I interrupted him as he was beginning his story.

"One thing I want to know first. You said the swindler Towers, who had given himself out as dead in that name, was leading a double life in London. Surely he has not come to life again and resumed his own name?"

Morgan paused. "Well, he *is* undoubtedly living a double life. That is certain, for 'Coggins' disappears from time to time, but, so to say, his life activity goes on."

"And what's his new name? What is his other life?"

"The answer to that question," said Inspector Morgan, "is the answer to the problem I set myself to discover. You will see that I did discover it. More by a strange sort of accident than by any cleverness of mine it came out. That he kept his secret so long was due to his wonderful talent."

"You mean that the police knew Coggins and could lay

their hands on him when they would, but the other life of the man was a mystery to them ? ”

“ Just so, and what was the good of arresting Coggins ? He managed that there should never be a scrap of evidence against him, though we know he was behind every big thing in London and 100 miles round London.

• “ Why, when Balin Abbey was broken into, Coggins was at Pangford, eight miles away, and our fellows had been there watching him for a week. He was staying at the Balin Arms at Pangford as Monsieur Dubois, travelling for a Lyons silk firm and booking a good many orders for silk skirtings and dress pieces. The man was the life and soul of the Commercial Room, speaking fluent English with a French accent and singing French songs to the piano in the travellers’ room ! What can you do with such a fellow ! ”

“ What made your people watch him ? ”

“ We had got notice from trustworthy sources that he had gone to crack a crib, as they call it, on the outskirts of Pangford. We had three good men on the watch, Sergeant Smith and two others under him, and they reported that he was seen at odd hours to be watching and studying this particular house—a retired manufacturer’s villa.”

“ A blind, I suppose ? ”

“ Not exactly, the house was broken into the very night following the affair at Balin Abbey, when every one was full of that, and the fellow got off with £5,000 in plate and jewellery. The burglary, however, could not be traced to Coggins, though of course we suspected him.

“ It was the day after the great affair at the Abbey that my chief sent for me. ‘ There is something going on down in Somersetshire,’ he said, ‘ which beats us all. Coggins is in it. I can tell you that much, but I can tell you no more. We are going to give you a chance of unravelling matters.’ ”

“ Stop, Morgan,” I said. “ Pray, did your chief know or

did you guess that Coggins and Towers were the same person ? ”

“ He did not and I did not—at that time. All we knew of Coggins was that he was a burgling luminary of the first order, who had come from nowhere about four years before and had beaten all our best men.”

“ Please go on. Forgive me for interrupting. I won't again.”

Morgan continued :—“ ‘ The case,’ said my chief, when I went before him, ‘ is peculiar, and we are taking unusual measures to come at the truth. The facts, as we know them, are these—(Forget what you have read in the newspapers, the reporters have got hold of some things by the wrong end). The plain facts are these :—

“ ‘ Lord and Lady Balin were entertaining a house party at the Abbey some days ago. On the 23rd of this month of January there was a big shoot on. The day was fine, dry and frosty ; the wind got up at night and some rain had fallen. The ladies joined the guns at lunch time at a point in the Balin woods some two miles from the Abbey. Every one of the ladies had elected to walk, except two ; the hostess, Lady Balin, and Lady Drusilla Lancaster, an elderly lady, a first cousin of Lord Balin. These two ladies were driven to the luncheon place in her Ladyship's pony phaeton.

“ ‘ The fact is important ; because that night the Abbey was broken into, and the room of every one of the ladies was entered by the burglar, or burglars, except Lady Drusilla's.’

“ ‘ Lady Balin's room was not entered ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, it was,’ said my chief, ‘ and the famous Balin emeralds were abstracted. They are historical jewels, and cannot be worth less than £20,000.’

“ ‘ Then the inference which you wish me to draw, that the four-mile walk and the day in the open air would have

made all the ladies drowsy except the hostess and Lady Drusilla, partly breaks down.'

"My chief smiled. 'Only partly. Lady Balin is a stout lady, and presumably a heavy sleeper. That fact would be known to the dwellers at the Abbey—servants and others.'

"'Ah,' I said, 'you suspect connivance of some one in the house?'

"'We are sure of it. The burglar had learnt when to break in, where to break in, and, being in, where to go. The house is ancient and very large, and the corridors and passages and bedrooms are a perfect rabbit warren ; no one but an inmate could make his way about. He made no mistake. He went into every room where there were jewels to be got, and he took everything except the pearls and diamonds of Lady Drusilla. The old lady is more careless even than most ladies with her jewels, and insists upon her maid leaving the string of pearls—about the biggest in the country—hanging by the side of her mirror, and her diamond necklace and pendant fastened to her pincushion, where she can see both from her bed in the light of her night-light. Coggins, or his agent, never troubled her, however, and her diamonds and pearls were safe in the morning."

"The chief had turned over the pages of a little MS. pocket-book, and he referred to an entry in it as he read these particulars in the habits and behaviour of Lady Drusilla Lancaster.

"'Lord Balin,' my chief went on, 'was here this morning. He asks, with the sanction of the local police, for the help of Scotland Yard. He wished to offer a great reward. I dissuaded him. He was himself of opinion that the burglar must have a confederate in the house. I told him I had no doubt of it. I told him I would send a couple of my men down to make inquiries. These inquiries, as you know, Sergeant, made openly and to the knowledge

of every one, are worth next to nothing. I told Lord Balin so ; but told him that, with his leave, I would also send down a competent officer with two assistants, who, while the other officers would fill the eyes of the people at Balin, would carry on a real inquiry. Would Lord Balin agree to receive such an officer as a guest ? ’

“ ‘ Lord Balin hesitated. He said, ‘ Would the detective be enough used to the ways of the world not to be discovered at once by the rest of my guests ? ’

“ ‘ The person I shall choose,’ said my chief, ‘ will run no such risk.’

“ ‘ Lord Balin bowed. ‘ I have an idea,’ he said. ‘ I have a distant cousin in Australia of whom I often talk. I have never seen him since he was a child. Let your officer impersonate him.’

“ ‘ What is his age ? ’

“ ‘ About thirty or thirty-five,’ said Lord Balin.

“ ‘ Rich or poor ? ’ asked the chief.

“ ‘ Fabulously rich. A squatter who has speculated successfully in gold mines in Western Australia.’

“ ‘ The very thing. My officer shall go down in a motor, with a chauffeur, and an Irish valet, both trustworthy officers in the force. Pray, Lord Balin, may I ask if you have lunched ? ’

“ ‘ Not yet. I propose to do so at my club.’

“ ‘ Pray do, and, when you come back, I will introduce you to your relative from Australia ! ’

“ ‘ Before Lord Balin went off to lunch,’ said my chief, ‘ I took down from his lips certain intimate particulars relative to every guest staying in the Abbey. Here are my memoranda. Put them in your pocket and study them at your leisure.’

“ My chief, having given me these details of his conversation with Lord Balin with his accustomed succinctness and lucidity, turned to me and said,—

“‘You will guess, Sergeant Morgan, that the cousin from Australia, whose name is Stanley, is yourself. Macgregor is your chauffeur, and O’Brien your valet and servant, both in your division ; they will, of course, take their orders directly from you. Go with O’Brien to the stores now and make yourself ready to go down to Somersetshire. You know what a smart man’s outfit should be on a country visit. As you are a millionaire, you may safely outdo good taste. You will take my own 24 h.-p. Napier. Macgregor is accustomed to drive it, and he will carry you down in less than five hours. Try to get there before ten, so as to see the guests and make a good impression before you turn in for the night. The rest I leave entirely to you. Go now and make your preparations and purchases, and, in two hours’ time, come back here and make Lord Balin’s acquaintance.’

“‘When I returned Lord Balin was with my chief.

“‘He received me very pleasantly. Lord Balin is known for a charm of manner not uncommon among Englishmen of his class. In his case it is explainable by the fact that he was in diplomacy before he succeeded to the peerage. I think my chief had said more in my favour than he had told me, for Lord Balin smoothed over a difficult position cleverly and kindly. He seemed particularly struck by the humour of the situation, and acted the part of a long-separated relation to perfection.

“‘Well, Mr. Stanley, you have changed less than I expected. It is true you were a chubby infant of four when your father carried you off to the Antipodes ; you’ve grown, my boy, but not out of remembrance. I could swear to those eyes of yours. You don’t remember me, Mr. Stanley—Stanley, I mean, for I must drop the Mr. with Dick Stanley’s son.

“‘Now tell me, my dear Stanley, one thing. Can you shoot ? Have you taken after your poor father in that ?’

“‘I used to shoot pretty straight,’ I said, ‘years ago. I hope I haven’t forgotten how.’

“‘I’m very glad to hear it. We have a big shoot on to-morrow, and we want an extra gun. Moreton is half blind, Pulteney nervous, and there is only myself left to account for the pheasants, and you, if you will help me. You didn’t bring your guns from Australia?’ asked Lord Balin, slyly.

“‘No,’ I said, ‘I’m afraid I left them behind.’

“‘Never mind, we can find you all that at the Abbey. I thought, Sir Henry,’ said Lord Balin, addressing my chief, ‘that I would not put off this shoot. It is one planned on pretty much the same scale as the one we had on the 23rd, the day of the robbery, and I thought it would help our friend’—he turned to me—‘that everything should take place to-morrow as it took place on the day the Abbey was broken into.’

“‘Excellent idea! Pray, Lord Balin, combine your plans with Sergeant—with Mr. Stanley.’ He laughed, shook hands with Lord Balin, nodded to me, and went off. ‘You have your last orders, Sergeant,’ he said to me as he left the room.

“Lord Balin and I talked over things in the chief’s room, and the more we talked the more did Lord Balin smooth over the awkwardness of the situation in which I found myself about to plunge, into the midst of a kind of society in which I had practically taken no part for over six years, and in which I was to appear—with the best of motives, of course—under false pretences, and in a name which did not belong to me.

“It was a pleasant drive down to Balin Abbey in Somersetshire: cold but pleasant. We three professionals talked naturally of nothing but the great jewel robbery. Certainly our chief could not have given me a better staff. Mac-

gregor is a young Scotsman of great intelligence and promise. He would take advantage of his superior position in the house as chauffeur to deal with the upper servants. Phelim O'Brien, a clever, good-looking, lively Irishman, who had himself served in the Irish Constabulary, had found the county work in that service too dull, enlisted into a line regiment, had been an officer's servant, but gave that up for harder work of a higher kind, and found his way at last to Scotland Yard. We trusted to him to find out what was going on among the valets and ladies' maids in the servants' hall. We naturally talked of 'Coggins,' the mysterious factor in the criminal world. Coggins, who went about evading us—the king of burglars, a master of disguise and make-up, admired and feared by every thief, bully, and hooligan in the streets—and though always suspected, never arrested. The very boys chaffed the policeman on his beat with '*Yah! Pinch Coggins—caunt yer? garn!*'—and here was this impudent scoundrel settled down at Pangford, within a few miles of the scene of his last successful exploit—and not a single ounce of evidence against him!"

CHAPTER III

THE CIRCLE AT BALIN ABBEY

"BALIN ABBEY, in Somersetshire, is a huge, stately building of Shakespeare's time, untouched by the hand of the restorer—a grey pile that stands up amid a wide flat area of grounds and gardens contemporary with itself, with stone paved courts and pathways and tall rectilineal yew hedges. As we drew up, the moonlight of a wind-still, winter night shone full upon its walls and the few ancient cedars that grew thereby, and displayed the armorial carvings on wall surfaces and gable ends.

"The ground is a plain, far and near, and the park studded with oak trees of great size. No high road runs within a mile of the Abbey, and I asked myself how the burglar could approach the house for purposes even of inspection without arousing observation, but Macgregor reminded me that the Abbey was one of the famous show houses of England, containing many valuable works of the great foreign masters and also priceless family portraits by Reynolds, Romney, and Raeburn.

"‘Be jabbers,’ said Phelim O’Brien, ‘I hope the knowledge of that same won’t reach ‘Gentleman Coggins’ at Pangford. If it does, the devil a picture will be left on the walls of Balin Abbey.’

"I never was so cordially, even so exuberantly, welcomed. Lord Balin could not better have played the part of a host welcoming a long-parted relative. His guests, many of

whom had known and heard of my supposed father, came forward as cordially as their host. It was fortunate for me that I had done garrison duty in Queensland and New South Wales, or I should have been puzzled by some of the questions I was expected to answer.

"For a moment I was confounded at the responsibility of my new part and even ashamed of my imposture. I was like an actor thrust forward upon the stage to act some important part that he feels to be beyond his powers, and is astounded at his own undeserved success and the applause of his audience.

"I could see that there was not a shadow of suspicion in any of the company that I was anybody but the person I was impersonating. Presently I began to reflect that to do any good to my superior and to Lord Balin and his despoiled guests I must do my utmost to second Lord Balin's endeavours to put me in the shoes of Dick Stanley's son. So I let myself go forward, and presently I was, as the saying is, in the very skin of my part, and I began to be almost persuaded that I was no other than young Robert Stanley, Australian squatter and millionaire. I had studied my chief's note-book in coming down. Most of the guests seemed to me thoroughly commonplace and uninteresting people. Lord and Lady Moreton and their two plain, good-humoured daughters, Lord Pulteney, a young man with every appearance of health and strength, but, according to his own account, a nerve-shattered neurasthenic, who got one into corners to complain of his health and the last new theories on serums, microbes, and what not. Two persons in the company struck me as standing apart, both were women.

"One was the elderly lady whom I have mentioned before, Lady Drusilla Lancaster; the other a remarkably smart and handsome woman who was introduced to me as Mrs. Townley. I should call her an unusually well-dressed

woman from the milliner's point of view, for I have eye enough to know what women and milliners mean by well dressed. It generally leaves men who are worth anything, cold, but this woman had evidently thought less of the fashion plates, in dressing herself, than of her remarkable beauty of face, hair, eyes and figure, and dressed to enhance these attributes. Her gown and its garniture seemed to me to be simple in defiance of the present mode which is not simple.

"When I put this point of view, admiringly, to Lady Drusilla Lancaster, that wise lady placed her double eyeglass upon her austere and aquiline nose and contemplated Mrs. Townley's half-reclining form with a severe expression.

"'Pretty creature!' she said, with more contempt than admiration in her tone. 'That soft cloudy mauve goes wonderfully with that bright complexion of hers and her golden brown hair. And that great diamond-clasped pearl dog-collar on her neck and the pearl embroidery on her dress and the dog-collar bracelets of diamond and pearls suit her white skin perfectly. But I think you said, simple?'

"'The effect is simple.'

"'My dear man!'—It was a favourite old-fashioned form of speech with Lady Drusilla—'My dear man, if simple means easy and if simple means cheap, that confection is nothing of the sort. Trust a woman's eyes! Paquin or Raudnitz has had sleepless nights over that dress, and you may be sure those *nuits blanches* will be represented in Paquin's or Raudnitz's bills!'

"'Mrs Townley is rich, I believe?'

"'She is a widow, or rather a grass widow, without children, whose husband came into, or made, a great fortune the other day—so I hear. Her wealth is one of her many charms.'

"'I never thought wealth was a charm.'

"'It never was one in my best time. It is now. Hideous people with horrid manners come among us, and, if they are

rich, we overlook their looks, and their ways, and adore them. Then, just imagine what we do with rich people with sweet faces and figures, who know how to dress and talk, like Mrs. Townley !’

“‘ You say *her* charm. Is her husband, then, a person of no importance ?’

•“ On the contrary, a man of great importance and intelligence ; for does he not manufacture the money that pays for all that luxury ?’

“‘ A dull, money-grubbing sort of man, I suppose ?’

“‘ My cousin Balin says not—says he is charming. His only fault is that he is never, so to say, anywhere. He is always travelling—always in pursuit of fortune, and always overtaking it. He even travelled here one day to see his wife and make Lord Balin’s acquaintance. Balin says he is a delightful man and clever and learned beyond words. He was interested in everything—the architecture, the abbey ruins, and, above all, the pictures. It seems he found out all sorts of masterpieces in the gallery that no one had ever suspected. The next morning before breakfast he had disappeared, had rushed down to Southampton to catch the next steamer for Tokio or the River Plate, I forget which.’

“‘ I am glad you approve of Mrs. Townley,’ I said. ‘ She is certainly charming.’

“‘ She is ; but pray do not go and fall in love with her, Mr. Stanley. Believe me, she is horrid in some ways, and I owe it to the son of my old friend Dick Stanley to tell him so.’

“‘ Horrid ?’

“‘ Horrid ! A baddish, indiscriminate flirt, a heartless woman, and a very selfish one, insincere and—all the rest of it. Mind, I don’t say not virtuous. I am sure she is as good as gold. It makes it all the worse, for it deprives her of the excuse of temptation.’

“‘ I was so taken aback by this outspokenness that I said

nothing for a minute. 'Now,' said the lady, 'that I have given myself away, and made you think me a spiteful old cat, I'll tell you why I said it all.'

"I smiled. 'You spoke out, and I am rather afraid your voice reached to Mrs. Townley's ears.'

"'My dear man! I talked loud just that I might not be heard. That woman has the ears of a lynx. If I had dropped my voice she would have overheard every word I said. She is not like one of us, who never condescend to listen when people abuse us. But no, I change my mind, I won't say why I abuse her. Let's leave her alone. You see I hate her! Tell me about yourself and your father. I knew him well and liked him immensely. Shall I confess the truth? I admired him—we most of us did. You have just his eyes, Mr. Stanley, and you would be like him but for that horrid beard of yours.' Forgive me for saying that! He was in the Guards when I knew him first. Then he got into debt—all the nice ones do—and exchanged into a crack cavalry regiment—which? the Scots Greys, I think—ruined himself entirely, and we had to let him go to the land of kangaroos and gold. Dear Mr. Stanley, if you wore your moustache only, you would be the image of him. You have just his height, his square shoulders and his light figure.'

"I may remark here that I had let my beard grow when I had left the army, short and trimmed back, to be sure—but it was a most complete disguise. I passed my oldest friends in the street and they never knew me. There is no such disguise as a beard.

•

"Lord Balin followed the hospitable custom of showing his latest guest his bedroom. I noticed that the guests left the drawing-room in a body, and we found ourselves in the great hall from which broad flights of polished oaken stairs lead in three directions to the bedrooms on the floor

above. On the hall table were two great silver trays, on one of which had been ranged decanters of white wines and spirits, with mineral waters. On the other were great crystal decanters of what looked like barley water. Most of the men and all the women drank copiously of this soothing and harmless beverage. All except Lady Drusilla. I filled a glass and brought it to her. She took it and touched the rim with her lips, barely tasting the liquid.

"‘It is bad luck, isn't it?’ she said smiling (there are few things more taking than the rare smile of an austere old woman), ‘to refuse the first thing one is offered by a new friend, and I want nothing bad to come between us two.’

"‘Thank you,’ I said. ‘You don't like barley water?’

"‘Well,’ she said, ‘if I drank as much dry champagne and sweet Benedictine as some of the women, perhaps I should be thirsty too. Besides which,’ said Lady Drusilla with a curious bluntness, ‘I don't like my drink meddled with by other people.’

"‘How meddled with?’

"‘Well, the other night I came out just before the others. I was sleepy, and I saw a woman stirring up the barley water with a long spoon. “What are you doing?” I asked, staring at her. “Only putting in a little more sugar. It is never quite sweet enough for me,” she said.

"‘I wonder who it was?’ I remarked. ‘The house-keeper, perhaps.’

"Lady Drusilla did not appear to hear my question. ‘Good-night,’ she said, ‘and don't dream of burglars.’

"‘I shall lock my door,’ I said, laughing.

"‘I shall not lock mine,’ she said, ‘for all the burglars in England, besides—’

"I laughed. ‘You are not afraid of seeing a masked figure with a dark lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other—’

"'Not at all,' she said, laughing in her turn. 'That is not the sort of figure I should see. I don't think I should see a man at all. Oh! I shouldn't be afraid.'

"We both laughed. I don't quite know why.

"Mrs. Townley had interrupted her talk with young Lord Pulteney and was watching us. Was she, like the man in the old play, sure we were talking of her because we laughed so heartily?

"I followed Lord Balin after the others had all said their last good nights and had gone to the bedrooms. He showed me into mine. No sooner had he shut the door behind him than he sat down and laughed heartily.

"'Now, did I do it well?' he asked. 'I used to be rather good at private theatricals, but, by Jove, I don't think I ever played so well as to-night. And you? Do you know the whole lot of them have been congratulating me on my new-found kinsman. Lady Drusilla raves about you, and the beautiful Mrs. Townley is sulking with her for monopolizing you all the evening. I say, though, my boy, there's one thing I'm sorry for—damned sorry for!'

"'What is that, Lord Balin?'

"'Why, that it isn't true—that you are not Bob Stanley and come to settle in the Old Country.'

"I had come to discharge a rather difficult and disagreeable duty, and, behold, I found myself in a Capua!

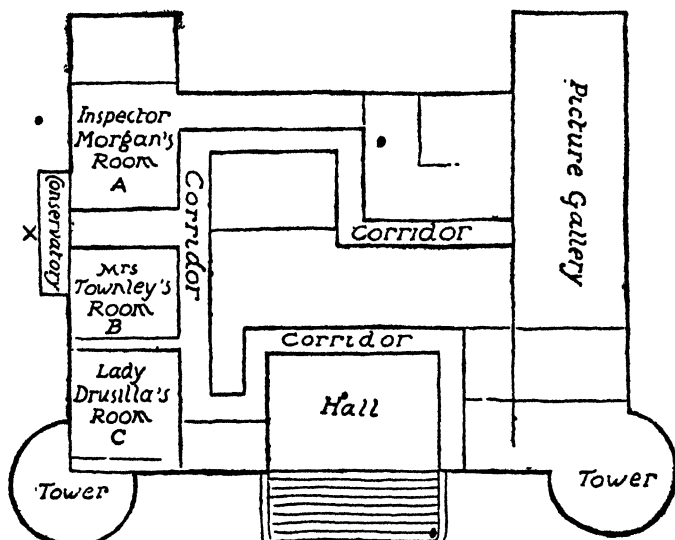
"'It's my great wealth that does it, I suppose. Lady Drusilla tells me wealth is the modern *open sesame* into society and into men's and women's hearts.'

"'Not into mine, Stanley—and, by Jove, if you knew her, not into my cousin Drusilla's either.'

"I thought it about time to get Lord Balin to give me some particulars. He was prepared. He had brought a plan of the first floor of the house. It was something like this."

Morgan took out his note-book, and on a blank sheet of

it drew a rough sketch something like this which I give here.



"The cross marks the place where the burglar had forced an entry, by entering the conservatory, climbing up a ladder inside, pushing up a skylight, and entering the corridor which leads to all the bedrooms of the guests. Observe that the bedroom marked A is mine, opposite to me is the bedroom B, occupied on the night of the robbery by Mrs. Townley. While her bedroom was entered and valuable jewels taken, Lady Drusilla's, marked C, was left unentered, although the burglar must have passed her door on his way to the other wing of the house where every room occupied by a lady was entered and the jewels abstracted. The passing by of Lady Drusilla's door, though it was known to every one what a prize lay there unguarded for the taking, was unaccountable, and perhaps should

furnish some clue to the thief and the motives of the thief.

"I asked Lord Balin if the forcing of the window leading from the end of the corridor on the flat roof of the conservatory might not be a sham entry, while all the time the real thief was some one, perhaps a servant, in the house.

"Lord Balin had considered that, but he did not think it possible. In the first place, the entry had been effected, according to the testimony of the two officers from Scotland Yard, with such skill that it could be the work of no one but a skilled professional. They would no doubt report all the circumstances to me, when I should deem it prudent to see them. I told Lord Balin that the officer Macgregor had been instructed by me to act as intermediary between myself and the two detectives, so as not to arouse suspicion by my speaking to them myself.

"Then, said Lord Balin, 'I can't do better than let you ring for your valet and chauffeur, interview them and leave you together. If you want to see me in private, you will always find me alone in the library.'

"Macgregor and O'Brien came and brought with them the report of the two detectives on the spot. They exactly confirmed what Lord Balin had told me. The window of the corridor was strongly barred with iron, and a bar had been removed from its soldered inlet in the stonework of the window. A circular hole had been cut through the thick plate-glass window, exactly over the bolt in the heavy oaken shutter, the shutter likewise had been neatly perforated with a burglar's centre-bit, the bolt pushed back, and window and shutter opened. No one but a very clever professional burglar could do such work so neatly, and even so it was a job that would take some time to execute. There was the mark of a hand on the glass and on the shutter, but the hand had been gloved. No betraying finger-marks had been left. There were plentiful footprints on the turf near where the entrance

had been effected, the night having been rainy and the wind high. There were even muddy marks where a man had trodden in the corridor, but, after four or five steps, the muddy impressions got fainter, as they naturally would, and presently disappeared altogether. The prints were untraceable for this reason, that rough socks had been drawn over the wearer's boots. So much for the burglar's entry. The wonder was that any one could break into Balin Abbey, for a night fireman was on duty all night in the hall. It is true he was a very old man, and that he remained on the ground floor and only patrolled the hall and the rooms on that floor, but the hall runs up nearly to the roof of the house, and any movement in the corridors would presumably be visible or audible from below. It seemed moreover impossible to come near the house without being observed, for, at nightfall, two under-keepers patrol the grounds, with two fierce bloodhounds in leash. After this patrolling, the dogs, which are kept shut up in the dark all day, are let loose, and only taken in again and fed at daylight. This practice, a precaution against poachers and tramps, had been followed for years, and was known all over the neighbourhood. Under these difficult circumstances a burglarious entry of the premises had always seemed to the owners and inmates of Balin Abbey an impossible circumstance.

"I had suggested to Lord Balin almost at once upon my introduction to him that the robbery might have been done by a servant, male or female, either in the service of a guest, or of the family. Lord Balin had told me that this was in the last degree improbable, from the fact of a curious domestic usage in existence at the Abbey from the days when the building had been a conventual house. All the men servants sleep in the east wing of the third story, and the women in the west wing—neither inmates of the separate sleeping apartments being able to reach the

lower part of the house without, in the case of the men, their passing through a door of which the key is kept by the house steward; in the case of the women, without their passing through the bedroom of the housekeeper.

“ ‘ This circumstance by itself, therefore, almost precludes the possibility of collusion between an outside burglar and a servant.’

“ It left this, then, as the inevitable conclusion. The crime which, from its nature and all the circumstances of difficulty surrounding it, could not have been committed by any single unaided burglar, must have been the joint action of a skilful professional criminal, acting in confederacy either with an inmate of the house, not a servant, or else with the connivance and help of one of the gamekeepers, of whom there was a small army at Balin Abbey. I put this latter possibility aside almost as soon as it occurred to me, for it is well known to members of our profession that criminality, of anything more than a petty larceny character, is nearly unknown among the gamekeeper class in this country! Taking them as a whole, a more respectable and honest community of men does not exist. Apart from which, the keepers have no access to the dwelling part of the house, and it was proved that the burglar's confederate had a very complete and intimate knowledge not only of where the possessors of the jewels slept, but of exactly where, in what drawers, cabinets or receptacles, the jewels were kept by their owners.

“ I went to sleep that night with the problem summed up in its shortest terms :—A great and successful jewel robbery, clear traces of burglarious entry by a most skilful operator, the fact that the most notorious burglar in Great Britain had taken up his residence in a town in the neighbourhood, the still more unaccountable circumstance that he still remained there after the jewels were stolen. What could be the only deduction from these facts but that,

though the robbery had been successful, the jewels had not yet been carried off by the principal in the affair. They must therefore still be in the Abbey. Since the robbery, I had been told that two additional bloodhounds had been let loose every night. The ways of these animals are well known, they are the fiercest among the race of dogs, their natural prey is man, and they never give tongue but when they scent their quarry. Unlike almost every other description of dog, they never bark or bay without cause. Therefore, if a single hound gives tongue in the night, it would be a signal to the other hounds that their quarry was afoot, the night would be filled by their baying, and the whole house instantly on the alert. With four such animals at large it was certain that no stranger would dare to approach the windows of Balin Abbey. This, then, was probably the explanation of the mystery of the continued stay at Pangford of the burglar Coggins, if indeed he was the author of the crime. He was waiting to receive the proceeds of the robbery from his confederate, an inmate of the Abbey. Why could not the jewels be made up into a parcel and sent away by post? The answer is that such a proceeding, since the advent of the police officers in the house, would be an extremely risky operation. Every postal packet would be scrutinized.

"So far my conclusions had now led me. I had ordered Macgregor to be ready for me with the motor by daylight. O'Brien was to be on the watch round the house so soon as the hounds were called in, which was always done as soon as the eye could travel a hundred yards across the lawns.

"The next day was to bring with it several remarkable surprises and discoveries.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST DISCOVERY

"I WAS up and was dressing before dawn, and from my window watched the great walls of yew turn from black to green, and their shadows, across the frost-covered lawns, slowly shorten, as the sun's globe rose from the eastern woods. I heard the keepers whistle, and saw the four fawn-coated hounds gallop slowly and lurchingly towards the sound. As they went they left their footprints on the white rime which lay on turf, paths, and flower beds. It was going to be a glorious day, and presently the sun, in a cloudless sky, would draw up the slight hoar frost. I went down and went out. I could hear the snorting of the motor in the stable-yard where I had told Macgregor to wait for me, but I would go round, first, by the conservatory under Mrs. Townley's and my windows, and take a survey of the ground. I could see for myself how, through the flat roof of the conservatory, half glass, half lead, the burglar had made his way, and how, from the roof, he had climbed by the thick stem of a wistaria to the window of the corridor—a bold and difficult feat, and one that only a master of his craft could attempt. How had a man, doing all this at night, escaped the bloodhounds which were at large every night? It puzzled me. And the explanation only came later.

"I walked along a broad stone-paved path that leads from the conservatory, and looked back at the house. Every blind was down and every shutter closed. The path leads to the lawn tennis ground. I reached a grassy plot

of turf beyond where the few ruins of the ancient Abbey are visible, ruined bits of walls and archways rising sheer from level well-shorn turf. The ground all round was at present one level sheet of hoar frost, dazzlingly white in the red rays of the rising sun.

"My eye was caught suddenly by a curious break in the whiteness, a little circular patch of green, no larger across than the palm of a man's hand, close to a ruined archway that rose out of the ground and broke the level monotony of white. Clearly a piece of wood, probably the top of some half-rotted post, just under the surface, had raised the temperature and prevented the deposition of frost crystals in that particular spot.

"Though quite satisfied with my explanation, the fancy took me to examine into the thing more closely. I went down on my knees, and perceived, at once, that the circle was artificially made, probably by a gardener's trowel. I perceived that the tool had cut deep all round the little circle. I took hold of the grass and pulled at it, but the slight frost had frozen all together. I took a penknife from my pocket and passed the longest blade deep round the circle and pulled again at the blades of grass. The bit of turf lifted as the top of a box lifts up and revealed the hole in the ground, entirely filled by a brown paper parcel a little larger than a man's fist.

"The jewels? No! Only their gold settings.

"I put the parcel half opened in my pocket, filled in the hole with a clod of earth, replaced the turfy covering, stamped all down smooth, and knew that, in half an hour, when the sun should have melted the hoar frost, not a trace would be left of my morning's work.

"Who had done this? Who had detached the gems from their setting and deposited them in this hiding-place? And why had it been done? To answer the last question first:—The settings were clearly removed to lessen the

chance of detection, and to make the jewels more easy to pass or send away. Who had taken the stones from the setting? Clearly not the burglar. It was a two hours' job for an expert, working with pliers and pincers. He would not have had the time. Clearly it was the work of his confederate, the inmate of the house, and he, or she, had hidden the gold settings in a place where they might reasonably be expected to lie, lost to man's cognizance, for ever. The place of concealment was admirably chosen—it was a secluded, unfrequented part of the grounds, where the Abbey ruins lay—and a person engaged in making the *cache* in such a spot could safely count on not being observed by guests or gardeners.

"I communicated my discovery to Macgregor as we motored to Pangford, where I desired to see the chief of our agents who were there to watch the suspected Coggins.

"'It's 'growing warm, sir,' said Macgregor, when I showed him the jewel settings. 'It's growing warm!'

"I thought so too, yet we were as far as ever from bringing the thing home to the man we were morally sure was the real author of the crime—'Gentleman Coggins.'"

CHAPTER V

SERGEANT SMITH : HIS OPINIONS AND ADVENTURES

"SERGEANT SMITH is in charge of the party deputed to watch the redoubtable Coggins at Pangford. The Sergeant is a North country man, senior to me in the force, but of more recent promotion, a very hard-working, conscientious man, but, to tell truth, I felt that Smith was not quite a match for the wily Coggins. I did not let Macgregor take the motor into the town, but waited outside the houses while Macgregor went on foot and brought Sergeant Smith to report and confer with me.

"Sergeant Smith had a strange tale to relate. It appears to him that Coggins has his heart in his new business. The Sergeant prudently keeps out of Coggins' way himself for fear of recognition, but neither of his men have ever seen him or been seen by him, and they drop from time to time into the bar parlour of the Balin Arms. From that 'coign of vantage' they can hear Coggins in the commercial room, talking loud in broken English, laughing, singing snatches of French songs, vociferating in his foreign way, joking with his fellow-travellers, boasting of his commercial successes, and then again talking over his many customers. For he has introduced some wonderful 'cheap lines,' as commercial people call them, in silk ties, smart handkerchiefs, all sold at remarkably low prices. He is out day after day, and at all times of the day, with the inn dog-cart and the ostler's boy. He visits all the neighbouring village shops, and talk of him has gone round the country. 'I suppose,' said Sergeant Smith, 'he will get a dozen calls

in a day from the small shopkeepers in the towns and villages round about to get more of his cheap stuff.'

"'And no one, I suppose, has any suspicion about him?' I asked.

"'No danger! They just think him a smart business man opening up a new line, and willing to let his stuff go cheap at first. Naturally, they want to make hay while the sun shines—and sometimes, Sergeant Morgan, I ask myself if this Mr. Dubois, as he calls himself ' Sergeant Smith pondered.

"'You ask yourself,' I suggested, 'if Mr. Dubois is really Gentleman Coggins after all?'

"'Just so,' said Smith, laughing. 'We are beginning here to ask ourselves that.'

"'I cannot help you, Sergeant Smith, I've never seen Coggins—but you have.'

"'That's just it,' said Smith. 'I've taken many a squint at this fellow Dubois through windows and the like, and for the life of me I can't spot him. The real Coggins is a sallow, clean-shaved fellow, just like one of those actor chaps you can see any day by the dozen in the Strand, and the real Coggins pulls a long face. Now this man is a rosy-gilled fellow—that's smiling and laughing all the time, no moustache, but a stiff black beard, shaved a bit on the cheeks, and going under his chin like a Newcastle ruff—French fashion.'

"'I don't think the office have made any mistake. Stick to him, Sergeant. It's Coggins, you bet!'

"'I will stick to him, and I have stuck to him, Coggins or not Coggins,' said Sergeant Smith, 'and I'll give you an example of how I've done it. Yesterday he ordered the inn dog-cart and drove out. It was close upon three o'clock in the afternoon. I thought I would follow him on my bicycle, as I had often done before in the last three weeks that we have been watching him. I had not noticed that he had taken

his own bicycle with him in the cart, covered with a rug. He drove to a village beyond Balin, got out and did business at the general shop. I held back out of sight, and when I came up to the trap again the ostler's lad was driving alone.'

" 'Why,' said I to the boy, 'where's Mr. Dubois? '

" 'He had his bicycle with him,' said the lad, 'and he goes to Pincote village and gets me to leave samples at places on the way back to Pangford.'

" 'Gone to Pincote, is he? '

" 'So I pedalled on fast, and presently got him in sight again, and he led me a pretty chase long past Pincote, up and down very bad roads, and I thought I'd just go up to him for once, and ask him what the devil he was up to. Just at this moment Dubois dashed into a narrow lane and I followed him. I felt I had the speed of him, and was overhauling him fast, when—whuff!—I ran over something and punctured my tyre badly, very badly, and presently I had to pull up. I got down, it was a clean cut, and in another part of the tyre were two tin tacks stuck fast. Had Coggins, or Dubois, whichever it is, sprinkled the road with glass and tacks, or was it the work of some cantankerous fellow who lived near the lane? I saw my man pedalling steadily ahead, and presently he was out of sight.

" 'My bicycle was useless, and I stood over it, thinking what I should do next. As I stood there cursing my luck I heard a rustic come singing and whistling down the lane from the direction towards which I had been travelling.

" 'He was a simple-looking young fellow in a tucked-up smock frock and leather gaiters, with a little battered wide-awake hat on the back of his head. He carried a bill-hook on his shoulder, and tied to the bill by a bit of string was a pair of thick, rough hedger's gauntlets.

" 'He stopped whistling *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, as he

saw me—stood and stared with his mouth open for a good minute, then began to grin from ear to ear like an idiot.

“‘Practising to grin through a horse collar, are you, my lad?’ I said. ‘Did you never see a punctured tyre before?’

“‘Forgie I,’ said the fellow, in a strong Somersetshire brogue. ‘Forgie I, zur, fer a venturing to laugh, but I niver zee two punctured uns in Farmer Joyce’s lane, a one day, afoor!’ and he laughed out loud.

“‘What?’ I said. ‘Is the other fellow caught too?’

“‘Ay, zur, at t’other end of the lane, and a swearing so terrible bad I had to move away from he. Ha! ha! It do tickle I!’

“Then he looked suddenly serious. ‘Yer moightend want a bit o’ hedging and ditching done, zur? I foinds my own gloves and my own bill ‘uk.’

“‘He leant his bill-hook on the ground and dangled his great leathern gloves at me.

“‘I’m reckoned a foine worker!’ he added.

“‘Tell me where’s the nearest blacksmith’s forge,’ I said, ‘and I’ll give you sixpence.’

“‘Will ee now, zur?’ he said with a greedy look in his eyes, and he came near and held his hand out. ‘T’other gentleman gave I a shilling for tellin’ he, but I’ll take sixpence from you, zur.’

“‘I put a shilling into his open hand and he began to direct me. ‘You be to go up droo the lane and keep a trending and a turning to your left and then to your right, and then to your left and then to your right again, droo the moorland till you come plump on to a horse pond that’s just over against Jem Bevan’s forge, only yer can’t see the forge rightly till you’m turned the next carner. Do ee understand I, zur? and thanking yer for your shilling, I’ll be going on whoam, zur.’

“‘The young rustic was whistling again, and presently

he broke into his song again of *The Girl I Left Behind Me*. I suppose it was a sort of rustic chaff on his part.

“‘I dragged my bicycle up through the lane and out upon the common, but I never saw a trace of the man I was after, nor did I find Jem Bevan’s forge.’

“‘But I suspect, Sergeant Smith, that you had found Gentleman Coggins himself.’ •

“‘What, the grinning idiot with the bill-hook! Never! Remember, I know Coggins by sight. This fellow was just a silly Somersetshire lad with an accent you could cut with a knife.’

“‘I said no more, but I had my doubts. ‘Tell me one thing, Sergeant Smith. Is the man Dubois often away in the night-time? Did you miss him, for instance, on the night of the 23rd when the burglary at the Abbey was done?’

“‘No, Sergeant Morgan, we did not.’ The detective took out his note-book, and, turning back to the date in question, read out the following:—

“‘January 23rd.—Dubois, supposed Coggins, went out on bicycle in early morning and never returned till dark. Saw several visitors before leaving; said to be from neighbouring villages—some of them took samples away with them. He received these customers mostly in little private office off his bedroom—my man had looked into this office in his absence one day, found it spread with samples, mostly cheap silks and neckties. Same day, brisk business. Inn servants and people in commercial room complain of Dubois’s noisiness. • At 9.30 in the evening, a man, said to be from Pincote, came to see him. Dubois angry, sent him away, reproved him loudly for coming to see him late and just as he was going to bed.

“‘Allowed man to take parcel of samples, but refused to do other business with him, told him he must come again at nine next morning. Dubois called out in the hearing of

inn servants that he was going to turn in. Man left muttering. Dubois was heard overhead in his bedroom for some time. Officer remained on watch all night in neighbourhood of inn. Dubois did not go out. Nothing further happened.'

" 'Thank you, Sergeant Smith. Tell your men to keep their eyes skinned. They have to deal with a sharp fellow in Coggins—very clever at disguises. Let them be sure he doesn't go out disguised and leave one of his fellows to stamp about on the floor overhead, making them think Coggins himself is at home.'

" Sergeant Smith did not relish my advice.

" 'I thank you, Sergeant,' he said stiffly, 'for your counsel. I will do my duty to the best of my ability.'

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW BEATER

"WE drove back to the Abbey, and I was in good time to sit down with the party at breakfast and hear all the preparations for the coming shoot.

"After breakfast Lord Balin took me into the gun-room and let me choose a couple of guns. As my host is of about my own height and arm-length, I found no difficulty in finding two that he had discarded with advancing age, a rather heavy Lancaster and a lighter Westley Richards.

"We drove to the woods about a mile away where the shooting was to begin. Great traditions of sport are followed at Balin—a company of keepers marshals and directs an army of beaters, and the procession of shooters, beaters and guns through the great beech wood is most interesting. Pheasants and ground game abound, but the shooting is varied. An occasional roe-deer starts before the beaters in the copses. Now and again, a glade in the woods opens and discloses a mere surrounded with willows, rushes and sedges, where mallard, teal, widgeon and snipe rise before the guns.

"The day was clear and the air ringing. It is the good old fashion at Balin Abbey not to repress the homely humour of the rustic beaters. They seemed to enjoy the sport quite as much as the gentlemen, and one heard jests and laughter and mutual chaff among them. Now and again, when the covert was more than usually thick, I heard singing along the line. Someone with a clear, resonant voice had started the well-known Somersetshire song,

'Cham a Zummerzetshire man,' and keepers and beaters and even 'the guns' themselves joined in the chorus to this air, known to every soul in Somerset.

"'Who is it with that good voice?' I asked of one of my loaders.

"'It is a queer half-cracked fellow that one of the keepers picked up on the road, looking for a job of hedging and ditching. He doesn't shirk his work in the woods, doesn't Joe, and he keeps the line in heart with his songs and catches.'

"I remembered the misadventures of poor Sergeant Smith. 'What,' I thought, 'has Coggins the impudence to venture into the lion's den?'

"'Is the fellow,' I asked, 'a Somersetshire man?'

"'By his talk,' said the loader, 'I should say he comes more Devonshire way, but he knows all our West Country ditties. Hark to him now, sir!'

"The singer began the first verse of that queer old Somersetshire ballad—

A shepherd kept sheep on a hill so high,
And there came a fair lady riding by.

The long line of beaters and keepers burst out with the odd uncouth words that form the chorus of the old ballad, and beat the measure out vigorously with their sticks against the tree trunks—then the ballad went on with the singer's ready memory, and the verses were broken into now and again with the rustle of a pheasant's wings through the tree branches, the cries of a keeper, 'Hare back,' or 'Cock forward,' or the banging of the guns. At the end of the song the gentlemen cried 'Bravo!'

"'Where have I heard that voice?' I asked myself, 'that fine, rolling baritone?'

"We stopped to lunch at an enchanting spot in the great beech woods. The ladies had already arrived and were

sitting or standing under the trees where the great bulging roots of the beech trees, covered with moss, emerald green, formed convenient seats. On the dry bare earth, still spangled with the fallen leaves, russet gold, the servants from the Abbey were laying the cloth for luncheon and handing out dishes from the hampers they had brought.

"The keepers and beaters sat down round a good mid-day meal, fifty yards away from us. Much laughter, chaff and talk was going on among them. We men went forward to look at the game, laid out in rows on a grassy bank. Lord Balin congratulated me heartily on my shooting. He and I between us had accounted for more than three-fourths of the whole bag.

"We lunched, and the meal was gay.

"'Did you have that delightful Joe again among the beaters?' asked Lady Drusilla—'the rustic with the lovely voice?'

"The men told her of his singing of the Somersetshire ballad and how they had enjoyed it.

"'When one thinks,' said Lady Drusilla, 'that a man with a voice and memory like that could earn a fortune at those hateful London music-halls!—and lose his country complexion, his country figure, and his country health in a season! How lucky it is no one tells him!'

"The point was debated. Mrs. Townley said he ought to be told the truth and have his choice offered. She said, 'Surely ignorance is never bliss in this world, and poverty, I am quite sure, was never a blessing to any one.'

"The discussion went on and only ended by our begging our host to let the man come and sing to the ladies.

"He came. It was just the man Sergeant Smith had told me of in the lane, the same leather gaiters, the same tucked-up smock frock, the same little battered wideawake hat set back on his head, that gave him, with his upraised eyebrows and perpetual smile, an air of rustic simplicity

and innocence. Could this possibly be the redoubtable Coggins? I had reproved Sergeant Smith for not suspecting him in this very guise, and now I could hardly bring myself to consider him anything but what he seemed to be, a simple West Country lout who was accepted for such in a company of his own West Countrymen.

"He stood leaning on his beating stick, with his hat in his hand, seeming half shy, half proud that he had attracted the attention of 'the quality.'

"He began to sing the old ballad. At first his voice was a little shaky as if with a natural diffidence before the strange company. Then he gained confidence and sang, and his voice rang out clear and ringing. At the end of every verse came the queer chorus, joined in by the rustics' voices from the distance, and presently the ladies and gentlemen caught up the air 'too, and the woods re-echoed with a melody perhaps as old as themselves. Something quaint and old world, something of rustic wit, rustic humour, and rustic romance that our modern hurry has quite let slip from our lives was in the old song. Lord Balin's guests were delighted. They cheered the singer heartily and asked for another song."

"I watched every look and turn of the man's face, every inflection of his voice. Where, when, and in what different circumstances had it all been present to me?—not the song indeed, that was new to me, but the ring of the singer's voice, and all his inflections, all his tricks of manner. Memory sometimes shuts the gates of consciousness very close, but a whisper comes at times through the locked portals.

"Mrs. Townley rose and approached the singer—she said a word or two of praise to him. He took off his hat, bowed with a bashful, rustic grace, and held it out towards her, asking unmistakably for a tip. The men laughed at the broad hint and felt for their purses, and Mrs. Townley

searched in the knotted corner of her lace handkerchief—a lady's purse—for a coin.

"I stepped quickly forward between Mrs. Townley and the singer and looked hard at her hands. The man, seeing himself watched, stepped quickly back. Mrs. Townley laughed nervously. 'You must sing us another song, Mr. Joe,' she said, 'and then I'll make a collection for you.'

"I said to myself, 'You will drop nothing into Joe's hat with my leave, madam,' and I kept a sharper watch than ever upon the two. I knew not much as yet, but something told me that I was in the presence of the two chief actors of the drama at Balin Abbey. Why was Coggins here? for, that the singer was Coggins I had no doubt at all now. Had I had any before, Mrs. Townley's action and manner would have sufficed to banish these doubts.

"To what criminal end was Coggins still here? For no possible reason, I was sure, except that his confederate had had no opportunity as yet of passing into his hands the stolen gems whose setting she had hidden among the Abbey ruins.

"How was it I had come to fix the guilt of confederacy so confidently on Mrs. Townley? The actual evidence was almost *nil*. I answer that I arrived partly intuitively at this conclusion, partly by the elimination of every other possible personage in the house. That there was a confederate was certain. The cleverest burglar could not have acted alone. Who, then, was it? I saw at once that only two persons were intellectually capable of the difficult rôle played by the confederate—Lady Drusilla and Mrs. Townley. Lady Drusilla's character, her age, her antecedents and a certain air of uprightness about her, put her beyond all possibility of suspicion. There was nothing of all this in Mrs. Townley. I had been at once impressed by a tone of insincerity in her voice, a false gaiety in her manner, a feigned seriousness, and a constant pretence of sham enthusiasm

and sham earnestness. She was never quite at home among the people of more assured social position than herself at the Abbey. She had not their ease and naturalness. All this had set me against her in spite of her great beauty and her obvious desire to please and attract. I must confess too that Lady Drusilla's strong disparagement almost at starting had been for something in my distrust. With pretty women it is often the first stroke that wins the game, or loses it for them. If they make that first happy stroke to their advantage, their charm and beauty tell on us and they score; if it is we who get in the first winning point, it is they who lose. Mrs. Townley never made the first winning stroke ; I was in opposition to her from the first.

"When I saw her rise to go towards the man I knew now to be the disguised burglar—when I saw her fumble with her knotted handkerchief, I knew that in another minute the jewels would have passed from her to him. I had stopped her, and the moment afterwards I almost regretted that I had done so. What if I had let her pass the stolen gems and then immediately arrested the culprit with the property on him? What a coup! What a bold and dramatic situation! Yes! and what an extremely unpleasant one to every guest present, and what if a single link in my long line of suppositions and intuitions and conclusions had broken? What if the new beater was, after all, a harmless rustic, the jewels not in his possession at all? What if Mrs. Townley was an innocent lady? My blood ran cold at the thought of such a catastrophe of misadventures happening in this delightful woodland scene.

"Mrs. Townley returned to her seat under the beech tree. I stood watching them both in seeming eager talk with the other guests.

"'Won't he sing us another song?' asked Lady Drusilla.

"Lord Balin asked him. The fellow took off his hat and grinned from ear to ear.

“‘Do, Mr. Joe,’ said Mrs. Townley, ‘some good old country ditty, and after that we will make a collection for you.’

“Joe played at being the diffident, over-honoured minstrel. At last he set his hat again upon the back of his head, and slanting his long stick upon his shoulder, he began the first bars of an air that is known to every English soldier, It is called ‘Turmut Hoeing,’ and is the regimental march of the Wiltshire that was once the 36th Regiment. The words are simple, rustic and homely, like the air. Here they are, for I know them by heart :—

“Some love to plough and some to sow,
 And some delight in mowing.
 Some, ’mid the hay, will stand all day,
 And loves to be a throwing
 The new mown hay wi’ pitchfork up—
 Gie I the turmut hoeing!
 Gie I my hoe and let me go
 To do the turmut hoeing.
 Oh! the hoe! ’tis the hoe, the hoe I loves to handle!
 And ’tis just so! ay! ’tis just so, that the hoe I loves to handle.

“The disguised burglar suited his action to the words, using his beater’s staff as a hoe. •

“For ’tis the pay, five bob a day,
 The farmer is a owing!
 Five bob a day will jolly well pay
 To set the ale-pot flowing!
 So that’s the reason that in the season,
 When turmut flies be blowing,
 I takes my hoe and off I go
 To do the turmut hoeing!
 Oh! the hoe, &c.

“Some loves to sing of early spring,
 And days of barley sowing,
 Some love to rhyme of sweet May time
 When daffodils be blowing.
 Gie I the moon that shines in June
 When turmut fields want hoeing.
 Ah! he’s no fool who loves the tool
 That does the turmut hoeing!
 Oh! the hoe, &c.

“The pretended rustic had not sung the first line before

the scales seemed to fall from my eyes—air, voice, and manner all came back to me in a moment, and, now that I could remember so much, the face itself began to reveal itself through all its disguises. I had heard the song sung a score of times at our mess by Captain Towers, Towers the turf swindler, Towers the card-sharper, Towers the author of my ruin, Towers the cause of my kinsman's death, Towers whose own death I had read in the papers and believed in, three years before, Towers himself was before me! Here was a revelation indeed. In a flash and by a sort of accident I had learnt more than the whole police force of London knew. If this indeed were Coggins, then Coggins the burglar and Towers the swindler were one and the same man, and my triumph was that here stood I face to face with him and he knew me not! I knew his secret and he never suspected mine. In truth he had not heard my voice, except in those tones that a man does not often use in the society of men, either his equals or inferiors. I had spoken but a word to Mrs. Townley in his hearing. My face he would not know, it was sufficiently disguised by my beard.

"I listened to his song, as he sang with excellent comic effect and in the broadest of Wiltshire accents. The song is well known in the West, and I want you to read into it all the character and cleverness which the disguised criminal was employing, in the presence of his former victim. There is a humour in naked facts even greater sometimes than the humour in words, tone and manner, and that form of humour I was enjoying to the utmost and all to myself, while the scoundrel was priding himself upon taking us all in.

"The ladies liked the turn the song took in the third stanza. They thought it poetical. I thought the whole thing, song included, was more than poetical. It was an ethical drama charged with human interest, working itself

out towards what critics, I believe, call poetical justice, and I was being the instrument of all this, and, as I have said, the sole member of the audience who really understood the plot of the play!

"When the song and the applause that followed had ended, Mrs. Townley said, addressing us all, 'Now, please, the collection.' The singer took off his hat and held it to one after another of the party of ladies and gentlemen, receiving from each a coin or two. He came towards Mrs. Townley, who had taken her seat some way back from the others, as I guessed with the object that if anything passed between her and the singer the action should not be visible to the others. He had stepped forward and was reaching out his hat towards her. Just as he was approaching her, I held out my arm and barred his passage. 'Stop,' I said, 'here is my contribution,' and I dropped half a crown into the hat. Then suddenly I took the hat from his hand and handed it myself to Mrs. Townley. I glanced quickly at both their countenances. They kept them admirably. There was a smile on hers, a continued grin on his.

"'Thank you, my lord,' he said to me with a mock gratitude.

"Mrs. Townley fumbled awkwardly for a moment with her handkerchief, and after a little delay, produced a silver coin.

"I had baffled them once again.

"Presently Mrs. Townley changed her seat and sat down on the outlying root of a great beech tree. She seemed, for a moment, to be lost in reverie; she began to trace fantastic figures on the bare earth with the point of her parasol.

"I went up to Lord Balin and began to talk to him, but my eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Townley's movements. 'Lord Balin,' I said, 'will you manage to let me walk with you alone for a hundred yards, when we go from here? I

have something important to ask you.' I spoke below my voice.

"'Certainly,' said Lord Balin. 'I will manage that,' and again he began loudly to praise my shooting.

"I smiled, and seemed all ears, but my eyes were following the point of Mrs. Townley's parasol.

"She had drawn what looked to me like the rude representation of a tennis racquet. Mrs. Townley was, I had heard, an enthusiastic tennis player—was her drawing done in mere distraction? We are all given to trace meaningless lines and figures if we happen to hold a stick in our hands, while our thoughts are otherwise engaged. Yet it looked to be the representation of a very palpable racquet. The parasol point had drawn a circle and filled it with cross lines. Then it drew the shape of a handle. It could surely be nothing on earth but a racquet! Then came a strange figure, an arch with a straight line under it. Finally the figure 7. Could these symbols have any possible meaning for any one? To Coggins? He was still making his rounds of the guests with his hat and grinning out his effusive thanks. He repassed the spot where Mrs. Townley's parasol had been busy. She had hardly raised her eyes for a second as he went by, but, when he had passed, she began at once to obliterate the figures. Presently nothing remained, but the drawn lines were fast in my memory. The figure of the arch, the numeral 7, and a racquet.

"That it was a signal I had not the slightest doubt—a signal to Coggins, and I knew that if I could not interpret it, the jewels would pass to him and be lost for ever.

"An archway, the figure 7, and a racquet.

"Seven might mean seven o'clock—a racquet might indicate the lawn tennis court—but the archway? I had it—it meant the secluded place beyond the tennis court where the ruins of the Abbey lay, half buried in the turf. One of the remains was an archway. Yes, it clearly

indicated the very spot where the jewel settings had been buried. Evidently something was to happen at seven o'clock that evening, or at seven next morning, in this unfrequented spot. I would anticipate the event, whatever it might be, by going there myself at both hours.

"We had another large covert to shoot, and the keepers and beaters went off to take up their line. The ladies started to go home, and Lord Balin and I found ourselves walking across the fields.

"'You have had no time to do much yet, I suppose?' he said.

"'I have learnt a good deal,' I said, 'in the last half hour.'

"'You don't say so, my dear Stanley! What a wonderful fellow you are! Why, I have hardly had my eye off you all day. You have been busy eating your lunch and laughing and talking with the women. Come, now! What can you have found out?'

"'First, I have made sure that the burglar is in league with an inmate in your house.'

"'Not a servant?'

"'No, not a servant.'

"'Mrs. ——?' He did not utter the name.

"I nodded.

"'Are you quite sure?'

"'I am quite sure now. I have seen signals passing between her and the burglar who broke into the Abbey.'

"'The burglar who broke into—— Are you dreaming? My keepers—why I could go bail for the whole of them.'

"'So could I, I believe.'

"'Then who is the man, and are you sure?'

"'The man I mean is Coggins—Gentleman Coggins, the smartest operator in his line, who has been living at Pangford for three weeks past.'

"'Yes, I know that; and how can that lady make signals to him there from our beech woods?'

"I could see that Lord Balin was beginning to find my statements difficult of belief—perhaps he half doubted my sanity.

"‘Mrs. Townley,’ I said, ‘twice tried to pass something to the person I know to be the burglar. Twice I was able to stop her. Then she traced a signal to him with the point of her parasol on the ground.’

"‘And what did she try to pass?’

"‘The stolen jewels.’

"‘What! they are in her possession?’

"‘Yes.’

"‘But they would be bulky—all the stolen jewellery together would make too big a parcel to pass.’

"‘Yes, in their settings—but they have been taken out of the settings. In their present form they would hardly fill a tea cup.’

"‘How do you know that?’

"‘Because the settings are here in my pocket.’

"I showed them. They were squeezed and pressed together.

"‘Good heavens!’ said Lord Balin. ‘Where did they come from?’

"I explained how I had found them.

"Lord Balin could hardly understand it. ‘You were at work early,’ he said. ‘By-the-bye, you have not mentioned one thing. Who is the criminal, the man who has broken into my house, and to whom you say Mrs. Townley twice tried to pass the jewels, and to whom she made signals? Who is this man? Where is he?’

"‘Joe the beater, the man who sang “Turmut hoeing” to us.’

"‘Joe the beater!’ said Lord Balin, stopping to look me in the face. ‘Why, surely not that weak-brained fellow!’

"‘He is the most dangerous criminal in all London.’

"‘Is it possible? And I have myself encouraged my

keepers to engage him! He seemed such a merry, harmless sort of fellow, just a rustic innocent. I even suggested that he might be taken on as an under-beater and watcher.'

"I told the story of how Sergeant Smith had pursued him, how he had spoilt Smith's bicycle, and then, hiding his own, had turned back disguised (the very disguise he had employed to-day), had sent the Sergeant on a wild goose chase in search of a forge which never existed, and how this self-same innocent rustic had been beating the woods all day, and singing country ditties to us.

" 'And what can he be doing here?'

" 'Waiting,' I said, 'to get hold of the jewels.'

" 'Look here!' said Lord Balin, taking out a whistle and giving three loud blasts on it. 'That will bring the head keeper here—anyhow, we'll get Joe the beater turned off the place at once.'

"I begged Lord Balin to do nothing of the sort. I undertook to watch that he did no harm. If he were sent off, I said, his confederate might devise some new way of hiding, or getting off with, the jewels.

"When the keeper came up I pretended to be interested in Joe and his singing.

" 'He's a good companionable fellow,' said the keeper. 'We all like him, and as his lordship desires me to engage him as under keeper, we take him with us on the rounds at night.'

" 'Ah,' thought I, 'that accounts for a good deal.'

"Lord Balin sent the keeper back to his duties, and the shooting began.

"I am afraid my loaders were less pleased with me during the afternoon shooting than in the morning. The first condition of good shooting is to have one's attention entirely concentrated on the matter in hand. A second lost in recalling one's wandering thoughts is generally the

chance of a shot missed, a head of game thrown away. My thoughts wandered all the afternoon. What mischief was my old enemy Towers, now Ikey Coggins, meditating? What did Mrs. Townley's signal mean? What was the signification of the mysterious figure of the racquet? Surely the archway was enough to indicate the spot. The racquet must be a further special signal agreed upon between the confederates to which I had no clue. Mrs. Townley would be at home three hours before me, and would have time to plot many things. I thought of sending a message by one of my loaders to Macgregor to bid him and O'Brien keep watch on her movements. Then I heard the cheery voice of Joe the beater halloaing in the woods, and I thought that, at least while he was with us, no great misfortune could happen.

"While my thoughts were thus engaged I missed three rocketers in succession. My head loader, pulling out his whisky flask, remarked that I was a bit off my shooting as compared with the morning. 'This morning, sir,' he was pleased to say, 'you hardly let a thing pass. Perhaps I may make so bold as to recommend a drop of this.'

"I took a sip at the proffered flask, and made an effort to pull myself together, with the good result that I knocked down a couple of pheasants right and left almost immediately, and recovered my shooting for the rest of the afternoon.

"It was nearly dark when we reached home, and I asked Lord Balin to let me slip off quietly to my room. From my window I saw Mrs. Townley coming back from the lawn tennis courts. She was an enthusiastic player, and sometimes went out with a boy to field the balls while she practised services by the hour. It was by now so dark that I could not see whether she carried her racquet with her. As soon as she had come in I sent for O'Brien.

"'Get me,' I said, 'a stable lantern and carry it un-

lighted, with matches, on to the lawn tennis ground there to wait for me, letting no one see you if you can help it. At what time are the bloodhounds let loose?’

“‘Not till ten, or half-past if no carriage-folk are coming to the Abbey or going away. They are that fierce they’d be after the horses in a carriage and pulling the coachman off his box.’

“‘Whistle twice in answer to me, softly, when you hear me coming.’

“‘I will, sir.’

“It was half-past six. I stole out a few minutes afterwards, wrapped in an ulster. I stumbled up the walk in the pitch darkness, giving a low whistle when I thought I was near the tennis ground. Then I made toward O’Brien’s double whistle.

“‘Here I am, sir,’ came O’Brien’s whisper close to me.

“‘Light the lantern,’ I whispered, ‘and keep your body between it and the house.’

“He struck three or four matches before he succeeded in getting it alight.

“‘Don’t throw the matches down,’ I whispered. ‘Put them in your pocket.’

“‘I’m doing that, sir,’ said O’Brien.

“I took the lantern in my hand and lighted our way to the Abbey ruins. I held it high up and could make out no one and nothing. We walked slowly all round the space occupied by the ruined remains.

“‘Is that what you’re looking for, sir?’ said O’Brien, pointing to the ruined archway.

“‘I see nothing.’

“‘It’s a spade, or something like it, leaning against that bit of ruined arch,’ said O’Brien, walking towards it.

“‘Is it a tennis racquet, O’Brien?’

“‘I’m thinking it may be, sir. Yes, ’tis just that very identical thing.’

"He handed me a large, heavy, substantial racquet.

"One of the ladies has been playing in the court,' I said, 'and forgot to bring in her racquet.'

"Sure, 'tis a mighty heavy tool for a lady to handle, sir.'

"Yes,' I said, 'and I'd choose a lighter one myself for convenience. O'Brien, my man,' I said, weighing the racquet in my hand, 'I'm thinking we may have found what we came down to Balin Abbey to look for. Go in now and open the side door, which is bolted inside. See here, I button this racquet under my ulster. I don't want to go through the hall where the ladies and gentlemen are and let any of them guess at what I'm carrying. Then you'll bring Macgregor up to my bedroom, and perhaps I'll show you both something queer.'

"When the two officers were in my room I bade them lock the door.

"If I'm not mistaken,' I said, taking up the racquet, 'here is the end of all our trouble.'

"The two detectives looked upon me as one who has taken leave of his senses. The handle of the racquet had, what many racquets have, a roughened covering of reddish indiarubber. I pulled it off, and the handle at first sight seemed to be fashioned just like the handle of any other racquet, but a close inspection showed an unusually large protuberance at the end. It seemed to be jointed to the handle, but our united strength could not pull it off, or unscrew it. Macgregor happened to have a little steel wrench, belonging to his motor car, in his pocket. He closed down the holder on the protuberance and held it fast while I turned the racquet in his hands. The screw worked loose, and presently the top was off, showing that a hole about three-quarters of an inch in diameter had been bored down into the whole length of the handle.

"I looked in and saw that the cavity was packed tight with pink cotton wool.

“Which of you has a corkscrew?’ I asked.

“The Scotsman and the Irishman each produced, in great haste, a neat extracting tool.

“I spread a sheet of newspaper on the table, entangled the point of the corkscrew with the cotton wool in the handle of the racquet and gave the screw a turn. I drew forth a great hank of cotton wool. As the cotton fell upon the table, gems of extraordinary size came tumbling out with it—some remained embedded in the cotton, some leapt out upon the paper—emeralds, green as grass, flat, and as large as a man’s forefinger nail, great blood-red rubies, some faceted, some cabochon-shaped, sapphires, blue as southern skies, and diamonds of uncommon size and brilliancy, and this profusion of precious things lay on the table between us three men, under the three-fold light of the electric lamps above our heads, shining and glistening as if they were living, moving things.

“There is, I think, something almost awe-inspiring about precious stones of such lustre and size to persons unaccustomed to see and handle them. The two men retired a step or two from the great treasure before them.

“‘There’s enough to fill the windows of a dozen jewellers’ shops in Bond Street,’ said the practical Scotsman.

“‘Bedad! It’s nothing short of a king’s ransom,’ said the more poetical Irishman.

“I carefully turned up the corners of the newspaper and made a small parcel of the gems.

“‘See, Macgregor, if there’s any more inside the racquet.’

“Macgregor banged the handle of the racquet down on the table—nothing came out. Then Macgregor held up the racquet to the electric light and squinted into the hole. ‘It’s all out, sir.’

“‘We must leave it as it was. I will spare you some of the cotton wool to repack it with.’

"It amused the men to drop bits of coal from the grate into the cavity that had contained the gems, to fill up the interstices with cotton wool, pack all tightly, replace the top, screw it on tightly, and roll on the indiarubber handle cover.

"'Now,' I said to Macgregor, 'carry it down—don't let any one see you, and hang it up in the passage near the conservatory with the other lawn tennis things.'

"Macgregor presently returned. It was now a quarter to eight, and I was dressing as fast as I could for dinner. He returned to report to me that as soon as he had finished hanging up the racquet with the others, he had gone towards the conservatory, just, as he said, from curiosity to find out if the door leading out was locked at that early hour of the night. As he went towards it he encountered Mrs. Townley coming in from outside through the conservatory. She was wrapped round in a long sealskin cloak, but, for all that, he could see that she was carrying some sort of a bundle underneath it.

"'Very odd!' I said. 'What do you make of that, Macgregor?'

"'I make nothing of it, sir, but it seems queer that a young lady should be out at this hour of the night and come in carrying a big bundle.'

"'Did she pass through the passage where you had hung the racquet?'

"'She did, sir, and I was close behind her.'

"'Did she seem to notice that you had put back the racquet in its place?'

"'She hurried through the passage and looked neither to right nor left.'

"'Is the night still very dark, Macgregor?'

"'Very dark and overcast, after the fine day, and a little drizzle of rain has set in.'

"'There's no moon, I think, Macgregor, to-night?'

"'Not till the small hours, sir, by the almanack, and but little then.'

"'A good night for cracking a crib, eh?' I remarked, dressing in haste.

"'Well, sir,' said Macgregor, smiling, 'not with those four savage bloodhounds roaming round the house.'

"'What would you say, Macgregor, if our friend Coggins had not only humbugged Sergeant Smith, but had got round the keepers here, and even Lord Balin himself? He has been going the rounds every night with the watchers. The hounds must know him by now, and he can come and go as he will by night or day. What do you say to that?'

"O'Brien stood with my white tie in his hand.

"He laughed. 'That beats all, sir! That's cleverness, if you like, but don't let him beat us, sir, for the dear Lord's sake! don't let him beat us!'

"'I'm thinking,' said Macgregor, 'that going the rounds won't help him far with the dogs. They've a kennel of a dozen of them here. The head keeper showed it me to-day. Bloodthirsty brutes, every one of them. I'd sooner face four hungry tigers from the Zoo. Ever since the burglary here these four fresh hounds have been let loose every night.'

"'That's good news, anyhow,' I said. 'Keep a sharp look out all the same, you two. See that the conservatory door is locked—keep my window open, and one of you stay in the room without a light burning. You may chance to hear or see something. I'll be back with you as soon as I can.'

"'I hurried down, but I was not the last. Mrs. Townley was still to appear, and she kept the party waiting. When she did at last come in, she abounded in pretty apologies—smiling, nervous, I thought, but full of life and movement. She wore a resplendent red dress with embroidery of seed

pearl, and a great string of large oriental pearls coiled twice round her neck and the ends hanging down. Pearls, she had told me, were her favourite wear. We were told she had lost a necklace of great pearls and diamonds in the burglary, as well as two pendants of pearl and diamond of great price. She deplored these losses hourly, but the wealth of this beautiful woman even after her losses impressed us all immensely. I remarked to myself, as I admired the superb pearls on her neck, that we had not discovered one single pearl among the wealth of precious stones hidden in the racquet. The fact, of course, had nothing astonishing for me.

"I took an opportunity of telling Lord Balin that I had good news for him, but that I would beg him to allow me to say nothing till the morning. 'The night,' I said, 'may bring its further developments'

CHAPTER VII

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

"WE spoke at dinner of the wonderful voice and cleverness of the beater, Joe. Mrs. Townley was particularly loud in her praises, and I myself was quite as enthusiastic about him as she. Such a man, I said, was much more than a clever village singer, he had artistic and other talents too, and I was sure it would not be long before he was heard of in London.

"Lord Balin's eye met mine, but he did not smile.

" 'We shall miss him when he leaves us ! ' he said, and he pinched his lips together as if a sudden emotion held him. Knowing Lord Balin's sense of humour, I feared an explosion, and hastened to change the subject. I spoke of the last woodcock that had got up out of shot and had never been seen again. A woodcock is a subject of conversation that will always take English sportsmen from any other talk.

"When I got upstairs it was nearly twelve o'clock. O'Brien and Macgregor were both in my room, the lights turned off and the windows open. The four hounds had been let loose an hour before, they told me, and the keepers gone home. Leaning out of the window, I could just hear the patter of the bloodhounds' feet, and their panting breath, as these fierce creatures ranged over the grass plots and through the shrubberies round the house.

" 'The moon,' I said, 'rises at three o'clock. If nothing happens between this and then, we may all go to bed.'

"I had an intuition that something would happen,

because I knew the burglar, being disappointed at not finding the jewels in the racquet, as he had been promised, would take some further steps to get hold of them.

"Assuming that he guessed nothing of the arrival of myself and my two subordinates, and there was indeed nothing to betray any of us to Mrs. Townley, or to himself, he would naturally conclude that his accomplice had been prevented by an accident from keeping her word. He would never dream that so clever a woman had been outwitted. The jewels were therefore, he would think, still in her possession, and he would, probably, present himself under his confederate's window at some appointed hour in the night and Mrs. Townley would throw out to him the packet of jewels. This simple and obvious way of getting hold of the jewels had, till now, been rendered impossible in my eyes by the fact that the grounds were closely patrolled by keepers every night up to a certain hour, and after that by fierce bloodhounds.

"But the keeper's revelation that day shook my confidence in the dogs, for, if Coggins went about at night with the watchers and their dogs, these latter would naturally get used to him. I had no doubt that it had been Coggins' original intention to get hold of the jewels in this simple manner. But then, after the night of the robbery, the head keeper, to make things safe, had, as I have said, let loose four instead of two hounds, and Coggins would of course be a stranger to two of these animals, if not to all four. So, to get the jewels, he had to resort to other methods. Hence the attempts of Mrs. Townley to pass the jewels in the wood and the later manœuvre of the tennis racquet. Now that he had been baffled in every attempt, what would he do next? He could not know, yet, that the stolen property had passed for good out of his confidante's possession. What did the heavy bundle brought in by Mrs. Townley portend? What could it contain except some means of

getting into the house, possibly a rope ladder, or, more likely, one of those knotted ropes which have lately become a common implement in a modern housebreaker's trade? Did Coggins meditate breaking in, a second time, into Balin Abbey? I was pretty sure that he did—not for purposes of robbery, but to secure the booty he had obtained through his confederate.

“I had made a fair guess, but I had really no idea to what lengths the audacity and insolence of this Prince of Professional Burglars were prepared to carry him.

CHAPTER VIII

COGGINS' CROWNING EFFORT

"THERE was an empty bedroom in one of the two towers which rise on either front of Balin Abbey. I had Lord Balin's permission to use it for purposes of observation, and I directed Macgregor to go thither and watch. He came to me in about half an hour to report that he could hear nothing of the hounds. Generally one or other of them were on the move all through the night, and their footsteps could be heard, or their panting as they galloped slowly across the turf, or the rustling of the evergreens as they pushed their way through the shrubberies ; to-night he had not heard a sign of them.

" 'The scoundrel has drugged them or poisoned them !' I said.

"It looked like it.

" 'Then he means to be up to something to-night,' said O'Brien.

" 'Go back to the tower, Macgregor, and watch for what happens. Go, both of you, and keep a good look out, and let O'Brien come here and report when you notice anything.'

"The tower stands out from the corner of the main building, and the windows command full views of two sides of the house, of the front and of the western side where the conservatory is and to which Mrs. Townley and my rooms look. Only on this side can the house be broken into. Here, then, was the point of danger.

"I had waited in the dark for nearly two hours, and,

tired out with my day's shooting and my many anxieties, was all but asleep, with my arms on the table and my head resting on them, when O'Brien opened the door hastily and said in a loud whisper,—

“‘The rascal's at work, sir!’

“‘What's happened?’ I asked, hardly daring to believe the good news.

“‘We heard Mrs. Townley open her window just now, and chuck something out.’

“‘The knotted rope!’

“‘We can't see a thing, the night's so thick, but we can hear him climbing up against the creepers on the wall, hand over hand.’

“‘Send Macgregor here, and you run to the two constables below and tell them to post themselves in the passage leading to the conservatory. There is no hurry. There let them stay till they hear me give three stamps on the floor overhead. Then they are to run out and nab any one coming down a rope from Mrs. Townley's window. Explain it all clearly to them, O'Brien. Let them stick closely to my instructions; and then you come back quietly into my room. Pull your boots off as you come upstairs.’

“Macgregor and I waited a good ten minutes. We removed our boots as a matter of precaution. Presently O'Brien entered the room barefoot. We had heard, or thought we heard, someone stirring in Mrs. Townley's room, but it was only after some minutes' waiting that we heard the door softly open. We waited a few minutes. Then I opened the door of my room and listened. I could hear the sound of stockinged feet some way up the corridor. I knew it must be Coggins. I followed the footsteps, after whispering to Macgregor to follow on some yards behind me.

“‘What is he at?’ I wondered, as I cautiously went

forward through the darkness in the direction of the footfall. To what was he leading me? I wondered, for he did not go in the direction of the living part of the house.

"He seemed to know every inch of the way in the dark, and turned sharp to the right and left more than once.

"Finally he came to a sudden stop. I heard the opening of a door; he went forward, half closing it behind him." I waited for a moment to let Macgregor come up. I could see now that the burglar carried a dark lantern with him. He turned it on, flashing the light upon the walls. To my astonishment he had entered the famous picture gallery of Balin Abbey. I saw the light of his lantern flash upon great luminous canvases of Rubens, upon sweet portraits of girls by Romney and Reynolds, upon masterpieces of Velasquez and Titian. Was O'Brien's prediction come true? Was the rascal coveting some of the works of the great masters which Lady Drusilla told me the Mr. Townley, whom I made no doubt was Coggins, had once criticized so acutely. I almost laughed at the fellow's audacity.

"This certainly was his object, and he now set to work to carry it out. He began with a beautiful picture of three nymphs in a woodland landscape by Rubens. It was a picture full of a golden and rosy light, and the bright surface reflected the gleam of the bull's-eye lantern carried at his waist-belt. The reflected light clearly revealed all his movements in outline. He took from his pocket a knife and cut along the bottom line of the inner frame, then as high as he could reach on each side. Then, standing on a table which he had moved in front of the picture, he cut along the top and sides. In another moment he had put up his two hands and was steadily ripping the canvas down, and off the backing of the frame, with a dull rasping noise as when a saw passes through soft wood; then he turned, and for a moment we could see his face and the knife with its gleaming blade between his

teeth. I saw, too, the handle of a revolver protruding from his breast pocket.

"He leaped lightly from the table and rolled the canvas up. His actions were almost monkey-like in their nimbleness. He moved the table to another picture and we saw the light stream upon it. It was the portrait of a lady in a grey dress slashed with black and embroidered with silver lace on the shoulders and sleeves—the portrait of a young queen, by Velasquez—a face with a proud, disdainful smile. I saw him use his knife upon this lifelike presentment of a noble woman, with something of the horror with which I should see him prepare to attack a living human being. The painted face and figure formed a point of light in that great vault of blackness which is before me at this moment that I speak to you as vividly as I saw it that night.

"Macgregor pressed forward as Coggins passed the knife quickly round the edge of the picture. I laid my hand on his shoulder and whispered 'Wait!' in his ear. When the burglar put up his hand and began drawing off the canvas from the back, I took advantage of the sound of tearing to throw wide open the door and, together, we rushed in upon the burglar. Together, we leaped up at him on the table, but before we could reach him he had heard us, turned, taken the knife in one hand and drawn the revolver with the other. Macgregor had seized one wrist, I the other, in the uncertain light. The table fell, and all three of us lay struggling on the ground. One barrel of the revolver went off, and he stabbed at us both repeatedly with the knife. The burning powder singed my hair, but the ball struck neither of us, and after a minute Macgregor got the pistol from him. He had struck Macgregor once savagely with the knife on the shoulder, but I had hold of his wrist and the blow glanced, and though it cut through the cloth of Macgregor's coat, it only just grazed the skin. The struggle on the floor lasted but a minute or two. Then we over-

mastered him. O'Brien ran up as we held him and slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. The Irishman picked up the lantern, which had fallen to the ground and had cast only a flickering and uncertain light during our fight with the criminal. Not a word had been spoken by any of us.

"Take him to the room in the tower, Macgregor,' I whispered in Macgregor's ear, 'and answer no questions if the prisoner asks any. Make no noise as you go.'

"I had expected the gallery to fill at once with people from the house, roused by the crash of the falling table, and more still by the report of the pistol, but nothing of the sort happened. The picture gallery lies far away from the inhabited portion of the Abbey, being reached through long and tortuous corridors. The door had shut to as Macgregor and I rushed in, and though the noise of the pistol discharge seemed deafening to us, as it reverberated through the vaulted roof of the gallery, it turned out that not a soul but ourselves had heard anything.

"I went downstairs and brought up the two officers from their post near the conservatory. I told them we had captured our man, and that their duty would be to watch him during the night.

"It was now nearly three o'clock. By daylight I was up again and had gone out. I saw the keepers assembled on the lawn. They were greatly disturbed by the non-appearance of the bloodhounds. The dogs had not answered, as usual, to the keepers' call, and a search in the shrubberies presently resulted in finding the bodies of all four of them lying dead and stark.

"I spent two hours in writing a report to my chief. I felt that luck had greatly befriended me all through—I had succeeded in every point. I had recovered the lost jewels. I had brought the robbery home to the actual thieves—that is, morally brought it home, for even now it was doubtful if legal evidence could have been brought against Coggins for

the jewel robbery, but I had established a clear case of burglary in the matter of the pictures against the man suspected so often and never yet in durance for an hour.

"It was nine o'clock. I dressed and sent in word to Lord Balin that I would like to see him before breakfast.

"I said, 'My business is done. I have found the stolen jewels—here they are,' and I laid the paper parcel before him. 'One of the thieves was Mrs. Townley, but the instigator and real criminal was Coggins, *alias* Towers, who is the husband of Mrs. Townley. The man Coggins broke into the Abbey last night for the second time, and we were able to arrest him in the very act of stealing your pictures. He is now a prisoner in the tower room. No one in the house knows anything of the matter, not even Mrs. Townley.'

"'Stop! stop!' said Lord Balin, raising his hands. 'You overwhelm me! What! found the jewels and arrested the thief? Why—why, you are the most extraordinary fellow in the whole world—you shoot my pheasants for me when I couldn't get anyone else to, you entertain my guests as no one else does—and now, in a turn of the hand, you find the lost property and arrest the thief. You are a wonderful fellow, my dear Stanley!'

"'Morgan now, Lord Balin—Sergeant Morgan, at your service. The comedy is over.'

"'Nothing is over, Morgan—if you will let me call you that and,' he added, holding out his hand, 'and my friend; and do not forget that I owe you a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to discharge.'

"Then he changed the subject suddenly. 'And that poor woman, Morgan? What are we to do with her—arrest her too, charge her with the theft, and get her put into prison?'

"'It seems hard upon her,' I said; 'she acted under the influence and compulsion of her husband.'

"'It is damned hard, Morgan. Though I confess I never

liked the woman ; but a pretty woman and my guest ! No, no !

“ ‘The moral evidence,’ I said, ‘against Mrs. Townley is overwhelming—the legal evidence almost *nil*. I doubt if we could secure a conviction. I have told my chief so. Counsel for her defence would be sure to argue, If she was the thief, why did Coggins run the risk of breaking into the house ?’

“ ‘To be sure,’ said Lord Balin, ‘why did he ?’

“ ‘Because he would know that he couldn’t trust her to do the trick herself. It takes pluck, nerve and experience which no ordinary woman possesses. Even if she had all the will in the world, Mrs. Townley could not have gone through the rooms single-handed and stolen the jewels herself.’

“ ‘Then you think he did it alone ?’

“ ‘Alone or together, who can tell ?’

“ ‘I tell you what, Morgan. Let’s think it over presently. Come in to breakfast now—the second gong has gone long ago—come in and be Robert Stanley once more. Let us ignore everything for the moment and see what this wretched woman will do and say.’

“ ‘Remember,’ I said, ‘that she can know nothing as yet. My men are to be trusted, and they won’t have spoken to any one in the house. The man passed through her bedroom towards the picture gallery. She certainly knew his errand, for he had brought a dark lantern and a sharp-cutting knife with him. He did not return. She would guess that he found it best to make his escape in some other way than back through her room, for she, having heard nothing of the struggle, would naturally conclude that her friend got safe off.’

“ ‘Just so,’ said Lord Balin. ‘I will call her in here after breakfast and tell her what has happened. I shall tell her she must leave my house at once and for good, but I will tell her also that, so far as I am concerned, I will not

prosecute her. If the authorities choose to press for a prosecution it shall not be my act or by my advice.'

"I thought that line was equitable, and I said so. I ventured to doubt if it were strictly legal.

"Lord Balin laughed. 'Law be hanged, Morgan! equity and poetical justice for ever! But come to breakfast; you must be hungry after your night's work.'

"We had sat down and taken our places before Mrs. Townley entered the room. I cannot say that her face was pale, for it was more highly coloured than ever, but her unquiet eyes and her trembling mouth told the tale of the night's anguish. Lord Balin greeted her with no change of his accustomed morning cordiality. She was more carefully, more exquisitely dressed than usual, and her hair seemed to have undergone the attentions of a professional hair-dresser. She talked and laughed freely, but I could see that she looked and listened for any stray revelation of the events of that terrible night.

"The butler came in and spoke in a low voice to Lord Balin.

"His Lordship half rose from his seat in anger. 'Poisoned them! What! all four? Confound the sneaking villain!' Then he sat down, having mastered his wrath.

"'I beg your pardon,' he said, turning to his guests, 'but what do you think? The scoundrel who robbed this house three days ago, and who has been hanging about the neighbourhood for weeks past, has poisoned four of my bloodhounds!'

"I looked at Mrs. Townley. She gave a nervous start, and a shudder shook her whole body for a moment. Lord Balin caught sight of her frightened face, and in a moment his chivalry to a guest and a woman came back to him.

"He smiled and changed the subject. So did the meal pass off, and I could not but marvel at the possibility of what may happen in a great house, in the night time, in

the way of moving human drama, and its inmates, guests and servants, have no inkling of what has passed.

"‘Mrs. Townley,’ said Lord Balin, but so much in his usual tone that I could see it did not alarm his guest, ‘I have some news for you. Will you join me in the library presently?’

"Then he left his guests, giving me a look to follow him. Mrs. Townley rose to leave the room. I opened the door for her, and followed her into Lord Balin’s private room.

"He motioned her to a seat and began at once.

"‘It is very painful, Mrs. Townley, for me to have to say what I am going to. Don’t please interrupt me till I have quite finished, and then say what you will.’

"Lord Balin’s tone was not stern. It was rather sad, but he spoke without hesitation.

"‘I want to speak to you about the robbery of jewels here three days ago. This gentleman’—he looked at me—‘is an officer of the detective service, and he authorizes me to say that the settings of the lost gems were found hidden among the Abbey Ruins; the gems themselves, which you twice endeavoured to pass to the disguised burglar—’

"‘Lord Balin!’ exclaimed the unhappy woman.

"Lord Balin went on:—‘The stones themselves were finally found, as had been indicated by you in a signal to the man Coggins, in the handle of your racquet.’

"Mrs. Townley groaned and hid her face.

"‘They are all there,’ said Lord Balin, pointing to a cabinet, ‘except the pearls and diamonds which you told us you had lost. We have reason to know that your husband broke into this house on the 23rd, and went or induced you to go to the rooms of the persons who had drunk of the barley water that you had drugged.’

"Mrs. Townley groaned again.

"‘Your husband broke in for the second time again last night, passing through your bedroom. He intended to rob

me of the pictures which he had admired at his visit here, and of which no one knew better than himself the value.'

"When Lord Balin had got so far, Mrs. Townley probably made sure that her husband had baffled the police once more and got safely away. She looked up, smiled through her tears, and shook her head.

" 'He was arrested in the very act,' Lord Balin went on, 'and will stand his trial for burglary.'

"The woman's face fell, she almost shrieked out the word 'Arrested!'

"Lord Balin bowed. 'You do not, I suppose, seek to deny any part of what I have said?'

"The unhappy woman muttered some incoherent words, and again hid her face in her hands.

" 'I have no intention of prosecuting you, Mrs. Townley. I shall advise the authorities not to do so, on the ground that you acted under the compulsion of your husband.'

"Mrs. Townley raised her head, with something of a reprieved look in her face.

" 'Lord Balin! you are very generous to me—very generous'—she wept—'to a most unhappy woman—guilty, yes, but, oh, if you could only know!'

" 'Mrs. Townley,' said Lord Balin, almost kindly, 'I wish to force no confession from you, but one thing I must tell you. You must leave my house at once, pretexting some sudden call of business. You will do so without again seeing my other guests. I will not betray you to them. Now go,' he said more sternly, 'and make your preparations to leave. The carriage will take you to the station in two hours' time from now.'

"Mrs. Townley got up, and without any leave-taking quitted the room. Again, as before, I opened the door to let her go out.

" 'Lord Balin,' said I, 'may I ask you a favour?'

" 'May you ask me!' said my host, smiling.

“‘It is that you will allow me to have a parting interview with a lady I have reason to respect very greatly.’

“‘My cousin, Drusilla Lancaster?’

“‘Yes.’

“Lord Balin rang the bell and told the butler to beg Lady Drusilla Lancaster to come to the library in order to hear some important news.

“‘Tell her, please,’ I said, ‘when she comes, who I am and why I came here.’

“‘I will, Morgan,’ said Lord Balin, ‘I will, my dear fellow; but, I say, we won’t give that poor woman away even to Lady Drusilla?’

“‘No! no! On no account.’

“‘Drusilla,’ said Lord Balin, ‘I have a confession to make to you, and to you alone mind, from my friend here. He is not Robert Stanley; he is Mr. Morgan, of the detective service.’

“‘I thought he was too nice for a millionaire,’ said Lady Drusilla, smiling, and otherwise unimpressed.

“‘I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude,’ Lord Balin went on. ‘He has recovered all the jewels that were stolen here, and he has arrested the thief.’

“‘The thief?’ asked Lady Drusilla, with a curiously shrewd look.

“‘Yes, the famous burglar, Coggins—Gentleman Coggins, who has baffled the whole London police for four years. Last night he made an attempt upon my picture gallery, and Mr. Morgan arrested him in the act.’

“‘Well done!’ said Lady Drusilla, turning to me.

“‘I have begged Lord Balin,’ I said, ‘to give me the chance of apologizing to you for the miserable part I played with you—’

“‘Miserable part!’ exclaimed Lady Drusilla; ‘why, this sort of thing is nearly the only real action possible in this tame age. In my eyes—Mr.—Mr.—what am I to call you?’

“ ‘Morgan,’ said Lord Balin.

“ ‘In my eyes, Mr. Morgan, you are a knight errant—you think and you act in the interests of the rest of us, and that is to be the only sort of knight errant and hero possible in these days.’

“ She came forward and took my hand in both hers.

“ ‘ ‘Mr. Morgan, you and I are going to be great friends, are we not?’ she laughed. ‘Do, if you please, come and have tea with me in Hill Street, next Friday.’

“ I have nothing more to say about this case at Balin Abbey except this. My short twenty-four hours’ work at Balin Abbey won me my inspectorship, and, on my favourable report, Macgregor and O’Brien were promoted to be Sergeants.

“ But I have gained what I esteem even more highly, the life-long friendship of my host at the Abbey and of Lady Drusilla Lancaster.

“ The authorities took Lord Balin’s advice and did not prosecute Mrs. Townley.

“ Gentleman Coggins, *alias* Towers, *alias* Townley, got five years’ penal servitude.

“ Mrs. Townley resumed her luxurious life in Park Lane. Her jewels, her dress, her motor cars, her yacht, her chef, her charming dinners, her bridge evenings (when the play runs high) are more than ever the talk of the town. She is said to be the richest grass widow on this side of the Atlantic; for she admits herself that grass widow is now quite an applicable name for her. ‘It is too bad of my husband,’ she says; ‘he never seems to have time to come home. One day I get a postcard from Pekin telling me of how he has a valuable concession from the Dowager Empress, two months later a wire comes from South America, then he is heard of in Japan! It is very hard upon his poor wife.’

"The supposed financial wanderer is, however, still doing time at Broadmoor, and we, in the force, are wondering whether, when he comes out, he will resume the very lucrative business of Ikey Coggins, or the far less profitable but safer profession of city financier. We hope he will continue in the burglarizing rather than the financing line. We know more now about Gentleman Coggins than we did, and believe we could catch him tripping ; anyhow, we can always follow a criminal in that line with some hopes of running him in, whereas the person who practises the more speculative branches of the profession is mostly quite beyond the reach of the law."

THE FLYING MAN

THE FLYING MAN

CHAPTER I

THE JOURNALIST

"IF there is one thing," said Detective-Inspector Morgan, when he was paying me an evening visit, "that riles me more than another, it is what I once read in some book or newspaper, that there are only thirteen or thirty—I forget which—plots of stories in the world. All stories that can be told being, it is said, variants of these thirteen or thirty. Now, what absolute nonsense! Tell that to the youngest constable in our branch of His Majesty's service, and he will laugh. Why, you might as well say that there are only thirteen or thirty changes to be rung on all the bells in all the world. There are more men and women in the world than bells, and more ways in which they move to their individual ends than ways in which bells can be rung. In all these possibilities of human motives and human actions are possibilities of stories, and instead of thirteen or thirty story plots, there must be more stories to be told than changes to be rung in all the belfries of the Christian and Pagan world put together!"

I laughed at the extravagance of the ordinarily sedate inspector. "I suppose," I said, "you are thinking of one particular story which the inventor of the thirteen or thirty theory never thought of?"

"I am thinking of one particular story that never could have happened before, and never can happen again."

"You might tell me that story, Morgan, and explain why it couldn't happen again."

"It's the story of a flying man."

"Do you mean a man who really flew through the air?"

"Not exactly that, but something very near it, and, all considered, much more wonderful. What is odd about this particular adventure of mine is that it happened before I joined the detective service."

"While you were still a soldier?"

"No, after that. After I had left the army and when I was casting about for what I should do next. When I left my regiment and the army and Ireland and came to London in consequence of the events in which the swindler Towers—*alias* Gentleman Coggins—had the chief part, I did not, at once, follow the advice of Inspector Medlicott and enter H.M. Detective Service, as we love to call it. I lingered for a while in town, casting about for fortune, or a competence, as other impecunious and adventurous people do. I must tell you that in my undergraduate days I had always had literary ambitions."

"What!" I said, "Mr. Morgan, you, a soldier, have been to college too?"

"It is not common, but it was my father's wish. He was an old University Don, and he wanted me to see something of University life before I went in for soldiering. He thought there was nothing like Oxford or Cambridge for making an *all round man* of an Englishman, and I agree with him, not the learning is valuable, he thought, so much as the life. I was at Cambridge only a year, and worked fairly hard. Of course, I took no degree."

Well, I tried literature with only very moderate success. The magazines are slow to accept the work of

unknown authors, and dilatory, if strictly honest, in payment, and I should have starved if I had not found an opening in journalism. Little by little, and step by step, I got upon the staff of an important daily paper, holding no very distinguished position, to be sure, for I never soared to be either a leader-writer or a paragraphist. I worked as a reporter, and was willing and ready to turn my hand to anything. It was hard and constant work, and I cannot say it was particularly well rewarded, but I shall always look back with pleasure to the days which I spent on the staff of the paper, for my colleagues were all good fellows and our editor a gentleman.

I cannot honestly say that I had distinguished myself particularly, as a reporter, but his chance comes to every man who waits patiently enough, and is able to make some sort of a stroke for fame and fortune. I never arrived at fortune on the staff of my paper, but at last a chance came to me.

Till then I had been employed to report on very commonplace occasions, the ordinary accidents and offences which we read every day in our morning papers with the least possible emotion. I thought my opportunity had come when one day I was called into the room of the affable young man of the world who then conducted the fortunes of the paper. Let me call it *The Daily Messenger*. It is not the name of that important journal, but it will serve, and I hate blanks in telling a story. *The Messenger* was, and is, an enterprising journal. Every successful journal is, but *The Messenger* beat all its rivals in enterprise and dash. It ever sought the human, the vital, the interesting element in things. "Let us tell our readers what they want to know, not what they ought to want to know," was a saying of the Editor, and I think he was right. I thought so then as a journalist, but I think it now as a reader of journalism. Our world is almost entirely composed of newspaper readers, and

therefore I take it the world is of my way of thinking, and wants entertainment before instruction.

The Editor, being a man of the world, and, as I said, affable by nature, treated his staff affably. Among us his manners were club-like and genially cynical; when he was among women his ways were drawing-room ways and he was genially enthusiastic. He got on with both sexes. I am told women believe in him. I am sure men do, for journalists, being all cynical by habit of their calling, cynicism goes down with us. When he said once, "I make a rule never to make either a friend or an enemy; both are dangerous," a brilliant and indispensable leader-writer, also a cynic, remarked, "Don't you find it easier to make the last than the first?" "Not at all, my dear fellow, and when you come to succeed me in this chair, you'll find the Editor of *The Messenger* has friendship thrust upon him twenty times a day!"

"Sit down," said my Editor, as I closed the door, "and tell me if you can pick any holes in this," and he handed me a proof slip of one of his own brilliant leaderettes. He rarely wrote for the paper, and when he did it was a masterpiece, and generally on some matter of immediate domestic and social importance.

"It is a check to our social progress," the printed slip ran, "a slur on our boasted civilization, a shame to our social order, a present peril to the whole community, that a crime of this character should remain undetected, its author unpunished, and the victim unavenged."

This just indignation was in reference to a murder case in the remote provinces, as to which, till then, the London world had taken little account. The body of a young country girl had been found on a lonely road in so distant a part of the world as Monmouthshire, and there was not a particle of evidence to show how she had come to an evidently violent death, nor any clue to the murderer.

"We must write this up," said the Editor, when I handed him back the slip with the obvious comment, "Splendid !"

"We must write this up," said the Editor. "Those fellows don't see much in it. I do."

When our Editor said "those fellows," it always meant the editors of contemporary journals, and it was his pride and pleasure, and also his profit, to see what we journalists call "good copy" when "they" saw nothing ; in other words, to make journalistic capital out of what "they" were willing to pass over as unimportant."

"Do you remember," said my Editor, "that some years ago there were strange rumours in that part of England of the appearance of a mysterious being whom the rustics called, 'Spring-heeled Jack' ?"

"Perfectly," I answered ; "'The Flying Man.' I come from that part of the world myself. 'Spring-heeled Jack' is a myth in the West of England. Nurses frighten children with him. It is a legend that goes back to ever so long ago. The Flying Man is a fellow supernaturally endowed with a sort of grasshopper power to make enormous jumps and springs that carry him at prodigious speed, in flying leaps, over hedges, ditches, and over men's heads. He appears only at night and frightens lonely travellers nearly to death."

"Yes, and not a spiritual being either," said my Editor, "for his tracks are found next day in the soft mud, or if there is snow on the ground. Don't they say that ?"

"Quite so, and each step is found to be at such a distance from the next, that the rustics know they could be made by no human foot."

"Capital! Capital!" said the Editor ; "make a point of that, my dear Morgan."

"Do you want me to go down and investigate?" I asked.

"Why, of course I do. Look, here is the Ordnance Map of the neighbourhood."

He unfolded it, laid it on the table, and made a cross at the spot in a by-road where the girl's body had been found. "Can you start to-night?" he asked.

I told him I was at the orders of the paper.

"Good. A train which lands you at Tretire station leaves Paddington at midnight. At Tretire you are fourteen miles from Pontregiddion, the scene of the murder. It seems, by the map, to be a lonely neighbourhood."

He was consulting Bradshaw as he spoke, and had unfolded the great map which forms part of that inestimable volume. He tore it out of the book, rolled it up with the Ordnance Map, and gave me both.

"You will find them useful," he said.

He meditated for a moment, a rare event.

"Morgan," he said, "do you think Spring-heeled Jack had anything to do with this poor girl's murder?"

I smiled incredulously.

"His escapades were in this very neighbourhood, were they not?"

"Yes," I said, "there or thereabouts, so far as I recollect."

"There seems," the Editor persisted, "to be a mystery all the same about this murder. The county police are clumsy, and they don't seem to have made anything of it. Here is a long report of the inquest in the *Tretire Courant*. Put it in your pocket."

Then we parted. As I was shutting the door the Editor called out,—

"I say, Morgan!"

"Hullo!"

"Don't forget the Flying Man, you know!"

CHAPTER II

A COUNTRY TOWN

It was on a very cold moonlit night that I travelled down by the Great Western mail train. All England had been under snow for a week, snow trodden into cold mud in the streets, snow dabbled with grime and smoke on the house-tops in London. In the country, a spotless sheet of white lay under the moonlight that obliterated the land and left nothing but the leafless trees, the tops of the hedgerows, and the house walls and roofs visible.

Tretire is a small town with a good family hotel, the Tretire Arms. I determined to put up for the night. The weekly market was to be held on the day after my arrival. It is the old-fashioned custom of the place that a farmer's ordinary is held at the inn on market days, and I determined to make one of the company at my host's table, where I should be pretty sure to hear something of the event at Pontregiddion.

In point of fact, I was a little late on the field, for the adjourned inquest on the body of the unfortunate girl was being held while I was travelling down to Tretire, and I should read an earlier account of what had occurred and of the verdict of the jury in the *Tretire Courant* than if I went at once to Pontregiddion that day.

I bought back copies of the local newspaper since the date of the crime a week ago. Here is a summary of the evidence taken at the first inquest :—

George Edmunds, carpenter, living at the village of

Pontregiddion, had a job of work at the great House (meaning Pontchurch Court, the seat of Colonel Pritchard, lying about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, by road, from Pontregiddion). In the very morning of December 15th last he started for his work at daybreak, the morning being cold but bright, and the light fairly good, snow then lying everywhere about two inches deep. He thought as he came to where the Welsh Lane leads to the Werne (residence of the Hon. James Price) that he could make out something in the nature of a cloak, or other garment, lying in the snow, in the lane, about 100 yards up from where it joins the roadway. Was considering with himself whether he had time to go and look at it, when he caught sight of John Parry, Colonel Pritchard's coachman, coming down the hill with his master's horses. Parry was taking them to the forge to be shod.

"I pointed to the object in the lane," said Edmunds, "and either John's eyes are sharper than mine, or the day was lightening, for he says, 'George, that's no cloak, nor garment! That's a woman lying in the snow.' Then I ran up and found the body of the young maiden, Dinah Morris, face downward on the ground. I called to John, and he came up, horses and all, and together we turned the body over. She was dead, and her body was cold and stiff.

"We supposed she had fallen down and died in a fit, for there was no mark, or sign of hurt, visible, either on the girl's face or her body, but we noticed there was a look on her face as of a person who has suddenly seen some horrible thing. The basket she had been carrying lay by her side empty, and parcels and packets of grocery were lying scattered on the road. We found her purse lying among the other things, with as much as 17s. 9d. in it, in silver and copper money."

Questioned as to whether there were any marks of struggle in the lane, the witness replied there were none—the body

just lay on its face, he said, "decent-like," the arms outstretched. The snow lay white and smooth all round about.

Asked if he was sure there were no footprints on the snow in the lane, the witness declared positively that there were none. He had noticed as he ran up that there were none except those made by John Parry and himself as they ran up. He could not say when the snow had fallen on the night of the 14th. The weather had been mild all that day, but got chillier towards nightfall, and, when he got up next morning, it had snowed and the ground was white with a hard frost. There were plenty of wheel-marks and horse-prints in the snow on the main road, but not a mark of any kind in the lane.

John Parry, groom and coachman to Colonel Pritchard, remembered the morning of December 15th. He was taking his master's carriage horses, the first thing in the morning, to Bill Evans's forge that lies at the cross roads at the bottom of the hill. It was just getting broad daylight, on the morning of Saturday, the 15th, when he noticed George Edmunds standing in the middle of the roadway with his bag of tools over his shoulder, looking at something in the Welsh Lane leading up to the Werne.

"What is it, George?" I asks; and he says, 'Is it a woman's cloak, or what is it?' and I says, 'By the Lord! it's the woman herself lying in the road!' 'I'll go and pull her out of the snow,' says George, and he offs it up the lane, and when he got up he calls out, at once, in a tremor, 'For God's sake, John, come here!' Then the two of us turned the body over, and found the girl was stone dead."

Questioned, as the previous witness had been, as to whether there had been any footprints in the lane, the witness Parry was positive there were none—he had particularly noticed that the snow lay quite untouched all round the body and up and down the lane. Asked if he had any knowledge of when the snow had fallen, Parry said

that, till ten o'clock the night before, it had not snowed. A little before that his master had sent to say that he would want the carriage for a long drive next day. He then remembered that the fore shoe of one horse was loose, and he took a lantern and went out to see if he could set it right. Finding it was more of a job than he had thought for, he had settled to take both horses to the forge the first thing the next morning. That was how he was up and about so early. It might be half an hour that he was in the stable with the horses at night ; when he went back to the house it was snowing fast. Towards morning it stopped snowing and a dry frost set in.

Questioned as to whether he had noticed any sign or a struggle or violence, or been struck in any way by the appearance of the deceased, the witness said he had not, the girl was lying naturally enough on her face, with her hands out, just as she would have fallen suddenly in a fit, but he had been struck by the look of horror on her face, when they had moved the body. Asked to describe this look more particularly, witness said he was unable. It was just a look of awe and fear, as if the girl had just seen some very horrible and terrifying thing. He had never seen a look like that on any woman's face before.

A juryman asked the witness if either he or George Edmunds had formed any opinion of how the girl had met with her death. Witness answered that, as he ran up, he heard George mutter, with his hand on the dead girl's shoulder, " This is Bill Evans's work ! "

The coroner immediately interfered to stop the witness. The question, he said, was an unfair and improper question, and should not have been put, and the answer was not legal testimony, and could not be admitted as evidence.

Witness remarked that he was sorry he had said what he did, but, being asked a question, he was bound, being on oath, to answer it. He begged leave to remark that

Edmunds' remark was only made in the heat of the moment and before he and witness had come to the conclusion that, as there were no marks on the body, death must have been due to a fit.

The Coroner said that witness's explanation showed a very proper spirit, and was a quite satisfactory explanation of his conduct. The matter then dropped.

Mrs. Reece, widow, keeper of the "general shop" at Pontregiddion, deposed that she was well acquainted with the late Dinah Morris. Dinah was a regular attendant at chapel, and interested herself in the Baptist evening school, where she regularly held an infant class three days in the week. Dinah mostly did her mother's shopping after evening school, which would be over about half-past nine o'clock—on the night in question, she knocked at the door, as usual, the shop being then closed, and, as a favour to Dinah, the girl being a favourite with her and the village generally, she consented, as she had often done before, to serve her with the few groceries she needed. She took no particular note of the hour Dinah left her, but it could not be later than a quarter to ten, for, as Dinah parted with her at the street door and she herself went back to her kitchen, she found her two boys finishing their supper. Supper time with her is half-past nine, sharp.

Asked if she had noticed anything peculiar or unusual in the girl's manner or demeanour, Mrs. Reece said that she noticed nothing of the sort. Dinah was in her usual good spirits and spoke in her usual gracious way. "She, poor child, was even a bit jocular with me in a friendly way," said Mrs. Reece, "for when I observed that, though the moon was getting towards the full, the sky was overcast and I was afraid she would have a stiff climb in the dark up Pontchurch Pitch, she said she knew every inch of the way even if it *was* 'pitch dark.'"

The Coroner (an Englishman) asked the meaning of the

word "Pitch," in the sense in which Mrs. Reece had used it, and was told it was the local term for a steep hilly road. This witness was asked if Miss Morris was known in the village to have any attachment to, or engagement with, any one in the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Reece replied that there was, at one time, some talk of the girl being affianced to young William Evans of the forge, but the engagement had been broken off some time before.

Mrs. Reece was pressed to give the reason why, and she said she presumed the character and conduct of the young man was not such as to satisfy Miss Morris, her mother, and her mother's chapel friends. Urged further to say if she knew anything against the character of Dinah Morris's former lover, Mrs. Reece begged to be excused from saying more on a matter on which she could only speak from hearsay. The question was not pressed.

Mrs. Morris was called into the witness-box. The grief of the widowed mother of the dead girl was so evident that the Coroner mercifully undertook to shorten it to the utmost. Her daughter, Mrs. Morris declared, was the best and most devoted of daughters. Asked if her general health was good and, particularly, if she were subject to fits, her mother declared that Dinah's health was always excellent and that she had never suffered from so much as a fainting fit in her life. Asked if, and why, the engagement with William Evans was broken off, she answered that it was broken off by Dinah's own wish and with the hearty assent of all her own friends.

A juryman asked if Mrs. Reece, or her daughter, had had any complaints to make of the character of the blacksmith, Evans.

The Coroner objected to this question being put, as not bearing on the question at issue and as injurious to the character of a person not in the remotest degree connected with the case.

The foreman said the question was material as possibly supplying a motive for the crime, if crime there was.

The Coroner called the jury's attention to the fact that they had at present no crime before them. They were inquiring into the cause of a death which nothing yet went to show was anything but natural. The gentlemen of the jury, however, unanimously supported their foreman in pressing the question, which Mrs. Morris proceeded to answer by saying that William Evans did not enjoy a good reputation in the parish, having notoriously fallen away from the goodly life he had once led and got into low company. He had twice been convicted of poaching. At this point of her evidence Mrs. Morris was overcome by her feelings and allowed to leave the witness-box.

A great many witnesses were called before the Coroner, and the facts above given were corroborated, but nothing more, material, was elicited.

So much came out at the first inquest. The doctor's report and evidence was not tendered till the adjourned inquest held on the day before my arrival, but I may remark that after the first inquiry the general opinion of the countryside was that the girl's death was, in point of fact, a murder, and this opinion was echoed in the press. This is what I found in the *Tretire Courant* next morning, and, as will be seen, it amply justified public opinion as to the nature of the crime.

Dr. Green deposed that he was a retired navy surgeon who had been, for ten years, in practice at Tretire. He had been called in to examine the body of Dinah Morris. It was the body of a perfectly healthy young woman. He found that there was a circular bruise, whose diameter was four inches and a half, over the region of the cervical vertebræ, almost in a line with the points of the shoulders. Death was due to the violence of the blow which had caused this bruise. There was not a scratch, bruise, or mark of any kind on any other part of the girl's body.

Asked if he could form any opinion of how such a bruise could have been caused, Dr. Green replied that, in the whole course of his surgical experience, he had never seen a bruised wound of this description. Asked if he could give any guess at the nature of the weapon with which such a blow could be given, witness said it was difficult for him to suggest any weapon of the shape necessary to deal such a blow, for the mark left was broader than the palm of a man's hand, and the force of the blow so great that the tissues beneath the skin had been broken up and the bones of the spine fractured.

Dr. Green was asked if a blow from a man's fist could have caused the bruise over the spine. The doctor said the bruise was too extensive and the injury done to bone and tissue too great to have been caused by any blow from a fist. Asked if a stroke with a heavy club would have sufficed to cause the injury, Dr. Green said the heaviest club would not have left that shaped mark, nor a stroke from it be severe enough to cause the mischief done. If a strong man, using all his force, had swung a heavy round-headed wooden mallet and struck the girl between the shoulders, it would have accounted for a wound like that which had proved fatal.

Such a mode of attack, said Dr. Green, would of course be almost an impossibility, and he only suggested it to show the nature of the blow which had caused the death of Dinah Morris.

Dr. Green's evidence concluded the proceedings of the Court, and the jury almost immediately found a unanimous verdict of, "Murder against some person, or persons, unknown."

CHAPTER III

THE SCENE OF THE MURDER

THE people of this, the wilder, pastoral part of Monmouthshire, are of Welsh descent, as most of their names prove, but the Welsh language has nearly disappeared, and, though the county is nominally an English county, it is for all practical purposes Welsh.

As I took my seat at the ordinary at midday, I found myself among Welsh farmers, and a genial, hearty, good-humoured set of fellows they were. The talk turned, as I expected, on the recent crime at Pontregiddion. The landlord, in showing me to a seat, had taken occasion to address me as Mr. Morgan, and my Welsh name, no doubt, was a passport to me, for the Welshmen talked freely in my presence. They could make nothing of the crime. Some one suggested that it might have been the doing of a tramp, but it was objected that the girl's purse was lying by her side, with a considerable sum of money in it, that there was no indication of a struggle, and that the girl had been felled by a single blow, and her body left as it fell.

I suggested, in a half whisper to my neighbour, that perhaps it was a case of revenge following upon love and jealousy. He laughed at my idea and repeated it aloud to the company. They all laughed too and rejected the possibility.

"Who could have any jealous feelings," asked one farmer, "towards Dinah Morris? There was only Bill Evans, and Bill Evans is a man known to all of us."

Evans was indeed, I found, quite a public character, being one of the most famous footballers in the Principality.

"Bill might be a free liver," said another of the guests at the ordinary, "and a free drinker, and he might have helped himself to the landlord's hares and pheasants now and again, but a better hearted fellow never lived."

The talk then turned to that favourite topic with all Welshmen of all ages, Rugby football. Every man was a player or a critic of this fine game.

It so happens that while at Cambridge I was acquainted with James Price, of the Werne, the "old blue," and famous cricketer. He, too, was a public character in Tretire, his ancient reputation as a cricketer and athlete being at present quite forgotten in his present fame as the finest half back in Wales. I recounted, for the benefit of the company, his prowess at Cambridge as athlete. I can remember no one who, in one year, had accomplished the feat of winning the long jump, the high jump, and the quarter mile race. I dwell on this circumstance, for it will be seen by the sequel of this narration that the fact has an important bearing on what is to follow.

After this, the cider cup passed freely, and cider, like wine, opens the heart. We Welshmen flatter ourselves that we are as sharp and shrewd as our neighbours over the English border, and, being Celts, our minds develop perhaps only too freely on the imaginative side. If it comes to music and poetry, we consider that we go a good deal further than our Saxon neighbours. If there are fewer world-famous native composers, or poets, in Wales than in England, every second Welshman is a musician and every tenth Welshman a poet. At times our imagination leads us astray, and we are, perhaps, too quick to set down to supernatural causes anything that is not immediately to be accounted for by natural ones.

"Perhaps," said a farmer at table, who had not hitherto

opened his lips, "perhaps this strange death is the Judgment of the Lord"; and, in the pause which his solemn words and solemn tone caused in the previous hum of genial talk, another farmer struck in with, "Ay, indeed, gentlemen! I had been thinking that myself."

The football talk ceased and we were at once hotly engaged in discussing whether Divine judgment did, or did not, overtake evil-doers in this world. I forbore from taking any part in this controversy, contenting myself with wondering if any one of the party had stopped to consider whether the poor girl who had met with this sudden and awful death, and of whom no one had spoken but to testify to her innocence and amiability, was an evil-doer, deserving of punishment of this terrible kind.

The talk presently assumed a purely religious turn, as is not uncommon among a community deeply swayed as most Welshmen are by religious emotion.

Edifying as this conversation might be, it was not for this that I had come down to Monmouthshire, and I made another attempt to change the current of talk. I spoke again in my neighbour's ear,—

"What if this was the work of 'Spring-heeled Jack?'"

I thought to myself that I had made a wild, not to say idiotic remark, but my neighbour did not so take it.

"You may be right, friend," said the man, with a grave look, "and you'll not be the first to think so."

"What? What?" said my neighbour on the other side, overhearing us. "Did you mention Spring-heeled Jack, sir?"

In a minute the whole party of Welshmen were listening to us. The name of Spring-heeled Jack seemed to have magnetized them. Then they began to talk. Every one had something to relate of this mysterious being. I could not quite make out, at first, whether they considered the Flying Man a real human being, or a supernatural visitant

to earth. Several of them positively declared that they had themselves seen Spring-heeled Jack, *in propria persona*. They spoke of having seen him in the moonlight, passing across meadows and pastures at prodigious speed, with enormous leaps and bounds, and taking tall hedges and wide brooks in his stride. He was gone and out of sight while they looked.

"And did he leave no trace or track where he passed?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, he left tracks. Haven't we all seen them on the soft ground in the valleys, or in the snow?"

"And what are they like, his tracks?" I asked.

"Like nothing in nature but themselves," said one farmer, "just a curved print like from a horseshoe, but narrower and much longer—a foot or more long, maybe, and two deepish indents in the ground beyond and behind each footprint."

"And he can really leap over fences and walls?"

"Aye indeed, sir, and high walls too!"

"Friend!" said a farmer named Rice, who seemed to be a man of some standing and authority, "did you ever see a hunter top a five-foot wall, or a high bank, too big to make a flying jump of, and get clear over it? The horse will light on the top and kick himself off, won't he? Well, sir, with my own eyes, I've seen Jack do the very same, only being man-shaped, like one of us, he'll do it rather different."

Then Farmer Rice told us this strange anecdote.

"There's a walled orchard at my place," he said, "and the wall, with espalier fruit trees nailed against it, may be a matter of twelve feet in height. I was coming home, one night, from the Hook Inn at Pontregiddion, and had got over the gate leading from the lane to the field outside my orchard, when I heard the *thud, thud, thud* of Spring-heeled Jack, coming up the lane. I'll not keep it from you,

gentlemen, that, being a bit scared, I ran and hid in the shadow of the hedge, just as Jack came flying over the five-barred gate into the field. I was a bit frightened, but, thinks I to myself, now I'll see a bit of sport, for, as you know, the river runs along one side of my field, and Jack must either splash into the deep water to get past that way, or face the big wall, or else turn back the way he came. Now, as you all well know, Jack will never turn back from the path he's taking, and these beings from the other world, if so be that they are from the other world, have no leave or licence to cross running water. That's a known thing."

"True enough, Mr. Rice," said one of the farmers. "'Tis known. They are not allowed."

"So it was there was nothing but the big orchard wall for him to face. Now, I'll give you my word, gentlemen, Jack never flinched. He went leaping and bounding over the pasture, straight on, till he was at a goodish take-off for the wall, then, before I could count five, he was flying up through the air, and, for a moment, he lay flat against the wall with his hands, or claws, on the top and scrambling up and over. I saw no more of him that night."

"Did you find his marks next day in the field?" I asked.

"Indeed I did, sir. I went to look for them at daybreak, and I took my yard measure with me. His taking-off hoof-prints were just twenty feet away from the wall, and his claw-marks were plain enough on the coping stones at top—and some of the mortar was knocked out eight feet six inches from the bottom, just where I had seen his hoofs go. The wall is within an inch of thirteen feet high where he cleared it."

"And pray, Mr. Rice," I asked, "as you had so good a view of him, could you tell me what sort of an appearance this night traveller has?"

"Just a man's shape like ours, but twice as tall, with roundish head like a big ape's in a wild beast show, black all over, with flames breaking out all over him."

"Flames, Mr. Rice?"

"Aye, indeed, sir, we've all seen them."

The other farmers nodded gravely in corroboration.

Were they all combining to make a fool of me, the stranger, among them?

"No wonder you hid behind the hedge, Mr. Rice," I said, mockingly.

"For the matter of that," said the farmer, "Jack is no harm-doer. Leave him alone, and he'll leave you alone. 'The day is yours,' Jack might say; 'leave the night to me.'"

"About those fiery flames, Mr. Rice," said one farmer sceptically. "They do stick a bit in my own swallow; I never having had the luck to cast eyes on Spring-heeled Jack."

Another farmer explained. "They're not flames, rightly spoken. They're just a fringe of fiery vapour that issues from him as he flies and bounds through the night air."

Some of the other farmers gave similar experiences of their own. The evidence, all taken, seemed really to go to prove the existence of the being whom they knew as Spring-heeled Jack. These earnest, honest men could not be trying to deceive me; but I naturally did not share with them the belief in his supernatural nature. I was sure his phenomenal speed and phenomenal leaps and bounds and trail of flame were greatly exaggerated in the glowing fancy of the imaginative Welshmen.

"And, gentlemen," I asked, "what does Spring-heeled Jack go abroad at night for?—what is he after?"

"Mischief!" said one farmer.

"Not much mischief, after all," said Farmer Rice. "I take it a being of his kind can't rest at nights, but must be travelling—who knows?—over his former haunts."

"And what mischief does he do, when he does any?" I asked.

"None at all in this neighbourhood," said the farmer. "So it is that we take him to be some chap who has once lived in these parts and who will do no harm to his old neighbours. He has been known to take a lamb or two in the summer season, but not in this parish, and he has done mischief enough in Lord Tretire's preserves and deer park. Pheasants and hares and even fawns he'll make free enough with at times."

I need hardly say, that the talk of the farmers, and their universal acceptance of what I had always supposed was an idle myth, led me to two conclusions, one was that some ingenious person was actually impersonating the mythical Spring-heeled Jack, and that that person dwelt not far from the neighbourhood of Pontregiddion, where he prudently took care to abstain from harming the sheep farmers of that pastoral neighbourhood.

A question was slowly forcing itself into my mind. Could there possibly be any connection between this mysterious night-haunting being* and the crime at Pontregiddion?

"I wonder," I said, "that no one, who has lost lambs or game, has not tried a charge of No. 3 shot, or a green cartridge on Spring-heeled Jack? That would settle the question of whether he was man or spirit."

My cynicism was, I could see, not relished.

No one spoke for a minute. Then Farmer Rice said drily, "Indeed, sir, there would be a good chance of the gun bursting and doing less harm to Jack than to the shooter."

Another farmer told this story:—

"Farmer Davies up Treginnig way lost three lambs, and supposed Jack had taken them. He swore he would be even with him, so he lay in wait with a big duck gun and

three bullets and a crooked sixpence rammed down the barrel over a double charge of powder. He waited every night for a week near a road where he had seen Jack's foot-prints going both ways. The seventh night, Jack came along and the farmer let fly.¹ Next morning, Farmer Davies was found lying in a swoon, the gun burst, the man's collar-bone broke, and a bit of the gun barrel lodged in his skull. It was found afterwards that a strange dog had taken his lambs and not poor Jack at all. Farmer Davies recovered after a time, but he doesn't intend to have a second shot at Spring-heeled Jack."

The farmers went about their business at the market, and I took my seat in the coffee-room to write my first letter to the *Daily Messenger*. The evidence at the inquest and the talk of the farmers gave me materials for a picturesque and, as I thought, interesting report. I wove the myth of Spring-heeled Jack into my narrative, but I took care not to commit myself to any theory as to the death of Dinah Morris.

CHAPTER IV

DR. SOLANDER

Now, the very surprising series of events and their unexpected sequel which I am going to tell you of have this personal interest for me, that they set me upon thinking that the ordinary methods followed in the investigation of crime—especially those employed in the popular literature of journalism of all countries—namely, by analysis and logical deduction from the facts, are not always those which lead to sound conclusions. I say this point is personally of interest for me, for what happened here led me to consider that there were perhaps other more modest, less pedantic, and better ways of getting at the truth, and it was this consideration which eventually led me to adopt criminal investigation as a profession, and which has, I fully believe, contributed to such little success as I have achieved.

I am not going to theorize. • I am not going to lay down any law. I merely state a fact and go on with my story.

* * * * *

A gentleman was eating his midday meal in the coffee-room as I wrote. Was he a rival newspaper man? I feared it, though he did not look very much like one. He was a grave, grey-haired, close-shaven man with a fresh country complexion and a look of much energy in his deep-set eyes and in the lines of his thin, thoughtful face. I should have set him down as a university professor, or some dignitary of the Church and a profound theologian to boot; but that he wore the grey tweed suit and blue spotted tie of the country squire. As he ate his chop and drank his glass

of ale, he had spread out before him the *Tretire Courant*, and was reading the report of the inquest with evident interest.

The landlord came in and addressed the grey-haired gentleman as doctor. Ah, I should have thought of that ! Of course a doctor—probably the Dr. Green of the inquest. Now, if I could enter into talk with him, I should no doubt hear some rational explanation of the Spring-heeled Jack mystery. I had finished my work. I got up and warmed myself at the fire.

“You have read this ?” asked the doctor affably, holding out the local journal, almost as soon as I came near him.

“Every word of it, thank you—a most mysterious affair !”

“Well—yes, I suppose so. It will seem so to you, I dare say, but I come from that part of the county myself,

“Indeed ! You are from near Pontregiddion !”

“Come,” said the stranger smiling, “confess that you took me to be Dr. Green.”

“When I heard the landlord address you as doctor, I—I—”

“Yes, I saw you did—I saw that you jumped to the not unnatural conclusion that, as doctors cannot abound in Tretire, I must be the Dr. Green of the inquest.”

“A good guess—just what I did.”

“Pardon me, sir, not a guess at all ; a fair deduction from the facts. It is my business to arrive at sound conclusions from scanty phenomena. That is science, sir. Or, if you like it better, that is human life, which, to be rightly lived, should be lived in accordance with the laws and dictates of science. Now,” said the doctor, smiling again, “I have made another guess, as you call it—deduction, as I say—you are curious to know who I am if I am not Dr. Green. I relieve your curiosity. I am Dr. Solander, and, by occupation, I am a country gentleman, with a small estate. I live near Pontregiddion, and by profession—”

I interrupted him. "What! you are the famous archaeologist and natural historian—Dr. Solander?"

"You are very good to put it so." His bow and smile were those of a courtier.

"Now, pray, sir," he went on, "let me, with your leave, carry my deductions a little further. I was going to say I had made another guess. You have come here to represent the *Daily Messenger*, have you not? and," pointing with an unlighted cigar, which he was in the act of taking from his cigar-case, "there is the admirable report of the Pontregiddion affair which will travel up to London by the express train which leaves Tretire at 5.35."

As he finished speaking, leaving me, I admit, wondering at his penetration, he offered me his cigar-case.

"I see," said Dr. Solander, "that you generally smoke cigarettes, but when you reach my age you will come to cigars. Forgive an older man than yourself for venturing to advise you to substitute three cigars a day for at least twenty cigarettes. At any rate, let me recommend you to use a holder."

I took his offered cigar and a seat by the comfortable coffee-room fire, and for a moment was too much astonished to speak.

"Dr. Solander," I said, "all this is a miracle to me. You guess my occupation, you guess the newspaper I write for, you guess my habits, and you are absolutely right in all your guesses. May I venture to beg you to tell me how you did it?"

"It is so simple that the miracle will cease to seem one when I explain it. The landlord told me he had a commercial guest in the house who was taking his dinner with the farmers. I thought that odd, because a commercial traveller has something else to do than to waste his time at an ordinary. I was sure you could not be a tourist for pleasure, because of the weather. I could think only of

newspaper work in connection with the crime and Pontre-giddion that could bring you down here with the snow a foot deep everywhere."

"Capital!"

"When I saw you writing just now—throwing off sheet after sheet, with the writing on one side only, I made quite sure you were no trade traveller slowly making out invoices and sending reports full of figures and calculations."

"But, Dr. Solander, how on earth did you know it was the *Daily Messenger* I wrote for? I might have been reporting for any one of a score of papers."

"I confess that was in the nature of a guess, yet a pretty safe one too. Only a London paper would go to the expense of a special reporter of a remote local crime. I had observed that none of the great London dailies had done more than notice the case. I wondered why they had missed such a chance. It was clear that one of them had at last woke up to its opportunity. The paper to do it was pretty certain to be the most enterprising of the London papers. That paper, we all know, is the *Daily Messenger*."

"Splendid! but how could you tell I was not the representative of a news agent?"

"A news agent would have wired about twenty lines to go by telegraph. You were writing two columns at the shortest. The *Daily Messenger*, having the field to itself, can afford to wait for the post."

I was dumfounded. "Dr. Solander," I said, "if you were not a famous archæologist and naturalist, you would have been a famous detective!"

"True it is that we and the detectives sometimes employ the same methods."

"May I ask another question, Dr. Solander? You told me I smoked twenty cigarettes a day and used no holder. You are absolutely right in both points. Pray, how did you know?"

"Ah! there," said the doctor, "I am a little proud of my ratiocination. It is not quite easy to tell a stranger how many cigarettes he smokes in a day."

"Impossible, I should say!"

"My dear sir, to the scientific analyst of phenomena nothing is quite impossible. Do you remember what my precursor in the paths I humbly follow, the great author of *Urn Burial*, said?"

"Sir Thomas Browne?"

"Yes. He said, 'What song the sirens sang, or what name Achilles assumed, when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.' So the number of cigarettes you smoke in a day, though a puzzling question, is not beyond conjecture."

"How did you even begin?" I asked.

"Look at the stain on your finger! It is hardly perceptible, but it is there. Now, that stain does not come except to the man who smokes at least from twenty to sixty cigarettes a day. Now, to smoke fifty cigarettes a day is to smoke between four and five cigarettes an hour, omitting meal times and sleep times. I could see you don't do that, for you did not smoke as you worked. Besides, you have not the pallor of the excessive smoker. Therefore, I could afford you twenty cigarettes a day, but I refused you a holder. I am glad to know I am right on both points."

I bowed in silence. What a help this man would be to me, I thought, if only he would turn his powerful analytical intellect upon the mysterious crime at Pontregiddion!

As these thoughts crossed my mind I glanced at Dr. Solander as he sat smoking by the fire. His keen grey eyes were fixed upon me from under shaggy eyebrows. A smile lit up his face.

"I suppose," I said, "you guess my thought again."

"Certainly I do," he replied, "but a moment's reflection, my dear sir, will convince you that I could not help

you much in elucidating this mystery, even if I had the will to do so."

"I can perfectly understand, Dr. Solander, why you should not have any will to assist a perfect stranger in doing what is his own business and not yours. That you could, if you chose, I am equally sure."

"You rate my amiability too low, Mr. Morgan."

"My name too!"

"Oh! I don't pretend to omniscience—the landlord mentioned it. I say, you set too little store on my willingness to oblige you. Now, I will tell you why I cannot; why, if I tried to elucidate this mystery, I should fail; why you, with your quick journalistic intelligence, your impartiality, and your general knowledge of life, would as likely as not succeed."

"You puzzle me, Dr. Solander."

"I feel that I do. Let me explain. In attacking the vital problems of life—mind, I call them all vital problems, whether it is a question of your smoking twenty cigarettes a day, or sixty, or of how poor Dinah Morris came by her death. In the solution of these problems, I say, the same methods of scientific ratiocination are required in order to travel, by the way of major and minor premises, to logical conclusions, as when we attack the greater problems of science. We must tread the narrow paths of science, and those alone. Fancy and imagination may be as lamps to light our path, but must never serve as our staff. The moment a man's emotions interfere with his ratiocination, he goes astray. The personal equation is fatal to all sound conclusions. That is why the pure *savant* is a poor guide in any matter where his feelings are concerned. Great men in science commit great absurdities where their prejudices or preconceptions sway them in one direction or the other. I could not trust the best of us on such a matter as, let us say, spiritualism,

because we all start our investigations with a personal tendency to scepticism, or a tendency to belief. Either tendency vitiates sound reasoning. So it is that I refuse to consider this crime at Pontregiddion. I may have my suspicions. I don't say I have not, but I dare not follow them to any conclusion. I know Pontregiddion and its people too well. I have lived among them for twenty years. Poor Dinah's father was my brother's tenant—I have known her since she was a baby in arms—I know every man and woman mentioned at the inquest. They are my neighbours, some of them my friends. George Edmunds does my carpentering work. Bill Evans shoes my horses. I buy my groceries at Mrs. Reece's shop. How can I judge among them? How can I say this man is innocent, this one guilty? If I tried, I should probably be wrong, but nothing will induce me to try."

Dr. Solander spoke, I thought, with good feeling and good sense. He had finished his cigar—he rose to leave. As he did so, he shook hands with me. "You will be coming to our village—when you come, do me the pleasure of calling on me. My house is but half a mile from the church. You may even find it useful, Mr. Morgan, to say you are acquainted with me. If you come among us as a newspaper man, you may be suspected of I know not what. Come as my friend, and I will promise you a good reception."

A few minutes later I watched him, through the window of the coffee-room, mount the step of a smart phaeton with two fast-trotting horses. The groom climbed up to his side, and the trap rattled away over the rough stones of Tretire High Street.

As he disappeared, the thought occurred to me that I had never once thought of asking him for the explanation of the problem which had so puzzled me, the mysterious appearance and behaviour of Spring-heeled Jack; but I shall see Dr. Solander again at Pontregiddion.

CHAPTER V

PONTREGIDDION

I ASKED the landlord about Dr. Solander.

"Ah, sir, that's a gentleman indeed—he and his have been on the land since the old churches and border castles were built, and, to tell you my mind, sir, the new men will never match the old lot."

The frost had gone suddenly, and a soft southerly wind was now blowing. I had intended to ride my bicycle to Pontregiddion, but the weather had softened the snow and the roads were impassable. I hired a dogcart at the inn, and we splashed through fourteen miles of hilly road, amid the first falling of the rain, to Pontregiddion. The driver entertained me with tales of Spring-heeled Jack. Pontregiddion is the main haunt of the "apparition," he told me. The word was his own.

The rustic Welshman loves long words. He speaks no such dialect as is used elsewhere in rural Britain. He has learned his English at school, and loves to use the bookish language of his schoolmaster.

"I suppose," I said, "you don't expect to see the Flying Man come leaping at us over these hedges and ditches?"

"No danger, sir. Jack's a night flyer. He never shows by daylight."

"But you may have a chance of meeting him by night when you travel back. He may scare your horse—or maybe you," I suggested, willing to see if he had any real belief in the "apparition."

"No, sir. Jack the Flyer never harmed nor hurt any one

yet. They say, even, down Pontregiddion way, that he has his friends among the county folk, and many a man has picked up a pheasant, or a hare, lying in the garden by his door in the early morning. 'Tis Jack's doing, for they always find his tracks about close by."

"Ah," I thought, "now I understand why the farmers have a liking for Spring-heeled Jack. "It looks to me," I said aloud, "as if Jack was only some clever poacher living, as the saying is, not a hundred miles from Pontregiddion!"

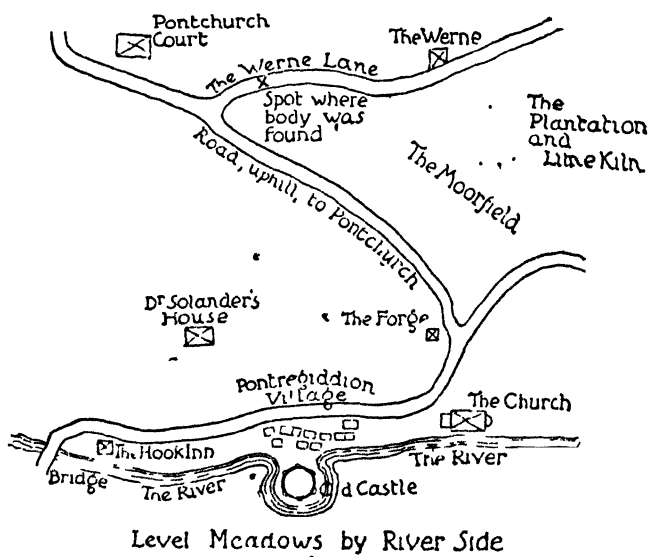
"Ay, to be sure, sir, so one might think, if it was not for his prodigious leaps and bounds. No mortal man could do anything like that, and then he goes by in a flash of fire."

I saw that my driver was just as confirmed a believer in the supernatural character of Spring-heeled Jack as the farmers at the ordinary. The hills got loftier and barer as we reached our journey's end, a little after sundown, and I put up at The Hook, an inn well known to anglers, for the river here is famous for its trout-fishing in summer and for grayling in autumn and winter. A guest at The Hook, therefore causes little curiosity even if he arrives when the ground is snow-covered.

Pontregiddion is known for two things, the piety of its inhabitants and the prowess of its footballers. It is but a small straggling village, with a population of only a few hundred souls, with a Norman church and a ruined Norman castle, but the stalwart inhabitants have contributed members to every successive international team of Welshmen. I have already mentioned my college friend, James Price, the second son of the first Lord Tretire, the famous half-back, and William Evans, the blacksmith, the almost equally well-known forward. Besides these two, George Edmunds, the carpenter, has played for his county for three years in succession.

I walked out that afternoon up the village street. Pontregiddion lies in a long valley on the bank of a stream, now running strongly and rapidly, and again into deeps and pools alder-marged, with steep banks cutting into flat meadows. The village street is rough and straggling. At one end of it is the bridge, and, by it, The Hook Inn and, at its other end, the church. Between the two, the ruined ivy-hung walls and keep of the old castle are reflected in one of the deeper pools of the river. Over the way are the shops and the houses of the village folk.

Here is a rough chart of the neighbourhood of the crime.



I had no doubt that the crime was a local one, for the possibility of its having been committed by a passing tramp was precluded by the discovery of the girl's purse by her side. I was now therefore to set myself, in the limits of

the parish of Pontregiddion, and with the scanty facts before me, to solve the problem and put my hand on the murderer. It was clear that the local police had done all in their limited power, and accomplished, in fact, nothing at all. In the discovery of crime of an unusual character, the wits of untrained men, of men accustomed to the ordinary routine of life alone, are nearly always at fault. Common sense, as we call it, is only another name for reason and logical conclusion from obvious premises as applied by the unimaginative man. It is an admirable guide in steering our way through the ordinary difficulties of human affairs, but it is baffled at once when some problem, outside the usual current of our daily life, is presented for solution.

When I listened to the talk of the frequenters of my landlady's kitchen, I found to my surprise that they had already given up all idea of finding a human motive for the crime. The strangeness and mystery of it set them at once ascribing it to causes as strange and as mysterious as itself. To them there were no marks of the natural about the sudden ending of this young life. There was no common touch of humanity about the girl's death. She had lain there, her life suddenly arrested, and, as they had all heard, no apparent wound or blood was there to account for her death. The fearful wound on the girl's body described by the doctor a week afterwards, that had struck the life out of the poor girl at a blow, served only as corroboration of their first conclusion. It was with them no work of a human hand that strikes again and again, and batters the body of the victim, leaving bruises and cuts and bleeding wounds behind. Surely, thought I, they were not going to ascribe the death to Spring-heeled Jack! This ghostly being was, even with believers in him, a grotesque and almost humorous being. They laughed over his exploits, even while they believed in them and him, and, for them,

he was a kindly being with no taint of malevolence about him.

Yet they were quite ready to ascribe this mysterious death to this mysterious being. It so happened that the fields and the roads and lanes hard by the site of Dinah Morris's death were the especial haunt of the Flying Man. He had been seen here more than once, passing up the high road which the girl must have travelled over on the night of her death, and he would often pass along the same Welsh road, leading to the Werne, in which her body had been found.

It was a well-known and recognized fact that, if the Flying Man ever met a traveller or a conveyance on the road, it was his invariable habit to take a flying leap over the hedge and disappear, leaving a trail of fire as he was lost to sight. He had never been known to meet, or to overtake and pass, any one on the road. So it was that even women and children entertained little fear of him. Till now, they had gone their way by day or night apprehending nothing. But since the death of Dinah Morris, they seemed to begin to reflect that the Flying Man—some of them had never called him by his more familiar name—was a creature of the other world, and one who might be called upon any day to be the instrument of powers outside their apprehension. I noticed that the men in the inn parlour spoke of him with bated breath, avoiding his name where they could, and speaking of him as "Him as we know on"—"Him as is come among us." When they left the inn for their home, they arranged to pass along the road in company. "I bain't going to walk along the Werne Lane alone to-night. Not I!" said one of them, and no one laughed at the fellow's poltroonery. A nameless terror was making cowards of men who would face anything in reason by daylight.

That night I lay long awake, trying to unravel the mystery

of Dinah Morris's death, and every avenue of thought ended in one conclusion. She must have come to her death somehow through the action of this same Flying Man. I had not the smallest doubt but that the so-called apparition was some one of the neighbourhood who had taken advantage of the popular belief in the ancient myth to "make up" in guise of Spring-heeled Jack; but how about the leaps and bounds? Even if there was great exaggeration about the peasants' tales, were such extraordinary speed of locomotion and such length of stride possible to human muscle and human limbs, even granting that they were the limbs and muscles of an athlete? Could any contrivance of human manufacture add power to human strength, and enable any man to make these prodigious leaps and bounds?

To explain that was quite beyond me. Then, for a motive. Who could desire the death of a young woman, and one notoriously liked in the neighbourhood? There was no robbery, there were no marks of struggle. Her assailant had overtaken her suddenly and murdered her suddenly.

It was clear to me that the only motive that could actuate any one to such a crime was jealousy. Were there rival lovers? Nothing more likely, for the girl was pretty and by all accounts pleasant of speech and manner. There was a lover, a rejected lover, William Evans, the blacksmith. How was it that he had come to be rejected? He was a personable fellow and had some village fame as a footballer. Had he been supplanted? If so, by whom? This would supply the jealous motive at once.

Could Evans have been the man who disguised himself as Jack the Flyer? Could he be the murderer of the girl who had jilted him? I almost laughed as I asked myself the questions. William Evans had come in to the Hook ~~last~~ parlour that evening, a typical blacksmith, a thick-set, well-featured young fellow of enormous strength and activity, no

doubt, for was he not a famous footballer, but of only moderate stature, with broad shoulders? whereas the Flying Man was invariably represented as of slim shape and twice the height of any ordinary man. Moreover, Bill Evans had a simple, rural bumpkin's face with a perpetual simper on it, and his talk, genial enough, was the talk of a simple-witted fellow. Now it was certain that the man who had devised some mechanical method for springing and leaping through the air, and who could play his part so cleverly and hoodwink a whole neighbourhood so successfully, was a man with a brain of no common calibre and an imagination of no common order. I heard afterwards that William Evans, in his former undegenerate days, had been a regular attendant at chapel. Even now his only fault was the drink habit. I could see that Evans was popular among his fellows and they treated him to liquor. He drank heavily, and was presently bemused with drink.

Suddenly, as I lay wakeful, with this puzzle in my brain, and hearing at times the heavy raindrops carried by the south-westerly gale against the latticed windows of the inn bedroom, a thought occurred to me. By morning the snow which had still lain deep on the fields, as I drove through them, would have disappeared. I remembered that the snow had only begun after the murder of Dinah Morris had been committed. The evidence was clear on that point. The snow had fallen again heavily and a still harder frost set in the very morning following the night of the crime. The previous day had been mild. Then, the footprints of those passing in the unfrequented lane in which the body had been found would still be there, hardened by frost, and visible now that the snow had disappeared. No doubt the spot had been trampled over again and again in the past week, but the soil would have been frozen too hard to take any fresh impression, and I made sure that if I could be on the spot, with the first light, I should find, printed on the

ground, evidence of what had happened at the scene and at the moment of the crime, that no eye yet had looked upon.

I resolved to be up with the dawn, and to be on the spot of the crime with the earliest light of day, but so fearful was I of oversleeping myself that I made up my mind to stay awake all night. I got up therefore, dressed, and let the slow hours pass. I heard the wind blow and the rain beat against the panes, through the long winter night. The day breaks late in December, and it was past seven o'clock before I saw the first faint gleams on the wooded hill-top. Before that I heard people astir in the inn, and when I went down, Mrs. Jones, the landlady, was already in her kitchen, the fire lit and a kettle set on the flames.

"What! sir, up so early? But the day has broke clear and fresh after the rain, and you'll have good weather for your fishing, or what not."

Mrs. Jones is a pleasant-spoken woman and a shrewd one, as I guess, for, I take it, it needs to be both to please all sorts and conditions of men in an inn. I don't know whether she treats all her stranger guests as well as she did me, or whether she singled me out for special favour on the ground that I am a friend of Dr. Solander (a fact I lost no time in mentioning) and a countryman of her own.

"Mrs. Jones," said I, "I am going to tell you a secret."

"Indeed, sir!" she said, laughing. "Then you'll be going the right way to any woman's heart."

"I am not an angler, and I've not come here to fish in your river. It's quite another sort of angling I'm after."

"I guessed it wasn't for the fishing you'd come," said Mrs. Jones. "Though the fishermen do come here in weather when not a summer trout nor a winter grayling will look at a fly, let them cast it ever so artful. You'll be travelling for some firm. In what? if I may make so bold as ask."

Mrs. Jones looked at me with her head set sideways and

her round red face full of curiosity. "Iron ware is it, or fancy goods?"

"I'm working for a firm that never sent its traveller to these parts before. I'm travelling here for a great London newspaper, *The Daily Messenger*."

"Ah," said Mrs. Jones, smiling. "I guessed as much. It will be about poor Dinah Morris's death?"

"That is so; if any one is guilty of that poor girl's death, we want him brought to justice. The people here seem to have made up their minds that it is no case for human justice at all."

"They talk wild, sir," said Mrs. Jones.

"So it seems to me," I said, "and I fully believe it was some one of this very neighbourhood, perhaps of this village."

Mrs. Jones now looked a little alarmed.

"You're a smart woman, Mrs. Jones, and I can see you're not led away by talk of a supernatural visitant and Divine judgment overtaking the girl."

"Poor Dinah! Indeed, sir, she deserved no worse than the best of us."

"You knew her well, I suppose?"

"I knew her very well, sir, and liked her just as the rest of us did in the village—a well-spoken, respectful girl to high and low alike."

"A pretty girl too?"

"A very winsome lass, sir."

"She would have had admirers, I dare say, and followers, besides the blacksmith Evans?"

"To be sure, sir, it's in nature that she should. She was liked by all and loved by some that perhaps a girl in her station should not look to winning."

"Indeed!"

But Mrs. Jones stopped there, and I did not venture to press her further. Dinah Morris had an admirer, then, of

higher station than her own. I must work this clue, but cautiously.

Mrs. Jones was busy with her pots and pans on the fire, and as I prepared to go forth, she poured me out a cup of coffee and filled it up with hot milk.

"You'll be feeling a sinking before breakfast if you don't take something now," said my landlady.

I went forth into the damp morning air, taking the road towards the scene of the murder. The white mist that often comes with a thaw hung over the valley, and till I turned to the left, a mile from Pontregiddion, and began to ascend the steep hill road that mounts to Pontchurch House, the hedges and hedgerows were barely visible through the fog. On the hill the mist had lifted a little, but still it was barely daylight as I walked along the road. I had met no one going to work.

Arrived at the turning of the main highway into what is called a Welsh road, or lane—those ancient narrow lanes with high banks which are found everywhere hereabouts—I paused for a moment. Here stood George Edmunds in the early morning on the day after the crime, here he had seen and waited for Colonel Pritchard's coachman to come down the hill before he went to investigate the unusual object in the lane. I looked just where he must have looked up the lane, and what was my intense surprise to find that a man was already on the spot of the murder? Was it a police officer, a detective, who had arrived at precisely the same opinion as my own, namely, that, here and now, would be found testimony as to the crime more valuable than anything that had been adduced at the inquest?

The man was stooping, with his eyes to the ground, scrutinizing something on the road. It was Dr. Solander. He had a notebook in one hand and a foot rule in the other, and he was busy taking measurements and making notes of them. He heard my footsteps and

looked up. His face expressed no surprise. He nodded to me.

"I am first in the field, but I made sure you would come too. Take care where you tread. We have some splendid evidence here. Pray look about you and tell me what you make of it."

I confess that it is one thing to theorize on paper about footsteps in a lane, and another to draw any certain conclusions from the confused and very faint indications of trappings on the muddy ground of a roadway seen in the dim misty light of early morning. I doubt if I could ever have unravelled all the mystery of the signs and marks here present, but Dr. Solander's practised eyes read them as easily as he would have deciphered some ancient manuscripts or interpreted a story told by the footmarks of some prehistoric reptile on a fossil slab of slate.

"Look," he said, "these are the regular footsteps of poor Dinah as she trudged along the lane. She must have heard the approach of something from behind her, and she turned to look over her shoulder, and certainly she saw something terrible advancing against her, for there was the terror-struck look in her face that they all deposed to at the inquest. That fact is corroborated here. See how she swerves suddenly to the left, and runs—for you see the weight of the body is on the toe of the footstep. But she cannot get away; she has taken but three steps when the thing is upon her, the terrible blow is struck, and she falls dead. Look, you can make out the imprint of her body faintly indicated on the soft ground, where it lay all that night on the spot where it fell."

I began to examine the ground with my own eyes.

"I see," I said, "no other steps near the body, not even those of George Edmunds and the coachman who discovered the body."

"I did not expect to find them," said Dr. Solander. "By the time they came, the light snowfall had turned to frost ;

will not easily pass a dead body, and they probably checked as they came near, and the coachman, seeing that tree branch handy, tied them to it before he approached the body. Had he not done so, the horses would have spoilt our day's work, for a horse's weight is five times that of a man's, and distributed over a smaller area of support, and they leave marks even upon frozen ground. Look and you will see their tramlings in the lane there."

I set myself to search for other marks and indications and was careful in moving about to tread nowhere but where the surface was undisturbed. Dr. Solander stood still and watched me, his notebook and foot rule still in his hands. Presently I announced a discovery.

"Here is a strange footprint!" I called out.

Dr. Solander did not seem interested.

"A man's footmark very plain," said I, "a broad foot with the print of hobnails, evidently a labourer's boot."

"Certainly, a labourer's footprint. Was he alone?"

I looked again. "I think there is another. Yes, certainly there is another, moving side by side with the first. And the shape of the second footprint is not quite the same, nor is the number of hobnail prints the same," I said, looking down to count them. "Then there were two men here."

"Two innocent men, Mr. Morgan!"

"How do you guess that?"

"I do not guess it—I know it. Do you see nothing peculiar about those steps?"

"Only that they are very plain and sink deep into the earth."

"Just so, but that is not all. See how close they keep to one another—and look!" Dr. Solander pointed to the double track of footmarks, which I could now, in the growing light, and distinguish very plainly, "See how they swerve in a curve away from the spot where the body lay. You may be sure that the prints are made by two fellows who passed through this lane no later than last night when the ground was already softened by rain, who were scared out of their wits, who kept each other company, and who—"

"I know the very men," I said, "but not their names. They were in The Hook kitchen last night, and I heard one man say he was not going alone up the Werne Lane. Anyhow, they are not the murderers."

"Murderers? There was but one who did the deed," said Dr. Solander positively.

I looked again at the ground, I walked, picking my ground to tread on, some yards up and down the lane.

"I confess I can't find the trace of a mark of any one, or anything. Only the footsteps of the poor girl and the tracks of the two poltroons. I am at my wits' end already," I said, looking at my new acquaintance.

"My friend," said Dr. Solander, "you will take up this case where I must leave it. Pray, look there, Mr. Morgan, and tell me what you see."

He pointed to a spot in the lane six or seven yards nearer the road from which I had come than the spot on which we stood. I walked cautiously towards the place indicated, careful, as before, to obliterate nothing by the way.

"By Jove!" I cried out. "It's Jack the Flyer in *propria personâ*!"

"*In proprio vestigio*," said the *savant*, remembering his Latin and his logic better than I did mine. "They are Spring-heeled Jack's footprints sure enough. I have made a particular study of them."

CHAPTER VI

SPRING-HEELED JACK

INCISED as clearly as the marks of the iron-shod horse-hoofs I had just been examining were two strange prints in the smooth surface of the road. The like of them I had never seen before. Two narrow curved marks not unlike horse-shoes, but of half the width and with the sides produced or prolonged in two parallel lines some eleven inches in length. Three inches beyond the terminations of the sides and in a line with them were two indentations in the soil.

There were two of these strange footprints, more or less parallel one with another, one a little in front of the other.

When a horse takes a great flying leap over a fence, he leaves prints of his hind hoofs, side by side, just as these footprints were placed.

"The—the creature leaped from here," I said, and I looked in vain about me to find where the Flying Man had landed.

"You must look further," said Dr. Solander, watching me. He pointed to a spot some yards beyond that where the body had lain, and I made to go towards it.

"Pace the distance, please, and count your steps."

I did. From footprint to footprint I counted ten yards exactly.

"Can you tell me, Mr. Morgan, you who are later from Cambridge than I am, what is the record there for the long jump?"

"I was there in your neighbour James Price's year, and I remember it was just over, or just under, twenty-three feet."

"That's a big jump. James Price can do better now, you

see. With a little mechanical help he can do thirty-six or more, but in this leap he was hindered and came just short of his present record."

"Good heavens! Dr. Solander, you do not wish to imply that James Price is Spring-heeled Jack, and that being so, he is the murderer of poor Dinah Morris!"

Dr. Solander did not answer for a moment.

I repeated my question. The doctor pointed to the tracks in the lane. "Is there any other conclusion to come to?" he asked. "No one else but the Flying Man was in the lane on the night that Dinah died."

"But how?" I asked. "By what means was that fearful blow struck on the girl's shoulder that must have struck her down as when an ox is felled by a pole-axe?"

"It is too obvious," said Dr. Solander, very calmly. "The man who had disguised himself as the Flying Man came along the lane at his full speed with flying bounds, and, leaping full at the figure of the escaping girl, struck her with his knee between the shoulders. In no other conceivable way could a blow have been given of the shape and size and force which was the poor girl's death wound.

"I came here," Dr. Solander continued, "hoping the evidence would tell me that it might be otherwise."

"But," I said, "James Price is my friend. At least, I knew him well in old days at college. He may have been a little wild and eccentric, but he was a gentleman, a good fellow whom we all liked. He was a man, I tell you, Dr. Solander, incapable of a foul and cruel murder."

"I had always thought as you do. I know him less well than you know him. Between his family and mine there is a natural want of sympathy; but all you say of his character I can corroborate."

"And you believe he is guilty of this foul murder?"

Dr. Solander paused before he answered me.

"Do you remember, Mr. Morgan, that I suggested to

you once that our minds being of a dual nature, the scientific and the emotional, we could arrive at quite sound conclusions only when the human or emotional side was eliminated. So it is, as I told you before, I cannot be the judge in a matter where James Price is concerned. It is not, of course, that my sympathies are for him. They are against him. I dislike him and his heartily, so here the personal factor comes into play and I can go no farther. I have told you nothing of the story that these footmarks tell that a man of your ability would not have discovered for yourself. I have told you that this mysterious Flying Man is no other than your former friend, James Price. It might seem to you that, knowing this, I should have offered myself as a witness at the inquest and stated this as a fact. Had I known then what these marks have now told me, it would perhaps have been my duty, my very painful duty, but I did not know," he added under his breath, "I only guessed."

Dr. Solander broke off suddenly. "We have seen enough here," he said. "Come with me, Mr. Morgan, and I will give you breakfast and tell you of the curious circumstances which enabled me, long before I saw these footprints in the lane, to—what shall I say?—to surmise that James Price and the Flying Man were one and the same person."

As we walked along the road and then across three or four fields to Dr. Solander's house, he said no single word of the death of Dinah Morris. His talk was of nature only; and even to me, who am nothing of a naturalist, he was interesting beyond belief. Never till then did I so fully enter into the story of the countryside, and how full and varied it is, even in the depth of winter, for the man who has eyes to see and understanding to use them. Every tree, every hedge, every stream, and every pond had, for him, its story of actual or dormant life.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURALIST'S STORY

DR. SOLANDER'S small house and the few fields that surround it are the sole remaining possessions of the great Solander family which once held the land over two-thirds of the county. The Doctor stopped me suddenly as we descended the steep hill at a point where, at a turn of the road, we had the village of Pontregiddion, with its ancient church and ruined castle, in bird's-eye view, at our feet.

"Look well," said the Doctor, "and I will show you where it was that I got my first and also my last sight of Spring-heeled Jack, but that was quite enough to clear up the whole mystery of the Flying Man."

I looked down upon the slated roofs of the village houses, the square ivy-grown tower of the church, and the great round tower—also thickly overgrown with ivy—of the castle keep. Beyond the castle was the glistening surface of the river, running deep and slow through flat grass meadows.

"You can read the whole story of castle, church, and village from here," said the antiquary. "Generally, in the stormy Norman days, the rulers of the land built their castles on high ground. Here they had no need. The river served as its defence. See how it runs, unfordable for miles through that valley, and how it forms a loop round the mound where they built their castle. It must have been a strong place in the days before cannon, for the river serves as a natural moat round three-fourths of the castle walls. Then came the farmers and village people and built their wooden shanties round the castle and, in time,

the church. In a few generations everything but the stone-built church and castle rots and disappears, and the houses of the villagers are rebuilt every second or third generation. So it is you get the village of to-day."

"Very interesting! But how does it touch the mystery of Spring-heeled Jack?"

"Forgive an old antiquary," said the Doctor, laughing, "for giving you theories when you want facts. Very well, look at the castle again. Do you see that its natural river moat makes it nearly as impregnable to the marauding village boy to-day as it was in Norman times to the marauders from the Welsh hills?"

"Can't the village people get in at the place where there is no river?"

"No, there is a high wall and a wicket gate in it. The hereditary custodians of the castle from old time are the Solanders—formerly Lords Warden of the Welsh Marshes. I am the sole living representative of the family, and I keep the key of the wicket. It is true I appoint a deputy warden in the person of the village sexton, and he has a duplicate key. But the castle is seldom entered, and what is the consequence? The wild creatures of the air and earth have made it their habitation. Foxes have their 'holts' in the recesses of the old halls and refectories, otters run up from the river and rear their young in the overgrowth of reeds and brambles in the courtyards, hawks and falcons, white owls and grey herons, jackdaws, jays and magpies build their nests in the towers or in the trees that have rooted themselves in the crevices of the walls. The strange calls and cries of these various creatures are heard by the villagers, who generally believe them to be unearthly, being nearly as ignorant of the common facts of natural history as educated gentlemen and ladies, and I am always hearing the queerest stories of ghosts and apparitions and of weird wailings near the old building. I

make a point of never laughing at these stories, and the castle, with them all, is a haunted castle. None of the villagers likes to enter the precincts by day, no peasant, for his life, would dare to go near it by night."

I waited with a journalist's impatience for something about the Flying Man. I was to wait a little longer.

"Did you ever hear, Mr. Morgan, of *Vespertilio Altivolans*?"

"Never in my life. Does *Vespertilio* not mean a bat?"

"It does," said the old naturalist. "Then I'm afraid you never heard of my famous monograph on *Vespertilio Altivolans sub var. Silurianus*."

"Only vaguely, I confess," I answered, not wishing to hurt an author's natural vanity.

Dr. Solander laughed. "Not even vaguely, I fear! My fame is very restricted, and yet I have done great things for *Silurianus*. I have introduced him into the European fauna. Professor Petropalwsky, of St. Petersburg, indeed, wished to name him *Solanderianus* in my honour, and the great Bumpff, of Berlin, was with him in the wish, so was Paillard, of Paris, and our British Museum agreed, but I stuck to *Silurianus*. Here he was discovered, here in the territory once inhabited by the ancient tribe, or sept, of the Silures. No! I put vanity aside and stuck to *Silurianus*. Don't you think I was right?"

"No!" said I; "you were too modest. But what connection, pray, is there between such a tiny and insignificant creature as a bat and—"

"Tiny and insignificant!" said the Doctor indignant, or pretending to be. "Why, *Silurianus* is nearly as broad in the spread of his wings as a jackdaw, and the habits of the whole family are a mystery, or were before the publication of my monograph."

"More mysterious than the mysterious Flying Man?" I asked.

"A thousand times! Imagine a creature of its size,

living in our land, though seldom seen, flying only in upper air, whence its name, and we knew almost nothing about it! What were its habits, when and why did it go abroad? What feed on? Where, when, and how did it breed? What was its home? Where did it pass the long months during which you might search the length and breadth of the land and not see a specimen of *Altirolans*? All this I solved, sir, and where do you think I studied the problem? There, in that ivied tower of the old castle! That is the home, Mr. Morgan, of *Vespertilio Altirolans*, or rather of his still rarer, larger, and more interesting variant—*Silurianus*. I have spent days in the keep—yes, many days and many nights of patient study has it cost me to get to the bottom of this mystery, whereas only two nights served to explode the minor mystery of the Flying Man!"

"Indeed!" I said, brightening up with anticipation, "and you—"

"Yes. I had come down to the castle one darkish night. I was groping about among the stones with a lantern in my hand, to see if the bats were in their usual haunts on such a night. If they were not, where were they? A bat is a curious beast; when he is not on the wing he is generally hanging head downwards by his toes in some dark nook. Well, *Silurianus* was not at home that night. It is, or was, a moot point how this species finds his food in the air during the dark hours, or whether, indeed, he moves abroad at all in the darkness. Some naturalists have it that he abandons the upper regions of air on dark nights and seeks his food near the ground—in my opinion a stupid heresy. The first point I had settled already, and I was considering some means of settling the second.

"I sat down on a ledge of stone at the highest point of the castle and thought how to accomplish this, while I waited for the rising of the moon. You can see from here

how, looking from the top of the tower, I should have an excellent view up and down the river and of the long, narrow meadows that run by its side along the bank furthest from me. Of course I could have taken in a very wide scope of sky, where I felt sure I could have seen Silurianus disporting himself, if only the veil of night had not been so thick. Then an idea occurred to me. What if I could contrive some sort of searchlight, cast it upward into the welkin at midnight, and see Silurianus as plainly as if the sun was shining at noon. We chemists know strong illuminants besides electricity, which is not available at Pontregiddion, and I resolved to do this very thing.

“As I sat in deep thought, the moon rose and threw its first rays sidelong through the woods at the upper end of the river valley. I looked up and saw the sky brightening; the moonlight, however, was too dim to allow me to distinguish forms in the upper vault of heaven, but as I gazed at the landscape, changing under the shine of the rising moon, I perceived a strange shape moving rapidly towards me down the valley from the very point at which the moon had risen not a minute before. The apparition—take the word in its literal sense—came straight towards me where I stood in the highest point of the castle tower, springing and leaping with remarkable swiftness, and, as it moved, its mile-long shadow was cast before it along the whole length of the valley. So, at last, did I get a sight of the Flying Man, and I understood at once that the country people had not exaggerated the strangeness of his appearance. For one brief moment I forgot all about Silurianus.”

“I don’t wonder!” I exclaimed.

“It was still too dark to see anything except very dimly. What, I thought, if I could have turned a searchlight upon him! I laughed to myself as I thought of the poor impostor’s coming discomfiture.”

“Dr. Solander,” I said, “science is full of terrible disillusion-

sions! I was beginning myself to believe a little in the supernatural element about the Flying Man."

Dr. Solander smiled serenely. "While I was looking hard at Spring-heeled Jack," he went on, "and wondering by what mechanism he contrived to take those, literally, superhuman bounds, he suddenly disappeared."

"He saw you, perhaps, and sank into the earth?"

"He couldn't see me, for my lantern was out, and he did not sink into the earth. He simply came under the shadow of the castle walls and was lost to my view."

"You saw no more of him?"

"I saw no more of him that night, and, what struck me as odder still, I heard no more of him. Now, thought I, that is odd, for, as he had come nearer and nearer, I—all the time with my night glass fixed upon him—had heard, from far away, the noise his hoofs made getting, every moment, louder and, louder—*thud! thud!* at each contact with the ground. The country people had all spoken of this noise made by his hoofs."

"His hoofs, Dr. Solander?"

"I call them hoofs, for they leave hoof-marks. They are, of course, part of the mechanism with which he makes his grasshopper jumps—let us call the apparatus his *spring heels*. Well, the noise of them ceased suddenly, as he went out of my sight. Of course, I drew the obvious conclusion which you, no doubt, draw likewise."

"Indeed, I can draw none," I said in the pause that the Doctor made.

"You would have drawn precisely the same conclusion as I did," said Dr. Solander, "had you stood where I stood."

"And pray what conclusion did you come to?"

"Simply that the Flying Man's last leap had landed him on my side of the river—"

"What?" I interrupted, "he jumped over the river?"

"To be sure! He jumped across at the place called Glendower's Leap, close under the castle walls, where the stream narrows to less than thirty feet. You may be sure that the half-legendary Glendower never jumped the river there in his life, but it is, as you know, well within Jack the Flyer's powers. Having, as I said, landed within the precincts of the castle, what was more certain than that he had removed his spring heels, and was hiding them somewhere among the underwood in the dungeons of this ghost-haunted castle?"

"Frankly," I said, "I should never have guessed all that."

"You would, if you had been as sure as I was that the Flying Man was a local impostor, and if you had already guessed that, being so, he could be no one but James Price."

"Why could he be no one else?"

"Because no one else in the parish, or within ten miles of it, has the knowledge and ability to construct the springs which enable Mr. Price to rush and spring about the countryside in this outrageous way."

"Is it really within the resources of mechanical science, Dr. Solander, to contrive springs that will enable a man to outpace a horse and leap across a salmon river? Surely it is all grossly exaggerated!"

"Not at all! and the proof that it is possible is that he has done it in my sight. Twenty or thirtys year ago, who would have believed that mechanical genius could contrive a tiny carriage that would enable a man to outpace a greyhound and outlast a horse?"

"That is true, but those surprising jumps?"

"Did you never see a man leap from a spring board? He can more than double or treble his own powers. Imagine that spring board lightened, made in some elastic metal and firmly adjusted to a man's foot and ankle, like a skate, and the problem is solved."

"These are steel springs, then—simply?"

"Not quite simply, and not quite steel. There was an alloy of one of the new metals with steel discovered about five years ago. It doubles the elasticity of steel and halves its weight. I guessed that Price had made his foot springs of this particular alloy."

"I know that Price took honours in the mathematical tripos at Cambridge. Does he know anything of applied mechanics?"

"Yes," said the Doctor. "He took up mechanical engineering as a profession when he left Cambridge, and would have gone into it for a living, but he had the ill-luck to inherit a small fortune. Since which he has lived in idleness, with no very good reputation in this neighbourhood. He has an engineer's workshop at the Werne and amuses himself with mechanics."

"Say what you like against poor Price, argue as you will—and I can't confute your logic—I can never bring myself to believe that the good-hearted fellow I knew at Cambridge has turned in fifteen years into the cold-blooded murderer of a defenceless woman!"

Dr. Solander held his peace.

"Your dilemma, Mr. Morgan," he said after a while, "is not unlike my own. It is the dilemma that is constantly presenting itself between the emotions and the reason, between man as a being of likes and dislikes, and the scientist who must indulge in neither. I am no friend of James Price and his family. I dare say you know enough of the history of these parts to know that he, and his, represent the new order, and that I am the sole surviving link with the old possessors of the land hereabouts. I do not approve of the methods by which his father, Lord Tretire, a former country attorney, acquired wealth, land, power, and finally political influence and a title, through the stupidity and negligence of the squires, his clients.

James Price himself has come to spend his easy-won fortune in this parish. He spends it amiss. He sets a very bad example to the young men in the parish. In a religious community he scoffs openly at the simple beliefs of the country folk, and is a friend neither to church nor chapel."

"I have been told he is not on very good terms with his own people ; is that so ? "

"He is not on terms with his father, or with any of his squire neighbours. He shuns the society of his own class, lives an idle, self-indulgent life, and finds his companions of both sexes among the peasantry."

"Of both sexes ? "

"Yes, of both sexes. Stories circulate in regard to his relations with women which I know to be true."

"I heard vaguely that Dinah Morris had an admirer in a higher rank than her own. Was the man James Price ? "

"It was, and what is more, the actual scene of her death was the road that leads to James Price's house and nowhere else, and away from her own."

That was a most confounding fact to any friend of Price's, and yet I presently found in it something that rather extenuated than corroborated the weight of evidence against James Price.

"At all events," I said, "the people who knew all the facts—the people of the parish—made no point of it as against James Price. Not a word was said about it at the inquest."

"It is a proof of the ineptitude of such inquiries," said Dr. Solander, "that nothing was said, for it had been the talk of the whole village for a week ! "

"And so they suspected James Price ? "

"Not at all. They knew, of course, that he was the favoured lover. What motive could he have had ? they asked. If you remember, their suspicions were, at first, of poor Evans, the blacksmith, who had been jilted. One

man, George Edmunds, actually said at the inquest, if you remember, 'This is Bill Evans's work!'

"Is it just possible that it *was* Bill Evans, after all?"

Dr. Solander shook his head.

"But consider," I said, "the extreme unlikelihood of a man of James Price's intelligence not only murdering the sweetheart he had won from a rival, but actually doing it in a spot which would connect the crime with himself."

"We'll argued—you are a good advocate!" said Dr. Solander; "but is it not likely that Price, who is a man of intelligence, and even of keen and subtle intelligence, might have argued quite differently, assuming that he had resolved upon the girl's death. He would have said, Everyone in the parish knows I am the girl's lover, and they will argue, Price is no fool. He would surely not think of doing the woman to death on the road leading to his own house. Therefore it can't be Price."

I was getting to attribute to Dr. Solander almost infallible faculties of clairvoyance, of analysis, and of ratiocination—amounting to divination—so keen was his insight, so quick and subtle was his reasoning, so inevitable his deductions and judgment.

"I suppose it is quite certain that the person disguised as the Flying Man committed the crime," I said, casting about desperately for some escape from the conclusion that my ancient acquaintance was guilty.

"Of that fact, as you have seen yourself, on the ground of the murder, there is not the remotest possibility of a doubt."

"And you have brought it home to James Price that he is the Flying Man and no one else?"

"I have," said Dr. Solander, "and it was an extremely curious experience which led me to do so. I told you how I had had my first glimpse of Spring-heeled Jack, and how I had come to the conclusion that James Price was hiding

his means of locomotion somewhere in the ruins of the castle under my feet. I waited in the dark on the tower top, till he had done his work and gone away, and it was not very long before I heard the slight click of the wicket gate."

"You had left it open?"

"I had locked it, but he had a key. Probably he borrowed the sexton's, took an impression and forged a duplicate in his workshop.

"After breakfast next morning I went to the castle and began a search. First I went to Glendower's Leap, and saw the place where the Flying Man must have landed in his leap across the river, but the twin hoof-marks were nearly obliterated. They had been carefully stamped upon by a man's boot; that boot-print was not that of a peasant's clumsy boot, but a gentleman's neat shooting boot. Then I began a search for the hiding-place. A countryman's eyes, Mr. Morgan, are sharp, and a natural historian's, used for forty years to explore the fields and hedgerows for signs and tokens of bird and beast life, are sharper still; and the tales they tell of the Red Indian trackers have nothing wonderful to us. I easily followed James Price's track, though I dare say he was unaware how visible it was, across the courtyard and up and down sundry ruined staircases, and I found the spring heels almost at once. They had been laid behind a thick screen of ivy which had overgrown and hidden a small fireplace in a roofless upper chamber of the old castle.

"A very extraordinary foot-gear I found—not the least what I expected, and evidently the result of numerous experiments by a clever mechanic. The metal portion was about eighteen inches in height, and was made of a dull bluish metal, with many curves and springs. The whole was screwed securely to a thin metal plate of the shape of the sole of a boot—this again was secured by metal uprights

screwed upon a stout leather gaiter moulded to and following the curve of a man's leg, and reaching upwards nearly to the knee. The said supports would doubtless be further tightly secured to the leg by thongs of leather which the impersonator of Spring-heeled Jack had no doubt taken away with him.

"For a moment I thought of carrying off this queer pair of boots, which, being found on my property, were lawfully mine, and advertising them as found, on the church door; but this proceeding, though not without its humour, seemed to me rather wanting in dignity, and also as something of an affront to the person I guessed was their owner. I bitterly repent now that I did not follow my first idea. I contented myself with making an accurate drawing of the contrivance, with full measurements, in my note-book."

He drew the book from his pocket and handed it to me. The drawing had the appearance of a hunting-boot, shaped closely to the calf, while below was a powerful zigzag-shaped spring something like the leg of a grasshopper. Between the angles formed by the bars of the spring were spirals seemingly almost as delicately contrived as the spiral springs inside a watch. They must have added greatly to the elasticity of the whole as an instrument of locomotion, and but little to its weight. The portion which touched the ground was horseshoe-shaped, and ended in two further supports—added, I suppose, to give a securer foothold.

"I left the foot-springs exactly where I had found them," said Dr. Solander, "obliterating every trace of my own presence before I went home.

"My next proceeding was to look for the Flying Man's marks in the long meadows beyond the river where I had seen him travelling through the night with those marvellous strides and springs. I found them and again took careful

measurements. I even found the hoof-prints going both ways and in considerable numbers, showing me that the narrow valley was a frequent haunt of this nocturnal vagrant. I found that many of the steps converged towards the castle, and always ended abruptly at Glendower's Leap.

"Every night I lay in wait in the tower with the searchlight, and at last I saw him just where I had seen him before—coming down the valley with giant strides at a great pace and leaping over hedges and ditches in his way. A gallant sight enough to an old fox-hunter like myself, I can assure you. I had my night glass fixed upon him as he came near, but I could not see him as well as I wished in the dim moonlight ; but, as I began to hear the loud *thud ! thud !* of his hoofs on the turf and he turned his course towards the castle, I adjusted, with the hand that did not hold the field-glass to my eyes, my searchlight full upon the flying figure. In an instant he was illuminated as if in the full glare of the sun, and the face of James Price was revealed to me as plainly as I now see yours."

"Stop, Dr. Solander, the farmers all speak of some sort of appearance of flames about the Flying Man. Did you see anything of the sort?"

"I did not sir, but the night was fairly moonlit when he came near me on the first night. My searchlight on him would have killed any lesser luminosity the second time—which, if it exists at all, is probably due to nothing but phosphorus paint."

"Oh !" I said, rather disillusioned.

"It would only be visible," said Dr. Solander, "on darkish nights."

"The fairy tales of science," I observed, "are sometimes very prosaic !"

Dr. Solander laughed and went on.

"What would he do? I wondered. Would he take

refuge as before in the place from which this tell-tale light proceeded? He had already come within fifty yards of the river bank, then, as my light flashed upon him, he turned from his course with as sudden a wrench to the right as when a hare is overtaken by a greyhound, and he went away at a great pace up the river valley."

"That was my second and last sight of Mr. James Price in the character of Spring-heeled Jack, and I don't ever want to see the Flying Man again."

"You are positive that no one else could be masquerading as the Flying Man," I said, throwing out a suggestion that seemed to myself rather extravagant.

"Does that hypothesis come within the range of possibilities, far less of probabilities, Mr. Morgan? One such being in a kingdom is almost an anomaly; two in one parish is surely a thing out of all question."

"I am afraid so. But then it comes to this, and there is no escape from it. James Price is the murderer of Dinah Morris."

"It comes to that," said Dr. Solander, solemnly.

"What are we to do? Denounce him? Surely not!"

"We cannot. You cannot, as his personal friend. I cannot, as his personal enemy. Our tongues are tied, and I would not have spoken to you as openly as I have done, had I not known he was your former friend."

"We are in a dilemma," I said.

"Yes," said the Doctor, "from which the only escape is silence. Silence, you know, is golden."

"Not for a journalist, Dr. Solander."

He laughed. We had reached the Dower House as he was speaking, and he threw the hall door open and followed me in.

Dr. Solander is a bachelor, and his house has the untidiness and solid comfort of a bachelor's home—a bachelor's and a naturalist's. My senses were assailed at

once by a pervading odour of strong tobacco mingled with camphor from the numerous taxidermic preparations of birds, beasts, reptiles, and insects that hung everywhere in glass cases against the walls. It was a house from which art, literature, and politics were entirely banished. No newspaper lay on the tables, only the proceedings of learned societies, no books were on the shelves but those that dealt with some branch of science, no picture or drawing was there on the wall but what depicted some fact in natural history or archæology. The nearest approach to fancy or imaginative work was the reconstruction, in pictorial form, of some antediluvian monster, *Dinotherium*, *Ichthyosaurus*, or *Pterodactyl*. I spelled out these names under the respective representations of the creatures.

It rather surprised me, for a moment, to notice, as we went straight into the dining-room, that breakfast was already laid for two, tea and coffee smoking in the pots, and the bacon and finnan haddock lying in their hot plates on the side table. Yet not a word had been spoken to the butler who stood ready to serve, a napkin under his arm. This was quite in character with Dr. Solander's way of arriving swiftly at inevitable conclusions about everything. He had evidently concluded, from the premises, before he left the house, that he would meet me in Werne Lane, he had concluded that he would ask me to breakfast, he was sure that I would accept, and he guessed that we should make our way to the Dower House at the very moment we did, and enter the dining-room precisely as the coffee, bacon, and haddock were being laid smoking upon the table ! It was almost uncanny !

Dr. Solander is a charming host and his talk delighted me. I think sometimes that the best conversation in the world is that of the man with a hobby, or hobbies. Such a man, perhaps, has thoughts, ideas, opinions, prejudices, or preconceptions which one does not share, but which,

having worked out fully in his own mind, he presents for consideration with a startling freshness. If, to all this, he is a man of tact and humour, who never insists too far on his superior knowledge, I say again there is no such delightful companion.

We said not a word more about James Price's escapades, Dinah Morris's death, or the now solved mystery of the Flying Man, but as I took my leave Dr. Solander said, "Come and see me again soon, Mr. Morgan, and we won't trouble our heads over what has brought you to Pontre-giddion."

"Unfortunately," said I, "it is business to me. I was even thinking I ought to call on James Price. But if I do, what am I to say about your discoveries—about your knowing that he and Spring-heeled Jack are one and the same person? I must not tell him what you have told me in confidence."

"Why not? He knows it already. He knows that I have found him out. He must know that it was I who was on the tower with the searchlight. He does not know, perhaps, that I have seen and handled his 'heel springs.' You may inform him of that circumstance if you like. By-the-bye, I forgot to mention one fact. From and after the night on which he was aware that he was discovered, James Price ceased his nightly peregrinations. I conclude that he was ashamed of himself."

"How long was that ago?"

"Nearly a twelvemonth ago. It was in early November of last year."

"And Spring-heeled Jack," I asked, "has he never been heard of since?"

"I don't say that. He began to haunt the parish again about three weeks or a month before Dinah Morris's death."

"Ah!" I said, stopping to think. "That is odd, is it

not? Do you come to any conclusion from that, Dr. Solander?"

"Only," said the Doctor, rather grimly, I thought, "that James Price wanted to be at his old tricks again—perhaps had some reason of his own to be at them. Pray, Mr. Morgan, what inference do *you* draw from the fact?"

"None—none as yet. I must think it out. I will go and see James Price."

"Do!" said Dr. Solander, shaking hands with me heartily at his front door, "and pray let me see you again to-morrow, when you have interviewed Price."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HONOURABLE JAMES PRICE

It was very slowly and rather reluctantly that I made my way towards the home of James Price, the man against whom every fact, every incident, every circumstance pointed, with such damning conclusiveness, as the murderer of Dinah Morris. I foresaw that it was going to be a most awkward and most unpleasant interview. The business of a journalist, I see, can land a man on the horns of a dilemma that is nothing but tragic. If I followed my plain duty to my employers in the line of its logical consequences, I was helping to put the halter round my old acquaintance's neck. Nay, I should assuredly not merely be helping, I should be chiefly and directly instrumental in bringing James Price to the gallows, for the only other person who was in possession of the evidence was Dr. Solander, and Dr. Solander had just declared that he could not, or would not, stir a finger in the matter. As for the county police, they had long ceased to trouble their dull heads with the problem of the crime. Therefore it rested with me and me alone to place the rope round James Price's neck!

I was actually in Werne Lane, the scene of the girl's murder, when the possible consequences of the action I was about to take flashed suddenly upon me. Should I return or not? Should I go back to my inn, wire to the Editor that I could make nothing of the business, and return to town? Or should I palter with the truth and write a long journalistic rigmarole giving a melodramatic history

of the circumstances of the crime, throw in a picturesque account of the village, the scenery, the people, dwell largely on their superstitions, instance, in proof, their belief in the revived myth of the Flying Man, and give an animated report of his appearances as recounted by the farmers and peasants, and, having done so much, stop there ?

Either of these two courses was better than strict duty, for strict duty meant betrayal of the man who once had been my friend. Has it ever struck the moralist that the primrose path of strict duty, which is oftener than not easy and tempting and often extremely lucrative, is, if it come to be regarded from the point of view of the higher ethics, often simply abominably and inhumanly immoral ?

In this case the path of duty was extremely lucrative and even, in the lower sense, honourable, for if I chose to betray all confidences and my own one-time friend into the bargain, I should obtain a journalistic success, honour and glory of no common kind ; England would ring and re-echo with the enterprise of *The Messenger* and the skill and ability of its correspondent who had skilfully unravelled the knot of a mysterious crime and brought a scoundrel of the deepest dye to justice.

Now, so complicated a being is man, and still more so, journalistic man, that, as I stood considering between conscience and convenience as to which of these three courses to adopt, I rejected all three as they presented themselves, one after another.

Let me recapitulate. First, there was strict duty to my paper, including the trampling upon the higher ethics, and consequent fame and a replenished banker's balance. Rejected, with scorn. Secondly, Compromise and a rigmarole report to *The Daily Messenger*. Rejected, with regret. Thirdly, Immediate abandonment of my post and immediate return to town. Rejected, without hesitation.

What was I going to do, then ? I hardly knew myself—

only that I was going to ring at Price's front door and see what would happen next. And why was I going to adopt this very illogical course? What was my motive? My motive was simply curiosity!

Curiosity was so stirred within me by the problem of the why, wherefore, and how of Dinah Morris's death that I could not bring myself to abandon my post and leave any stone unturned in the way of a solution. I was prepared even to shake the murderer by the hand.

Three minutes later I was doing so. James Price is the same cheery, humorous, clever, good-natured, self-willed, and apparently self-indulgent and lazy giant that I remembered him at the University. Everything he set his mind to do at Cambridge he did seemingly without effort. At cricket matches his was always the top score, on the river his height and weight kept him in the middle of the boat, but he pulled the best and strongest oar, he captained the football team in his first year, made records in every branch of athletics, and though he never seemed to read seriously, he went in for honours, and to the astonishment of his whole college his place in the honours list was high. Great things were predicted of him, but the prophecy was never fulfilled. Every fairy gift was his except ambition, and here he was, at thirty-five, an obscure country squire, with no place or position in the country—a nonentity, politically and socially.

He was in his workshop, his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, standing by the forge fire, one foot on the step of the bellows; he wielded a blacksmith's hammer, and as he smote the piece of glowing metal held by pincers on the anvil with his left, the red sparks flew up all round him in a cloud. He looked up from his work, as I came in.

"Morgan!" he called out; "not Morgan of Trinity come to see his old pal?" He dropped hammer and pincers, the sparks fell to darkness, the fire, no longer wind-fed, died

down, and he came—huge, swarthy, hospitable—with outstretched hand towards me, the same kindly fellow with the same undeniable magnetic charm that had won us all to him fifteen years before.

"No, by Heaven!" I thought to myself, "this good fellow never was guilty of a foul crime," and all the inevitable deductions, all the accumulated evidence before me, all Solander's subtle train of logic fell away before the man's smile and the tone of the man's voice.

"I say, Morgan, do you remember how you took Pinkerton at the wicket and saved the match when he'd got his eye in and was getting on for his second century?"

That was just old Price's way. In point of fact, it was he who won the match. It was he who had kept us all up when the "frost" had set in, and who had held up his wicket to the last and pulled us through.

"What are you here for, Morgan? Fishing?"

I told him that my walk in life was journalism, and that I was brought down here by the murder of Dinah Morris.

The name brought a sudden change in Price. His face saddened, the gay laugh and ringing voice were silenced in a moment.

He made some pretence to turn from me for a moment, and I could not see his face. When he did speak it was in a strangely altered tone—almost the tone of one who affects an indifference he did not feel. What did it all mean?

"Poor Dinah!" he said. "The police will have it that it was a tramp, and I am inclined to believe it was, but they are very slack. What do you think, Morgan?"

I felt rather treacherous.

"I made Dr. Solander's acquaintance at the inn at Tretire yesterday."

"Ah, Solander, my enemy! Clever old fellow, but I wish he didn't think me quite such a blackguard. We are not on speaking terms, you know."

I began to feel not a little uncomfortable. "He told me, Price, quite a lot about you."

"Never fear! Well, I hope you did not believe it all. I am not perhaps a very respectable character, but you know the devil may be painted blacker than he is. Did he tell you about Spring-heeled Jack?"

"He did."

"Ah! He caught me out there very neatly—just when I was having such fun and mystifying the whole countryside to my heart's content."

James Price laughed out heartily, and the more he laughed the soberer did I grow. Is he really the good fellow I have always thought him, I was asking myself—the idle, inconsequent, happy-go-lucky James Price that we all knew—or a deep designing criminal, and a comedian to boot, of the first order? If Solander was right, and reason and evidence and sound logic were all on Solander's side, as well as my own slowly reached convictions, no words were strong enough to describe James Price's criminality, no punishment too great for his crime.

On the other side was the man himself. Fifteen long years had passed for us both, of fight and struggle in the world, those first years that, I suppose, harden us most of any, that estrange us from our early illusions and associations as no later lived stretch of time can do; and here was James Price treating me just as he used to at college, when I happened to look in upon him in his rooms, with the same frank welcome, the same pleasure to see a friend, the same hearty familiarity and comradeship, the same smile, the same genial voice, the same ready confidence.

"I say, Morgan, you know, this Flying Man business was awful fun. Just think of it. It was like realizing a fairy tale. When I put on those springs I was suddenly transformed into something that almost felt supernatural. By Jove, sir, I half deceived myself. I thought I was

transcending humanity. I could outstrip a hare at her fastest, I could leap gates, hedges, ditches, that no hunter would face. I was possessed of powers that perhaps no human being has enjoyed since the world began. I, one of life's failures—Solander, I suppose, would call me that—helped of course by the latest discoveries in science, had hit upon a secret that gave me attributes that were literally superhuman. Ah, Morgan, if you only knew the exquisite delight of feeling the midnight air whistle by you, of topping the highest hedges at a bound, and of seeing the white water gleam under your feet as you fly across the streams and brooks with hardly an effort. It was grand! It was glorious! And it was all pure fun; I never did any one any hurt or harm. At first I rather scared the people, but they soon became used to me. I always made a point of bolting from man, woman, or child. I never crossed them on their road or overtook them. I knew it would frighten them to death to have Spring-heeled Jack come bumping and rustling by them in a narrow road, so I gave every one a wide berth."

"I heard you did a little poaching now and then."

"Oh, yes, if you can call that harm, I did; but you know I have advanced views, and I don't approve of game-preserving. My father and Colonel Pritchard keep up a head of hares and pheasants, and I think it's all wrong. It's a selfish use to put one's land to, to let it feed game, when it ought to feed men and women. Sometimes in the course of my nightly wanderings, I would enter my father's preserves—he and I are not on speaking terms—and I would show my disapproval of game-keeping and game-preserving by taking a few hares and pheasants and distributing them among their poorer neighbours."

"Acting Providence! I suppose it can't have been easy work, though, the catching hares and pheasants."

"Quite easy! On a moonlight night I enter a field and find the game feeding in the open. The first flight of a

pheasant is not very fast, and in the first fifty yards of a hare's course he is at his slowest ; fast enough, of course, but still his slowest, and I could run down the hares in the first two hundred yards, and knock down the pheasants in the beginning of their flight. It was splendid sport, I assure you, but it nearly led to an unpleasant incident."

"The gamekeeper?"

"Just that! Colonel Pritchard's keeper watched me one night. I had bagged a brace of pheasants and a hare before I saw him behind a hedge. He put up his gun and fired both barrels. Luckily it was a hundred yards away, the shot scattered, and only two or three flicked against the thick leather coat I wore. I pretended not to be aware of anything, and bagged another hare that his shots sent towards me. Then I made off.

"The next night I looked in at The Hook to drink a mug of cyder. It was half the fun listening to what the people said of me in my character of the Flying Man. I expected to find the keeper there, and I did—he was telling the story to the rustics, with additions. I had come at him, he said, roaring like a bull, and he had let fly both barrels at twenty yards. I had dropped to the shot and lay on the ground. When he came up, I had miraculously disappeared—either sunk into the earth or been spirited up into the air, and, what was stranger, the hares and pheasants had gone too!

"The men looked to me as I came in. I shook my head and drank my cyder without a word."

"'Is it the Devil incarnate?' asked the keeper.

"'No, John Williams,' I said. 'It was Jack the Flyer, but you've had a narrow escape, for I can't understand why Jack did not make an end of you there and then.'

"'Lord a' mercy on me!' said the keeper, turning pale, 'but all the same I wish I'd had a green cartridge in one barrel, or he'd been a bit nearer when I let fly.'

" 'Why, Williams, I thought you had him within twenty yards of your muzzle.'

" 'No, sir, when I come to think of it, he must have been a bit further. It was a longish shot, it was.'

" 'Look here, Williams, you're a well plucked fellow and I know you'll be doing your duty to Colonel Pritchard, but take my advice, don't you try plain shot, or even green cartridge on Spring-heeled Jack. It isn't safe, and next time we shall find you stretched out stiff and stark and your gun burst.'

" Williams groaned, and the fellows in the inn kitchen shook their heads and said I was right.

" 'What must I do, Mr. Price, sir?' asked Williams.

" 'Well, if you ask me I'll tell you, but you must follow my directions exactly, or I won't answer for your life. You must wait till the moon is at her full—mind, not a night sooner or later—and you must load your gun with a full charge of powder, and you must cast a round silver bullet and ram it down tight over the powder. Then you must keep out of sight and watch for Jack's coming, and when you get him within range, let fly! You'll see what will happen.' "

I laughed. "Wasn't that preparing a very unpleasant reception for yourself the next time you visited Colonel Pritchard's coverts?"

"I took devilish good care not to go near them for a long time. Besides, a silver bullet! You can't cast silver like lead, and a keeper could no more melt a piece of silver than he could fly. The next few nights I haunted a different part of the country. Unfortunately I went to a farm where some sheep had been worried by a dog."

"I heard that story, and how the farmer's gun burst and hurt him."

"Yes, that was unfortunate—for him, but it made me free of the whole country. No one dared to draw a trigger on me after that."

I looked about the workshop. It was completely fitted up with every mechanical, electrical, and chemical appliance. There were marks of hard work all round. Bits of machinery—springs, wheels, and metal joints—quite beyond me to know the use of.

"Why, Price, they told me you were an idle fellow."

"So I am, outside this shop."

"What are you working at?"

"Inventions of every kind and sort, improvements in motor-cars, in cotton-spinning machinery, and all sorts of things. That's how I make my living. I've hit upon some new notions. I spent my aunt's £5,000 legacy years ago."

"Ah," I thought, "that accounts a little for the spring heels."

James Price is one of those magnetic fellows who reads one's thoughts. He read mine now in my silence.

"You're thinking of Jack the Flyer and his seven-league boots. Like to see them?" He unlocked a cupboard, and, behold, there hung up the wonderful locomotive apparatus. He unhooked one and handed it to me, a marvel of strength and delicate adjustment.

"Why," I said, "they hardly weigh more than a pair of strong shooting-boots."

"No. I had to keep them light. You can't run very fast or jump very high with heavy springs. I made lots of experiments on my way to these. If the springs are too heavy you can't do much more than clear a five-barred gate or a low hedge—you can never top a big bullfinch, fly over a big brook, or a couple of quickset hedges with a Welsh road running between them."

While he spoke I was examining the spring heels.

"They are quite rusty," I said.

"Yes, there's a year's rust on them or more. The fact is, I was so riled with old Solander for turning his infernal searchlight on me that I put them aside uncleaned the

night he found me out, and have never worked at them since."

"But," I said, "they talk in the parish of the Flying Man having been seen quite lately—within a month or two."

"I know they do, and nothing surprises me less. I have sat in the inn parlour and listened to the men's talk—every man trying to outdo and outlie his neighbour. Yes, only a month ago there was talk of Spring-heeled Jack. They used to make me jump higher and run faster with the spring heels than ever I ran or jumped, and swore they saw me in places which I had not been within miles of, and on nights when I never stirred abroad. That's the strangest thing about a myth. Just set it going, and it lives for ever in people's imagination. If you hear of the Flying Man going about now, you may set it down as a lie."

While he talked I was examining the heel spring, and continuing to admire the fine work of the springs and spirals. I saw a tiny bit of dried, reddish mud stuck fast upon the iron sole of the apparatus.

"Look at that," I said, and I pulled the bit of red clay off and gave it to him after examining it. It was as dry and hard as a stone.

"Yes, I know, it was careless of me not to clean them. I'll clean and oil them this very day."

He took the little bit of dried clay without looking at it, and chucked it on to the forge ashes.

This trifling circumstance, that I hardly noticed at the moment, was to turn out to be the clue to the whole mystery, and it came in time to fix the guilt of the crime firmly and for good and all upon its actual perpetrator.

CHAPTER IX

THE OLD LIMEKILN

I WITHSTOOD James Price's hospitable invitation to lunch and dine under his roof, told him I must get back to my work, and left him, promising to return as early as I could to the Werne.

Walking along the Werne Lane towards the village, I stopped to ask myself a question. Had this man, with his strange personal magnetism, hypnotized my understanding? It was strange, but, though my sober, waking judgment pointed to him, through an unanswerable train of logical deduction, as the foul murderer of a defenceless girl—though a web of circumstantial testimony held him firmly in its meshes—though no logic, or reasoning of mine could weaken a thread of this web or break a link in this chain of reasoning, I could not bring myself to feel the slightest personal repugnance to the man! The old sympathy that had once been between him and me in college days had revived. The suspicion, nay, the certainty—so far as reason compels certainty—that he was a criminal left my personal relations with him absolutely untouched!

I stood for a moment in the lane in wonder of myself. What sort of a man am I, thought I, who boast to have a man's understanding and reasoning faculties and fail to use them at a critical moment! There is no possible logical escape from the fact that James Price is a murderer, and yet you go and take him by the hand, and talk and chaff and smoke with him as you did when he was your chosen friend. Verily, men are complex creatures.

As I walked along the lane leading to the Werne from the scene of the murder, which lies only some quarter of a mile from Price's home, I asked myself if Solander had examined this part of the lane and found on it the tracks of Jack the Flyer. I presumed he had, though he had not mentioned the fact. It would of course bring the crime one step nearer to Price.

I looked for the tracks in the lane near Price's house, but there were none. It did not surprise me, for Price, if he were indeed the criminal, would have used the obvious precaution of removing his spring heels as he approached his own house. So regarded, the absence of footmarks would be corroboration of the weight of evidence already accumulated against James Price.

I must stop here to say this. Every single step I took this forenoon, every successive discovery I made, is a matter of such vital importance in the history of the case, that I must describe my seemingly trivial proceedings in full and circumstantial detail.

I walked on till I came to the spot where the murder had been committed. A few paces on the Werne side of the spot was the double hoof-mark which Solander had already pointed out. The banks were some four or five feet high on either side of the lane, and a quickset hedge grew on the top of both banks. I was forgetting the Flying Man's leaping powers. Of course, he would have jumped out of the lane to one side or the other the moment he had struck down the girl. If he had not done so, he must have stopped dead short and removed the spring heels. The marks of his having done so would have been left as plainly on the ground as those of Dinah Morris's own footsteps, which were still visible as I came up to them. There were no such hoof-marks visible. The lane runs along the side of a steepish hill, the bank on the left side is high and against the hill-side, on the right, or lower side, it is easier

and, beyond it, the ground falls away downwards with a slope. Looking closely, I saw, in one place, a break in the hedge, the leafless thorn branches were bent and broken, as if a man had scrambled through and over. Here I felt sure Jack the Flyer had passed. I climbed up through the gap and forced my way through the blackthorn branches on the top, standing for a moment on the top of the bank to survey the great field below me. It was a very large one, sloping gradually to level ground below. I noticed that it was poor, thin land, overgrown in its level portions with reeds and rushes, with here and there a stagnant accumulation of water.

It was then that I noted a circumstance which a keener observer would have marked long before and used in the elucidation of the mystery. It was that the soil in the lane was no longer a stiff red clay, as it was almost everywhere else and notably in the river valley below. Hereabouts the soil was of a thin gritty consistency and greyish in colour. If any of the soil of the lane and its neighbourhood had adhered to the iron sole of the Flying Man's spring heels on the night of the murder, and he had removed the springing apparatus immediately the deed was done and left it uncleaned, evidence of the fact would certainly be found on the sole. Now, I had seen a bit of red clay on the spring heels in Price's workshop, and that bit of clay dried and hardened by time. This trifling circumstance was the first weakening of the chain of circumstantial evidence against James Price, and I welcomed it. I took from my pocket the ordnance map and found that the large field was marked as the Moor Field. It had indeed more the look of a bit of moor than of agricultural land. I saw that a limekiln was set down, in the map, as standing in the middle of the field. A limekiln implies a limestone soil, and in point of fact, as I found afterwards, the whole hill-side is of that geological formation. I could see no sign

of the limekiln, but near the centre of the Moor Field was one of those ugly circular woods of young larch trees that country gentlemen spoil the face of nature by planting on poor land. I concluded that the limekiln had either been pulled down to make place for the wood, or that the thick growth of larches had overgrown and hidden it.

My immediate object was to find tracks of the spring heels, or signs of the place where they had been removed. I made a cast across the field just as a huntsman does with his pack when the scent fails and hounds come to a check. I came almost at once on the track of the Flying Man in a line with the spot where I guessed he had made his exit from the lane, and the footprints headed straight for the plantation in the middle of the field. At the very edge of the little wood they ended. I could come to no other conclusion than that the wearer of the spring heels had, from his last take-off, in the field, leapt boldly into the wood. True, I could find no signs of his having done so, for the plantation was surrounded by a ditch about two feet in depth, and on the earth, thrown up on the ditch's inner side, was a barbed wire fence not more than three feet in height, a defence against sheep and cattle, but one that any man could climb over easily. I got across, but found the wood itself impassable. The plantation was evidently but of a few years' growth, for the larch trees were not above twice the height of a man, but they grew so thickly together, their branches were so interlaced and the furze grew together with the trees so rankly that try as I would, I could not force my way into the wood. I recrossed the fence and walked all round the plantation, carefully looking for footprints issuing from the wood, either prints of a man's boots or prints of the hoof-marks of Spring-heeled Jack. I had tracked him into the wood, and, if I could not find that the hoof-marks went out, the inference would be that he had hidden his heel springs in the wood as, once

before, he had hidden them in Pontregiddion Castle, and, if the springs had been concealed here on the night of the murder when the ground was soft, I should find the boot-prints of the wearer of the springs at some point in the outer circumference of the wood where he had sallied forth. That was a pretty fair inference, but logical deduction and plain fact do not always coincide, and I made the circuit of the wood, peering curiously for footprints and hardly hoping to find any. Suddenly the footprints were before me, deeply indented in the soil, where a man, having evidently climbed the fence, had jumped down from the little bank on which it stands. In a moment I was on my knees, scrutinizing the marks in the ground.

A second gleam of hope came to me as I examined them. They were unmistakably the impressions of the clumsy hobnailed boot of a labouring man, not such foot-gear as James Price would wear.

"Hurrah!" I cried aloud, "James Price never trod in those prints, his foot must be at least an inch longer!" It was indeed a shorter and broader foot than could possibly belong to a man six feet three inches in height.

I followed the prints across the fields. They led into a road leading to the village, and, in the road, I lost them.

It remained for me to return to the wood, try to get in and find the hiding-place of the springing apparatus.

Perhaps the wearer had returned to the wood and carried away the heel springs, but this seemed improbable. If he came to the wood, he must have come intending to hide his apparatus in it. If he had carried it away with him, then or later, what need had he to enter the wood at all? It was clear that the owner of the apparatus had a good reason for not keeping it at home, or for being seen carrying it about the road. The heel springs must therefore be in the wood, and I must somehow force a way in and find them.

Again I walked round the plantation. As I did so, I

made a further discovery, the field was scored in more places than one with the hoof-marks of the Flying Man. What was more remarkable was that the tracks, when I could trace them, converged upon the point to which I had at first followed them. It was clear, then, that the wearer of the springs had several times resorted to this particular thick-grown plantation. He had always come in at one place, and this place I had tested and found impossible of entrance. What was the explanation? It was the obvious one that I was always forgetting to apply :—namely, that Spring-heeled Jack did not move as other men move, along the ground, but by prodigious leaps and bounds through the air. He could leap the bank and top the wire fence, and alight among the larch tree boughs some seven or eight feet from the ground. The tough elastic branches of the young larch trees would close after his passage and show not a trace of his entrance. Inside the plantation, in the shadow of its branchage, the underwood of furze would not be so thick, and locomotion would no doubt be easier. Now, if I could get into the wood somehow, and come across the path taken by the man, I should run a good chance of discovering his *cache*.

I went back to the place where I had found his footprints leaving the plantation, and thought, "Surely where he can come out I can get in!"

It was as I expected—with a squeeze and a scrape I pushed through, and then almost immediately I had a surprise. Just inside the nearly impassable outer fringe of young tree trunks, furze, and branches, was a fair pathway through the thickest of the plantation. It had been made by lopping the undergrowth and the crossing branches, and dodging the tree trunks here and there. It was not a straight path, but it led with turns and twists into the heart of the little wood. Here there was a dip in the ground and a fairly open space—only partly furze and bramble covered

—where still stood the ruined limekiln. The dip in the ground and the growth of the surrounding trees prevented its being seen from anywhere in the neighbourhood. Here, or hereabouts, I felt sure, the steel springs had been concealed by the murderer.

I sat down on a block of stone and looked about me and took a careful view of the ground, before I began a search. Now, a pair of spring heels with the gaiters, or upper leather, is by no means a small object, and cannot therefore be put away and hidden in any nook or corner. In all, the apparatus is more than two feet in height, and requires a hiding-place of that depth, or length. I longed for the keen eyes of Dr. Solander. Strain mine as I would, I could detect no trace of where Jack the Flyer had passed along the path I had travelled over, or anywhere in the weed and bramble covered ruins that constitute the old limekiln where a hiding-place could be made. Then I began a painful search that lasted half an hour. It left me with hands scratched all over and tired with lifting flat stones and finding nothing. The only single trace of man's former existence that I found here, was an old iron crowbar, broken at one end and covered with the rust of many years. It lay in the vaulted passage leading to the pit of the kiln, the pit or sunken hearth where, in days gone by, the fire had been kindled that turns limestone into lime. I left the bar where I found it, and returned, quite discouraged, to sit on the stone block and rest after my labour.

As I sat, I happened to look down on the ground and noticed that the grass and weeds close round the stone had been walked over, or otherwise disturbed, just where my own feet were resting.

My curiosity was aroused. Here alone were signs of man's presence, nowhere else all round. I got up and looked at the stone I had been sitting on. It seemed to be a block of limestone rock which was the formation all round.

I had concluded that it was not detached or lying on the surface, but made part of the living rock, jutting out in that spot and left there in old times by the lime-workers, as a seat close to the firing hole from which to watch the working of the furnace. I tried to move the block. It did not stir, but that did not surprise me, for the portion above ground was so large that two or three strong men could not have lifted it with their united strength. Looking more closely at the stone block, I noticed that there was a hollow in its back, and that the upper curve of that hollow or recess did not rest on the ground. I thought of the old crowbar in the limekiln. I ran eagerly to fetch it, and, placing a good-sized stone in front of the hollow, and using this as a leverage for the bar, I raised the block with the greatest ease.

Underneath was a hole, and in that hole were just such a pair of spring heels as I had had in my hand in Price's workshop, with upright attachment of steel and leather gaiters. There were here, too, the coils of thin leather straps with which, as Dr. Solander explained, the whole apparatus was firmly bound to the ankle and leg of the wearer of the springs.

I drew them forth and examined them. The moment I did so, I found a great difference between them and those I had seen at The Werne. I have already said that Price's spring heels were a marvel of lightness, strength, and delicate adjustment of parts to the whole. This apparatus was comparatively clumsy, heavy, and roughly though strongly put together. The first was the work, as it were, of an artist, this of a journeyman worker.

As I examined them I saw, on the upper portion of the curved iron shoe, a bit of mud caught up just where I had seen the bit of mud on Price's heel springs.

It was at the place where the iron shoe, sinking deeply into the soil, would bring up, on its upper surface

a bit of the earth from the last place where the iron had touched the ground. There was a difference, however, the mud on Price's apparatus was, as I have said, red and dry and hard, the mud on these springs was grey and fresh and soft. This fact seemed to me almost of itself to invalidate all the elaborate deductions of Dr. Solander. The whole train of evidence seemed, in my partial eyes at least, to break down here. Something had always told me that James Price was not guilty of this murder. Then who was? Clearly the owner of these heel springs—the man who had left his footmarks as he crossed from the plantation. I stood, turning over these arguments and rejoicing in the fact that I was clearing my friend of a foul imputation, when my ears caught the sound of an approaching footstep, and I heard the rustle of the larch boughs as some one pushed them aside in a cautious approach to where I stood.

"It is the murderer himself," I thought. "He has seen me enter the plantation and fears a discovery." The danger of my position was evident. He and I would be together in a chosen haunt of his own, inaccessible, or almost inaccessible, to any one else. I hastily caught up the heavy crowbar and stood, armed with it, waiting.

I did not see the man who had entered the wood, so thick were the trees, till, emerging from them, he faced me, at five yards' distance. I was not greatly surprised to see that it was William Evans, the blacksmith, the first sweetheart of Dinah Morris.

Had he expected to find any one in his haunt? When he saw me, his face fell. For a minute, we neither of us spoke.

As I had stood looking at him, the truth flashed upon me. All the elaborately built up evidence of Dr. Solander fell to the ground as I looked at Evans, and I knew that I was at last face to face with the murderer of Dinah Morris.

His guilty look betrayed him, his sudden paleness as he stood thus, panic-stricken, as of a man overtaken by his fate, and hopeless of escape by flight or by assault upon the man who had found him out. I saw that he trembled in every limb. It was I who broke the silence first.

"What are you doing here, William Evans?"

He muttered something I could not hear.

I raised my voice. "I say, what are you doing here, at the spot where you hid the things which you wore on the night you murdered Dinah Morris?"

I pointed to the hole under the block of stone.

His lips moved, but he could not utter a sound.

"Answer me!" I said peremptorily.

Then he spoke. "I knew in a dream that my secret was discovered, and I was warned from on high to come here and make confession."

I saw that I had to do with no ordinary criminal, but with one driven to extremity by an agony of repentance.

"Why did you kill Dinah Morris?"

He did not answer me directly; he joined his hands in prayer and looked up.

"Thou, Lord in heaven—" He muttered the words, and I could see that a strong emotion held him.

"Thou, Lord in heaven, have mercy on my soul!" he repeated. His hands were still joined in prayer, and he seemed unconscious of my presence.

"Have mercy, O Lord God, on my soul!"

I felt somehow that I was to be this man's accuser—perhaps his only accuser.

"You had no mercy on her! You sent her to her account with no moment for repentance."

He had been praying for Heaven's mercy, he now turned to me and asked for man's justice.

"Sir! Sir! You cannot know how it happened!"

"I know everything that took place—I know how you followed her along the main road."

"I did."

"You drove her to take refuge from you in the Werne Lane."

"I did not, sir, she turned up towards the Werne Lane before she knew I was behind her."

"Then you followed her and—"

"When I saw her turn towards the Werne, Satan entered into me, but, as the Lord is my witness, I never intended her hurt or harm. I meant only to frighten her. She heard my irons in the narrow lane. I had been three hundred yards, or more, behind her, till then, and I had never thought of so much as passing her till she turned into the lane where her lover lives. Then did Satan tempt me!"

"To kill the woman who had jilted you?"

"No!" and he raised his voice. "No! As I hope for salvation, I did not mean to do that! May I drop dead where I stand, and my soul fall to the depths of the pit, there to dwell in eternal flames, if I had a thought of killing Dinah Morris!"

"Yet you did kill her, William Eyans!"

"I did! I did!" He spoke with an agony of distress. "I struck down the woman I loved, and she fell in death, and I knew it was her death, for I felt her bones break under the blow, and I fled in terror. And now I mean to hang for it—the terror and agony is too great for life!"

"You struck her down, and yet you did not seek to kill her?"

He looked at me with hopeless, bewildered eyes.

"God knows my sin and what my weight of guilt is. For He has all-seeing eyes, all-judging understanding, and an all-merciful spirit. He will weigh it hereafter in the scale and judge me and forgive me. My punishment will not be for ever!"

His face suddenly took an expression where faith and despair, sorrow and hopefulness mingled strangely.

"But men will judge you too on the facts before them?"

I had known that William Evans had fallen away from a religious life, but he had not forgotten the teaching of his better days, and the man's mind, I could see, was still versed in the thoughts and furnished with the vocabulary of his theology, and he spoke lucidly according to his belief in higher spiritual matters, but in the affairs of daily life he was but an ignorant peasant, unable to see clearly or express himself clearly. He muttered something about his standing apart from man's judgment and being in the hands of his Lord.

"Have a care, William Evans, that you do not stand alone in your own conceit, and that God and men alike do not condemn you for a foul and cruel murder!"

My words seemed to spur him to further confession.

"I swear before my God and I swear in the face of my fellow-men that I had no thought of harming the girl. I came close up to her in the lane, thinking to pass her in a flash, and frighten her, but she turned sharp as I was close behind her, and, to save striking her with the full force of my going, I thought to leap up and over her, but I rose too late. I am clumsier with the springs than—than—"

"Than whom?"

"Than him as is come among us," he said with hesitation, using the title I had heard given to the Flying Man by the peasants.

"Go on, Evans!"

"My springs are heavy compared to his, and I can't leap and bound and run as he can."

I deferred my curiosity for a while. "Go on," I said.

"As I leapt up to pass over her head, I struck poor Dinah with my knee between the shoulders. I felt the bones give

and break. I knew she was dead, and I fled. Since that moment I have been in hell."

I looked at him, pale as a man at the point of death—hopeless as one done for ever with the world's traffic—glad to fix his thoughts on the life to come—glad of release from the cares and troubles of mortality—a madman, a fanatic, perhaps, for every man who willingly relinquishes the present life for the future one is, in the eyes of worldly men, a madman and a fanatic.

"Evans! I will not say I believe you, or that I disbelieve you. It is too solemn a thing for any man to come between you and your fate, but if you wish your account of the woman's death to seem a true thing to me, you must tell me this: how did you come by these things?" I pointed to the springs that lay between him and me. "Was it with the connivance, or in the knowledge of any other person that they came into your possession?"

He answered hastily, "No, sir, it was not by any man's help or any man's leave or any man's knowledge." Then he hesitated and a look of shame came into his face. "I will confess, sir, that it was the act of a blackguard in me to act as I did, and one—one"—he went back to his Bible phraseology—"and one of little faith for me to copy them and make these things as I did."

I easily guessed his meaning. I guessed that James Price had employed him to help him in the fashioning of this apparatus, and that he, being a clever workman at his trade, borrowed the idea and had perhaps purloined some of the new alloy to make a pair for himself.

"You need not make a secret of the matter to me. Mr. Price has shown me his apparatus and told me of the use he had put it to."

The blacksmith looked at me with astonishment.

"That being so, I won't keep the secret any longer which I have faithfully kept till now. I did help Mr. Price to

make them. It's a delicate job, and it takes two to weld some of the adjustments. He made no secret to me of what he was at, and, when he tried them, scores of times, in his walled garden, I watched him, and he would go back to his workshop and strengthen a bolt or set a spring, or a spiral, right. Mr. Price has a winning way with us and we do as he bids us. I've no kind of feeling against him even now, though he did win my poor sweetheart away from me. I had no call, or claim, to do him harm on her account, for he won her fairly from me, and told me honourably, as man to man, that he meant to marry her."

How simple and mean and unromantic are life's most seemingly terrible and mysterious tragedies! To a whole countryside it had been an event nothing less than supernatural; to me a deep problem of life, fraught with fearful possibilities and full of contradictory circumstances, drawing me now to one side with my reason, now to the other with my human instincts and personal intuitions: to Dr. Solander, the man of science, the strict reasoner and logician, who had investigated all the details and circumstances of the event with wonderful patience and mastery of scientific methods, to Dr. Solander it meant the condemnation of an innocent man as the author of the crime.

Now, I had suddenly been brought almost by a series of chances, hardly of my own seeking, to this poor, tame, commonplace solution of the problem. A young and promising life had been ended in a moment by a mere accident, by a fortuitous concurrence of mean circumstances in which she herself, James Price, and William Evans were contributing agents—blameworthy agents, perhaps, in some degree—but no one of the three more worthy of blame than the other, and none certainly of the three by any law, devised by man or prompted by God's Equity, guilty of a grave crime, or deserving of legal punishment of any kind.

What was I to do? Deliver this man to the justice of his

country? Expose this poor, ignorant, innocent man whom I, holding the threads of the case in my hand as no one else ever could, or would, hold them, knew to be virtually innocent. Was I to give this man up to the chances of a trial by a stupid jury of his peers, and a law-wearied judge, with evidence to deal with collected by police who had already amply proved their incompetence?

If, knowing what I did, I failed to give William Evans up to the mercies of the law, I should of course myself be guilty of an offence against the law. I suppose Englishmen's regard for law and order may be shocked if I say that I never had the remotest intention of betraying Evans's confession to the nearest policeman! My excuse, if I am blamed by Englishmen, is that I am a Welshman. But I don't believe that I shall be blamed either by Saxon, or by Celt. There is a higher law than that administered in our law courts, and ethics above those dictated by the belted policeman. In our conscience we all abide by that law and those ethics, and by no other.

"William Evans," I said, "I have not the presumption to interpret between you and your God, but between you and man I can interpret. I believe what you tell me—not only because of the words you have used and the repentance that I see in you, but because all you say is confirmed by other things that I know and by what I have heard of you yourself. You believe that it is only a question between you and your Judge in Heaven and that your duty is only to your God; but your duty is to man also."

He listened to me, dazed. Yet I could see a gleam of hopefulness in his poor bewildered eyes—as of one whose plea has found acceptance with his fellow-man—who, confessing the worst he has done, has the comfort of seeing human eyes not turned from him in abhorrence.

"My duty, sir," he said, "is to surrender myself to justice—is it not?"

"I think not. You have surrendered yourself to the justice of your God. Let that suffice!"

He looked at me as one suddenly reprieved.

"Listen to me, Evans. Dinah Morris's death is not a crime in the eyes of the people here, as you know. It is for them the act of the supernatural being that you and James Price have pretended to be, but in one man's eyes it is not you who are guilty of the girl's death, but James Price."

Evans still looked at me wondering. "Who is that man, sir?"

"Dr. Solander. And your duty to your God and to your neighbour is to clear James Price's character to Dr. Solander."

"Yes, sir," said the blacksmith. "To be sure I will. When must I do it, sir?"

"At once. We will leave these things here and hide them again where you have hidden them."

I replaced the apparatus that had had so large a part in the tragedy in its hiding-place, and Evans and I together set to work to lower the great stone to its former position. It descended like the cover of a chest on its hinges.

"Take up the crowbar, Evans, and show me the way you take out of the wood. I am not sure I could find it again."

Evans took up the bar and looked at me with a strange expression in his face. Had a sudden criminal impulse come to his dull brain to make an assault on the only man who knew his secret, now that he had the means in his hand, and thus rid himself for ever of the peril he stood in? One glance at Evans's simple, honest face was enough to tell me I had nothing to fear.

He began to stammer out some sort of thanks.

"Well, Evans, what are you thanking me for?" I asked.

"Because you have trusted me, sir, and made me feel

that I am not a castaway and a criminal and an outcast from the face of men for the thing I have done."

The Welsh peasant is a queer bilingual creature, he has the language of the fields, of the farmyards, of the bar-parlour and the workshop, poor, mean, and limited, for his everyday talk, and the language of the chapel and the meeting-house and the Bible itself to express his deeper and more vital thoughts.

"To be sure, Evans, I think you were a bit of a fool to try to walk in your better's footprints, and a bit of a pilferer to borrow his ideas and steal his property, but I don't call you and I don't consider you a criminal; so shoulder your bar—we won't leave it to help you, or any one else, to lift the stone again—and show me the way out of the wood and to Dr. Solander's home."

"Shall I leave it outside, sir?" said Evans, when I rang at the front door of the Dower House.

"By no means, bring it in, the Doctor will like to see it."

Dr. Solander was in what he calls his museum workshop, a long, low room with all the appliances to help his work in the various departments of science which he follows. Stuffed specimens of lizards, fishes and snakes, stood in glass cases against the walls; bats, owls and hawks, with full-stretching wings, were suspended on wires in mid-air from the blackened rafters in the ceiling. Ancient pages torn from illuminated missals and breviaries, with a hundred other rare and curious objects, hung in black frames upon the walls, while innumerable shelves and glass cabinets were crowded with skeletons of small animals, fossil bones, bits of Roman pottery, and fragments of ancient marble altars and milliary columns.

On tables under the light of windows were set retorts, alumbics, and crucibles, while furnaces of strange shape,

their air-holes and stoking doors gaping like open eyes at the visitor, stood in the room corner.

Into this queer room, the talk and terror of the people for ten miles round, I introduced Evans.

"Here, Dr. Solander," I said, with no further introduction, "is the man who is responsible for the death of Dinah Morris."

The true *savant* never indulges in surprise.

Dr. Solander, in a long crimson dressing-gown, wearing a black skull cap, was sitting at a table crowded with papers and specimens, his spectacles on his nose and a magnifying glass in his hand. He laid down his glass, raised his spectacles to his forehead, and contented himself with asking quietly,—

"You are sure of your facts?"

"Quite," I said; "and if you will allow me to leave you together for ten minutes, Evans will tell you his story from beginning to end—and how, by a queer accident, we came together, just now, near the old limekiln in the Moor Field. He will tell you what passed between us."

Dr. Solander bowed assent, smiled at me pleasantly, but continued to express not the faintest surprise at the strange turn things were taking.

"Don't go too far," he said hospitably, "and I recommend a turn or two in the botanical garden, in front of the windows. You will find it very interesting."

I can't say I did. Dr. Solander's botanical garden was a walled enclosure with rows of plants (mostly withered). Some of them had run to seed, and all grew, or tried to grow, in little raised beds bordered by innumerable narrow paths. There were shrubs, some of them evergreen, some bare of leaves, and every plant and shrub was marked by a huge white label with Latin names in black lettering. Not the ghost of a flower was visible anywhere. The innumerable mound-like beds, the great monumental-looking labels,

gave the place the look of a botanical cemetery in which lay, dead and buried, all the sweet bloom and blossom that lovers and poets have ever dreamed and sung about. *Savants* have queer ideas of interest for the lay mind!

When the watch told me that a quarter of an hour had passed I knocked at the museum door.

"Evans," said the Doctor, "has told me everything, and of the judgment you have arrived at in the matter. It is of course absolutely against the law, as you probably know. It is the compounding of a felony, and so forth, but I need not say that, with the facts before me, I entirely concur in the view you take." He turned to the blacksmith. "William, go back to your forge and get to your work and look on all that has happened as a bad dream."

The Doctor held out his hand. Evans held out his, timidly, and Dr. Solander grasped it with a firm hold, while he spoke.

"Now," said the Doctor, "say this after me, Evans:—If ever again I drink a drop of strong drink—"

"*If ever again I drink a drop of strong drink—*" repeated the blacksmith.

"May the Lord hide the light of His countenance from me—"

The response of the criminal came in lower tones :—" *May the Lord hide the light of His countenance from me—*"

The Doctor went on in the same even solemn tone :—

"If I fall away from righteousness may my hidden and repented sin rise up before me, and may the faces of my brother men darken when I pass by, and their voices never cease day and night from cursing me."

The blacksmith did not hesitate to repeat the terrible words, but he trembled as he repeated them.

"*If I fall away from righteousness may my hidden and repented sin rise up before me, and may the faces of my brother men darken when I pass by, and their voices never cease, day and night, from cursing me.*"

Solander had kept the blacksmith's hand grasped in his while he said these words, and the look in the Doctor's eyes was more stern and his voice more awful than any look or voice I have seen or heard in mortal man.

Then suddenly the eyes, fixed on the poor man's contrite face, grew softer. The sternness of expression relaxed, and his voice changed. He said kindly, "Good-bye, William, and may God help you and speed you!" Evans departed, and we were left alone.

"Will he keep straight?" I asked.

"Yes," said Solander, "he will. He has had such a frightening as will last his lifetime. He is a good-hearted fellow with his weak head turned by James Price and his performances. He has gone back to his religion within the last two or three days, and he will be steady for the rest of his life."

After a while Solander smiled in the way that I knew betokened a not ungenial cynicism. "Do you remember, Morgan, that I told you that men of science were no better than fools when they get away from their books and their dead specimens and out of their laboratories?"

"No," I said, "I don't remember your saying that."

"Well, or words to that effect? Anyhow, that was my meaning. This is my domain," he swept his hand round the museum, "outside it, I am an ignoramus. I told you so. I told you I could reason correctly from the facts, but, then, where human affairs are concerned you never do have all the facts. I led myself astray, and I led you astray. I told you, however, that I mistrusted myself. I did not do so because I had any suspicion that I had made a mistake, but I mistrusted myself because I had often gone wrong before, when the personal equation has been concerned. That is why I told you to finish what I had begun. Something whispered to me all the time that Price could not be

guilty, but my logic told me he was. We *savants* fear that warning voice that speaks to us outside the facts and impairs our conclusions from them. I saw you were Price's friend, and that his case would not suffer in your hands, so I told you all I knew against him, and was curious to see what you would make of it. I saw that it was only your reason and logic that made Price a criminal to you, and that the same 'something' that whispered to me, spoke out louder still to you, and I knew I was doing the fair thing by your friend in handing over the case to you. I did the right thing in mistrusting myself, who am only a *savant*, and trusting you, who are a man of the world as well as a journalist—"

"Come, Dr. Solander, you are doing me more than justice and yourself a good deal less. What could I have done without you? You marshalled all the facts, you discovered the secret of the Flying Man, you did what I never could have done, you read out the history of what had happened in the lane on the night of the girl's death from the marks in the mud."

"Only I read it wrongly."

"You read it quite correctly, only we drew wrong conclusions from the reading. What could I have done without you? Nothing; and what, after all, did I accomplish of my own initiative? Nothing again. I only happened to stumble on Evans's hiding-place."

Solander questioned me as to my interview with Price. I told him all. I told him I had come to have entire confidence in Price's innocence before I left his house, so frank and open had he been with me, so exactly the same honest, genial, kindly fellow I had always known him. I felt he was innocent all the time that there was this weight of evidence against him, quite strong enough to make any jury bring him in guilty. I should, however, have left him in a dilemma between my understanding and my intuition

had it not been for the tiny dot of red mud on the iron sole of his spring heels.

"Ah," said the old man, much pleased, "you thought to find grey mountain limestone mud, and instead you got the coloured clay of the old red sandstone from the valley below. Well argued and well concluded! Yet you probably know no more of geology than poor Evans."

"I fancy not so much."

"Morgan," said Dr. Solander presently, "I have done a good deal of injustice to your friend James Price—not now alone with my infernal scientific syllogisms, but with my old-world prejudice of a man of the old order fighting with the new. What shall I do to make amends?"

"Cultivate Price's acquaintance," I said. "You and he are the only educated and enlightened people in the parish. You'll like each other."

"You are right, my dear Morgan. I will do that very thing."

It was in going up to town that I wrote the best thing in journalism I ever accomplished. If I had not long left the pleasant, uphill path of journalism, I should not venture to say, as I do say, that there was almost everything in my article that newspaper editors and newspaper readers desire—except news. There was picturesque description, points about the manners and habits and talk of the Welsh natives, the mystery of the Flying Man, as seen from their point of view, and a great deal of vague talk as to the mysterious fate of poor Dinah Morris—but my report contained nothing, or next to nothing, of the facts of the plain and simple narrative which, only after a long lapse of years, I have seen my way to give you now.

Nevertheless, my Editor was greatly pleased, and perhaps I should have mounted some way up the ladder of journalistic success had I not adopted the detective career.

My visit to Pontregiddion led to a friendship and a delightful correspondence with Dr. Solander. Here is a bit from a letter he wrote some two years after the events here recounted:—

“Evans, you will be glad to hear, has turned entirely from his former evil ways and evil company. He is now a very regular attendant at chapel in the village. About a year after you left, I thought well to remove any possible temptation from his path, and I made my way to the old limekiln in the Moor Field and abstracted his spring heels. I had all the difficulty in the world to hit upon the path you had found, and, having found it, to push my way through an additional year’s growth of the jungle of furze and larch. You and Evans on that memorable afternoon had evidently not replaced the earth very carefully round the stone, for the water had found its way into the hole, and the iron-work of the spring heels was covered with rust—the leather portion soaked and ruined. I brought the apparatus home, cut off the leather attachments, and hung the springs up in my museum. They look so like the many bits of mediæval ironwork, armour, instruments of torture, and so forth, displayed in my museum, that I thought well to put a label on them to the following effect, in *savant’s* dog Latin: *Machina, seu apparatus attributus fabuloso ‘homini volitanti,’ aliter nominati Johanni cum calcibus prosilientibus (vulgo ‘Spring-heeled Jack’)*. *Tempore forsitan circa A.D. 1500.*

“It was not long after I had hung the sham antique on my walls that James Price paid a third or fourth visit to me in my museum, in the contents of which he takes a great interest. His eye almost immediately fell upon the familiar outline of the spring heels. He left his chair at once and read the label to himself.

“‘Hulloa, what the deuce is this?’ he called out. ‘Odd I never saw it before!’

“I pretended to think he could not understand my dog

Latin, and proceeded to translate, 'Apparatus ascribed to the mythical Flying Man, commonly called "Spring-heeled Jack." Date probably about 1500.'

"'But, I say, you know, Solander, it's the most extraordinary coincidence in the world, but . . . well, you know you saw mine in Pontregiddion Castle, and here is this fellow 400 years ago hitting upon the very same idea . . . How do you account for it?'

"I was not going to account for anything—I was not going to betray Evans even to so good a fellow as James Price.

"'History,' I said, in my most solemn scientific manner, 'History, my dear Price, is always repeating itself.'"

THE MURDER AT JEX FARM

THE MURDER AT JEX FARM

CHAPTER I

CHARLES JEX

INSPECTOR MORGAN and I were sitting over the fire one particularly cheerless winter night at my lodgings in Duke Street.

The Inspector had brought with him a thick bundle of documents. He threw them on the table between us as he came in.

As usual, our talk had fallen upon the art, or science of crime detection.

"Do you remember," asked Morgan, "my once saying that the first thing a clever criminal does is to try his best to block the way of the man who has to follow up the track of his crime?"

"I shall do that myself," said I, "if I ever commit a serious crime."

"Of course you would, so should I, and so, I suppose, would any man with his senses about him. Well, that is just what a man coming green to detective work is apt to forget. I came near to forgetting it myself when they sent me down to Jex Farm to inquire about the murder there. You must remember the case, for it made a great stir at the time."

"I hope you are going to tell me all about it, Morgan. One does not carry these things in one's head. One big crime gets mixed up with another."

"I came here meaning to tell you the whole story," said the Inspector, taking hold of the bundle of papers and untying the knots of red tape which bound them together.

"Are these documents in the case?" I asked.

"Plans and reports, and cuttings from newspapers, but I am only going to ask you to look at some of them."

"If I am not mistaken, Morgan, the papers spoke very handsomely of your conduct of the Jex Farm case."

"They did, but they had little reason to. If they had known all the facts as well as you will presently know them, they might have handled me differently. It is wonderful what the papers do get to know, but, naturally, they can't see things from the inside as we can."

"Well, Morgan, get to the story. I want to hear it."

"There is not much of a story to tell, so far as the outside facts were concerned. It is only the inside working of things that made it interesting. A young girl had been found lying at the orchard gate of the farm, 37½ yards from the house, dead, with three pistol bullets in her head. Suicide was out of the question, the three wounds and the three bullets precluded that, and there was no pistol about. Moreover, it was not in evidence that the girl had any cause for despondency. There was no reason whatever for her taking her life. But then, again, she was not known to have an enemy.

The Inspector took out a newspaper from the bundle of documents, docketed *Jex Murder Case*, and handed it to me. I read as follows:—

"MURDER IN SURREY.—Jex Farm, one mile from the village of Bexton, in Surrey, was the scene of a terrible and mysterious crime, on the evening of Wednesday last. A

young unmarried lady of the name of Judson, a niece of Mrs. Jex, the widowed owner of Jex Farm, was found murdered, late on Wednesday night, just inside the orchard gate of the farm, and within a stone's throw of the house. There were no signs of a struggle, but Miss Judson's gold watch and chain were missing. The crime must have been committed at late dusk on Wednesday evening, 17th inst. (October). It is singular that no sound of firearms was heard by any inmate of the house; and the crime was not discovered till the family were about to meet at supper, when Miss Judson's absence was noticed.

"After waiting awhile and calling the name of the young lady in vain, the night being very dark and gusty, young Mr. Jex and the farm-labourers started out with lanterns. They almost immediately came upon the dead body of the unfortunate young lady, which was lying on the walk just inside the orchard gate, and it is stated that the first discoverer of the tragedy was Mr. Jex himself. It adds one more element of gloom to the fearful event when we add that it is rumoured in the neighbourhood that Mr. Jex, the only son of the lady who owns the farm, was engaged to be married to the victim of this terrible tragedy.

"No clue has yet been obtained. It is clear that the motive of the crime was robbery—the young lady's valuable gold watch and chain were missing—and it is supposed in the neighbourhood that, as the high road runs within twenty yards of the scene of the tragedy, the perpetrator may have been one of a very rough set of bicyclists who were drinking at the Red Lion at Bexton in the afternoon, and who were seen, at nightfall, to retrace their journey in the direction of Jex Farm. We understand that Inspector Morgan, the well-known London detective, has been despatched from Scotland Yard to the scene of the murder. Inspector Morgan is the officer whose name has recently attained considerable prominence in connection

with the successful discovery and conviction of the perpetrator of the great jewel robbery at Balin Abbey.

"Rather penny-a-⁴lining and wordy," observed Mr. Morgan as I finished reading the paragraph aloud, "but barring the too-flattering allusion to myself, on the whole, a fair enough account of the facts.

"I found that it was young Mr. Jex himself who supplied the information about the bicyclists. He had been shooting rabbits at an outlying farm of his own a couple of miles beyond Bexton, and, stopping to get a glass of beer at the chief inn there, found himself surrounded in the bar by a group of rowdy bicyclists. The Surrey countryman generally dislikes the cycling Londoners who travel along the roads of his county in extraordinary numbers. Mr. Jex had noticed that these men, instead of continuing their journey towards London, had turned again in the direction of Jex Farm. If they repassed the Lion at Bexton, they must have done so at night, for they were not seen again.

"Mr. Jex is a fine young man with good looks, a little over thirty years of age, six foot one in height, a sportsman, and popular in the neighbourhood. But I will confess at once to you that the ways and manners of the man did not find much favour with me. However, he seemed very ready to give me every assistance in his power. He is resolved, he says, to bring the villains to justice.

"His mother is a kind and motherly old lady, rather infirm in health and slightly deaf. She herself gave me to understand that she fully approved of the approaching marriage of her son. I gather in the neighbourhood that Mr. Jex, like so many of his class, has been very hard hit by the prevailing agricultural depression, and that his proposed marriage with his cousin, Miss Judson, an orphan, with a considerable fortune of her own, was something of a godsend to himself and his family.

"My written orders from headquarters had been to instal

myself in the house, if I could obtain an invitation, in order the better to unravel the facts of the crime, and I was to take my full time in the investigation. I showed my instructions on this head to Mrs. Jex and her son, and was by them at once cordially invited to consider the farm my home for the time being. I thought it best to leave my two subordinate officers to do outside work and hear and report outside rumours. They put up at the Lion at Bexton.

"It was a somewhat delicate situation, and I put it plainly to each of the inmates of Jex Farm, to Mr. Jex, to his mother, and to a young lady on a visit to them, Miss Lewsome. I was a detective officer, I told them, on a mission to detect a great crime. Though I was a guest at the farm, I was bound, as a police officer, to make a minute inquiry into everybody's conduct since, and before, the murder. They must not take it amiss if I was particular and even impertinent in my questions, and vexatious in my way of putting them.

"The reasonableness of all this was apparent to them all, and I at once began my investigations at the farm and outside it.

"The first person I interviewed was young Mr. Jex himself. Now, I repeat that I did not quite like young Mr. Jex's manner. Some witnesses are too shy and too holding back, and others a good deal too forward, not to say impatient. Jex was of this class, and I was a little sharper with him in consequence than I should otherwise have been. On the 17th he told me he had returned from shooting at his farm on the other side of Bexton, and he stopped on his way home for a drink at the Red Lion.

"'At what time?' I asked.

"'It was growing dusk,' said Jex. 'I should say it was within a few minutes of half-past five or getting on for six; three men were drinking at the bar, bicyclists; I was thinking

they would be overtaken by night; I did not like the look of those men.'

"'Never mind the bicyclists, for the present, Mr. Jex. You stayed some time in the bar?'

"'An hour or more.'

"'Did you meet any one you knew at the Lion? Any neighbours?'

"'Yes, I met James Barton and—'

"'Don't trouble yourself with their names just now! You met friends who can speak to your being at the inn?'

"'I did.'

"'That will do. I want to get to the dates. At about 6.30 you started for home?'

"'It was exactly on the stroke of seven, by the clock of the Lion.'

"'You had no doubt taken a glass or two of ale?'

"'No, I took a glass of whisky and water.'

"'Or two?'

"'I took two glasses.'

"'You took two glasses of whisky and water, good; and then you set off for the farm? Was your man still with you?'

"'What man?'

"'The man who carried your game, or was it a boy?'

"'I had no man, or boy, with me. I had brought three rabbits in my pocket, and these I left as a present to Mrs. Jones of the Lion.'

"'You were carrying your gun, of course?'

"'Of course I was.'

"'Was it loaded?'

"'Yes, but I drew the charges as I neared home.'

"'You noticed nothing unusual as you came in?'

"'Nothing.'

"'Yet you passed within a yard of the orchard gate where the poor girl must have been lying dead?'

" 'I did, of course, but it was pitch dark under the trees. I saw nothing but the lights in the parlour windows from the time I opened the gate out of the road.'

" 'And coming along the road from Bexton you did not notice, or hear anything?'

" 'Yes, I saw the lanterns of three cyclists coming towards me when I had got only a few hundred yards from the Lion. I never saw men travelling faster by night; they nearly got me down in the road between them.'

" 'Were they the men who had been drinking at the Red Lion?'

" 'I couldn't see, it was too dark. They never slackened speed; I just felt the swish and wind of their machines as they shaved past me.'

" 'You noticed nothing else on the road home?'

" 'Yes, I thought I heard some shots far away—poachers, I thought at the time—in Squire Watson's woods.'

" 'How many shots?'

" 'Three.'

" 'Close together?'

" 'As close as I speak now: one—two—three.'

" 'Was this long after you met the cyclists?'

" 'He took a moment to think. 'Come, Mr. Jex, you can't want time to answer such a simple question?'

" 'It was some time before I met them.'

" 'How far might it have been from the Lion when you heard the three shots?'

" 'A matter of half a mile or so.'

" 'Then it was *after* you met the cyclists?'

" 'No, it was before.'

" 'It was *after*, for you told me just now you met them a few hundred yards on your way home, and now you say you heard the shots when you were half a mile on your way home. Half a mile is not a few hundred yards; half a mile is 880 yards.'

"Mr. Jex seemed puzzled.

"You are too sharp on a fellow !' he said.

"I had need to be, perhaps, Mr. Jex,' I answered.

"Now, Mr. Jex,' I said, 'there is another point on which I am afraid I must question you.'

"I guess what it is,' said he ; 'go ahead. You mean about me and Miss Judson ?'

"That is so, about Miss Judson and yourself. You were engaged to her ?'

"I was.'

"Had the engagement lasted long ?'

"A month.'

"And she had been two months your mother's guest at the farm ?'

"Going on for three.'

"And there was nothing to stand in the way of your wishes ?'

"I don't understand what sort of thing you mean.'

"Well, any misunderstanding between you—quarrels, you know ?'

"Oh, lovers' quarrels ! They don't amount to much, do they ? We had the usual number, I suppose.' (This is a queer, indifferent sort of a lover, I thought.)

"Well, even a lovers' quarrel has a cause, I suppose—and it's mostly jealousy ; perhaps there was some neighbour you did not fancy the look of ?'

"God bless you, no ! Miss Judson hardly ~~knew~~ the neighbours.'

"Or some old London friend the young lady may have had a liking for once ?'

"Couldn't be,' said Jex positively. 'Because Mary only had one friend. She had been engaged to him, and she threw him over. She fancied me better, you see. She told me all about him. She told me everything, you know.'

“‘ Ah, I suppose women always do ! ’

“‘ They do when they care for a fellow,’ said Jex warmly.

“The man’s way of talking of the poor dead girl grated upon me most unpleasantly.

“‘ Well, perhaps they do, Mr. Jex, but you see, here’s a mysterious crime, and I want to find a motive for it.’

“‘ Who could have a motive ? ’ asked Mr. Jex.

“‘ Possibly a disappointed rival—from London.’

“‘ Why, man,’ said Jex, ‘ I tell you it couldn’t be ; the man I spoke of is in New Zealand—thousands of miles away. I tell you the motive was robbery. Why ! wasn’t the girl’s gold watch and chain taken ? ’

“‘ That might be a blind, Mr. Jex,’ said I, looking him straight in the face ; ‘ it’s a common trick, that.’

“‘ Oh, nonsense ; we all agreed at the inquest it was robbery, and we fastened it on to those three cyclists I saw at the Lion, coming back along the road, hot-foot, just in the nick of time to do the trick.’ Don’t you go wasting your time, Mr. Morgan, over rivals, and rot of that kind ! ’

“I let this very positive gentleman run on, but I thought well presently to throw a little dash of cold water over his cock-sureness.

“‘ Mr. Jex,’ I said, ‘ do you remember that at the inquest the county police put in plaster casts of all the footprints found next morning round about where the body had lain ? ’

“‘ Well, what if they did ? ’

“‘ Only that I’ve just compared those footprints with the bootprints of the inmates of this house, and the marks correspond with the boots worn by the three labourers at the farm, and—by yourself.’

“This seemed to stagger him a bit.

“‘ Of course,’ he said, ‘ we made those marks when we brought the body in.’

“‘ I know that,’ I said.

“‘And one country boot,’ said Jex, ‘is just as like another as one pea is like another.’

“‘Not quite so like as that, Mr. Jex, and did you ever know a cyclist to ride his machine in hobnailed boots? There was no single footprint in or near the place but what had heavy hobnails showing. So you see, the murderer could not be one of your bicyclists.’

“Jex kept silence for a minute, and he went rather pale, as I watched him.

“‘The man who committed this murder, Mr. Jex,’ I said, ‘never wore a cyclist’s shoe or boot.’

“‘I’ll tell you what,’ said Jex, after a longish pause, ‘we’d trampled down the ground a good bit all round; we must have trampled out the murderer’s footprints.’

“‘It’s just possible,’ I said, ‘but not likely that he shouldn’t have left a square inch of shoeprint anywhere. However, that is of no matter to me at present. I’ve another bit of evidence that I’ll work out first.’

“‘A clue?’ asked Jex, eagerly. ‘What is it?’

“‘Well, Mr. Jex, you’ll excuse me for not mentioning it just at present. You’ll know soon enough.’ I gave him a moment to think over the matter, then I went on,—

“‘Now, sir, I should like to ask you one or two more questions, if you’re quite agreeable.’

“‘Fire away,’ said Jex, regaining his assurance. ‘I’m here to answer you.’

“‘I’m told you used to meet Miss Judson on your return from shooting, or what not, at the orchard gate leading out of the flower garden?’

“‘That’s so.’

“‘At nightfall?’

“‘Yes, as it grew from dusk to dark.’

“‘Might she be expecting you there on the 17th, just as night fell?’

“‘Likely she might.’

“‘But about that time you were drinking in the bar-parlour of the Lion?’

“‘Well, if you call two small goes of whisky and water after a long walk, drinking, I was.’

“‘The landlady is an old friend of your mother’s, I’m told?’

“Jex laughed. ‘Whoever told you that, told you wrong; my mother does not particularly cotton to Mrs. Jones.’

“‘What! the two old ladies don’t hit it off?’

“‘Who told you that Mrs. Jones was an old lady?’ said Jex. ‘She’s a young widow, and a very pretty one into the bargain.’

“‘Then that accounts,’ said I, ‘for the present of rabbits, eh?’

“Jex winked. ‘Decidedly I don’t like this young man.’

CHAPTER II

MAUD LEWSOME AND HER DIARY

I HAVE mentioned a fourth inmate at Jex Farm at the time of the murder, in the person of Miss Maud Lewsome, a young lady friend of Miss Judson's, and a distant cousin of hers, but no blood relation of the Jex family. Miss Lewsome had come as a friend of Miss Judson, and had resided at the farm some five or six weeks. She is a tall, dark, handsome girl, gentle and reserved in manner, but, as I should judge, extremely intelligent. I hear that her profession in life is the literary one, but whether in the way of novel-writing, or journalism, I am not told. She had also been for a short time on the stage. I have, as yet, had hardly any conversation with Miss Lewsome, so overcome is she with the nervous shock of the tragedy of which her dearest friend has been the victim.

I need not reproduce here at any length the evidence of the country surgeon who made the *post-mortem*, as given at the inquest. It was to the effect, that death had resulted from three bullet wounds in the side of the head, one just behind the ear and two just above it. The shots must have been fired from the distance of some few yards, for there was no burning or discoloration of the skin. That they must have been fired in rapid succession was evident from the fact of the three wounds being within a circle whose diameter was not more than three inches in length. The charges of powder, in the doctor's opinion, must have been light, for, after passing through the walls of the skull, there was little penetration. The bullets, all three, had been extracted—very small round leaden bullets hardly bigger

than large peas, and not of the conical shape used in revolvers of the more expensive kind. Death must have been instantaneous, for the bullets were all three found buried in the brain, one still spherical, the others flattened by contact with bone.

Now, it is obvious that this circumstance increases the difficulty connected with the fact that no one at the farm, neither Mrs. Jex nor Miss Lewsome, nor any of the labourers or female servants, who were indoors and at supper at the time, had heard the sound of firearms. It is true that on the evening of the 17th half a gale of wind was blowing from the north-west, and the orchard, where the fatal shots were fired, is nearly south of the house. All doors and windows were closed, the night having turned cold and rainy, but the sitting-room faces the south-east, and, though a tall yew hedge interposed, it was difficult to understand how three pistol shots, fired less than forty yards away, should not be audible by the inmates of the room. Was Mrs. Jex hard of hearing? I asked her. Only very slightly so, she declared. Had she heard positively nothing? Nothing but the roaring of the wind in the chimney and, every now and then, the rattling of the windows. Was she absorbed in reading, or talk? No, she was knitting by the fireside. Miss Lewsome had been writing at the table all the evening. From time to time, Mrs. Jex told me, she had talked with Miss Lewsome, who had remained with her in the sitting-room from before sundown till supper time.

I then examined Miss Lewsome by herself, as I had already examined Mrs. Jex. She corroborated what that lady had said. The wind was loud that night, said Miss Lewsome. It rattled the windows and made a great noise in the chimney. She was writing all the evening, she said.

"Forgive my curiosity," I said, "was it something that took up your attention and would have prevented your hearing a noise outside?"

She hesitated. "I was writing up my diary," she answered.

"You keep a regular diary?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "That would be quite impossible. I could not show it to any one. You must really not ask to see it."

"I am very sorry," I said, "but I am afraid you must let me read it."

"Why?"

"Because I am a police officer, and am here to inquire into the death by violence of Miss Mary Judson, and because your diary may throw some light upon the circumstances of the crime."

"How can it help you? It is all—personal; it is all about myself."

"I am not in a position to say how the diary can help me till I have seen it; but see it I must."

She still hesitated; after a pause she asked,—

"Do you really insist?"

"I am afraid I must."

She walked to her desk, opened it, and gave me a red leather-covered book, locked, and put it, with the key, into my hands.

That night I read the diary. The entries were, as Miss Lewsome had told me, scanty, that is, at first, referring to such trivial events as her arrival at the farm, for the diary began with the 'beginning of her visit. As it went on, however, the entries became fuller, and the occurrences of the six or seven days previous to the murder were narrated with considerable fulness. Before I had ended my perusal of the book, certain vague suspicions that had already formed themselves in my mind began to gather in strength and to acquire full corroboration.

Inspector Morgan picked out, from the bundle of documents, one marked: *Extracts from Miss Lewsome's Diary*. This is what he read out to me:—

October 3.—The more I see of what is going on between Charles and Mary the more I blame myself for my fatal weakness. Had I only known of their engagement! . . . why, oh, why, did they keep it a secret from me? He never should have learned my passion for him—never should have . . . oh, fool, fool that I have been! Poor Charles, I hardly blame him. In honour he is bound to poor Mary, and yet I see, day by day, that he is getting colder and colder to her and more and more devoted to me. In honour he can't break off his engagement. Poor fellow, too, he needs his cousin's money. Without it, I know, ruin stares him in the face. Were it not for that, as he says, he would break with Mary to-morrow. I believe him.

October 5.—What am I to do? The situation becomes more and more difficult every day. I see that I must leave Jex Farm, but it will break my heart, and I fear it will break Charles's too.

October 6.—Mary suspects nothing, though Charles grows daily colder to her.

October 11.—Charles and I have had an explanation. I have told him that I can bear it no longer. He said he could not break off the engagement; if he could, he would. He spoke almost brutally. "I must have Mary's money," he said. "Without it my mother, I, my sisters and brothers and the farm must all go to the devil. I hate the woman!" he cried out. "Don't—don't say that, Charles; it is so dreadfully cruel and wicked. What has poor Mary done to you?" "She has come between me and the only woman I ever loved. Is not that enough?" "But you have told me that your cousin's money must come to you

some day or other?" "Yes, but only on her death." "Don't, Charles, it is too dreadful." "Yes, isn't it? Just awful!" "Well, but—" He laughed. "Oh, women never understand business, but I see what you are driving at, my dear, a *post obit*, or a sale of the reversion of Mary's estate, eh?" I nodded, just wishing to see what his meaning was, but of course never dreaming of anything so mercenary and hateful. He went on: "Then you think, I suppose, that with the cash in hand I could break off with Mary and make amends for the wrong I have done you? Is that your little game?" At that moment I almost hated Charles. Tears of mortification came into my eyes. "Oh, Charles, don't think so meanly of me!" "Meanly! Why, hang it, it was in my own head, why should it not be in yours too? You are the cleverest girl I know, for all you are so quiet; of course you thought of it! So did I, only that cock won't fight, my girl. Oh no; I consulted a lawyer, and he upset all my little plans. 'You could not raise a penny,' says he, 'for Miss Judson might marry, and if she does and dies, her estate goes to her children, if she has any. Anyhow, you can't touch the reversion till she dies single, or dies childless.'" "Then, Charles, there is nothing for me to do but to go out into the wide world, poor, abandoned and miserable, with all the weight of my sin on me!" He looked at me a long time with a curious expression in his eyes, frowning. Then he kissed me suddenly on the mouth. "Maud," he said, "you love me—really? really? really?" "I love you," I said, "with all my heart and soul and strength." "And what?" he asked, "what would you do to gain my—my company for ever?" I made him no answer, for I did not understand him. I do not understand him now. Then he said suddenly, "If you look at me like that with those great brown eyes of yours and kiss me with those lips I would . . . by Jove! there is nothing, nothing I would not—"

Then, without another reasonable word and with an oath, he broke from me and left the room.

The last entry in Miss Lewsome's diary was made and dated on the evening of the murder, and it was no doubt written at the very moment that the tragedy was being enacted within a few yards of the farmhouse windows. This gave her written words a strange impressiveness to me. The handwriting of this last entry, I noticed, was as firm as it had been throughout—such a hand as I should have expected from what I knew and had heard of this young lady's character and temperament. She is a strikingly beautiful, dark-skinned girl, quiet and reticent in manner, impulsive and headstrong, perhaps, where her passions lead her—the diary proves this only too clearly—but gentle, repressed in all her ways and speech ; a woman, in short, with such powers of fascination as few men can resist. It is just such a girl as this for whom men commit untold follies, and just such a girl as would hold such an obstinate, dull-witted, overbearing, and vain young fellow as I see Charles Jex to be, in the hollow of her hand. These lines that follow are the last in the diary :—

“I have had a long talk with Mary to-day. Charlie has at last spoken to her about his feelings towards her and his feelings towards me. He has told her, plainly that he no longer cares for her, but that he will marry her if she insists upon holding him to his promise. The communication has come upon her as a shock, she said. She was overwhelmed. She could give him no answer. She could not believe that I had encouraged him. Did I love him? she asked me. Did he really love me? Was it not all a horrible dream? I told her the truth, or as much of it as I dared. I told her he had made me care for him long before I knew, or even guessed, there was anything between him and her. I would go at once. To-morrow I could take the

train to town and never trouble him, or her, or any one connected with Jex Farm again. Poor Mary cried—she behaved beautifully. She said, ‘Maud, you love him, he loves you. You can make him happy, I see now that I cannot. His happiness is more to me than my own. I will go away, and you shall be his wife. I will never marry any one.’ We did not speak for several minutes. I could not at first believe in such a reversal of misery. Then all the difficulties of the situation flashed upon me. My poverty; the financial ruin he had to face; the wealth that would save him. ‘No,’ I said, ‘Mary, it cannot be. You are generous, and I love you, but it cannot be! I cannot allow you to make this sacrifice.’ We talked long together, and we both of us cried a great deal. I do not think the world holds so sweet and unselfish a woman as Mary Judson. Whatever our lots are in life, hers and mine, we shall always be as sisters one to the other. To-morrow I leave Jex Farm.”

CHAPTER III

FRESH EVIDENCE

THE immediate effect upon my mind of the reading of Miss Lewsome's diary was to supply me with what had been wanting: a motive for the crime. Everything had pointed in my estimation to treachery in the household; everything seemed to be against the possibility of the crime being committed by an outsider.

Assuming thieves and murderers not connected with the household, what possible reason could have brought them to run such a risk as to shoot down an innocent, unoffending girl within forty yards of a dwelling-house, where probably several men were within call, and certainly within earshot of the sound of firearms? Then again, if a stranger had done this thing for the sake of robbery, how could he be sure that the girl would have money or a watch about her? A third and stronger reason against any stranger criminal was the fact that no stranger had left the imprint of his steps in the garden plot near the gate on the further side of which the girl had fallen. Her head, as she lay, all but touched the lower bar of the orchard gate. She had been shot down at her accustomed trysting-place with her lover, in the dusk, and under deep shadow of the trees, in the darkness of late evening. What stranger could guess she would be there? What stranger could know so well where and how she would stand as to be able to fire three following shots, through the shadows of falling night, with such deadly aim as to take effect within an inch of each other on the poor girl's temple?

I abandoned the idea of a murder for the sake of robbery. It was untenable. I scouted the theory suggested by Charles Jex, and persevered in by him with curious insistence, that the murderers were the bicyclists whom he had seen in the bar at the Lion. The murderer was an inmate of Jex Farm; of that there could be no manner of doubt; the evidence of the footprints was proof enough for that.

Who, then, was the murderer?

Before I answer that question, I put in another document, a very important piece of evidence. It is the report—the very concise and careful report—of one of the most conscientious, painstaking and intelligent provincial officers I have ever had the pleasure of doing business with, Sergeant Edwardes, of the Surrey Constabulary.

The Inspector took up the bundle, selected one paper and gave me to read—*Sergeant Edwardes' Report on the footprints near the spot where the body of Miss Judson was found at 9.35 p.m. of October 17, 189—*. It ran as follows:—

"I have counted 43 distinct human footsteps and 54 partial imprints.

"Of the 43, 24 are made by the left foot and only 19 by the right.

"Of the 54 faint or partial impressions I found 17 of the left foot and only 12 of the right, the rest are not distinctive enough to pronounce upon.

"Of the total number of the fainter footprints 18 are deeply marked in the soft clay, and others are less strongly impressed. Of the 18 that are deeply marked, 11 are made by the left foot, 7 by the right.

"This accords with what I was told subsequently—that Mr. Jex's three labourers, and Mr. Jex himself, on finding Miss Judson's body, at once took it up in their arms and bore it to the house.

"Bearers of a heavy weight, such as a dead body, walking together, invariably bear heavily upon the left foot, both those who are supporting it on the left and those who are supporting it on the right side.

"Distinguishing the bootprints by their length, breadth, and the pattern of the nail-marks upon them, I find that they are the footprints of five separate persons, all of them men. I also found, clearly impressed, the footprints of a sixth person, a woman, namely, those of the victim herself.

"There had been heavy rain in the morning of the 17th, and the soil is a sticky clay. I examined the marks at day-break on the morning of the 18th, and, as it had not rained during the night, the impressions were as fresh as if they had just been made. By my orders no one had been allowed to come near the spot where the body was found during the night. Just inside the gate of the orchard the grass has been long ago trodden away by passers-by, leaving the earth bare; and this patch of bare earth forms an area rather broader than the gate. On this area the body had fallen, and round about the spot where it had lain, I found all the footprints on which I am reporting.

"I have compared the boots worn by the labourers with the impressions near the gate. They correspond in every particular.

"In the case of the footprints of the three labourers a majority of the deeper impressions are made by the left foot.

"I therefore conclude that all three men came upon the spot only to carry away the body of the girl, and had no hand in her death.

"I argue the same from the footprints made by Mr. Jex. He also had borne more heavily with the left than with the right foot. He also, therefore, must have come on the spot only to bear off the body, and could have taken no part in the girl's murder.

“There are almost an exactly equal number of impressions, plain or faint, of the footprints of these four persons.

“There remain the footprints of a fifth person. They are the impressions of a man’s foot, but the hobnailed boots that made them, though full-sized, are of a rather lighter make than the others, and the nail-marks are smaller, the boots are newer, for the sides of the impressions have a cleaner cut, and, what is important, the impressions *of the left foot are in no case deeper than those of the right.*

“This person, therefore, clearly did not assist in carrying the body.

“The person who left these footprints is, in my opinion, the man who, on the night of the 17th of October last, murdered Miss Mary Judson.”

CHAPTER IV

MORE FACTS IN THE CASE

THE conclusion, so clearly and so logically arrived at by Inspector Edwardes, at once narrowed the field of investigation. My own inquiries bring out a still more startling discovery. The footprints alleged by Sergeant Edwardes to be those of the murderer—the almost self-convicted murderer—correspond in length and breadth, and in the number of nail-marks, twelve in the print of the left foot, ten (there being two gaps) in that of the right, with a pair of boots in the possession of Mr. Charles Jex.

I did not, however, allow this very damning fact to press too heavily against Charles Jex. It is absolutely necessary in inquiries of this very grave character to proceed with caution and deliberation. Another man might have worn the boots with intent to deception on the night of the murder. A murderer, using the devilish cunning of one who seeks to compass the death of a fellow-being without risk of detection, frequently employs such wily precautions as this.

I must first of all seek for a possible criminal among the inmates of the house. There was Miss Lewsome—but it could not have been Miss Lewsome, for, first, there was the direct evidence of old Mrs. Jex that the young lady had not left her side, in the sitting-room, from sundown till after the body was found. There is the almost stronger indirect, undesignated, and internal evidence of Miss Lewsome's diary, with the entry of this very date calmly and

ully set out at the very time the murder must have been committed.

Then, again, there are the two maids, to all seeming well-behaved, innocent, rustic girls. It could be neither of them, for their presence in the kitchen the whole evening was vouched for by the evidence of the other servants. The same applied to the three farm labourers. Not one of the servants, male or female, had left the kitchen or scullery that night. From sundown to supper-time is the hour of rest and recreation at a farm, and the day, which has been spent in work and silence, generally ends, for rustic folk, in talk and laughter. The whole five of them had been enjoying themselves noisily round the kitchen fire. Their loud talk and the blustering wind that roared about the farm chimneys on this tempestuous evening had, doubtless, prevented any one of them from hearing the three revolver shots on the night of the murder.

There remains Mr. Jex. Let us impartially examine the acts that throw suspicion upon him. Here is a man who clearly no longer loves, probably never did love, the girl whom he is about to marry for her money; who certainly does care for another woman; who has entangled himself in an intrigue with this second woman, which he may reasonably expect to come to light, at any moment and endanger his prospects of a rich marriage. Here is a man who, by the impartial evidence of that woman's diary, has indulged in vague threats against the murdered girl. Lastly, he is the only person who could benefit by her death, and who would, in fact, enjoy a welcome and immediate relief, by this event, from impending bankruptcy.

On the other hand, Mr. Jex, at the moment of the crime's commission, represented himself to have been at Bexton, or on the homeward road; but we have, of course, no exact knowledge of the hour at which Mary Judson met with her death. It clearly took place a little time before

or a little after half-past six o'clock. It might be, for all we know, a good half-hour later than Mr. Jex's return to the farm. We know nothing of Mr. Jex's movements from the time of his coming home till his entry, at nine o'clock, into the sitting-room where his mother and Miss Lewsome were awaiting him. No servant opened the door for him; he let himself in. No one saw or heard him enter. What was he doing during all the time that elapsed between his coming home and the discovery of the murder? By his own statement there was an hour and a half to be accounted for. He says he was taking off his wet things and putting on dry ones, lounging about in his bedroom, resting. It may be so, but the time so occupied seems unnecessarily long.

Charles Jex had shown himself in his talk with me, not a little of a fool, as well as (assuming his guilt) a brutal and cruel murderer. It was the very extremity of his stupidity, indeed, that almost inclined me to hope him innocent. It was almost unthinkable that such a shrewd fellow as Jex had the character of being in the country-side—keen at a bargain, quick at a joke, a hearty, jovial companion at board and bar, knowing and clever in all the signs of coming change in weather and market—should have proved so clumsy and stupid in this deadly affair; leaving traces enough and supplying motives enough to hang a dozen men. Of all men, one would suppose that a man of the fields and a sportsman, used to the marks and tracking of game, would be careful how he left the imprint of his footsteps on the soft clay. Why, that evidence alone, with time fitting and motive thrown in, was enough to bring him to the gallows!

As if this was not enough, further most damning evidence was presently forthcoming.

I will trace out for you, step by step, the history of the murder, on the assumption that Jex was the actual

murderer. As to motive I have said enough. No one but Jex had a pecuniary motive for the murder of the girl, whom he certainly did not love. The evidence of the footprints was very strong, but I have said enough of them. To touch upon the immediate cause of the girl's death, there were three small bullets found in the brain. I have already told you that these bullets were not of the conical kind usually found in revolver cartridges. They were round, and of the size that is used in the dangerous toys known as drawing-room pistols. During one of Jex's absences on the farm, I had carefully overhauled the saddle-room, where the young farmer kept his guns and ammunition. I found all his guns, cartridge-fillers, wads, shots of different sizes, arranged with the neat order that a good sportsman uses. The guns, carefully cleaned and oiled, were slung on the wall. Two were of the ordinary kind—twelve-inch bore and double-barrelled. A third was a heavy, single-barrelled, percussion-action duck gun, no doubt meant for use in the neighbouring marsh. Half a dozen old-fashioned shot pouches hung along the wall, full, or half full, of shot.

These receptacles, as every one knows, were formerly employed for muzzle-loaders, when men put in, first, the powder, then the wadding, then the shot, with a second wad over that, and finally a percussion cap on the lock nipple. One of these old-fashioned pouches caught my eye. It was of a larger size than the others. I took it from the wall, held it mouth downward over my left hand, and pressed the spring which releases a charge of shot. No shot fell into my hand, but three slugs of the size of small pistol bullets. I slapped the spring again, and three slugs again fell out. I repeated the experiment again and again, every time with the same result. The brass measure, meant to hold an ordinary charge of shot that would weigh about one ounce, held just three of the

slugs, neither more nor less, every time it was opened and shut.

It was a revelation, for the slugs were identical in size and weight with those found in the brain of the unfortunate girl!

The obvious conclusion was that the murderer had loaded his gun from this leather pouch.

There was another corollary to be drawn. The theory of three shots from a revolver was no longer tenable; it seemed clear that the fatal shot had been fired at one discharge, and from a gun. It was also certain, from other evidence, that the person who fired the shot had been one well acquainted with firearms and their use. He would have been anxious that the discharge of his gun should make as little noise as possible. A man, knowing in gun-firing, knows that, to do that, he must use a minimum of powder, with a soft paper wadding in place of the usual tightly-fitting circular wad. So, fired, the report of a gun is little louder than the clap of a man's two hands when he holds them half-curved. It was in evidence that the bullets had made but little penetration, only just enough to kill, and that therefore the charge was light. It is true that no such paper wadding as I believed had been employed further to muffle the sound of the discharge, had been found near the scene of the murder. There were further conclusions still to be drawn. The gun was heavy and unhandy. It could hardly have been used but by a strongish man. A further conclusion still was this, that for the three bullets in the charge not to scatter in their trajectory, the gun must have been held quite close to the girl's head.

It was well, though not absolutely indispensable, in order to bring home the perpetration of the crime to Jex, and in order to show that it was the deed of an expert—in order to show that his story of his hearing the three shots was a lie, invented to find a reason for the gun report, fired so close

to the house, having been unheard by its inmates—it was well, I say, to show that the noise had actually been deadened by the use of soft paper wadding.

I walked straight to the orchard gate. I placed myself where the murderer must have stood, within two or three yards of it; he must have fired point-blank at the girl, suddenly and quickly, in the half dark, before she would have had time to move. She had, probably, with her hands resting on the top rail, stood waiting for her lover. The paper wadding, or any wadding, would have flown out from the gun barrel, at an angle, more or less acute, to the line of fire, right or left of it, some four or five yards from the muzzle of the gun, and would have fallen, and must now be lying hidden in the grass across the gate, on one side or the other of the orchard path.

I searched the long wisps of grass, and, in two or three minutes, had the satisfaction of finding, half hidden among them, first one, and then a second piece of crumpled paper charred and blackened with gunpowder. Inspector Edwardes had overlooked this important piece of evidence. By the time I had spread the papers out upon a board, there was little left of them but a damp film, but enough was left of their original appearance to show that they were pieces of the county paper, taken in regularly by Mr. Jex.

The man who fired that shot therefore was a proved expert. He was one who had strong reason for not wishing the shot to be heard; and, with half a charge of powder, a light load of shot, and loose paper wadding, he had taken the very best means to effect this purpose. Who in the household was thus expert in firearms? Who, alone, could have known of the existence of the bullets in the saddle-room? Clearly, no one but Charles Jex. He had loaded the gun, too, with paper obtainable in his own house.

I had now more than evidence enough to justify Jex's arrest for the murder of Mary Judson, but I was willing to accumulate still more. I therefore contented myself with obtaining a warrant for his arrest from the magistrates at Bilford, the nearest large town, and prepared to execute it the moment circumstances should make it expedient. Jex had, for some time, shown himself to be uneasy. He shunned me ; it was clear he suspected me of having got upon the trail of the crime. I became anxious lest he should think the game was up, and try to escape from justice. I wired for two officers, and instructed them to watch the farm by night, and lay hands on the farmer if he should attempt to break away in the darkness. By day I could keep my own eye upon him. I did not let him get far out of my sight, but, careful as I was, he showed signs of knowing he was watched.

On the morning of the 22nd of October—it was my third day on this job—he came down early, dressed rather more smartly than usual, and, before breakfast, he went round to the stables. I affected not to have observed this suspicious movement, and, in the course of the morning, I accepted Miss Lewsome's invitation to accompany her on a walk to Bexton. We both went to make ready. Jex left the room at the same moment. He went towards the stables ; I was watching him from my bedroom window. I ran downstairs, prepared for what was coming, and, making my way quickly into the road, stood behind the tall, quickset hedge.

Presently I heard the hurried steps of the groom in the avenue ; in a moment more he had opened the gate wide, and as he did so, the dog-cart appeared with Jex driving his grey mare very fast. He called to his servant to look sharp, and hardly stopped the trap for the man to climb up behind. I moved quickly in front of the mare. •

“Hulloa, Mr. Jex, you're in a hurry this morning !”

"Yes, confound you, I am ; get out of my way, please, or we shall do you a mischief," and he whipped up the mare and tried to drive past me.

"Easy ! easy ! if you please." I took hold of the reins and kept a firm hold.

"Well, what is it ?" he asked.

"Going to catch a train, Mr. Jex ?"

He hesitated.

"You're in good time for the 12.10 up, you know. Going to town, perhaps ?"

"N—no—I'm not. Going to meet a friend at Lingham Junction, that's all."

"Will you take me with you, Mr. Jex ?"

"No room, Inspector. My friend and his things, and my fellow will take all there is to spare."

"Oh, leave Sam behind. I can hold your mare at the station, you know."

He muttered an oath, stupidly, but there was no way for him out of the scrape.

"Jump up, then," he said sulkily. "Sam," he called to his man, "you can go back to your horses."

I sat by his side in the cart, and we drove at a fair pace to the station without half a dozen words passing between us.

No doubt he was thinking the matter out ; so was I. I knew just what was passing in his thick head. He was devising how he might slip into the train while I stood outside, holding the horse. He forgot the telegraph. Dealing with these rustic criminals and their simple ways, is bad practice for us London officers, who have to set our wits, in town, against some of the sharpest rogues in creation. I thought, as I sat by Charles Jex, of my old friend Towers, *alias* Ikey Coggins, and I laughed to myself as I compared the one criminal with the other.

We got in good time to the station. The up-train signal only went up as we drove to the gate.

"Now, Mr. Jex, you'll be wanting to meet your friend ; shall I walk the mare about ? "

"Please to do so, Mr. Morgan," said Jex. "You might take her two hundred yards, or so, up the road. Keep her behind that outhouse, where she can't see the train passing, will you ? when it comes in. The mare is a bit nervous."

I laughed in my sleeve at the fellow's shallowness.

"All right, give me the ribbons. Hullo, you've got a bag ! "

"Only a parcel for the up-train."

"Oh, I see ; only a parcel for the up-train. Look sharp, then, and get it booked while there's time."

I looked up and down the line ; the train was not yet in sight ; there was no need for hurry. I turned the mare round and drove her slowly towards the building Jex had pointed to. I saw him watch us for a bit from the station gateway before he went in. As he disappeared I beckoned to a boy standing by.

"Here's a shilling job, my lad ! Just you walk the mare up to that outhouse, and keep her there out of sight of the train till I come back."

Then I slipped into the station, and, keeping out of sight, saw, as I fully expected I should, Jex taking his ticket.

I waited till the train was in, and just as the young farmer, bag in hand, had stepped on to the footboard of a second-class carriage, I walked up to him and laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Charles Jex," I said, speaking loud and clear, for him and the others around to make no mistake about it, "I arrest you for the murder, on the 17th instant, of Miss Mary Judson ! "

There was a crowd of ten to fifteen porters, guards, farmers, and others round us in a minute. Jex just swore once. Most criminals that I have taken this way, lose their

pluck and turn pale, but Jex behaved differently. It was clear that my move had not taken him by surprise.

"I expected as much," he said. He looked round at the people on the platform—his friends to a man, for the young farmer was a known and popular character in the neighbourhood. "Half a minute more," said he, under his breath, "and I'd have done it."

I slipped one of a pair of handcuffs over his wrist—and clicked the catch, keeping fast hold of the other iron.

"Anyhow, the game's up now," I said.

"Ay, you're right, Inspector, the game's up now, sure enough."

The crowd of his friends became rather obstreperous. I called on the station-master and his guards to stand by me, telling him and the people about, who I was.

There was a bit of a hustle, and rough talk and threats, and I tried to get the other handcuff on, but my prisoner and I were being pushed about in spite of what the station people did to help us, and I should not have managed it but for Jex himself.

He held his free hand out alongside of the manacled one. "Oh, damn it, Morgan, if that's what you want, get done with it, and let's be off out of this."

I put the second handcuff on and clicked the lock.

The sight angered his friends, the farmers standing about, and one of them shouted,—

"Now, then, boys, one more rush to goal and we score!"

"Hold on, gentlemen, if you please," I cried. "I warn you, in the King's name! This is my lawful prisoner; I'm an Inspector of Police, and I hold a warrant for the arrest of the body of Charles Jex, for murder."

They held back at this for a moment, and I hurried my prisoner through the station entrance, and the porters, guards, and station-master closed round and shut the gate in the faces of the crowd.

I never yet knew a man take it so coolly as Jex. When we got to the dog-cart, he said,—

"I guess you'll have to drive yourself, Mr. Inspector. With these damned things on my wrists, I can't."

We got in, and I took the reins and drove off fast.

We had travelled some half a mile from the station, and Jex had not opened his lips. I said,—

"So you were going to town, were you, Mr. Jex?"

"Mr. Inspector," he said quietly, "haven't you forgotten to caution your prisoner before you ask him any questions? Isn't that the law?"

He had me there, sure enough.

"I warn you," I said, coming in with it rather late, I must admit, "that any statement you make may be used against you on trial."

"That's just what I had in my mind, Inspector," said Jex, and he never uttered another word till we neared the farm.

Just as we sighted the farm buildings, I made out on the road, in the distance, a woman's figure. It was Miss Lewsome. She stood in the middle of the road, and I should have driven over her if I had not pulled up.

"What is this, Mr. Morgan?" she cried as we drove up. "Why is it you who are driving? Tell me—tell me quick."

"You'll know soon enough, Miss Lewsome. Stand aside, if you please."

"Oh! what is it? Charles, speak, for God's sake, speak!"

Jex had kept his hands under the apron; he did not say a word, but presently he held out his two wrists, manacled together, for the girl to see.

She gave a loud scream.

"O God! you have arrested him, Mr. Morgan! No, no, you can't—you—"

As she was speaking a faintness came over her; she turned from red to very pale, muttering incoherent words which we could not catch, and staggered back against a road gate.

But for the bar of the gate to which she clung, she would have fallen.

"Help her," said Jex. "Get down and help the girl. You know I can't."

"It's all right, she'll get over it. We'll let her be, and send the women to her presently," and I drove the cart the forty or fifty yards that took us into the stable-yard.

It had been my intention to lodge my prisoner, after dark, that evening, in the keeping of the county police, but events were to happen before nightfall that put a quite different face upon the whole case.

As soon as I had given the young farmer into my men's charge, with orders that one or the other was to be with him till we should give him over to the police at Bilford, I called to two of the women of the farm, and went with them to the help of Miss Lewsome.

We found her lying by the roadside, in a dead faint. A farmer's wife—a passer-by—was kneeling by her side, and trying to recall her to her senses.

"Poor thing!" she was saying. "It's only a bit of a swoond. She'll come to, if we wait a little."

In two or three minutes Miss Lewsome opened her eyes, and presently stood up, and, with our help, she walked to the house. She said nothing, in her seemingly bewildered condition, of what had happened, and presently afterwards she was induced to lie down in her bedroom, and, for the time, I saw no more of her.

In little more than an hour, however, I had a message from her through one of the farm girls. She desired to see me at once, and alone.

I found her sitting up in an armchair, pale and excited in looks, but, at first, she did not speak. I drew a chair near hers and sat down. She did not notice the few phrases of condolence I uttered. Suddenly she spoke, and I could judge what she must have felt by the strained tones of her voice.

"He is innocent, Mr. Morgan."

I said nothing. Poor girl! My heart bled for her.

"Innocent, I tell you! Innocent, and you must release him at once!"

"You must not excite yourself about this matter, Miss Lewsome. It is not a thing for a young lady to meddle with."

"Yes, but I must meddle with it! I must, I must!"

She raised her voice to a scream.

"Yes, yes, my poor girl, I know how shamefully you have been treated."

"I, shamefully treated? No, no! He has treated me so well. No one could be so good and loyal as he has been."

"Your diary, Miss Lewsome?"

"Lies, all lies, all wicked, cowardly lies, to save myself and hurt him. Yes, to hurt the only man I ever loved. Oh, I am a devil, a malignant, horrible, hateful devil! No woman, since the world began, ever schemed so hellish a thing as I schemed."

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

What should I do? I was wasting my time in listening to the raving of a love-sick, hysterical girl. I rose to leave her.

"You are doing your health no good, dear Miss Lewsome. You must see the doctor, not me; he shall give you a sleeping-draught, and you will be all right again in the morning."

"By the morning you will have gone away, and you will have taken Charles with you to disgrace, perhaps to death. No, they can't, they can't! The law can't convict him, can it?"

"It is not for me to say. The evidence is very strong."

"Very strong? But there is not a particle of evidence! There can be none!"

"If that man did not murder Mary Judson," said I,

getting impatient with her hysterical nonsense, "who did?"

She did not answer for a space of time in which I could have counted twenty, slowly; but she kept her eyes on me with a look in them that almost frightened me.

"I did!" she cried out, at last.

"Ah no! young lady, I see what you're driving at, but it won't do. No, Miss Lewsome, it's a forgivable thing, your saying this to save your friend, but I tell you, at once, it won't do."

"I murdered Mary Judson!"

I shook my head and smiled.

"I tell you, I shot Mary Judson on Wednesday night. I did it because I was a jealous, malignant devil, and hated her, and hated him."

"Quite impossible. You never left Mrs. Jex's side all the evening, from before sundown till supper-time. It's in evidence."

"She says so—she believes I did not. She dozes for an hour every evening, and does not even know that she does. I went from the room. I slipped out the moment she dozed off, and came back before she woke. Oh, I had plenty of time."

"But your footprints were not there, and Jex's were."

"I put on his boots over my own. I had often done it, in fun. I did it that day in earnest."

"Did you want to hang him?"

"I did. I hated him so—then."

"Why, in your diary you say you loved him!"

"I did; oh, I do now! But then, when she was alive, I hated them both—her and him. But you can't understand. Men can't understand women. I was mad."

"You are mad now, Miss Lewsome, if you think to save your lover by telling me these falsehoods—for you know they are falsehoods. Mind, I don't blame you for saying

what you are saying, but don't expect me, or any one, to believe you."

"I shot Mary Judson in the dusk, at the gate, with his gun! I put three little balls in it that I took from a shot-pouch in the saddle-room."

"You couldn't load the double-barrel with powder and balls, without a cartridge, and none was used."

I thought to catch her tripping in her invention here.

"I did not use the double-barrel. I used the single-barrel. I loaded it as I had seen Charles load it. I put a bit of paper over the powder, and another over the bullets, and rammed them down as I have seen Charles do, and I put a cap on as he had shown me how."

"Come now, that gun with a full charge would have .
knocked you down."

"I know it would, but I put in only half a charge."

"Stop a bit now, Miss Lewsome, and I will catch you out. I have found the paper wadding in the grass. What sort of paper was it you put in—a brown paper?"

"No, a bit of newspaper; the county paper. I tore off a bit of the *Surrey Times*."

The thing was beginning to puzzle me.

"Another question, Miss Lewsome. You say Mr. Jex is an innocent man. Then why does he attempt to run away? He tried this very day to throw dust in my eyes and go by the express to London."

"I guessed he would, and that is why I wished to get you out of his way this morning."

"Had you told Mr. Jex, then, what you tell me now?"

"No, but he suspects me—oh, I am sure he knows it is I who have done this dreadful thing!"

"If he knows that you are the real murderer and himself innocent, why did he try to escape? You see your story won't hang together, Miss Lewsome."

"Mr. Jex tried to escape, I tell you, to save me."

"But why should he put his own neck in the halter to save a guilty woman—if guilty you are?"

"Because he loves me. He would be suspected, not I."

She was certainly in one story about it all.

"Yes, he loves me so that he has run this great risk to save me from being found out and hanged."

"He told you this?"

"No, he has told me nothing, nor have I told him anything; but these last days I have guessed, by his face, that he knows. I have seen it in his eyes. Oh, he loathes and despises me now!"

I said nothing for a few moments.

"Now, Miss Lewsome, I will ask you once more deliberately, and, mind you, your story will be sifted to the utmost, and what you say now may be used against yourself in court. You tell me you shot Miss Mary Judson after sundown on the night of the 17th of October?"

"I did."

"You used Mr. Jex's gun, and you charged it yourself?"

"Yes."

"You wore Mr. Jex's boots when you went out in the dark to kill your dearest friend, and you committed this black crime in order to throw suspicion upon Mr. Jex, who was your lover?"

"Yes. Oh, I was quite mad! I can't understand it. But there was only hatred and bitterness in my heart, and I saw nothing but blood—there was blood in my eyes."

"And what was your object? What did you think would come of it?"

"Nothing, only I hated her so. I was too miserable, the time was coming near when he would marry her and leave me left alone."

"According to your first story, you were writing your lover at the time of the murder, at least immediately before. Do you wish me to believe that they are false?"

murderess, hot-handed, can sit down and write long entries in a diary?"

"It was a lie I told to take you in. I wrote that entry in the diary—all those lies, to throw dust in your eyes—in the forenoon."

"You expected nothing, then, from the murder?"

"I think I expected that perhaps Charles would inherit her money and be able to marry me, when it had all blown over."

"But why did you say, just now, that you hated him, and had committed this cruel crime to spite him? You must have guessed that you would bring him in peril of his life."

"Ah, you don't understand women. Women understand women; men never do. I tell you I felt a devil. Why did he want to make her his wife and leave me in the cold? Oh, I hated him for that; I should never have killed her if I had not so hated him."

"Surely you could not have expected him to marry a woman who had committed a murder?"

"I never thought he would guess. I never thought of all these discoveries. No one would have known, if you had not taken him up."

"But you brought that about by wearing his boots, and firing with his gun and his ammunition."

"Ah, yes, there is the pity. I did not reason; I wanted to punish him for his jilting of me. He would be in my power. Oh, I did not reason. I only felt—I only felt a vindictive devil. Have no mercy on me; I deserve everything. I hate myself!"

I got up.

"We will talk of this again to-morrow," she said, "when you are calmer."

"Yes," she said quietly, "when I am calmer."

"You will let me send for the doctor?"

"Why?"

"To give you a sleeping-draught."

"Yes, send for him; but you won't tell Mrs. Jex. She is old and feeble."

"No, I will tell her nothing to-night, at any rate—nothing of what has happened. She need not even know that her son has been arrested. He will not go from here to-night."

"Can you manage that?"

"Yes, I can manage that."

The farm servants, of course, knew that their master was in custody. I told them they were to keep it from the old lady. I sent one of them for the doctor, and when he came I bade him give a strong sleeping-draught to Miss Lewsome.

I went into Jex's bedroom. He was lying on the bed, with the handcuffs on his wrists. My two men were with him. I motioned them to leave me.

I took out my key, unfastened the irons and removed them.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I've some fresh evidence, that is all."

"Am I no longer under arrest, then?"

"Please to consider yourself in custody for the present. I have said nothing to your mother about all this. She knows nothing. Isn't that better so?"

"Much better. I'll come down to supper, to keep it up."

"I was going to ask you to."

"How is Miss Lewsome?"

"Very excited and disturbed. I've sent for the doctor to give her a sleeping-draught." Miss Lewsome has made a communication to me."

"Ay, ay." He showed no further curiosity in the matter.

The doctor came, gave Miss Lewsome a pretty strong dose of chloral, and departed, having learned nothing, by

my express orders to the servants, of what had taken place that day at Jex Farm.

One of my men remained that night in Mr. Jex's bedroom, and the other had orders to watch the house from the outside.

Miss Lewsome's absence was easily accounted for to Mrs. Jex, who was too old and feeble to be easily roused to curiosity, by a story of a chill and a headache that had obliged her guest to keep to her bedroom.

The hours after breakfast, next morning, passed slowly. No fresh developments of any kind occurred. Jex asked no questions, and I did not care to speak to him.

I waited for Miss Lewsome's awakening and deliberated as to my next step. Was her confession to be seriously acted upon? It had shaken me, but not quite convinced me, curiously supported though it was by a whole chain of circumstantial evidence. Was I bound to arrest this evidently hysterical girl, on the strength of a story which might, after all, be nothing but a tissue of cunning lies to save her lover?

I have not often been so puzzled. I have not often found the facts and probabilities, for and against, so equally poised in the balance.

Midday came and there had been no sign, or sound, of stirring in Miss Lewsome's bedroom. I sent in one of the servants and waited outside.

Presently the maid screamed and ran out of the room, pale and speechless.

"What is it?" I asked, rather fearful myself. "What's up now, my girl?"

"Go to her, sir; go in to her quick! Oh, I don't know—I can't tell, but I'm afraid it's— Her hands are cold, stone cold, and her face is set. I can't waken her!"

She was dead—had been dead for hours—and on the dressing-table, propped against the pincushion, was a closed

letter addressed to myself. I opened it, and read what follows :—

“I, Maud Lewsome, make this dying confession. I, of my own will, no one knowing, no one advising, no one helping me, shot my friend, Mary Judson, at the orchard gate of Jex Farm. I had put on Mr. Jex's boots over my shoes in order that the crime might be shifted from my shoulders to his. I shot her across the orchard gate, in the dark, just at nightfall, when she could not see me. She was waiting for him. Perhaps I could not have done it, though I had resolved I would, but that as I came up, she said, ‘Is that you, dearest?’ Then I raised the gun and fired—seeing her only in outline against the little light still in the evening sky. She fell at once on the place where she stood, and she made no cry or groan.

“The gun gave no report hardly, but I was afraid they might somehow guess indoors it was me, and I waited a long time, not daring to go in. Presently the gate from the road was opened. I knew it was Charles Jex coming from Bexton to her, and I was glad then that I had done it. I thought he would see me if I ran into the house, so I opened the orchard gate very softly and crouched down beside Mary's dead body. He came up to the gate and called ‘Mary’ twice, but he could see nothing and went away. Then I felt quite hard and callous, but my mind was very clear and active, and I thought I would take her watch, so that people might think she had been robbed. I took it and her chain, and, coming into the garden again, I buried them with my hands, two or three inches deep, in the flower-border, near the porch and smoothed the mould down over it. Then I was afraid he would hear me in the passage, and I took off the thick boots and carried them in my hand. I could hear him in his bedroom overhead, and I took the gun to the saddle-room and the boots I rubbed dry with a cloth and laid them in a row with the others.

Then I felt I must see him, and I went up very lightly and knocked at his door and he came out in his shirt sleeves and said, in a whisper, 'How pale you are, Maud,' and he kissed me, and I kept my hands behind me lest he should see the garden mould on them, but he did not notice that, and he said again,—

"'How pale you look to-night! Have you seen a ghost?'

"And I ran back first to my room and washed my hands and looked at myself in the glass and thought, This is not the reflection of Maud Lewsome! This is the reflection of a murderess! And, in my ears, there is always the report of the gun as I fired it at Mary Judson, and, in my nostrils, the smell of the gunpowder smoke, and since then I have heard and smelt these two things day and night; but Mary's face, when I killed her, I did not see, and I am glad I did not. The doctor has given me chloral, and, presently, I shall take another double dose from a bottle of it I have, and, before morning, I shall be dead, for I cannot live after this thing that I have done. I thought I could forget it, but I cannot, and I must die. I tell the exact truth now in the hope that God may listen to my confession and my repentance, and forgive me for the awful wickedness that I have committed. I shot her with Charles's large gun; I had watched him loading it often, and I did as he did, and I put three little bullets in it that I took from the shot pouch that hangs third in the row on the wall."

The first thing I did after reading this was to call one of my men and bid him turn over the soil in the flower border close to the porch. He did so, and in my presence he found Mary Judson's watch and chain. Taking it in my hands, I carried it to Jex.

"We have found this, Mr. Jex."

"Where?"

I told him. He nodded, but said nothing.

"Will you, please, read this paper, Mr. Jex?" and I handed him that on which Miss Lewsome had written her confession.

He read the first few lines and started up.

"Good God! Has she—?"

I nodded.

"She took her own life last night."

He sank down on a chair and covered his face with his hands, but his emotion lasted for a moment only.

"Poor girl!" he said, sadly. "I expected it."

"Then you knew she had done the murder?"

He made no answer, but read calmly through the confession he held in his hand, then he gave it back without comment.

"After this, Mr. Jex, you are, of course, at liberty. I have only to apologize to you for the inconvenience I have put you to, but the evidence against you was strong, you must admit."

"You could not do otherwise, Inspector Morgan, than you have done," and he held out his right hand to me.

"I made some pretence of not seeing his action. I did not take Charles Jex by the hand."

"Except for certain formalities that I need not give you, there is no more to interest you in the case. I need only add that with such evidence before us as Miss Lewsome's confession, it was, of course, impossible to charge Jex with any part in this murder; but, remembering all the circumstances since, I have sometimes asked myself, Was the girl alone guilty, was she a tool in the hands of a scheming villain, or was she perhaps only a victim and entirely innocent? Women are, to us men, often quite unaccountable beings."

THE KIDNAPPED CHILDREN

THE KIDNAPPED CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

HOW IT HAPPENED

INSPECTOR MORGAN had one more story to tell me. "Some time ago," he began, "my chief sent for me and said, 'There is something very puzzling going on in Copplestone Gardens, and we trust to you to make it out.'"

"The kidnapped children?"

"Yes, the American millionaire's children. We have kept it out of the papers as far as we could, but they have got hold of the main facts. Sergeant Smith had the case in hand for a week, and could make nothing of it. Then we sent Inspector Podolinsky, who speaks every language like his own, to go into the millionaire's house as butler. He has put together a lot of facts, but he seems to have got into hot water, through not understanding his duties, with the under-butlers, and footmen, the housekeeper, and the chef. After a week's work, he thought it prudent to break a Sèvres jardinière in the drawing-room, and to take a month's warning from Lady Muriel Ericssen.

"Here are his notes. Read them at your leisure. Here is Sergeant Smith's report, rather less to the point. He worked outside the house."

"Is the Inspector still working out his month as butler?"

"No, his services were urgently required in the great extradition case in Vienna, so, not to have to stay his full month, he pretended to be dead drunk, and was instantly kicked out of the house by Mr. Ericssen, who seems to be a very summary gentleman. Podolinsky's conduct of a case is always a little foreign and eccentric, but he is an invaluable officer, and we allow him some licence. Anyhow, we are no nearer to any clue as to the kidnapping."

"I suppose Mr. Ericssen was unaware that Inspector Podolinsky was officially at work in his house?"

"Oh, yes! Quite unaware until he had left his service. Podolinsky wished it so. I was opposed at first, but let him have his way. He is an experienced officer."

"What line do you wish me to take?" I asked.

"Your own, Inspector. We were so satisfied with your work at Balin Abbey and Jex Farm that I should like you to look through those notes of Podolinsky and Smith, and suggest a line of action of your own. Julius P. Ericssen is, of course you know, a multi-millionaire and one of the richest men in America. American millionaires are particularly apt to get their children stolen and held for ransom. It has happened to Ericssen once before, in the States, and he had to pay a hundred thousand dollars to get them back. The question is: Is it the same gang at work—come over the water—or is it British talent? Our people have never done much in that line yet, and I don't want them to begin. I want to pull the gang up short."

"I see, sir. Do they ask a big reward now?"

"Yes—an unthinkable one—quite out of the question, even for Ericssen's purse. Just two hundred thousand pounds sterling. Come, now," said my chief, "take these papers, study them, and come and tell me what you propose, in three hours' time."

My chief glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, an invariable sign with him that time is up.

I spent all the afternoon in reading up my brief. Here is an outline of what I found in it.

Julius Ericssen is supposed to possess from ten to fifty millions of dollars. His fortune varies with the success of his coups and corners. Sometimes it is probably over the fifty millions ; sometimes it is perilously near zero, but Julius P. Ericssen never loses heart and hope, and never thinks of laying by for a rainy day. He is a gambler to the core of him.

Such a man is the prey of every criminal adventurer in a country like America, where the newspapers publish every personal detail anyhow knowable about every one in the eye of the public, and invent what they don't know. I suppose no man has been so often and so successfully blackmailed as Ericssen. When the blackmailer is in league with the lower form of yellow journalist, the blackmailer is a power in the land. That, I guess, is why Julius P. Ericssen has transferred his financial operations and his home from the United States to this country. He can't stand press tyranny any longer.

I got little more than the bare facts from Sergeant Smith's reports.

Mr. Ericssen is an American of partly Swedish extraction. Three years ago he came to this country a widower with two young children, a boy and a girl, pretty, blue-eyed, fair-haired creatures, the boy nine, and the girl seven. Their mother had died a year before in America. Her maiden name was Margaret Morrissy, a name well known in the States as that of a young Californian girl of great beauty and talent, who, ten years before, promised to make a great name for herself on the American stage. She married the brilliant and good-looking millionaire in the

first height of her reputation, and, thenceforth, the theatre knew her no more, and she carried her charm, her beauty, and her intelligence into the drawing-rooms of New York.

It was about a year before her death that the two children were kidnapped for the first time. There were strong reasons for suspecting that a newly-engaged governess of the children was in league with the kidnappers. The woman was dismissed, and Miss Vachel, a young lady, distantly connected with the family of the Ericssens, took her place. Miss Vachel had been the lifelong friend of the late Mrs. Ericssen, and, like her, had been on the stage, but, unlike her friend, had had no success at the theatre. It was well known in stage-land that she and Miss Morrissy had been devoted friends, and the diversion of Miss Vachel's career from the theatre to the millionaire's schoolroom, seemed natural enough to her stage friends, but it came as a shock to the outer world.

The fact of the education of two children of tender years being confided to a young actress aroused the susceptibilities of the more conventional American public, and caused a good deal of unfavourable newspaper comment. The private affairs of great millionaires are considered public property in America, and the domestic doings of the man whose talents have diverted the dollars of the multitude into his own pocket are, by way of a sort of rough equity and justifiable reprisal, freely criticized by the printed organs of that multitude.

So unanimous was the public disapproval that some of the more personal journals thought well to break the monotony of condemnation by taking the other side, and defending the millionaire and his governess. Inquiry showed that the new governess had been a very poor actress, and that her private life was respectable to the

point of dulness. The defence of the young lady on these two grounds was almost as wounding as the attack had been. Photographs of Miss Vachel in some of the journals displayed to a critical public a face and figure as unlike the typical seductive syren of the stage as was possible—a tall, thin figure, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, a face without any of that charm which audiences look for in their favourites, a serious, intent, unsmiling mouth, and hollow eyes, with a grave outlook upon what was clearly, to their possessor, an unsympathetic world.

Sergeant Smith is not the man to enter into details of this kind. He does not consider them vital, or even to have a remote bearing upon a case. I found little of what I now set down in his report. I gathered them from the copious newspaper cuttings which accompanied the sergeant's report.

In one of them I read that Mrs. Ericssen, in her terror of a second kidnapping of her children, had induced the dearest and most trusted friend she had to take charge of and watch over her boy and girl, a task which her own failing health made daily more difficult for her. The newspaper cuttings bore evidence of the heat of the controversy which had sprung up and raged in the American press over the unfortunate Miss Vachel. Was she, or was she not, a fit and proper person to have charge of the children of the millionaire? The more reasonable and kinder-hearted public was beginning to take the side of the Ericssens, when a regrettable incident occurred. Mr. Julius P. Ericssen had, till then, respected the press of his country, "a mighty engine," as he once said in a public speech, "travelling along various roads for the good, the greatness, and the glory of our great nation."

Counting on a favourable reception from a gentleman with such sound views on a great American institution, a

reporter from a journal of world-wide circulation had called upon Mr. Ericssen for "copy," just when opinion had begun to turn in his favour on the subject of Miss Vachel.

The journalist asked a string of questions, took out a voluminous note-book, spread it on a table, and sat with uplifted pencil.

Mr. Julius P. Ericssen smiled. He said,—

"Sir, I'll tell you a little story first."

"Good!" said the journalist, smiling too, in anticipation of the kind of copy journalists love best.

"A friend of mine," began Mr. Ericssen, "amassed a large fortune in a very short space of time, and, when a very impertinent fellow asked him how he managed to do it, do you know, sir, what he answered?"

"No, sir," said the reporter. "I do not."

"My friend's answer was—'He did it by minding his own business.'"

The reporter thought he must have heard amiss, and asked, "Is that, all?"

"That is all that my friend said," replied Mr. Ericssen, "and it's just all I've got to say to you. I'll beg you to mind your own business, and let me mind mine. Good morning!"

Next day, the snub to the journalist was reported in plain terms. The plain truth, now and then, is a very piquant journalistic sauce. It appeared, in the great journal, under a three-line heading, in the boldest capitals.

INSOLENT, CYNICISM OF A MULTI-MILLIONAIRE.

OUR REPORTER GROSSLY INSULTED.

AFFRONT TO, AND DEFIANCE OF, PUBLIC OPINION.

After this Mr. Ericssen had an uneasy time. He would probably not have taken the strong line he did, had he not already made up his mind to leave a country where the sanctities of private life are daily invaded. In point of fact,

however, he did not leave for another twelve months, and, by then, his beautiful and charming wife was no more. He came to London a widower, and, in course of time, married Lady Muriel Macgruddery, the eldest daughter of the tenth Earl of Grudderworth, in the Scots peerage, an ancient and impecunious family of high local reputation and standing.

Mr. Julius Ericssen and Lady Muriel had already begun to establish themselves successfully in the social world of London when a fresh catastrophe occurred. The children, now respectively twelve and ten years of age, were suddenly and mysteriously spirited away.

My experience in detective work had already told me how important, in investigations of this kind, it is to know something of the personal habits, characters, and temperaments of the people chiefly concerned. From Sergeant Smith's report I learnt, as I have said, little more than the plain facts of the case. To be sure, Sergeant Smith had not been inside the house, but Inspector Podolinsky, from his post of observation at the sideboard, had better opportunities of observing family affairs. Moreover, he is well aware of the vital importance of what may be called the personal equation in investigations of this kind.

I found in his report opinions very clearly set forth about the three chief personages in the case—Lady Muriel, the millionaire, and last, but not least, the governess, Miss Vachel. Lady Muriel he describes in his report “weak, querulous woman of fashion,” very extravagant, and regarding her husband's purse as inexhaustible, fond of society, and seeking social success as the chief end in life. She was evidently, reported Podolinsky, proud of her husband's talents and commanding presence and manners, but too much taken up with herself and her social ambitions to be much concerned with him personally. Her attitude towards Miss Vachel was that of a weak nature,

and a dependent one, towards a strong, sufficing and kindly one. If she loved any one but herself, she loved Miss Vachel. She trusted her, and Miss Vachel was her confidante and her guide, who never seemed to presume upon, or take advantage of, her position. Of Miss Vachel the Inspector spoke with respect and admiration. I suspected that the charms of mind and character, rather perhaps than those of face and figure, had somewhat magnetized the worthy Inspector. In his report, he records his opinion that she is a loyal, devoted, and noble woman. He learns from the unanimous testimony of the servants that she was a second mother to the children of her dead friend, and that the children regarded her as their real mother. Inspector Podolinsky could, of course, only speak from hearsay of the friendship that had subsisted between the late Mrs. Ericssen and Miss Vachel, but a story was current in the household that it was the dying wish of the late Mrs. Ericssen that, after her death, Mr. Ericssen should marry Miss Vachel, in order that her children might be insured against the tender mercies of some unkind or indifferent stepmother. It was known that the millionaire himself was quite willing to carry out his wife's desire, but that Miss Vachel refused, and that the rather anomalous position of that young lady in the household of the Ericssens was the result of a compromise. Miss Vachel had remained on, rather as the guardian than the governess of her friend's children, and the servants asserted that the present wife, so Podolinsky declared, Lady Muriel Ericssen, had been made aware of the very unusual conditions, and had accepted them before marrying the millionaire. She had accepted them at first not unwillingly, as, relieving her of responsibilities in respect of children not her own—and afterwards gladly, as she came to appreciate the tact and discretion of the children's governess and guardian.

Inspector Podolinsky reports, from information received,

that Lady Muriel had more than once alluded openly and in the presence of the lady's-maid, to this arrangement.

So completely had the worthy Inspector come under the charm of the governess that, in his report, he goes so far as to refute the poor opinion of the American journalists and photographers of the young lady's personal appearance. "Miss Vachel is a person," he sets down, "of singular beauty of face and figure!"

Of Mr. Ericssen himself the Inspector also had a very high opinion. He was not, he said, of the type of millionaire which was in Europe recognized as such. He was not of the pushing, vulgar kind of financial magnate that he had been more than once in contact with, in the course of detective investigations in the higher regions of criminality. He was not the man who overbears, when he can do so with safety, and is subservient when subserviency serves him better; blarneying and bullying by turns.

Mr. Ericssen was undoubtedly a financial gambler, but, by all accounts, he played the game of speculation fairly. Inspector Podolinsky considered him to be a man of high courtesy to equals and dependents, and nevertheless with a pleasant buoyancy and impulsiveness of manner. "He might pass anywhere," says Inspector Podolinsky in his report, "with his easy way of address, his conversational tact, and his conciliatory manner, for a foreign diplomat, or an English Secretary of State of the higher kind."

Inspector Podolinsky was so strong in his praise both of Miss Vachel and her employer, and in disparagement of the pretty, vapid little wife, that he left no room for information on points on which I desired information. What were the relations between Mr. Ericssen and his wife? Were they those of affection? Was he fond of his children? Were the children happy at home? Was their stepmother kind to them? Was the paragon governess a

peace-promoter in the house, or was she, the friend of the deceased wife, a source of strife and dissension in the family?

This was the personal information I sought for, and I sought it in vain, either in Sergeant Smith's or in Inspector Podolinsky's reports.

I will now give you the history of the actual kidnapping of the children, nearly in Sergeant Smith's own words:—

Among the many child-friends of the children whom they visited at their houses or received at Copplestone House, were their cousins, somewhat younger than themselves, Walter and James Raymond, children of William P. Raymond, of St. Louis, whose wife and sister had taken rooms during the London season in the Great South Western Hotel, within a few hundred yards of their kinsman's home in Copplestone Gardens.

The entrance-hall of the South Western Hotel, crowded with guests, waiters, porters, and reception clerks, was the last place where the children were seen, at half-past twelve o'clock, on the 16th of June.

Since their previous kidnapping in America, particular precautions had been used. Miss Vachel hardly allowed the children to leave the house except in her company. On this occasion, unfortunately, Miss Vachel had been laid up for a week with a severe cold, and the children were, for once, trusted to their old nurse, Olivia Macguire, an Irishwoman, a servant of tried and proved fidelity, who had grown old in the family of Mr. Ericssen, and of his father before him.

What happened on the morning of the 16th was thus described by Olivia Macguire:—

The children had, as on many previous occasions, arrived at the hotel, between ten and eleven o'clock, and, not waiting for the lift to take them up, had run upstairs to the third floor. Olivia's instructions from Miss Vachel had been, to remain in the hall until they came down, and

then to send for a cab, and return in it to Copplestone Gardens.

The old nurse had ensconced herself in an arm-chair in a corner of the hall, where she fears she must have slumbered for a moment. She was not conscious of the fact, but, when she looked up at the clock, she found it was half-past one o'clock. As the children were due at their home for lunch at that hour, she asked the hall porter to send up word to Mrs. Raymond's room, and beg her to let Master and Miss Ericssen come down.

"Oh, there you are!" said the porter, who knew her well. "I didn't notice that you hadn't gone out—there's been such a bustle this morning. Well, your young lady and gentleman have gone off this half-hour and more. A commissionaire came in a cab with a letter from the big house to Mrs. Raymond, who sent the two children off with him to Copplestone Gardens."

Olivia Macguire went home and found that the children had not been heard of, and that Miss Vachel was already getting very anxious.

CHAPTER II

"THE DETAINER"

THREE weeks have passed since then, and not a trace of the children has been found. The cabman who had come with the commissionaire was with some difficulty traced. He was a stout, red-faced, heavy-witted fellow. He remembered having been hailed by a commissionaire in uniform, at Hyde Park Corner, on one forenoon in mid-June. Had driven him to the Great South Western Hotel, had waited a quarter of an hour, and had taken a young lady and a young gentleman to Victoria Station, the commissionaire riding by him on the box. Questioned as to the commissionaire, the cabman did not think he should know him again, was not sure if he had his arm in a sling, or was blind of one eye, but was pretty confident he had two arms. Was sure he would know the children again, they were remarkably fair of complexion, with flaxen hair, and blue eyes, and the girl with long fair hair on her shoulders.

The commissionaire was likewise traced. He corroborated the cabman's evidence in every particular. He had been ordered from his office to engage a four-wheeled cab, and call for two children at the South Western Hotel with a letter for Mrs. Raymond, and take them, with their luggage, to Victoria Station, where they would be met by a lady on the platform. He executed his commission, and found that their luggage had been sent on before. He should know the children again, they were remarkably fair of complexion, and both had fair hair. The lady at the

station appeared to be a respectable, middle-aged woman of the servant class. He doubted whether he should know her again.

Now, it was a fairly obvious conclusion from these facts that the criminal was perfectly acquainted with the habits of the Ericssen household. He knew of their frequent visits to the hotel in South Kensington. He must have been aware of the fact of Miss Vachel having been, on the day of their abduction, confined to her room. The letter handed in by the commissionaire, though not in Miss Vachel's handwriting, was a sufficiently close imitation of that lady's writing to impose upon Mrs. Raymond and her sister. From all this, it was safe to conclude that the kidnapper had a confederate in the house of Mr. Ericssen, or that he was in league with one or more of the upper servants.

No pains were spared to discover the whereabouts of the children. A reward of £500 was offered for any information that should lead to their recovery. Their full description and copies of their latest photographs were circulated to every police-station in the country, and a strict watch was kept at every port of departure for abroad. Unless they had been carried across the Channel by the two o'clock boat on the 16th, it was quite certain that the children were still in the country. The reward was almost immediately raised to £1,000, and every policeman in Great Britain and Ireland was immediately on the look out to win this great reward.

Not a trace of the authors of the crime was found. No single clue was forthcoming.

Within three days of their disappearance, a letter with the Paris post-mark was received by Mr. Ericssen, stating, first, that the children were concealed in a remote part of France; secondly, that the writer would not, in view of their necessarily close confinement, be responsible for their

continued health and well-doing, unless they were redeemed within a week ; thirdly, that the price of their redemption—this was the phrase employed—was two hundred thousand pounds sterling ; fourthly, that if their father thought fit to communicate with “the Detainers”—this again was the peculiar title the kidnapper arrogated to himself—he must do so in the columns of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*, and the communication must be in the cypher to be presently indicated, and must express, in clear language, the stipulation, on the oath and honour of Mr. Ericssen, that any contract, or transaction, between himself and the Detainers would be *bona fide*, and that no attempt, direct or indirect, would be made to entrap, or discover the Detainers, or Detainer, or any person acting for the Detainer, or Detainers.

The letter was type-written. A date but no address was given, and it was signed “Faithfully yours, The Detainers.” In a postscript was a description of the cypher to be used.

Now, this choice of a cypher showed a wide and profound acquaintance with the little-studied principles which govern cryptographic work. No artificial, or, so to say, arbitrary cypher can be invented by human ingenuity so complicated but that it can also be deciphered by human ingenuity. In scientific phrase, analysis is equal, or superior, in this matter, to synthesis. It is a common amusement of the younger members of our branch of the force to try their hands on the numerous cyphered communications in the “agony” columns of the daily papers. Unless they elude detection by excessive shortness, they always betray themselves to careful investigation, and sometimes they have led to the detection of serious crime. They mostly, of course, have nothing criminal about them. The only undecipherable cypher is a so-called book cypher, and that, too, must be varied from time to time, or it, too, will end

in being detected. In this case the "Detainer's" letter indicated that the cypher was to be founded upon Hamlet's well-known soliloquy, read backwards, beginning with its last word. Each letter in the line was to correspond with a letter of the alphabet. In the case of a letter in the text corresponding with the one in the communication, the next in the text was to be employed. After 250 words had been used from the soliloquy, the cypher was to be changed, and letters taken from the beginning of the soliloquy.

This is a slow and tiresome sort of cypher to write and read, but it is not difficult to do either, and it is absolutely undecipherable to any one who has not the key.

In reading over the reports, this choice of a cypher and of a passage from a play of Shakespeare, seemed to me the only thing we had in the nature of a clue. The self-styled "Detainer"—in ordinary language, the criminal who had made himself liable to a sentence of several years' penal servitude—was evidently a person of some thought and experience. The selection of a passage in Shakespeare, hackneyed though it might be, implied one of two things, either some general culture, or special theatrical culture. Was there any one in the surroundings of the millionaire possessed of any culture whatever? There was an exceptionally large body of servants of all ranks in the big house in Copplestone Gardens, but one does not look to find either general or special culture among the servant class of this country. There were but two people in the household who might possibly be qualified in this direction. There was Mr. Ericssen's private secretary, a personage whom Inspector Podolinsky had passed by in his report, using the contemptuous phrase of the day, as a "young man of no importance." There was also Miss Vachel, the Swedish governess. To be sure, every word written by Podolinsky of this young lady was eulogy; and her antecedents and

character certainly seemed to remove her from any suspicion of connivance in the crime of kidnapping the children. What motive, indeed, could have been great enough to induce her to commit this injury to the children of the woman who had been her life-long friend, or to tempt her to run the risk of long years of imprisonment for so vile a crime? Of what depths of baseness and hypocrisy must Miss Vachel be guilty to plan, or connive at, such a crime against the family who had befriended her, and the children to whom she professed to stand in the place of mother?

All these were strong and obvious arguments in favour of Miss Vachel's innocence. Nevertheless, it is a detective's first duty to take nothing for granted. He must ever seek for every undercurrent in life, look at everything and everybody from the worst side; he must suspect every one, and, departing from the leading principle of English law, must consider every one guilty till that person's innocence is incontestably established.

It was clear to me that that admirable and experienced officer, Inspector Podolinsky, had for once failed to apply this rule. He had accepted Miss Vachel on trust. On trust of what? Of her good repute in the household, as voiced by masters and servants. Clearly, too, on the trust of his own obvious sympathy for a girl of evidently no common mental power, and no common charm.

I was certainly not going to fall into that error. Moreover, there were several circumstances which seemed, at first sight, to connect Miss Vachel with the crime—vaguely enough to be sure—but what else than the vaguest clues could I expect at this stage of the investigation?

To sum up: The criminal, or rather the Detainer, for I prefer to call him, or her, by the euphonious name employed by the writer of the blackmailing letter to Mr. Ericssen—the Detainer was clearly a highly intelligent person—Miss Vachel was, by all accounts, extremely intelligent. The

Detainer was, so to say, either behind the scenes at Copplestone Gardens, or connected with a person who was. Miss Vachel was behind the scenes. The Detainer happened to choose, as the foundation of his or her cypher, a passage from a dramatic author. That might easily be the choice of any actor or actress, and Miss Vachel had been, for years, on the stage.

To be sure, some of these coincidences might, for aught I knew, apply to the other educated person in the Ericssen family—and one not bound, as she was, by all sorts of tender ties, not to commit so heinous an offence against rectitude and all loyalty. That other person was the private secretary. Inspector Podolinsky had dismissed him in a contemptuous phrase. Perhaps the secretary had good reason to suspect so bad a butler as the Inspector of being a detective in disguise. If so, he would naturally take every care to keep his intelligence, if he possessed any, in abeyance.

It was impossible to arrive at any sound conclusions at all on these knotty points, except in one way—that way was by entering the family at Copplestone House.

That, and that only, seemed the only step to take beyond those that the authorities had already taken. They were watching the outports. They had questioned and examined every one who could be questioned and examined as to the children and the servant, at Dover and Calais. They had circulated full intelligence of the crime and its circumstances, with description and likenesses of the stolen children. All this had been done, not in Great Britain only, but in Ireland, in France, and in the United States. Another detective measure being employed was to follow up all the known criminals engaged in the particular traffic of child kidnapping, but, though blackmailing is a common crime in our country, the art of child stealing is almost unknown here, but inquiries were being instituted among the known professors of the art in America.

I had examined^o the whole of the documents of my two predecessors before, I saw my chief. I told him that my idea was to enter the house in one capacity or another.

"It is mine, too," he said, "and Mr. Ericssen's as well. But there is only one way in which you can do it. Mr. Purdy, Mr. Ericssen's private secretary, has slightly broken down in health, it seems. Could you fill his place? The post is no sinecure. You would have to do real private secretary's work. Do you think you can take this place at a day's notice, and do the work?"

"Yes, if there is not much accountant's work to be done, or many accounts to keep. I was adjutant in my regiment," I said, "but that would not carry me far."

"Mr. Ericssen tells me he does his own accounts in his head. There would be innumerable letters to write from verbal hints; memoranda to make; appointments to keep with people whom your employer has no time to see himself. A private secretary has to be the mirror of the mind of his principal. You see, if you don't do real work, the people in the house won't believe you are a real secretary. I rather fear that Podolinsky's blunders when he played at being butler have opened their eyes."

"I think I could do the work. I know it is the only way to get at the facts. Till I get inside the house, it is all guess work."

"Just so. I will wire to Ericssen to come here and confer with you."

Inspector Podolinsky had made no mistake about Mr. Ericssen. He had described him exactly. A man with a look of power and energy behind easy, courteous, and taking manners; a handsome, fair man, getting on for fifty; tall thin and active, with something open, cordial, and prepossessing, as well as quick and unhesitating in his manner. I had wondered at his immediate acceptance in the world both of London Society and of London Finance

His wealth did not seem enough to justify it, but I wondered no longer. No door remains long shut at which a man like Mr. Ericssen knocks.

He shook hands with me, and laughed at the idea of his new secretary.

"I am very glad you can come," he said. "It's all settled. I prepared Purdy when I got the Sir Henry's wire. I guessed it meant business. I told Purdy he would have to stay one day to put the new secretary up to his duties, and then he could go on his holiday for a fortnight. He is delighted ; so am I ! "

"I hope, Mr. Ericssen," said my chief, "that you are not thinking of paying the preposterous ransom the scoundrels ask."

"I paid a tenth of that sum in New York, and I would gladly have paid twice as much here to get the kids back safely ! "

There was a touch of deep feeling in the man's voice as he spoke of his lost children that went to my heart—even my detective's heart.

"But what they ask—going on for a quarter of a million of your money—would ruin me just now, and the children and their future. There are times when we financiers are flush of money—there are times when we are not—just now my pile is low."

He smiled, as he made this confession of insolvency, but he spoke buoyantly and confidently. I know that smile and that tone. It is the smile and tone of the inveterate gambler.

CHAPTER III

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY AT WORK

IF Professor Podolinsky was wrong about Mr. Purdy, the private secretary, if he is a person of any weight or importance, or any mental capacity whatever beyond the capacity to perform his simple round of duties as clerk and secretary, then is Mr. Purdy the most consummate of actors.

I found him a mild-spoken, red-haired, spectacled young man of about twenty-five. Men of his type are born to live in the suburbs, to spend from nine to four behind desks in the city, and, in due time, after long and faithful service, to be superannuated and pensioned by their grateful employers.

To Mr. Purdy, Mr. Ericssen was one of the greatest men on earth, and he blessed his own luck ten times a day, in that he was privileged, for a sufficient salary, to open, read, docket, register and arrange Mr. Ericssen's huge correspondence.

In this work I found him engaged when, by desire of Mr. Ericssen, I called at Copplestone House, at eight o'clock next morning.

"Do you really think you can manage it?" the secretary asked me anxiously—for his holiday depended upon my not failing. Mr. Ericssen had told him that.

"I don't know," I said, "it seems awfully difficult. You must show me what you can of the work."

"Of course I will," he said, eagerly, and he set himself to explain everything. First the letter was to be opened,

then read, then docketed—that is, folded, and the name of the writer, date of sending and date of receipt inscribed on the back, with a short summary of its contents.

“I had no idea,” I said, “that a private secretary’s work was so hard and so responsible.”

“Oh,” said the young man, “it is more responsible a great deal than you think—for I have to put all the docketed letters into a despatch-box, and take them in to Mr. Ericssen. He is generally in an awful hurry, just glances at the dockets, tears up and throws half the letters into the waste-paper basket, scribbles a word or two on the back of the others, and then rushes off to keep an appointment in the city.”

“Then you write answers from his minutes?”

“Just so,” said the secretary. “I have to make out what he means by his minutes—sometimes he says only ‘No,’ or ‘Yes,’ ‘Accept,’ ‘Refuse,’ ‘Can’t,’ ‘Won’t,’ ‘Rot!’ ‘See him hanged first!’—sometimes he is sarcastic, and writes ‘No, really!’ ‘What a chance for me!’ ‘Not if I know it!’ Of course I have to write proper polite letters, spun out a bit, on these indications, for one must be careful never to offend people. When he comes back from the city he glances at my letters, and alters them, or puts his pen right through what I have written, and writes it all over again himself. I assure you, Mr. Morgan, he is a man one loves to work for. He is always reasonable, and I never once have known him lose his temper.”

“I guess, Mr. Purdy, you don’t often give him the chance, and he knows when he has got hold of a good secretary.”

“Well,” said the young man, shaking his head, “sometimes I am not quite sure of that. Mr. Ericssen is, of course, a wonderfully clever man. He has all sorts of ideas that I confess are quite over my head, and sometimes I’m afraid I can’t quite understand him, but, bless you, he never

complains—and 'it makes a fellow all the more hard-working, and all the more anxious to please him."

Mr. Purdy suddenly remembered his work, and the pile of unopened letters still on the table. He began to open them, to read them, and to docket them, and I watched him for a while in silence.

"Let me try my hand on some of the letters," I said.

"Do you really think you can—already?"

"I'll try."

I opened a dozen letters, read their contents, docketed them neatly as I had seen him do, and showed them to Mr. Purdy.

"Wonderful!" said the young man, rubbing his hands in great glee. "You'll do! and I shall get my holiday. It's awfully important to me to get my holiday—on account of my health—though, you know, it's a rum thing, but I don't, in myself, want to go."

"No?"

Mr. Purdy smiled knowingly, but kept his secret to himself. I did not press him. I knew I should come at it presently.

Then suddenly his face darkened.

"I say, you know," he began.

I laughed. "No! no! Mr. Purdy, I promise you I won't."

"You're very quick," he said "to guess what was in my head—but are you sure you won't—that you won't get me 'the kick'?"

"I am quite sure I won't! I came here to oblige a friend. I've other work, and I could not leave it for any consideration."

The young man's face cleared.

"I believe you, Mr. Morgan. You don't look as if you'd humbug a fellow."

These are the little stabs a detective has to bear! I was

humbugging him most successfully, but, anyhow, not to his hurt or hindrance.

We both set hard to work on the pile of letters, and had got the last letter docketed and registered just before Mr. Ericssen burst into the room.

He is a very cheery person, and Mr. Purdy showed him some of my handiwork as evidence of his good teaching and my quick learning.

"Capital ! capital ! nearly as neat as your own !"

Then Mr. Ericssen went through the process detailed by the secretary. In an incredibly short space of time, he had glanced at the dockets, scribbled a word or two on the backs of the letters—now and again, he quickly read the letter through, and then wrote a longer minute ; quite half the letters were torn impatiently into bits, and thrown into a huge waste-paper basket.

Then he dashed out of the room to go to his telephone in a special apartment of its own. There, I suspect, most of his real business was done.

Purdy and I were left alone with the minuted letters.

"You take half, and see what you can make of them," said Purdy. "You won't perhaps get the hang of it quite at first, I'm afraid."

"Does he like civil phrases ?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, let them down easy, he says."

"And long words ? and roundabout sentences ?"

"Yes ! yes ! that's just what he likes. He says the art of letter-writing is to say 'no,' and make the receiver think you'd rather have said 'yes,' and *vice versa*."

"I see. Here is a man asking him to accept a directorship on a company that the writer is promoting, and of which he will be chairman. Mr. Ericssen has written on the back, '*Won't at any price, man influential, let him down easy.*' Suppose I answer : '*Dear Sir, The pleasure, honour and profit of serving on the board of a company presided over by*

so influential a chairman as yourself are circumstances of no small importance in my estimation, and were my own private inclinations and interests only concerned I should not hesitate before accepting your proposal, but the fact of my already occupying a seat on the boards of companies which, if not actually rival companies to the proposed undertaking, are run on cognate lines, renders it impossible for me to accede to your flattering proposition. I need not tell you how sorry I am for personal reasons to be compelled to arrive at this decision.'"

Mr. Purdy listened to this piece of vile rhodomontade and looked at me with stupefaction.

"Why, Mr. Morgan, you have been at this work before ! That letter is just splendid ! Oh, you'll do !"

I bowed at the compliment.

"Mr. Ericssen *will* be pleased. But, I say, you know !" and again the poor young man's face darkened.

I laughed. "I swear to you, Mr. Purdy, that I won't take a mean advantage of you. The day you come back I go off—it's on my word of honour !"

We shook hands over this.

When Mr. Ericssen came back and looked over the letters, he signed them hastily one after the other; when he came to those for which I had been responsible, he smiled then read one or two more of my flowery epistles, and leaning back in his arm-chair, his body shook with silent laughter.

"It's my fault if Mr. Morgan has rather overdone it," said Mr. Purdy, hastily, fearing that his principal's emotion meant disapproval.

"No ! no ! my dear fellow ! It's not that at all. I'm laughing at—well, Mr. Morgan, where did you catch this particular style ? It's just perfect, you know !"

"It's Mr. Purdy's teaching," I said.

We had heard the luncheon gong go while Mr. Ericssen was signing the twenty or thirty letters we had prepared for him.

"Lunch time!" he said to us both, rising, "and I want, Mr. Morgan, to present you to my wife and my cousin."

"Now," I thought, as I followed my employer to the dining-room, "comes the difficult part of my mission. I must remember that I am only a millionaire's private secretary, and I must behave as private secretaries do. I determined to keep a close watch upon Mr. Purdy, and make him my model of behaviour.

CHAPTER IV

THE MILLIONAIRE AT HOME

PROFESSOR PODOLINSKY had made a very natural mistake about Lady Muriel. A foreigner unaccustomed to the world—the narrow world, perhaps—in which an English lady has been born, trained, and for which alone she lives, is very apt to make a mistake about that lady when he sees something of her intimate life. The more likely would he be to mistake, if he is removed from her personal influence—if he is out of the reach of her social magnetism, if he merely listened to her talk from the position of a servant serving at her table. Lady Muriel is anything but a vapid and silly person. She is a pretty, well-dressed, well-mannered woman of about thirty. A little narrow, perhaps, a little selfish, a little exacting, a little shrewish, even not a little affected, but trained, from nursery to schoolroom days, never to wound, always to please, and, when she can, to charm.

The level of Lady Muriel's talk is not lofty. It is not, perhaps, wholly wise, but it is very human, and there is a good deal of it. I laugh, as I think of poor Inspector Podolinsky at his sideboard, surrounded by his decanters and his plate, with his little army of footmen and under-butlers, getting quite out of hand and heartily despising their chief—I can understand his ruffled feelings under the gathering eyebrows and rebuking look of his little mistress, for Lady Muriel is not long-suffering. She has a Scot's shrewdness, exacts full service from her dependents, knows well how to obtain it, and is anything but a lenient and enduring mistress. Her powers to please are not, I can

see, wasted on her inferiors. Clearly they were not employed upon the very inefficient new servant, and though the butler could not retort, the disguised detective could write her down fool, fully believing, no doubt, that she was one.

I had made up my mind, as I have said, to form my manners on Mr. Purdy's, but it was difficult. Mr. Purdy kept his eyes modestly fixed upon his plate, spoke in monosyllables, under his voice, and addressed our hostess as "my lady" and "your ladyship."

This was subservience quite beyond my ability. After all I was not a real, only a *locum tenens* sort of private secretary. Mr. Ericssen had told me that he had spoken of me as "something in the City" who had consented to work for him, in a confidential capacity, for a limited period. It was absolutely necessary to impress the family and the numerous servants. Now, diplomatists and detectives act on the principle that there is no disguise like truth. Leave people you are among in the dark, and they fill up the void places in your life history with all sorts of suspicions and inventions, but tell them as much of the truth as you can afford to tell, and they use that truth to fill the blank spaces in question.

Lady Muriel, like all people who desire to please, is inquisitive. Nobody can take an interest in any one, or pretend to feel interest in any one, who does not feel, or affect curiosity, and ask questions.

"What is being 'something in the City'?" she asked me. "What do you do? where do you go? Whom do you see? Is it very dull, or very amusing? 'Something in the City' seems to me a phrase invented to put off women's curiosity."

"It may be anything," I said, "from being a waiter in a City restaurant to being Lord Mayor of London, or Governor of the Bank of England."

Lady Muriel laughed.

"That is a putting-off answer! Do you write, or read, or talk, or do sums?"

"All four," I said, "and all day long, and I can't say how tiresome it is sometimes."

The conversation was getting dangerous. Miss Vachel's great, intent, grey eyes were fixed upon me, the servants, with listening faces, moved silently over the deep-piled Oriental carpet.

"Now," I thought, "the moment has come to tell the truth!"

"It must be tiresome," said Lady Muriel, still not satisfied with my answer.

"To me it is particularly tiresome," I said, "for I am not used to that sort of life. I was in the army, and I left it to—to take to business."

Mr. Ericssen smiled, watching me with a sort of approval. As he said afterwards—I had got out of a tight place neatly.

Miss Vachel's eyes did not leave my face for a moment. Her unwinking gaze was almost oppressive.

Lady Muriel looked pleased. "Do you know, I almost guessed it! Your voice even reminded me of some one I knew in the army. What was your regiment?"

I told the name of my old regiment. The break with my old military life had been so complete, the change of my personal appearance since I had worn a short beard was so great, that I was sure it was quite safe to speak of my soldier career in any company.

It happened, though, to be not quite safe in this company.

"But I know the regiment very well!" said Lady Muriel. "It was quartered so often at Dalrymple, which is only ten miles from Grudderworth Castle."

Then it flashed upon me that I was skating on very thin ice indeed.

"I remember your colonel," Lady Muriel went on, "He

came sometimes to Grudderworth, and there was a very tall young Irishman who danced beautifully. What was his name! O'Grady—Terence O'Grady, of course. And Major O'Gorman, rather stout and red-faced, but very good fun. Then there was a namesake of yours too, a Captain Morgan, rather good-looking, who rode. Is he a relation of yours, Mr. Morgan? Of course you joined later?"

I hesitated, but I managed to seem not to hesitate, and my hostess rattled on:

"I used to dance with Captain Morgan at the County ball at Dalrymple," said Lady Muriel.

It had all come back to me! It was Lady Muriel Macgruddery who was speaking to me; quite the prettiest girl within twenty miles round Dalrymple, that half our fellows fancied themselves in love with! I had forgotten her and her Christian name, and even her face, though I sat within a yard of her—so thick a veil does ten years weave in our memories. The moment had come for the whole plain truth.

"You don't remember me?" I said, laughing.

Lady Muriel looked hard at me, and suddenly her memory brought me back.

"Of course I do—Captain Morgan! Of course I do. You are not changed a bit. Ah! what fun we had in those old days!"

She spoke almost sadly.

"Old days! But it was only yesterday!"

"Thank you," said my hostess, smiling. "Still, you know, you did not recognize me."

"Not recognize you!" I said, with a pardonable diplomatic wiliness, "I only waited for you to recognize me!"

"You are changed, of course, Captain Morgan, or I should have known you at once," she said, "but it was because in those days you wore a moustache only.

Remember, I thought you must have joined later. That meant that I thought, you younger, didn't it? Tell me," she said, changing the subject quickly, "what became of that nice boy."

I told of how poor O'Grady was my kinsman, and of his tragic end. I told her how the swindler, Towers, had been his evil genius and mine; how Towers cheated at Bridge, and won great sums on the turf from both of us; of how he had ruined my cousin, and led to his death, and had helped to ruin me; and how I had reached the verge of insolvency, and been compelled to leave the army.

Lady Muriel, a keen sportswoman and a rider to hounds, was deeply interested in my tales of the steeplechases, and the ingenious ways that Captain Towers had tricked and robbed us all.

I thought Miss Vachel's watchful eyes relaxed a little and softened as she listened to this tale of misfortune.

Surely the art of concealment consists in the art of half revelation!

"And what became of the man, Towers?" asked Mr. Ertesen. "Did he not cross the Atlantic, and come to us?"

"He did. And left just in time to save himself from your Pinkerton police. He came back here."

"And then?" asked Lady Muriel.

"He came to London, and turned gentleman burglar. He was caught, and is in prison now."

"Was not Towers," asked Lady Muriel, "one of the *aliases* of the man who tried to steal Lord Balin's pictures? Lady Drusilla Lancaster was telling me all about it, the other day, and how a wonderfully sharp detective had come down from Scotland Yard and caught him."

We were getting on to very thin ice again!

"One sees these things in the papers," I said unconcernedly, "but they don't make very lively reading, do they?"

The matter dropped, to my great relief.

What was Miss Vachel thinking about all this time, I wondered. She had hardly taken any part in the conversation. It had been chiefly confined to our hostess, our host, and myself. The private secretary seemed more than ever occupied with the pattern of his plate, and the contemplation of the reflection of his own face in the backs of the spoons. From time to time, he answered a kindly remark from Lady Muriel, or Mr. Ericssen, tumbling over his words with nervous haste. His only pleasure seemed to be to raise a timid glance of obvious admiration, for a moment, from the plate and spoons, to the fair face of Miss Vachel, sitting opposite to him.

So far as speech went, Miss Vachel was almost as silent as her admirer. But there is silence and silence. It is said that a good actor has been known so to "fill the stage," so to occupy the eyes and thoughts of his audience by his mere presence, by his magnetic sympathy with the incidents and characters of the play, that, even though he have but a dozen words to speak throughout the play, the audience applauds him when the curtain falls, and have gone home convinced that he was the chief speaker in the play, as well as its chief and best player.

So it was with Miss Vachel. Lady Muriel had led the conversation, and she and I had done most of the talking, but Miss Vachel's silent presence had predominated. Her influence mutely magnetized us. Lady Muriel glanced at her constantly, and seemed to wait, after every sentence, for her judgment and approval. Miss Vachel's smile came quickly and sweetly, in response to each speaker, and was the more marked as her lips almost immediately recovered their serious unsmiling expression.

Even Mr. Ericssen seemed unconsciously to refer to her. Once or twice he asked her a question requiring a longer answer. She always answered shortly, but to the point. I

liked her voice. "I have seldom heard a pleasanter one—low, deep, and sweet, but so modulated that her shortness of speech had no bluntness about it. Was she habitually reserved, or had she something on her mind to-day?"

"Then you play Bridge?" said Lady Muriel suddenly to me.

I remembered that this was in suite to my relation of my misadventures at that game with Towers.

"Don't remind Mr. Morgan of that!" said her husband, laughing.

"But we are not going to treat him as Captain Towers did."

"I play," I said, "and I like playing. Pray, why?"

"Because we all love to play Bridge," said Ericssen, and because we lose Purdy to-day, who is a capital player."

"I hope you won't find me wanting," I said.

I was longing to hear Miss Vachel say something a little more explicit than her previous utterances, but, with a talker like Lady Muriel, it is difficult to bring the conversation back to a lover of silence. All the judgment I could make of her at present was through her appearance and behaviour.

Here I must pause a while to say that the American newspapers, of four or five years ago, seem to me to have conspired to disparage Miss Vachel's looks persistently and of malice prepense. They had described her with a brutality, which is typical of the "personal" newspapers of all countries, as a very young lady, tall and spare, with a colourless face, colourless hair, and a slight stoop. Her photograph seemed to bear out the description—but photographs in the daily papers are merciless things.

So prepared, I was taken aback by finding myself in the presence of a very handsome woman of about twenty-eight. Where was the stoop of the American journalist? Miss Vachel stoops as Queen Juno stoops, her shoulders incline

as the shoulders of the goddess of Milobend. That her face lacked the red and white of the country milk-maid was true, and equally true that her hair had not the golden tint which is reported to be purchasable at the hair-dresser's, but the hair exactly harmonized with the face, and the face was, beyond all dispute, lovely. I am a cold critic of women. Their brain weighs with me more than their beauty. Yet I could not fail to see that the beauty of this woman was incontestable. It was not a skin-deep prettiness either, it was that subtle union of features with tone of voice, gesture, movement and expression which places one woman above another, and bends men to her will. It may seem a trivial point, that of a woman's looks, in an investigation of this kind. But it is not. It was the point on which everything turned.

"Do you like Bridge?" I asked her at a venture, suddenly turning full upon her.

Miss Vachel smiled, and for a moment her face brightened. Her smile is charming.

"Very much indeed," she said, and I don't think she had any intention of adding anything to this very trivial remark. If she did, Lady Muriel prevented her.

"Miss Vachel is the best of us all. Mr. Purdy plays a good game, I like a sound one—my father, you know, is an old member of the Portland, and taught us all the right principles. Mr. Ericssen plays a dashing and adventurous game, but Ada—Miss Vachel—plays as a great general plays with his army on the field of battle. She is brilliant and deep and far-seeing."

Miss Vachel did not blush, or look confused, or simpler. I rather wonder she did not, most people would have felt uncomfortable at this sort of point-blank compliment, but she was a remarkably grave young lady. She only looked straight in front of her. There is something misty and vague in the look of those large, grey eyes. Was she looking at me? I

thought at first she was watching me, but I came presently to the conclusion that she was looking beyond me into space, and that her thoughts were occupied with concerns beyond those of the moment.

This, however, was a mistake. The explanation of her absorbed expression was very simple. Miss Vachel was short-sighted! When she looked full at me across the table, without her glasses, she probably saw no more of me than if she had stared at a whitewashed wall!

Short-sighted people, blinking at nothing, often get the reputation of being dreamers, and seers of visions, just as deaf people, with the smile of aloofness and unintelligence in their faces, pass for profound philosophers.

From the purely detective point of view, I resolutely set myself, however, to see things as others saw them. That she was clever, every one saw with me, also that she was good and kindly, straightforward and honest. The whole American press was agreed that she was—to use their own expression—"deficient in personal charm and in personal magnetism." They had defended Ericssen's conduct in giving her charge over his children on this very ground! Even Podolinsky, who had clearly been fascinated by her, seemed to hesitate in admitting her personal attraction, and referred to the stoop.

A detective must see things as others see them, and not be guided by so arbitrary a circumstance as his own æstheticism. I accordingly argued as follows:—Here is a short-sighted girl, with a pale face, and a stoop. A woman who had failed in the only attempt she had ever made to achieve anything, and one who made no attempt to take her part in social life, a girl who, apparently, accepted with satisfaction the open and obvious admiration of a stupid, shy young secretary! This was the woman I had suspected of having contrived and conducted one of the boldest, cleverest, and most clueless crimes of recent years! A crime quite new to

English criminality, and one that had tried and baffled all the powers of the ablest detective force in the world !

A crime, moreover, to commit which required a criminal of more than common villainy, treachery, and cold-blooded plotting iniquity. Ada Vachel was backgrounded by the love, esteem, and respect of every one around her. A criminal's looks and expression never fail to be an index to his criminality. Miss Vachel had faced me for an hour. Her looks had been an open book to me, in which any one could plainly read goodness, gentleness, and loving-kindness.

Thus did I sum up the case for Miss Vachel as an advocate might have summed them up for her in a Court of Law, and no fair-minded judge or generous jury could have withstood my arguments for a moment. Yet such is the amazing perversity of the detective's mind, such is his inhuman habit of seeking for vice under the fair face of virtue, that my suspicions were as unallayed as ever. If Miss Vachel was not behind the abduction of the children, who was ?

My chief had informed me that there was not a sign of activity among the confraternity of evil-doers in this country, or America, who might possibly have turned their hand to this particular form of crime.

To be sure, of evidence I had not a scrap, but causes of suspicion abounded. Did she really love the children ? If so, how did she manage to remain so calm and placid after three weeks of suspense that would have brought on an agony of nervousness to any average woman ? Mr. Ericssen was a strong man, used beyond other men to control his feelings, yet he could not always master his emotion. I had heard his voice break, and seen his eyes fill when he had spoken of his lost children. Miss Vachel's apathy seemed in itself so strange and unnatural a circumstance that, of itself, it would have determined me to bring all my powers of observation to the clearing or confirming of my suspicions about her.

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CHAPTER V

CONFEDERATE, OR TOOL?

AFTER lunch, Mr. Purdy and I went back to the library. Mr. Ericssen returned to the City, and the ladies disappeared into their part of the house. A few more letters and telegrams had come, and from time to time the telephone bell took Mr. Purdy into the room where the instrument was hung.

We had soon prepared the letters for Mr. Ericssen's return, and the secretary and I fell upon general talk. I let him lead the talk to his holiday. He and his mother would go down and take lodgings at Southend.

"It will be a pleasant change for you."

"In some ways," said the young man.

"Why," I said, "I should have thought in every way!"

"Oh, the work here is light, and very interesting. Just compare it with the work of a bank clerk in the City, stuck upon a desk all day."

"Still," I said, "work is work, and a holiday is a holiday."

"Well, you see," said the young man confidentially, "I have great privileges, Mr. Morgan. I lunch every day with the family, and sometimes I dine with them—when they are not going out—and then we play Bridge. Oh, I shall be glad enough to come back to my work!"

The red-haired young man rubbed his hands together in glee.

"I see," I said. "Do they play a fair game of Bridge?"

"They all play very well, but Miss Vachel—well, you heard what Lady Muriel said."

"I don't think much of girls' play, as a rule," I said.

The young man smiled rather disdainfully.

"Ah! you don't know Miss Vachel. She is not like other young ladies."

"She did not give me much chance of finding that out, did she? She hardly opened her lips at lunch."

"There is no one like her!" said the young man comprehensively.

"I could see you admired her."

The secretary shot a quick glance of apprehension at me.

"How could you see that?" he asked.

I did not answer.

He blushed crimson to the roots of his hair.

"I was only saying that I don't think Miss Vachel is a very communicative person."

"When Miss Vachel chooses," he said, sententiously, "no one can be so—so eloquent."

"I shouldn't have thought that unless you had told me. Pray what does she talk about chiefly?"

"Er—well—social reform, for one thing. Miss Vachel is, in some things, a Socialist. So am I."

"She thinks the poor should grab the wealth of the rich?"

The young man laughed. "No! no! not that at all. But, Mr. Morgan, I can't argue. I am not clever enough. I won't try, for I couldn't do justice to her ideas."

"Miss Vachel is certainly very pretty."

"Only pretty?" Mr. Purdy blushed again.

"Oh, beautiful, if you like! But, for my part—"

I thought we were saying enough about the young lady and her looks. I gathered that Mr. Purdy was over head and ears in love with her, and would gladly do her bidding and be her slave in whatever she might command. This was all I wanted to learn.

I had already formed a theory of the crime.

There were just four persons in the house who could, by any possibility, be guilty of the abduction, or of connivance in the abduction, of the children, for the servants had been closely watched by the police for three weeks, and not a suspicious circumstance had been recorded against any one of them. They might therefore be put out of the question, and the possible guilt or innocence of the four persons referred to must be dealt with.

These persons were Mr. Ericssen, Lady Muriel, Miss Vachel, and Mr. Purdy. Let us take Mr. Ericssen first.

What motive could a father have for kidnapping his own children, and holding them to a preposterously heavy ransom to be paid by himself? Could the report that he did so in any way advantage him in his business? It would surely have the very contrary effect. Could it be useful to him as an advertisement? But, by his own action in concert with Scotland Yard, the matter had been kept—or nearly kept—from the knowledge of the papers. These two infamous motives, moreover, could only hold good in the case of a man destitute of all principle, and destitute too of all natural affection. There was abundant evidence that Mr. Ericssen was an honest and honourable man, and an affectionate father. The case, therefore, against Mr. Ericssen must be dismissed without hesitation.

Secondly, there was Lady Muriel. She was not, to be sure, a very affectionate stepmother—affectionate stepmothers are rare—but she was at least a tolerant one. She was not the ogre-like stepmother of the fairy stories. She could not be under any temptation, had she been the wickedest woman in the world, to do her husband's children an injury. The children were no trouble to her; Miss Vachel saw to that. The servants had informed Inspector Podolinsky that Lady Muriel was kind to them. There was a large ransom asked—blackmail in its worst form—but, that a well-born, well-bred, strictly trained young Scots

lady, with an established position in a world where a whisper of such an action would ruin her, should dream of blackmailing her own husband was a proposition too preposterous to think of. Why should she blackmail any one, even if she were criminal minded? She had all she wanted, she had but to ask the man who was by common report the most generous of husbands, to be furnished with wealth beyond the dreams of avarice itself. A supposititious case against Lady Muriel broke down as completely as one against her husband. It was not only improbable, it was impossible, that she should have kidnapped her husband's children.

None of the arguments that clear Lady Muriel and Mr. Ericssen of any possible inception of or collaboration with the crime apply to Mr. Purdy. He is a poor man, and I knew nothing of his antecedents, his relations, his friends, or his private character. They may, for aught I know, be the reverse of respectable. In favour of Mr. Purdy, however, is the fact that he is certainly a man of inferior brain power, of little strength of will and of no initiative, nor is he a person of any knowledge of the world, either of the good, or the wicked world. He would, therefore, be little likely to adventure himself in a transaction requiring great knowledge of men and of affairs. As I have said before, no actor in the world could delude two such experienced people as Inspector Podolinsky and myself into mistaking a clever scoundrel for a simple fool. The man was a booby beyond all doubt, but boobies of this kind are just the men who are turned round the finger of clever and designing criminals.

There remains only Miss Vachel. I had no knowledge whatever that Miss Vachel was designing in a bad sense, but I knew she was a very clever woman. If Inspector Podolinsky had not told me so, the fact that so cautious and sagacious a man as the Inspector had come under her

influence and been magnetized, was evidence enough of Miss Vachel's talents in this line. As for motive, there is always a motive when poverty sees its way to wealth. Miss Vachel was, of course, poor. She was in the daily contemplation of great wealth. It was intelligible that such a person would be more tempted to covetousness than if she lived poorly, and away from the spectacle of ease and luxury. The asking for so exorbitant a ransom as two hundred thousand pounds was startling. But the fact seemed to point an indicating finger at some such actor as Ada Vachel rather than at an ordinary and professional criminal; for what inducement could any one in the common rank of criminality have for so multiplying the amount that Mr. Ericssen had already paid on a previous occasion? The abduction itself was certainly the action of a most adroit criminal, for nothing could be more masterly than the manner in which the whole thing had been carried out, with not a clue left anywhere to follow up. This demand of excessive ransom seemed, however, not to be in the region of practical criminality. A scoundrel eager for the reward of his villainy, and fearing for his skin, would surely ask a more reasonable sum than two hundred thousand pounds. The half, or even the tenth, of that sum would be a fortune to any man.

What was the conclusion? Why, that the crime and all connected with it had originated in the brain of some one not practised in the ways of crime—of an amateur—but an amateur of extreme intelligence—of one knowing every circumstance in the family life of the Ericssens, of one likely to be actuated by one of the commonest human motives that lead men and women to crime, of one having the rare power of influencing surrounding persons, of one who had actually magnetized one weak will to do her bidding—in other words, of that strange, strong individuality, Ada Vachel.

It was, of course, not my settled and absolute conviction that Miss Vachel was guilty of this foul and cruel crime. It was only a hypothesis. The profession of crime detection has many drawbacks. A man must abandon many of the standards of conduct which have hitherto governed him who follows this profession. He must sacrifice, or at least put away from him for a time, his belief in human nature. He must re-test virtue and purity itself, so as by fire. He must give up, what I confess is terribly hard for me personally to give up, all sense of deference and gallantry towards women. I was reasoning this woman into the ranks of criminality, yet all my instincts as a man told me that she was a pure woman, that she was good and kindly; strong to comfort and console, gentle and helpful, and the more able, in all these respects, in that she was of a rarely strong and sympathetic intelligence.

A detective needs to fortify himself constantly with the reflection that he is doing the greatest service to humanity that any man can do, that he is fighting day and night the battle of the innocent against the guilty, of good against evil, of light against darkness, of God against Satan.

I spoke just now of the theory I had formed as to the origin of the crime. It was this: that while the originator was Ada Vachel, the secretary Purdy had been brought under her influence, that she had magnetized him to do her bidding, and that, perhaps, while quite unconscious of the fact that he was engaged in crime, he had helped her to spirit away the children.

A further corroboration of the case against Ada Vachel suddenly flashed upon me. Why was Purdy taking leave of absence? He did not wish to go. He told me his health required it, but he looked the picture of health. Then, why was he going? I guessed that it might be at Miss Vachel's bidding that he had applied for leave. The

man was weak of will and weak of head. Any clever man could twist him round his finger. If she was guilty, and he a confederate, or, as I guessed, a semi-confidant, his presence in the house was a danger to her. Detectives were about, and detectives would worm what he knew out of Mr. Purdy. Therefore, at Miss Vachel's bidding, he was to go. This deduction, from these premises, seemed fair.

I say again that it was not my actual conviction that the facts were as I now state them, I only put it forward as a working hypothesis, and I would proceed in my investigations as if it were sound, and see how the facts, as they developed, would fit into or break up and demolish my hypothesis.

CHAPTER VI

MR. PURDY'S COMMISSION

WHILE I was busy with this train of thought, Mr. Purdy came back from the telephone room, to which he had been rung up.

"I have to go, presently," he said, "to do a commission."

"For Mr. Ericssen? Let me go. I want to get into the way of the work."

Mr. Purdy hesitated, got red, and finally said: "I think I must do this commission myself."

I said nothing, his hesitation and confusion seemed suspicious.

"Look," I said, "while you were away, the postman brought five more letters. I have not opened them, in your absence."

"Oh, you might, you know," said Mr. Purdy.

"No, you are in command still. By-the-bye, Mr. Purdy, will you show me the telephone room, I want to speak to the other end of the town."

I had given the letters to be dealt with by Mr. Purdy for the simple reason that it was necessary to keep him in the house for at least half an hour longer.

He showed me the small room with padded door in which a man might speak to the telephone and no sound be heard.

I rang up Scotland Yard, and my message to the inspector on duty was this: "Send good man at once in

fast hansom to Coppelstone House, to shadow young man with red hair who will leave it in half an hour from now."

I waited till the answer came : " Man gone," then I rang off.

I was leaving the room, when I heard the electric bell in another part of the room. There was a separate instrument, and I put my ear to it. " Are you there ? " came in a woman's voice. It was Miss Vachel's. I made no answer, and left the instrument. Eavesdropping is not in my line, though I am a detective, and, as I believed, on the hot scent of a great crime. I went from the room, and returned to the library.

Mr. Purdy was still busy with the letters. Presently he had finished. Only ten minutes had passed since I had got the answer from the Inspector. It would take quite twenty minutes more for a cab to reach us from Scotland Yard.

I engaged Mr. Purdy in general conversation. He fidgetted, and looked at his watch. It would not do to let him go before the detective had time to arrive. He took up his hat and gloves.

" By-the-bye, Mr. Purdy," I said, " I meant to ask you a question."

" What ? " said Mr. Purdy, looking about him for his umbrella.

" Are you looking for your umbrella ? " I said calmly ; " you won't want it. It's quite sunny."

" I never leave it behind," said Mr. Purdy, taking hold of it. " It might rain, you know."

He was moving to the door.

" What was your question ? " he said, with the handle in his hand.

" Oh, nothing," I said. " It was only about Miss Vachel."

He returned at once to the table, laid his hat and gloves on it. His impatience had disappeared.

"What about her?" he asked with his accustomed simple smile.

I glanced at the clock. There were still ten minutes to fill up before the cab from Scotland Yard could arrive.

"It is really not very important," I began; "I had noticed that she has a short-sighted look."

Mr. Purdy frowned. I had, no doubt, seemed to be hinting at some disparagement of a divinity.

"She is short-sighted," he said, coldly.

"Not," I said, "that I consider it any sort of defect. Rather the other way—it gives Miss Vachel a strange, far-away look, as if she saw visions not given to common mortals to see."

"Yes! how well you put it! I have often thought that myself, but I could not for the life of me have said it so well."

The minute hand of the clock had moved five minutes forward.

"Does she," I asked, gravely, "have to wear spectacles? I did not see any. I hope not, at her age."

"No, no! only eye-glasses, and I think eye-glasses are becoming, don't you?"

"To some faces, Mr. Purdy, yes."

The time was nearly up. In three minutes the cab must arrive.

"By-the-bye, when I was in the telephone room just now, another bell rang, and when I went to the instrument—I suppose it is a private telephone connected with the other part of the house?"

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Purdy, his traitorous colour mounting again. "Did any one say anything?"

"Yes, and I thought the voice was a woman's."

"Could you make out the words?"

"Perfectly. I almost thought it was Miss Vachel's voice. In fact, I am nearly sure it was."

"And what did she—what did the voice say?"

"It said," I answered, "*Is that you?*"

"And you answered?" he asked quickly.

"Mr. Purdy, what do you take me for? I knew *'you'* could not mean me, and I didn't answer, and left the instrument."

A look of intense relief passed over Mr. Purdy's face.

"No, of course you wouldn't answer!" he said.

The time was up. I heard the rattle of a fast-driven cab in the street, and I heard it pull up.

Mr. Purdy took his watch out.

"I have sat here talking with you," he said, "and I'm ten minutes late for my appointment. Dear! dear! what shall I do? I haven't time to go to the telephone!"

"Shall I go for you?" I suggested, mischievously.

"No! no!—I mean, it doesn't matter a bit. I'll go when I come back; I shan't be long."

He seemed to be in an agony of indecision.

"I should go out at once," I said, "if I were you, you'll be keeping him waiting."

"Him! Mr. Morgan?"

"I mean the man you have the appointment with."

"Oh, I see. Yes, and I think I'll take your advice."

He went, and presently I heard the front door bang to, far away.

Decidedly the scent was getting a little warmer, but it was a very cold scent still.

I was sitting at the table, setting down in my note-book the few memorable facts I had to enter, when a knock came to the door.

I expected a servant. It was Miss Vachel.

"Mr. Purdy?" asked the quiet voice of the governess.

"I am here in his place," I said. "Mr. Purdy had a commission to do. He has just gone out."

She hesitated, with the handle of the door in her hand.

I knew she was acting a lie if not telling one.

"I had even thought the commission was for you," I said to test her.

"Did Mr. Purdy say so?" asked Miss Vachel, quietly.

"No," I said, "it was only a bad guess of mine. I had assumed it was for Mr. Ericssen, and suggested doing it, thinking it came within my duties, but Mr. Purdy wouldn't let me." •

Miss Vachel has the rare art—in a woman—of occasional silence. She said nothing. She was still hesitating between, going back and coming in.

"Do you know," I said, "that you put me in an odd dilemma just now, Miss Vachel?"

"I! How?"

"You spoke to me, and I did not answer you."

Her gaze was full on me for a moment, but it expressed no emotion, or surprise. After a pause, she asked,—

"At the telephone?"

"Yes. You said, '*Is that you?*' and I thought: 'If I say '*yes*,' which would have been true, for, of course, I am '*you*' to anybody who speaks to me, it might lead you to say what was only meant for some other '*you*.'"

Miss Vachel smiled, relieved perhaps. She came forward into the room, and stood for a moment by the fireplace, leaning her elbow upon the mantel-piece. All her movements are slow, gracious, and stately for so young a woman. Are her gestures and carriage and the way she stands and reclines studied, or natural? I asked myself. Studied, I fancy, a remnant of her actress days, but certainly grown to be part of her nature now. How had I failed to notice that her figure was as remarkable—I was going to say, as beautiful—as her face? I don't say that, for I am not quite sure that her face would pass as beautiful. The eyes are large,

dark grey, and the eyebrows straight and markedly darker than her fair Scandinavian hair, hair of that fine quality and pale, ungolden tint that belongs to the Northern races. But her face is a little thinner than one sees pretty women's faces drawn in pictures of them, just as her tall figure, though shapely, is too spare to allow any one to describe her as Juno-like. The statues of Juno, Minerva, and the heathen goddesses generally, are in truth a good deal plumper than Miss Vachel. There was no red and white in her cheeks, and how can a woman be beautiful in the world's estimation without that? Her skin was not pale, but it was colourless, like her hair. Her shoulders were too broad for grace, her hands and feet too long and large, strong and shapely. Her hands, I fancy, could hardly be fitted by the largest sized woman's glove.

A woman so indescribable is not, according to any of our accepted canons, beautiful. She may be interesting—and, quite apart from the hidden mystery of crime about her—I will admit that as a woman she might have charmed me had I not been inclined to disbelieve in all the apparent good about her, and search at every loophole in her defence for unapparent vice and treachery.

Already, and to my own knowledge, four men had come within Miss Vachel's influence. One had desired to marry her, Mr. Ericssen. One had been blinded as to what he believed now was her real nature, Inspector Podolinsky. One man loved her, unreasoningly, and was ready to sell his conscience to do her service. I, myself, the fourth, was perhaps a greater triumph to her powers than any other for though I had made up at least one side of my mind that she, and no one else, had committed this vile crime against her employer and the children of her dearest friend—I could appreciate the power of her beauty, and could acknowledge and admit her rare charm of expression and form, temperament and character.

I had begun to reflect that it was odd, that neither Lady Muriel nor Miss Vachel had said a word about the missing children. Lady Muriel, with the tact of a woman of the world, had perhaps avoided the subject before her husband, and before Miss Vachel, to both of whom the children had been more near and dear than to herself. Mr. Ericssen himself never ceased to speak of them to me. If I avoided the subject altogether with Lady Muriel and Miss Vachel, should I not raise the suspicion in their minds that I was a detective in disguise, and no true secretary? If Miss Vachel were really guilty, would not these suspicions already have formed themselves? Was her watching manner at lunch, her silence, her non-committal to any opinion whatever, not the behaviour of one who suspects that she is being watched, and fears to commit herself? Was her coming now to the library, when she must have known that Mr. Purdy was absent, and I alone, not with the object of finding out if her suspicions on this point were well-founded? Of finding out, too, if it was I and not Mr. Purdy who had been in the telephone room.

Every one knows how slight sounds are heard at the telephone. She would, no doubt, from her end of the telephone wire, in the further wing of this huge, rambling house have heard the murmur of a voice speaking through the instrument, and from the ringing of my bell as it rung off, have imagined that it was Mr. Purdy who was there. The question "*Is it you?*" does not convey much to be sure, but at the least it implies familiarity, at most it would mean confederacy and collusion.

At every step, and at every moment, I was coming nearer to a conclusion—the conclusion that was to clear, or to convict Miss Vachel.

Perhaps I should advance a step forward if I spoke freely about the kidnapped children. I had an opportunity of doing so presently in answer to a natural remark of Miss

Vachel. She feared the private secretaryship was giving me very hard work.

"Just at present, of course," I said, "very many of the letters refer to Master Oscar and Miss Belinda."

"I had not thought of that," said Miss Vachel.

"I must not ask indiscreet questions," I said, "but I hope the police are giving you some hopes."

"I am afraid they are doing very little."

Her face, always a little sad, expressed a very profound melancholy.

"It is now," she said, "more than three weeks since they were taken away, and they may be in America by now."

"Oh, I hope not!" I said. "Indeed I should guess them to be much nearer home than that. People who kidnap children don't run risks, and don't spend more money than they can help. I should not be surprised if the children were less than a mile away from us at this very moment."

"Do you really think so?" said Miss Vachel. I thought her habitual calm was troubled for a moment.

"Of course it is only a guess," I said. "I have heard of people hiding themselves for years from those who know them best, and never going out of the same street."

"You have had some experience of criminals, have you not?" said Miss Vachel.

"I? Oh, yes—you mean Towers, who swindled us all? But he was not exactly a professional criminal when he took us all in."

We were fencing with the buttons off the coats. Did we not each suspect the other? Did she not as certainly guess me to be a detective, as I guessed her to be a criminal?

"If Towers," I said, "were not in prison just now, I should suspect him of having a hand in this foul crime."

I dwelt on these two last words, and looked at her as I spoke.

Did her face change for a moment? Did her steady gaze waver? Were her lips pressed for a moment more tightly? I thought so, but I was not sure.

She did not answer for a moment, then she asked: "Why?"

"Because I never met any one so clever, so cool, so bold, and so cruel as Towers—never, that is, until I heard the story of this kidnapping of the Ericssen children."

This lunge did certainly go home. She winced—her eyes fell before mine; she turned her face away, and muttered: "I wonder!"

At what did she wonder?

The door opened at this moment, and a servant brought a letter, and handed it to me. After looking at her for permission, I opened it. It had been brought by a messenger. I read the letter, placed it in a small despatch-box, locked it, and rang again for the servant.

"Please leave this on Mr. Ericssen's dressing-table, so that when he comes in, he may see it the first thing."

No words passed while this took place.

"Forgive me," I said, turning to Miss Vachel, "for attending to my duties."

She nodded.

"It is an odd thing," I said, calmly regarding her as I spoke—she was sitting reclined on a sofa—"that the question we raised just now of whether the children are out of the country or, as I suggested, within a short distance of where we sit, will perhaps be settled within an hour or less?"

"What do you mean?" said Miss Vachel, rising from her seat, and now quite unable to control her emotion.

"I suppose I must not tell you what the police say confidentially to Mr. Ericssen. I am new to my duties, but I know, I am expected to be discreet."

"Tell me what it is!" she said.

I shook my head.

It was a new Miss Vachel that was before me. The impassive mask had dropped from her face. There was a passion of entreaty in it. The eyes, half closed, softened ; the lips were parted. It was a new voice that was in my ears—a voice with a world of beseeching in it.

She stood before me with outstretched hands—immovable—and the strain of her prayer was, against my will, strong. I think it helped me to resist that I remembered that she had been an actress, and I thought perhaps these very tones and gestures had been employed by her on the stage. Perhaps I should not have resisted, but that a step was heard approaching in the passage. Miss Vachel sank back in her seat on the sofa, and all her recent passion of entreaty passed like a shadow from her face.

CHAPTER VII

A CLUE

It was Mr. Purdy. He looked astonished at seeing Miss Vachel in the room.

I said nothing, wishing to see if they would say anything to each other in my presence. They were mute.

I rang the bell, and the servant reappeared.

"Will you bring back that despatch-box I gave you just now for Mr. Ericssen? I have changed my mind about it."

When it came, I took out the letter it contained, and placed it in my pocket.

"I will give it to Mr. Ericssen myself," I said.

Mr. Purdy directed a questioning glance at me, but asked nothing. He and Miss Vachel exchanged a single look.

I had thought it not safe to let so compromising a letter lie in a box of which the private secretary had also a key, for the letter was from the detective who had shadowed Purdy, and it ran as follows:—

"I followed the gentleman to Croxton's Family Hotel. He brought a letter in a lady's hand addressed to Mrs. Raymond. Learned that Mrs. Raymond, with sister and two young gentlemen, boys of about eleven and twelve, had arrived from the Great South Western Hotel less than three weeks before."

What more natural than that Miss Vachel should have asked the private secretary to take a letter to Mrs. Raymond, her friend, and the cousin of the late Mrs.

Ericssen? What more natural, and yet why so much mystery about it? Why should the letter have been confided to Mr. Purdy, and not to a servant? Why did Mr. Purdy resolutely refuse to let me do his commission, or even to let me know it was a letter he was carrying? Why was Miss Vachel so alarmed, or at least so strangely moved when I made my wild guess that the children were in hiding not a mile away? Were they by any possibility being hidden by Mrs. Raymond? Not certainly in an hotel, even a quiet family one,—and yet? All sorts of possibilities began to cross and recross my brain.

—No sooner was Miss Vachel out of the room than I went again to the telephone, and asked Scotland Yard to have Croxton's Hotel watched day and night.

As I came back to the library I remembered a trifling circumstance that might be of great importance in the case or of none at all.

I had asked Mr. Ericssen that morning, when Mr. Purdy left the room for the telephone, if he had any quite recent photograph of the two children.

"Yes," he said; "here is a very good one of them both together, taken not a month ago;" and he rose and walked to a table in the corner of the room.

"Why!" he said, "it was here yesterday! Who has taken it away?" and he went to the bell and rang impatiently.

"May I suggest," I said, "that you don't ask for it? I don't want the servants to think I am interested, or know anything about the children."

"You are right, Inspector," and he gave a different order to the servant when he came in.

Now, who had removed the photograph? Just before my arrival, and why?

The answer to 'Who?' was Miss Vachel, if my hypothesis were well grounded. The answer to 'Why?' was not so obvious. It gave rise to a whole new train of thought.

Could she have any reason why I should not be familiar with the lineaments and expression of the children? Clearly she had. She must have known that, if I was from Scotland Yard, I must have seen the likeness of the children as distributed on the police sheets, but there is a vast difference between the rough copy of a photograph done by what is called the "process" method—the method which has to be employed when a photograph is copied quickly by the thousand, and the careful work of a good photographer. In such a copy, expression is mostly lost, and the likeness is only in the mask of the face, but we mostly recognize likeness not by the lineaments but by expression.

Now I particularly required to see the children as a good photographer had rendered them, and Miss Vachel had taken particular pains that I should not. Again—why?

Mr. Purdy and I parted cordially as good friends that afternoon.

"I will come again to-morrow and explain anything you want to know," he had said, "but you are so quick, I think you know everything already."

Before this he had been to the drawing-room to take leave of the ladies, and he came back a little sad, but his cordiality with me was in no way impaired.

"He is not deep in Miss Vachel's confidence," I thought.

We shook hands, and he said, hopefully, at parting,—

"I shall be back again in a fortnight—not a day later!"

A hard-worked young man does not often take a holiday so sadly.

Dinner passed very much as lunch had passed. Lady Muriel talked freely. Miss Vachel interposed monosyllabic remarks, and then only when she was appealed to, but now and again she spoke at rather greater length in answer to a question of Mr. Ericssen. I noticed that she invariably spoke well, and to the purpose—but always, I thought,

with some undercurrent of reserve, as one who is resolved to give a watcher no chance of forming a judgment. Once only she spoke out. Mr. Ericssen had alluded to a violent and threatening speech reported in the papers of a well-known, extreme Labour member of Parliament.

"Of course, Ada," he said, chaffingly, "you, as a Socialist, approve, and the bloated capitalist would get a short shrift and a long rope from you!"

She could not refuse the challenge. She laughed and turned it off lightly.

I had not seen her in this humour before. Her laugh was pleasant, her way of talk, half gay, half serious, was quite charming, and all my suspicions and antagonism began to melt and disappear before the magnetism of this strange woman.

Then as Mr. Ericssen pressed her in argument, she said, more seriously and argumentatively,—

"You know I am only a progressive Socialist. I think the world of men and women would have to change to a world of angels for real socialism to make its way. We must go little by little, and step by step, towards social equality, till the poor man is richer and happier, and the rich man poorer and happier too—but not by violent means."

"But," I interrupted, "to do all this you would have to teach your subjects to sin against all existing ethics. You must undo all the moral teaching of the ages."

"That is just the greatest difficulty," said Miss Vachel, "we must preach and teach a new and a nobler code of ethics than the present one—one law would be that to do a great good we may do a passing evil—or what now is considered evil."

"So you wouldn't despoil and disestablish the existing millionaire, after all?" asked Mr. Ericssen, laughing.

"No." Her face turned to grave, her voice took on a

serious, earnest tone as she went on : " I would only induce him to consider that it is bad form and bad morals to keep in his own purse the fortune of tens and hundreds of thousands of struggling and starving men and women. I would persuade him to incline his ear to the cry of the unhappier myriads of his fellow-beings."

There was on Ada Vachel's face, for a moment, the look of a sibyl, a prophetess, the eager, glad look of one who sees, in the near future, a great golden vision of human enlightenment, and human happiness.

Ericssen looked at her, visibly impressed. Lady Muriel, too, was grave and puzzled.

" You are an odd girl, Ada," she said.

Was this the woman to plot out this mean and vile crime ?

The grave talk ended, and presently the stream of Lady Muriel's wordy conversation caught us in its current, and carried us with it.

While she talked and I answered, I looked at the many photographs on the table, and Mr. Ericssen, seeing me looking at them, suddenly asked Miss Vachel if she had taken away the group of the two children that had stood on the table in the library.

" I did," said Miss Vachel. " I thought it might worry you."

" My dear Ada," said Mr. Ericssen, with the first shade of impatience I had ever seen him show, " it has stood for three weeks in my room, and you only take it away yesterday !"

She said nothing.

" Besides, I don't require a photograph to make me think of them—God knows I do that, day and night !"

Miss Vachel looked at him with a strange look. I thought I read intense pity in that look. I am sure her eyes filled with tears. It is difficult to understand this

woman. Is she what she seems—an angel, or is she that negation of all goodness, the being that, at some future day, we shall see well to sweep from out of our midst—a confirmed criminal?

"Where is the photograph?" asked Mr. Ericssen.

"In that drawer," said Miss Vachel, hesitating a little, I thought. She pointed to a cabinet.

"Look, Morgan," said Mr. Ericssen, taking out the photograph, "it's the last that was taken of them, poor little beggars! The likeness is perfect."

I saw two wonderfully pretty, very fair children, the boy with fair curly hair, the girl with fair hair falling to her shoulders.

I have seldom engaged in a more interesting game of Bridge than we played after dinner.

For Bridge to be a really enjoyable game so many things are required that it is a wonder the game is ever played at all. If wine brings out the true temper and character of men, more still does Bridge. If a man or woman is outwardly courteous and inwardly cantankerous, Bridge will show it. If he is impatient, fussy, garrulous, mean, disloyal, unfair, vain, covetous, exacting, pedantic, overbearing, querulous, or short-tempered, Bridge will reveal every one of these unpleasant characteristics to his partner, or to his adversaries.

To be a pleasant game, the players must be fairly evenly matched, they must be wanting in the various evil attributes mentioned above, and they must be keen lovers of the game, as a sport. If, to all these conditions, is added a fairly equal fall of the cards, then is the game one for the elect.

I drew Miss Vachel for partner. She was a rapid player—at times she did not, perhaps, count all her small cards, but, for subtlety of combination and judgment in playing to the score, I have never met her equal.

"Yes," I thought, "If this woman chooses to turn her mind to constructive criminality, it would be hard indeed to beat and baffle her."

Lady Muriel is very sound, and played to all the conventions. The worst player of us was, perhaps, Mr. Ericssen—but only because he took too many risks, and cared more for the gambling than the play of the game.

CHAPTER VIII

SMART DETECTIVE WORK

I LEFT the house before midnight. Though I had intended to speak to Mr. Ericssen of the report of the detective who had followed Mr. Purdy, and of my suspicions in respect of Miss Vachel, I changed my mind. It is of little use to exhibit the loose ends of a knot which is in process of being disentangled.

Second thoughts, however, are not always best, and had I abided by my first intention, Mr. Ericssen might have been saved a huge and unnecessary expenditure, and this story of a crime would have had a very different ending.

On my way home I went slightly out of my way to Croxton's Hotel. I timed my walk thither. It took me exactly four minutes and a half. It is a good-sized, comfortable family hotel. In the shadow, at the corner of the street, I saw two men in conversation. I went up to them. They knew me. They were the officers, set, at my suggestion, to watch the house. At five o'clock that afternoon, they told me, the two boys of Mrs. Raymond had gone out, attended by an elderly woman. They had kept to the quieter part of South Kensington, passing through squares and side streets, and finally they had returned to the hotel after a round-about walk of about an hour's duration. They had called nowhere, and been accosted by no one in their walk.

I told the men they need wait no longer, but that they must come again to-morrow by daylight, and, if the children were taken out in the course of the day, one of them was

immediately to communicate the fact to me at Copplestone House from the nearest telephone station.

The next morning brought a fresh surprise. On the table lay a sealed letter, marked "Private and Confidential." As Mr. Ericssen had requested me to open all letters for him, confidential or not, I opened this one, and found it to be a type-written communication from "The Detainer." The children were, the writer declared, poorly. Long confinement and foreign food were bringing them low. The Detainer feared the worst, and so fearing, and purely in his own interests, would now consent to reduce the ransom demanded. He would take, if the sum were proffered on the day of the receipt of the letter, half the amount demanded before. If Mr. Ericssen thought fit to accept this offer, the answer "Yes," followed by the word "*Honour*," must be advertised in a specified evening paper, and must appear that day. The word "*Honour*" would be taken to mean that Mr. Ericssen passed his word of honour that no steps, direct or indirect, would be taken to discover the whereabouts of The Detainer, or of those acting with him, or take any fair or unfair action to the disadvantage of either principal, or agents, in the abduction and detention of the children.

I was about to docket this remarkable document when the servant brought in a letter marked "Immediate" from one of the two detectives on duty at the Croxton Hotel.

A carriage, they had learned, had been ordered by Mrs. Raymond. One of the policemen in plain clothes had followed the messenger to a neighbouring livery-stable, and heard the order given. The carriage would be at the hotel door in few minutes.

I had not a moment to lose if I wished to see the Raymond children, and settle a suspicion that was in my mind, so vague as yet that I had not even written it down, but that suspicion, if it should be confirmed, would mean a solution of the whole mystery.

I hastily, therefore, put the letter, undocketed, into a despatch-box, and left it on Mr. Ericssen's table, with a note to say that I was called out on important business connected with the case, and would be back in an hour's time.

I then took a hansom to the corner of Conway Gardens, and heard from the detectives that the carriage was still to arrive. An open landau with two horses rolled up as we spoke, and I went to the hotel, walked once or twice along the street in front of it, and presently saw an elderly lady come out of the house with two boys. Though it was the first week in July, the morning was overcast, and the wind rather cool. The weather, however, by no means justified an overcoat, yet the two boys wore long great-coats reaching nearly to their ankles. For a moment I hoped I had penetrated the disguise of the kidnapped children, Oscar and Belinda Ericssen, but that hope died away as I saw two good-looking, curly-headed boys of, I should say, eleven and twelve—brown-haired, fresh-coloured, and so dark in complexion as to be almost swarthy of skin. They passed in single file before me, the elder boy in front, down the steps of the hotel, and across the pavement footway. I stood to let them pass.

I don't know whether it is a matter of common observation and knowledge, or a piece of information acquired only by detectives, surgeons, artists, and other close students of humanity, that a boy moves his feet in walking, from his earliest years, from the knee, and a girl from the hip. The knowledge of that simple fact in anatomy, common to me and to every expert, was the easy solution of a problem that had occupied the best thoughts of Sergeant Smith, Inspector Podolinsky and myself, with all the heads of Scotland Yard, for over three weeks.

I saw the younger of the two Raymond boys take three paces across the footway, but that was enough to show me

that the walk was a girl's walk, not a boy's, therefore, it was a girl dressed and disguised as a boy. Therefore, it was certainly Belinda Ericssen, and the elder boy was probably her brother Oscar.

One of the men in waiting, at a signal from me, came quickly up to me as the carriage drove slowly off.

"Get a cab and follow," I said. "If they go anywhere by train, follow them, and wire when they get to their destination."

The man was off like the wind to hail a cab.

I returned to Copplestone House, and here I was to meet at once with a second surprise.

The servant who answered the bell informed me that Mr. Ericssen had returned almost immediately after I had gone out, that he had opened the despatch-box I had left for him, and that he had gone out again at once, leaving word that he would not be back again till lunch time.

I took out my card-case, and wrote in pencil on a card—"May I, please, see you at once in the library on important business?" I asked the servant to take the card to Miss Vachel.

I waited long for her. Ten minutes passed, then a quarter of an hour, then half an hour. What, I thought, if she had left the house? what if, seeing discovery imminent, she had bolted? Yet it did not seem very like what I knew of Miss Vachel to do that. The letter from "The Detainer"—her own letter, I made no doubt—proved that she had guessed that her secret was nearly discovered. I now regretted that I had not plainly suggested to Mr. Ericssen that the plot against him had been hatched in his own house and by his own *employée*. If only I had sent him a line, with "The Detainer's" letter, to say that I was on the close trail of the criminal! What if, in despair of recovering his children, he had given way,

and accepted the offer of the kidnappers, and agreed to pay their monstrous price ?

I went to the telephone and spoke through it to his office—Mr. Ericssen had not yet appeared there. The clerks could give me no address to find him. I told them to let me know the instant he came in.

I went back to the library, and waited again for Miss Vachel.

Presently the door opened, and the young lady appeared.

CHAPTER IX

ADA VACHEL AT BAY

THE woman who stood for a moment in the doorway was no longer the sad-faced personage that I had hitherto seen with vague, dreamy, but watching and suspicious eyes, and a mouth that expressed a grave restraint. It was a radiant face that met my severe look upon her, and eyes and mouth that seemed struggling against some inner sense of the humorous side of the situation.

"Miss Vachel," I said, "I suppose you have guessed long ago that I am Mr. Ericssen's secretary only in name?"

"Of course I guessed that you were a detective," she answered, "but may I say, you did it very well? Those confidences about your old regiment, and the swindler Towers, quite shook me for a moment. Lady Muriel believes in you still. And so you guessed that I was 'The Detainer'?"

"I guessed at first—I am sure now. I have found the kidnapped children at Croxton's Hotel."

"Well done! Yes, of course I am The Detainer. Sergeant Smith hung about the house for a fortnight, and never suspected it, and Inspector Podolinsky was in our midst for a week, and thought me an angel. He made such a poor butler! And you, in a single day, you found out I was a criminal!"

She was using a tone of levity which I did not quite understand, nor why she was trying to turn the tables upon me.

"I am afraid, Miss Vachel," I said, "the matter will turn out to be a very serious one for you."

"Are you going to put me in irons, and carry me off to prison, Mr. Morgan?"

She was sitting where she had sat yesterday, on the sofa in front of me. She held out her wrists towards me, and her face assumed a mock air of resignation and surrender. How this woman should have failed on the stage is a mystery to me!

"I said nothing. The awful feature of the case was that it was my clear duty to have this girl arrested forthwith. Suddenly I forgot the woman and her strange magnetism, and thought only of her crime. I spoke severely,—

"You take a very light tone, Miss Vachel, but to me, and I fancy to others, the crime to which you confess is a terrible one, cruel to the children, cruel to the father, and meanly and vilely mercenary."

Her face altered, and her manner changed in a moment. Her eyes filled with tears. But almost in a moment she recovered her equanimity of face and manner, and, when she spoke, it was as calmly as before.

"You have had a hard duty to do here, Mr. Morgan; you have tracked my doings little by little, and slowly and surely you have found me out, but you have never, for a moment, forgotten that you are a gentleman, and I a lady, and I could see that there were moments when your instincts told you I was no criminal, though your reason was proving to you that I was!"

Was this very capable woman trying anew her powers of fascination upon me? No, this time there was the unmistakable note of sincerity and truth in her voice.

"I think," she went on, "it is only fair to you who have so nearly solved the problem to tell you how I managed to take in every one but yourself."

"Stop, Miss Vachel! I must warn you that we do not

meet on the terms of social equality, and are not bound by the laws of the society you live in. I am a professional police officer, and every word you say will be reported, and may be used against you."

She laughed. "The old phrase! Do your duty, Mr. Morgan, and your worst, I am not afraid of you. You shall hear my story. I am rather proud of it."

"I don't want to hear it."

"Thank you, but you ought to, after your warning, if you are a real professional. You know you ought!"

- Then she began her confession as follows :—

"The respectable middle-aged woman who met the children at Victoria Station was my old nurse, my former dresser at the theatre, and my present maid, Mary Brown. She is devoted to me and the children, and she and the Raymonds were the only persons in my confidence. Mary might have betrayed me for the reward at any moment, but I knew I could trust her."

"In the train, Mary, who is the cleverest dresser and maker up in the profession, dressed and made up Oscar and Belinda as two boys—got out with them at Dover Town Station, came back by the next up train, and met Mrs. Raymond at the London Terminus. Mrs. Raymond took them, in the character of her own children, to Croxton's Hotel, having previously sent her own two boys to school."

"I knew that the commissionaire and the cabman would be found, and give their evidence. It only served to throw the police off the scent. The children and their nurse were never traced at Dover in the crowd, and there was every reason to think they had gone abroad. Mr. Ericssen told me that you were the only person who was sure they had never left the country."

"Then," said I, "he told you that I was in the house in the character of a spy?"

"Oh, not at all. I found that out for myself. He only told me of an interview he had at Scotland Yard with a detective who, he said, seemed to see more clearly into the thing than any one else. When you came to us I guessed at once you were that clever person."

"Thank you!" I said, drily.

"Don't, please, think me too intelligent. Inspector Podolinsky made so many blunders that I expected some one to come and do it better. Then you came."

"I did not take you in for a moment?" I asked.

"Hardly for a moment. You did better. You found me out. The situation was getting dangerous, for you seemed to see through me. Mr. Purdy, my half accomplice—a poor young man, he never for a moment guessed I had kidnapped the children—was a child in your hands. Every look you gave me, every word you spoke, every tone you used—showed me that in your eyes I was—a detected criminal."

"You are very candid with me, Miss Vachel," I said coldly.

"Oh," said the girl, "I want to be candid with you. I have a reason. Well, I saw that you were on the point of finding out where and how the children were hid, so I took action while there was still time. But I want Mr. Ericssen to know that it is entirely owing to you that he was not asked for a much higher ransom than was actually demanded. I wrote the letter from The Detainer which you read and gave to Mr. Ericssen this morning."

"Yes? and he?"

"He brought the letter to me at once. I did not think it quite fair to urge him to pay the hundred thousand pounds, but his father's heart was touched by the letter describing the children being ill—they were, in point of fact, never in better health. Fortunately he had just made a lucky coup on the Stock Exchange. I'll give the rascals my cheque at

once,' he said, and he added : ' By Jove, if they had asked for double the money they'd have got it.' You must admit, Mr. Morgan, that to see one hundred thousand pounds slip through one's fingers like that was a little hard on the poor Detainer ! I had been too hasty ! "

How I had been mistaken in this woman !

" Miss Vachel," I said, with indignation, " I have long thought you guilty—and yet—and yet—I had hoped—that—that—but I was wrong ! You—I see now—that you are nothing but a cold-blooded, cruel and calculating woman ! "

" Yes," said Miss Vachel, quite calmly, " I feel I deserve all that. I am calculating, and cold-blooded."

" If any influence," I said, " that I possess and can use with Mr. Ericssen will induce him to change his mind and not pay you this money, I will certainly use it."

" I am sure you will," said Miss Vachel, " but it is too late. Mr. Ericssen rushed off two minutes after he had made up his mind, so as to be in time to get the words ' Yes,' ' Honour,' as an advertisement into the first edition of the evening paper. The first edition is published at noon, you know, and should be here presently. Would you mind ringing the bell ? I want to see if it has come, and if the advertisement appears."

The cool assurance of the governess was beginning to irritate me.

I got up to ring the bell, and I did so without answering her.

The man came and brought the evening paper with him.

" Ah, thank you, George, that is just what we rang for," she spoke in her accustomed soft, calm voice.

" Yes," she said, looking at the so-called " agony column " in the paper. " I see he was in time. Here it is !—Hurrah ! "

She read out the words, " *Yes. Honour.*"

" But he hasn't made the payment yet, and when he knows that it is you—! "

"Nothing that Mr. Ericssen can ever know now will make him go back from his word when once he has passed it. You don't quite know Mr. Ericssen yet, Mr. Morgan. He never in his life did an unfair, or a dishonourable thing, or spoke a word that a man of honour would wish unsaid."

"Yet this is the man against whom you have committed this crime!"

She said nothing, but she did not cease to look calmly into my face.

"The man under whose roof you lived, and whose bread you ate; who trusted you!"

She looked still unabashed at me.

"The man whose children you pretended to love, whose mother had trusted you with their future!"

"There is no use my denying all that," she said, quietly.

My indignation was rising at every moment, and such wrong, such a vile affectation of rectitude, such pretence to a contented conscience, in the face of such infamy, was repulsive to me.

"I say again, Mr. Ericssen is not bound by any law of honour to pay you this sum, this blackmail, and I shall advise him not to do so. Remember, he knows nothing as yet as to who has done this thing. I did not even prepare him."

"I am glad you did not. Thank you. But he knows by now."

"How?"

"Because I wrote a long letter, and confessed everything to him. I sent him my letter by messenger, half an hour ago. I was writing the last sentences of it when you sent for me. That is why I delayed coming to you."

"And the cheque that he is to pay? Do you really suppose he will pay it into your hands?"

"Yes, if I choose that he should."

I rose from my seat, this time thoroughly enraged, and

beyond all patience with such hardened hypocrisy. In my profession we often come across cases of callous villainy, but to see a girl, young at least in vice, case-hardened like an habitual and impenitent criminal was new to me.

"Madam," I said, "I have held my tongue too long. At least you shall hear what I think of you. I will not try to hide from you that you have successfully used your influence on me, as I know you have on others. I have seen and felt that you were beautiful, I have come under your charm of manner, and voice, and intelligence. Thank God! a something told me that it was a false charm, and an evil influence, and I have awoke in time. And now I tell you this,—that I have known many criminal actions, I have seen many reckless, many violent, many treacherous, and many cruel things done, but nothing so treacherous, nothing so base, so vile, or so cruel as this act of yours! No conduct has been so mean, disloyal, and hypocritical as what you have done against your employer and his children!"

For a minute no word passed between us. I stood by the fire-place, leaning against the mantel-piece, she was sitting on the sofa, looking at me, still calmly and questioningly, but I noticed that her face was growing pale, a dim look coming to her eyes.

How was it that I had come to forget my professional character and to let my human indignation speak, when my plain duty was, simply, to act and to say nothing?

Slowly the tears sprang to her eyes. She looked no longer at me. Presently she covered her face with her hands, and I heard her sobs.

The tears of a woman rarely move me. The tears of such a woman as Miss Vachel—stage tears, and artificial sobs, irritated me beyond words.

I waited till they were nearly over, and then I interrupted,—

"Come," I said, "if those tears of yours mean anything, which, frankly, I don't believe, they mean that you are sorry—that you repent. Well, there is still time. You have only to go back from your devilish bargain with Mr. Ericssen, and let him have his children again."

Miss Vachel took her hands from her face ; her eyes were still wet with her tears, but her face was, to my extreme astonishment, radiant with a sort of triumphant gladness.

"But I am not sorry ! I don't repent ! I only cried a very little because you scolded me so cruelly, and, for a moment, I was under a sort of spell, and believed it all."

"I am afraid I don't understand you at all."

"Oh, no, you don't, Mr. Morgan ! you don't understand me one little bit !" and she laughed. It was like the laugh, straight from her heart, of a happy child.

"You see, if you had not scolded me, if you had not thought my conduct hateful and horrible, and all the hard words you called me, I should have thought you just an ordinary professional detective. Now I see, what I suspected before, that you are a man, with a man's heart and brain."

"I don't suppose, Miss Vachel, it can make much difference to you whether I, or, any one else, approves or disapproves of your conduct. Your conscience is in your own keeping, and you will have a hundred thousand pounds to save it with, and of course under the circumstances, the law can't touch you. Believe me, if my hard words have given you any sort of pleasurable emotion, as they seem to have, I greatly regret them."

"That is the hardest and unkindest thing you have said yet, and I assure you that, all the same, it gives me keen pleasure."

I said nothing. The situation was growing too complex.

"Well, I suppose the time has come to undeceive you, Mr. Morgan. You see I have prolonged the situation with

you as long as I could. I have made you delightfully outspoken, and quite forget that you were a detective. What if I tell you that not a penny of Mr. Ericssen's money will ever come to me ? ”

“ It goes to your accomplice, I suppose ? ”

“ I have none. I was alone in this—crime.”

“ You will pass it on to some friend, then ? ”

“ What do you mean by a friend ? ”

“ I mean what you guess very well, but what I do not care to put into words.”

“ Oh,” said Miss Vachel, with real or affected simplicity, “ you mean my fiancé. No, I am not engaged to any one. There is no person of the sort. You see I am confessing myself to you, as you have taken it upon yourself to denounce my sins.”

“ You are under no sort of obligation, Miss Vachel, to confess your sins to me. Consider all I said, unsaid, and apologized for. Look on me, please, as only a detective officer, and yourself as no longer even under suspicion. The act which you yourself called a crime is apparently condoned by Mr. Ericssen, and is therefore no crime. Your actions and conduct are no longer within my competence.”

“ I liked your scolding just now better than your coldness, though neither is deserved, as you will understand if you will let me go on with my confession.”

“ Please yourself,” I answered coldly, and, I suppose, brutally.

“ I will, by saying that I have no friend at all outside Copplestone House.”

“ Then I don't understand anything, except that you are evidently mystifying me for your own amusement.”

“ I don't want to mystify you at all,” said Miss Vachel, “ I am only trying to tell you the truth.”

“ The truth ? ”

“ Yes, the truth is that I have no friends of the kind you

mean outside Copplestone House, but I have two dear friends within. For their sakes I committed this—I suppose I must say—crime.”

“Two dear friends?”

“The two children—Oscar and Belinda Ericssen.”

“You are telling me that you kidnapped the children for the children’s own sake?”

“And you, who guessed so much, could you not guess that?”

I did not answer, I was speechless with astonishment.

“You did not do this for your own gain?” I asked.

“Listen, Mr. Morgan, and you shall have the story from the beginning. The greatest friend I ever had in the world was Margaret Morrissey. She was the sweetest, the best, the dearest and the most beautiful nature that ever lived. I loved her as, I think, I can never love any friend again. She died, and she confided her two children to me. Can you understand what a mother feels when she leaves her children to the mercies of an unknown world? She confided them to me, almost with her last breath. James Ericssen is the best and kindest man that lives, but you see for yourself that he is a gambler—a gambler so ingrained, so sanguine of the future, so confident of his own luck that he cannot be persuaded that all will not always go well for himself and for his. His wife asked him to make some provision for his children. He promised her he would. He has never yet had what he thinks a good opportunity of keeping his promise. Margaret had foreseen this, and I promised her to do my utmost to induce him to keep his word. He is, as you must have seen, unselfish, generous, even prodigal where others are concerned, but he cannot be persuaded to see the necessity of doing for others what he never cares to do for himself. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are to him the counters of the great game of speculation he is playing at. He never has found it possible

to spare a single one of these counters. He loves his children to the point of devotion, but he believes he is doing the best he can for them in building up a colossal fortune for them to inherit, forgetting that every day of his life he risks insolvency, and never stopping to note how, day by day, his fellow-speculators are sinking and the waters of ruin closing over their heads.

"Neither Lady Muriel nor I could persuade him, though we have tried again and again. I have used every argument, and he always agrees, but he always puts off the day of action. He always has need of the particular sum that he is going to invest for the children, and what is odd, so great is his luck, that more than once when we had seemed near to persuading him to give way, but failed, he has been able to say afterwards, 'I was on the point of doing as you asked, and investing five hundred thousand dollars in the children's name. Luckily I waited, and see what happened—I have nearly doubled that very sum.' Once he said to me, 'I am beginning to want it done as much as you want it, but it's so hard to part with the counters—sometimes I feel that I am doing the children a wrong when I even think of locking up money that I can use so profitably.'

"Another day he laughed and said, 'Think, Ada, of some way of doing it without my knowing, till it's all over. Look there!'—he pointed to that great safe in the corner—'why don't you get a skeleton key and take out the notes you want. There are not enough just at present, but there may be next week. Steal the five hundred thousand dollars, my dear girl, and invest them in Oscar's and Belinda's names, and I swear I'll forgive you.'

"That speech of Mr. Ericssen's, said half in fun and half in earnest, gave me the first idea of turning criminal for the children's sake.

"How I carried out my scheme you know, but you can

never know what terrible agony of mind it has cost me. They thought it was the loss of the children that made me so silent and so miserable. Of course it was nothing of the sort, for I knew that they were well and happy, and I was with them every day. My unhappiness came because my life was one long lie, because, every day, I saw the trouble, anxiety and grief of their father deepening. One thing surprised me. The ease with which I had carried out what, in its inception, had seemed so difficult and so complex. My secret was quite safe. It baffled Sergeant Smith, and, as for poor Inspector Podolinsky, I guessed him at once to be a detective when he came here as butler. He never for a moment thought of guessing me.

"I had thought the thing would have lasted only two or three days, and the moment that Mr. Ericssen showed a sign of paying the ransom I had meant to confess my trick and ask his forgiveness. Unfortunately his speculations were against him just at that time, so it came to be that the thing has dragged miserably on, for over three weeks."

"Why did you ask more than twice as much as you wanted for the children?"

"For fear of making Mr. Ericssen suspect if I asked the very sum he and I had agreed upon—that he would suspect it was my doing."

"Then," Miss Vachel went on, "you came into the house. I knew at once, when you talked of your former life that you were one of us, and could enter into our thoughts, feelings and ways, as the other detectives could not. I knew, therefore, you were dangerous. I tried to fence with you and bewilder you—and weaken and turn your reasoning powers."

I smiled.

"Why do you laugh, Mr. Morgan?"

"Because you succeeded in doing that very thing! I hesitated—my instincts told me one thing, and my reason

another. My instinct said you were innocent, and my reason that you were guilty."

"And which was right?"

"My instinct! It generally is."

"Then you believe my present story?"

"Every word of it!"

"Thank you all the same, Mr. Morgan, for all those hard words you poured upon me. It was very unofficial of you, but I was overwrought. They struck upon me like blows, and wounded me. I was between tears and laughter. They hurt me and I cried. I knew they were absurd, and I laughed. Yet, I was glad you said them. A man would not have behaved as I did. That comes of being a woman."

"I withdraw what I said," I answered, "every word."

Miss Vachel rose, and took my hand.

"I should have been sorrier still if you had meant them; I should have been very sorry if you had not said them."

"I am afraid I did mean them."

"So did I. I was saying them all the time. Calling myself cruel and a hypocrite and a deceiver—and trying to console myself with the idea that one may do a little evil that a great good may come."

"I ought to argue against that fallacy," I said, "but I am not orthodox."

"Then you forgive me?" she asked, almost humbly.

"Forgive you!—I—I can't tell you how I—I—admire you for what you have done!"

We heard the approaching footsteps of Mr. Ericssen. No one but he could have been in such haste to come in.

"I suppose, Miss Vachel, I shall never see you again, from this minute?" I said.

"Will that not depend upon yourself?" she said, as the door opened and Mr. Ericssen rushed in.

"Ada! my dear girl!" he cried out. "This is the best joke in the world, and has the happiest ending."

He seized Miss Vachel by the two hands and kissed her on the forehead.

"Julius," she said gravely, "can you really forgive me for all the pain I have caused you?"

"You have got me to do what I hoped to have done long ago, and what I wanted to do. Well, it's over now, and I am glad. Do you know what my morning's work has been? I have bought Consols to the amount of one hundred thousand pounds, the full equivalent of Detainer's blackmail, and have given instructions to my solicitors to have the proceeds of the purchase settled by deed of gift upon Oscar and Belinda Ericssen, in the names of two trustees—and, after all, you know, Ada"—here spoke the gambler—"it's a splendid speculation, for Consols stand at just ninety-one and a quarter to-day—they'll be near par in a twelvemonth!"

Ada glanced at me and smiled.

Ericssen went on: "It's settled on them in the names of two trustees—I am not one of them—oh, no! Of two trustees—both trustworthy—Ada Vachel and"—he looked at me—"I don't know a man I've more confidence in than yourself, Morgan, but I didn't dare to put your name in without your leave. Is it a cool request? but you know I'm notorious for sudden inspirations. Do, please, say you accept the trust."

"I do. I accept it, and as a very great compliment."

"I hope you are satisfied with your co-trustee, Ada? Say so, dear, if you are."

"I shall be glad to work on Mr. Morgan's side in future," said Miss Vachel.

Mr. Ericssen did not seem to see the point of this dark saying.

"Mr. Morgan and I were only saying just now," Miss Vachel went on, "that this would be our last meeting—but now, perhaps, we shall meet sometimes—on business."

"Meet sometimes! but I am not going to let Mr. Morgan go so easily! Shan't we play Bridge again this very night? Of course we shall."

We did.

This is the end of the sequence of curious moral and other problems presented by the case of the Kidnapped Children. You know, I think, through other channels, that there was another sequel to these incidents, and how Miss Vachel became my wife, but this has nothing to do with the professional aspects of the case, of which the moral, if any one cares for one—is that first appearances, in criminal investigations, often prove deceptive, and that the only way to arrive at sound conclusions is closely to study the characters of the criminal, who may, sometimes, turn out to be the very reverse of a criminal.

THE END

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