
PIPCUB CLASSICS
THE EYES
of Max
CARRADOS
ERNEST BRAMAH

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THE AUTHOR



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1868 - 1942

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernest Bramah

Ernest Bramah was the pen name of Ernest Brammah Smith, an English writer born in Manchester. After an unsuccessful attempt at farming, he turned to journalism and then to fiction. His first book, *English Farming and Why I Turned It Up*, drew on the experience of trying to make a living from the land.

His writing developed in several directions. The Kai Lung stories use elaborate courtesy, proverbial language and tales within tales to create a comic world. Their imagined China belongs to a British literary tradition of fantasy and satire; it should not be mistaken for an account of Chinese life.

Bramah also created Max Carrados, a blind detective whose investigations depend on close attention, reasoning and information that other people overlook. The contrast between these mysteries and the Kai Lung tales shows his interest in different ways of telling a story, from a practical investigation to an ingenious verbal performance.

He also wrote speculative fiction, including *What Might Have Been*, and kept much of his private life away from public view. Readers can notice how often a change in perspective alters the apparent meaning of an event. Bramah makes both the detective and the storyteller demonstrate that the most obvious account is not always the most revealing.

Biographical references: BYU Modernist Short Story Project and bibliographical research. Portrait reference: Howard Coster photograph of Ernest Bramah Smith, National Portrait Gallery, reproduced by BYU.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

In offering a series of stories which continue the adventures of a group of characters already introduced to the reading public, a writer is inevitably at a certain disadvantage. In contriving their first appearance he has been able to select both the occasion and the moment which lend themselves most effectively to his plan. He has begun at the beginning—or, at least, at what, so far as you and he and the tale he has to tell are concerned, must be accepted as the beginning. Buttonholing you at the intersection of these three lines of destiny he has, in effect, exclaimed: My dear Reader! the very man I wished to see. I want to introduce rather a remarkable character to you—Max Carrados, whom you see approaching. You will notice that he is blind—quite blind; but so far from that crippling his interests in life or his energies, it has merely impelled him to develop those senses which in most of us lie half dormant and practically unused. Thus you will understand that while he may be at a disadvantage when you are at an advantage, he is at an advantage when you are at a disadvantage. The alert, slightly spoffish gentleman with the knowing look, who accompanies him, is his friend Carlyle. He has a private inquiry business now; formerly he was a solicitor, but … (here the voice becomes discreetly inaudible) … and having run up across Carrados again…. And so on.

This is well enough once, but it should not be repeated. One cannot begin at the beginning twice. In any case, it does not dispose of an obvious dilemma: those among prospective readers who are acquainted with the first book do not need to be informed of the how, when and wherefore of Carrados and his associates; those who are not so acquainted (possibly even a larger class) do need to be informed, and may resent the omission. In the circumstances a word of explanation where it can conveniently be avoided seems to offer the least harmful course.

Max Carrados was published in the spring of 1914. It consisted of eight tales, each separate and complete in itself, but connected (as are the nine of the present volume) by the central figure of

Carrados. The first story, “The Coin of Dionysius,” cleared the necessary ground. Carlyle, a private inquiry agent, who has descended in the social scale owing to an irregularity—an indiscretion rather than a crime—is very desirous one evening of testing the genuineness of a certain rare and valuable Sicilian tetradrachm, for upon its authenticity an immediate arrest depends. It is too late at night for him to get in touch with expert professional opinion, but finally he is referred to a certain gifted amateur, a Mr Max Carrados, who lives at Richmond. To Richmond he accordingly proceeds, and is at once recognized by Carrados as a former friend, Calling by name. The recognition is not at first mutual, for Carrados has also changed his name—he was formerly Max Wynn—in order to qualify for a considerable fortune, and he, like Carlyle, has altered in appearance with passing years. More to the point, he has become blind: “Literally … I was riding along a bridle-path through a wood about a dozen years ago with a friend. He was in front. At one point a twig sprang back—you know how easily a thing like that happens. It just flicked my eye—nothing to think twice about…. It is called amaurosis.”

Carlyle fails to recognise Carrados because the latter is an altered personality, with a different name, and living in unexpected circumstances, but to the blind man the change in Carlyle is negligible against the identity of a remembered voice. They talk of old times and of present times. Carlyle explains his business, and Carrados confesses that the idea of criminal investigation has always attracted him. Even yet, he thinks, he might not be entirely out at it, for blindness has unexpected compensations: “A new world to explore, new experiences, new powers awakening; strange new perceptions; life in the fourth dimension.”

Not regarding the suggestion of co-operation seriously, Carlyle puts the offer aside, but, later, Carrados returns to it again. Then the private detective remembers the object of his visit, the meanwhile forgotten coin, and to settle the matter, and to demonstrate to Carrados his helplessness (for the idea of the blind man being an expert must, of course, have been someone’s blunder), he slyly offers to put his friend on the track of a mystery.

“Yes,” he accordingly replied, with crisp deliberation, as he recrossed the room; “yes, I will, Max. Here is the clue to what seems to be a rather remarkable fraud.” He put the tetradrachm into his host’s hand. “What do you make of it?”

For a few seconds Carrados handled the piece with the delicate manipulation of his finger-tips, while Carlyle looked on with a self-appreciative grin. Then with equal gravity the blind man weighed the coin in the balance of his hand. Finally he touched it with his tongue.

“Well?” demanded the other.

“Of course I have not much to go on, and if I was more fully in your confidence I might come to another conclusion——”

“Yes, yes,” interposed Carlyle, with amused encouragement.

“Then I should advise you to arrest the parlour-maid, Nina Brun, communicate with the police authorities of Padua for particulars of the career of Helene Brunesi, and suggest to Lord Seastoke that he should return to London to see what further depredations have been made in his cabinet.”

Mr Carlyle’s groping hand sought and found a chair, on which he dropped blankly. His eyes were unable to detach themselves for a single moment from the very ordinary spectacle of Mr Carrados’s mildly benevolent face, while the sterilised ghost of his now forgotten amusement still lingered about his features.

“Good heavens!” he managed to articulate, “how do you know?”

“Isn’t that what you wanted of me?” asked Carrados suavely.

“Don’t humbug, Max,” said Carlyle severely. “This is no joke.” An undefined mistrust of his own powers suddenly possessed him in the presence of this mystery. “How do you come to know of Nina Brun and Lord Seastoke?”

“You are a detective, Louis,” replied Carrados. “How does one know these things?”

The bottom having been thus knocked out of his objection, Carlyle has no option but to promise Carrados the reversion of “the next murder” that comes his way. Actually, it is a case involving thirty-five murders that redeems this pledge.

But in spite of every device of Carrados's perspicuity there is still the cardinal deficiency that he cannot *see*. Whatever remains outside the range of four super-trained senses, aided by that subtle and elusive perception (every man in odd moments has surprised his own mind in the act of throwing out faint-spun and wholly forgotten tentacles of search towards it) called in vague ignorance the "sixth sense"—all beyond these must be for ever a *terra incognita* to his knowledge. To remedy this he has a personal attendant called Parkinson. Carlyle ingenuously falls into a proposed test that Carrados suggests—his powers of observation against those of Parkinson. When it comes to actual specified details the visitor finds that he only has a loose and general idea of the appearance of the man who has admitted him. On the other hand, when Parkinson is called up he is able to run off a precise and categorical description of Mr Carlyle—although his period of observation had certainly not been the more favorable—from the size and material of the caller's boots, with a button missing from the left foot, to the fashion and fabric of his watch-chain. A very ordinary man of strictly limited ability, he has, in fact, trained this one faculty of detailed observation and retention to supply his master's need.

These three men—Carrados, Carlyle and Parkinson—are the only characters of any prominence who are carried over from the first book to the second. An Inspector Beedel makes an occasional and unimportant appearance in both. In the story called "The Mystery of the Poisoned Dish of Mushrooms" a Mrs Bellmark (niece to Carlyle) will be met; she is the lady whose acquaintance Carrados formed in "The Comedy at Fountain Cottage," when a very opportune buried treasure was unearthed in her suburban garden.

Every generation not unnaturally "fancies itself," and whatever is happening is therefore somewhat more wonderful than anything that has ever happened before. But for this present age there is, of course, a special reason why the exploits of the sightless obtain prominence, and why every inch won in the narrowing of the gulf between the seeing and the blind is hailed almost with the satisfaction of a martial victory. That the general condition of the

blind is being raised, that they are, in the mass, more capable and infinitely less dependent than at any period of the past, is undeniable, and these things are plainly to the good; but when we think that blind men individually do more surprising feats and carry themselves more confidently in their blindness than has ever been done before, we deceive ourselves, in the superficiality that is common to the times. The higher capacity under blindness is a form of genius and, like other kinds of genius, it is not the prerogative of any century or of any system. Judged by this standard, Max Carrados is by no means a super-blind-man, and although for convenience the qualities of more than one blind prototype may have been collected within a single frame, on the other hand literary licence must be judged to have its limits, and many of the realities of fact have been deemed too improbable to be transferred to fiction. Carrados's opening exploit, that of accurately deciding an antique coin to be a forgery, by the sense of touch, is far from being unprecedented.

The curious and the incredulous may be referred to a little book, first published in 1820. This is entitled Biography of the Blind, or the Lives of such as have distinguished themselves as Poets, Philosophers, Artists, &c., and it is by James Wilson, "Who has been Blind from his Infancy." From the authorities given (they are stated in every case), it is obvious that these lives and anecdotes are available elsewhere, but probably in no other single volume is so much that is informing and entertaining on this one subject brought together.

The coin incident finds its warrant in the biography of Nicholas Saunderson, LL.D., F.R.S., who was born in Yorkshire in the year 1682. When about twelve months old he lost not only his sight but the eyes themselves from an attack of small-pox. In 1707 he proceeded to Cambridge, where he appears to have made some stir; at all events he was given his M.A. in 1711 by a special process and immediately afterwards elected Lucasian Professor of Mathematics. Of his lighter qualities Wilson says: "He could with great nicety and exactness perceive the smallest degree of roughness, or defect of polish, on a surface; thus, in a set of Roman medals he distinguished the genuine from the false, though they

had been counterfeited with such exactness as to deceive a connoisseur who had judged from the eye. By the sense of touch also he distinguished the least variation; and he has been seen in a garden, when observations were making on the sun, to take notice of every cloud that interrupted the observation, almost as justly as others could see it. He could also tell when anything was held near his face, or when he passed by a tree at no great distance merely from the different impulse of the air on his face. His ear was also equally exact; he could readily distinguish the fourth part of a note by the quickness of this sense; and could judge of the size of a room, and of his distance from the wall. And if he ever walked over a pavement in courts or piazzas which reflected sound, and was afterwards conducted thither again, he could tell in what part of the walk he had stood, merely by the note it sounded."

Another victim to small-pox during infancy was Dr Henry Moyes, a native of Fifeshire, born during the middle of the eighteenth century. "He was the first blind man who had proposed to lecture on chemistry, and as a lecturer he acquired great reputation; his address was easy and pleasing, his language correct, and he performed his experiments in a manner which always gave great pleasure to his auditors.... Being of a restless disposition, and fond of traveling, he, in 1785, visited America.... The following paragraph respecting him appeared in one of the American newspapers of that day:—'The celebrated Dr Moyes, though blind, delivered a lecture upon optics, in which he delineated the properties of light and shade, and also gave an astonishing illustration of the power of touch. A highly polished plate of steel was presented to him with the stroke of an etching tool so minutely engraved on it that it was invisible to the naked eye, and only discoverable by a powerful magnifying glass; with his fingers, however, he discovered the extent, and measured the length of the line. Dr Moyes informed us that being overturned in a stage-coach one dark rainy evening in England, and the carriage and four horses thrown into a ditch, the passengers and drivers, with two eyes apiece, were obliged to apply to him, who had no eyes, for assistance in extricating the horses. "As for me," said he, "I was quite at home in the dark ditch ... now directing eight

persons to pull here, and haul there with all the dexterity and activity of a man-of-war's boatswain.""

Thomas Wilson, "the blind bell-ringer of Dumfries," also owed his affliction to small-pox in childhood. At the mature age of twelve he was promoted to be chief ringer of Dumfries. Says our biographer: "He moreover excelled in the culinary art, cooking his victuals with the greatest nicety; and priding himself on the architectural skill he displayed in erecting a good ingle or fire. In his domestic economy he neither had nor required an assistant. He fetched his own water, made his own bed, cooked his own victuals, planted and raised his own potatoes; and, what is more strange still, cut his own peats, and was allowed by all to keep as clean a house as the most particular spinster in the town. Among a hundred rows of potatoes he easily found the way to his own; and when turning peats walked as carefully among the hags of lochar moss as those who were in possession of all their faculties. At raising potatoes, or any other odd job, he was ever ready to bear a hand; and when a neighbour became groggy on a Saturday night, it was by no means an uncommon spectacle to see Tom conducting him home to his wife and children.... At another time, returning home one evening a little after ten o'clock, he heard a gentleman, who had just alighted from the mail, inquiring the way to Colin, and Tom instantly offered to conduct him thither. His services were gladly accepted, and he acted his part so well that, although Colin is three miles from Dumfries, the stranger did not discover his guide was blind until they reached the end of their journey."

Music, indeed, in some form, would seem to be the natural refuge of the blind. Among the many who have made it their profession, John Stanley was one of the most eminent. Born in 1713, he lost his sight at the age of two, not from disease, but by falling on a marble hearth, with a china basin in his hand. At eleven he became organist of All-Hallows', Bread Street; at thirteen he was chosen from among many candidates to fill a similar position at St Andrew's, Holborn. Eight years later "the Benchers of the Honorable Society of the Inner Temple elected him one of their organists." The following was written by one of Stanley's old pupils:—"It was common, just as the service of St

Andrew's Church, or the Temple, was ended, to see forty or fifty organists at the altar, waiting to hear his last voluntary; and even Handel himself I have frequently seen at both of those places. In short, it must be confessed that his extempore voluntaries were inimitable, and his taste in composition wonderful. I was his apprentice, and I remember, the first year I went to him, his occasionally playing (for his amusement only) at billiards, mississipie, shuffle-board, and skittles, at which games he constantly beat his competitors. To avoid prolixity I shall only mention his showing me the way, both on horseback and on foot, through the private streets in Westminster, the intricate passages of the city, and the adjacent villages, places at which I had never been before. I remember also his playing very correctly all Corelli's and Geminiani's twelve solos on the violin. He had so correct an ear that he never forgot the voice of any person he had once heard speak, and I myself have divers times been a witness of this. In April, 1779, as he and I were going to Pall Mall, to the late Dr Boyce's auction, a gentleman met us who had been in Jamaica twenty years, and in a feigned voice said, 'How do you do, Mr Stanley?' when he, after pausing a little, said, 'God bless me, Mr Smith, how long have you been in England?' If twenty people were seated at a table near him, he would address them all in regular order, without their situations being previously announced to him. Riding on horseback was one of his favorite exercises; and towards the conclusion of his life, when he lived at Epping Forest, and wished to give his friends an airing, he would often take them the pleasantest road and point out the most agreeable prospects."

All the preceding, it will be noticed, became blind early in life, and this would generally seem to be a necessary condition towards the subject acquiring an exceptional mastery over his affliction. At all events, of the twenty-six biographies (including his own) in which Wilson provides the necessary data, only six lose their sight later than youth, and several of these—as Milton and Euler, for instance—are included for their eminence pure and simple and not because they are remarkable as blind men. Perhaps even Huber must be included in this category, for his marvellous research work among bees (he it was who solved the mystery of the queen bee's

aerial “nuptial flight”) seems to have been almost entirely conducted through the eyes of his wife, his son, and a trained attendant, and not to depend in any marked way on the compensatory development of other senses. Of the twenty youthful victims, the cause of blindness is stated in fourteen cases, and of these fourteen no fewer than ten owe the calamity to small-pox.

To this general rule of youthful initiation Dr Hugh James provides an exception. He was born at St Bees in 1771, and had already been practising for several years when he became totally blind at the age of thirty-five. In spite of this, he continued his ordinary work as a physician, even with increased success. If Dr James’s record under this handicap is less showy than that of many others, it is remarkable for the mature age at which he successfully adapted himself to a new life. He died at forty-five, still practising; indeed he died of a disease contracted at the bedside of a needy patient.

But for energy, resource and sheer bravado under blindness, no age and no country can show anything to excel the record of John Metcalf—“Blind Jack of Knaresborough” (1717-1810). At six he lost his sight through small-pox, at nine he could get on pretty well unaided, at fourteen he announced his intention of disregarding his affliction thenceforward and of behaving in every respect as a normal human being. It is true that immediately on this brave resolve he fell into a gravel pit and received a serious hurt while escaping, under pursuit, from an orchard he was robbing, but fortunately this did not affect his self-reliance. At twenty he had made a reputation as a pugilist.

Metcalf’s exploits are too many and diverse to be more than briefly touched upon. In boyhood he became an expert swimmer, diver, horse-rider and, indeed, an adept in country sports generally. While yet a boy he was engaged to find the bodies of two men who had been drowned in a local river and swept away into its treacherous depths; he succeeded in recovering one. He followed the hounds regularly, won some races, and had at that time an ambition to become a jockey. He was also a very good card-player (for stakes), a professional violinist, and a trainer of fighting-cocks. All through life there was a streak of jocosity, even of devilment, in

his nature. Twenty-one found him very robust, just under six feet two high, and as ready with his tongue as with his hands and feet. The following year he learned that his sweetheart was being married by her parents to a more eligible rival. Metcalf eloped with her on the night before the wedding and married her himself the next day. From Knaresborough, where they set up house, he walked to London and back, beating the coach on the return journey.

On the outbreak of the '45 he started recruiting for the King and in two days had enlisted one hundred and forty men. 64 of these, Metcalf playing at their head, marched into Newcastle, where they were drafted into Pulteney's regiment. With them Metcalf took part in the battle of Falkirk, and in other engagements down to Culloden. After Culloden he returned to Knaresborough and became horse-dealer, cotton and worsted merchant, and general smuggler. A little later he did well in army contract work, and then started to run a stage-coach between York and Knaresborough, driving it himself both summer and winter.

His extensive journeyings and his coach work had made the blind man familiar, in a very special way, with the roads and the land between them, and in 1765, at the age of forty-eight, he came into his true vocation—that of road construction. It is unnecessary to follow his career in this development; it is enough to say that during the next twenty-seven years he constructed some one hundred and eighty miles of road. Much of it was over very difficult country, some of it, indeed, over country which up to that time had been deemed impossible, but all of it was well made. His plans did not always commend themselves in advance to the authorities. For such a contingency Metcalf had a very reasonable proposal, "Let me make the road my way, and if it is not perfectly satisfactory when finished I will pull it all to pieces and, without extra charge, make it your way." He had been over the ground in his very special way; of this a Dr Bew, who knew him, wrote: "With the assistance only of a long staff, I have several times met this man traversing roads, ascending steep and rugged heights, exploring valleys and investigating their extent, form and situation so as to answer his designs in the best manner.... He was alone as usual."

Remarkable to the end, John Metcalf reached his ninety-fourth year and left behind him ninety great-grandchildren.

It would be easy to multiply appropriate instances from Wilson's book, but bulk is not the object. Nor can his Anecdotes of the Blind be materially drawn upon, although it is impossible to resist alluding to two delightful cases where blind men detected blindness in horses after the animals had been examined and passed by ordinary experts. In one instance suspicion arose from the sound of the horse's step in walking, "which implied a peculiar and unusual caution in the manner of putting down his feet." In the other case the blind man, relying solely on his touch, "felt the one eye to be colder than the other." These two anecdotes are credited to Dr Abercrombie; Scott, in a note to Peveril of the Peak ("Mute Vassals"), recounts a similar case, where the blind man discovered the imperfection by touching the horse's eyes sharply with one hand, while he placed the other over its heart and observed that there was no increase of pulsation.

One point in the capacity of the blind is frequently in dispute—the power to distinguish color. Even so ingenious a man as the Nicholas Saunderson already mentioned not only could gain no perception of color himself, but used to say that "it was pretending to impossibilities." Mr J. A. Macy, who edited Miss Helen Keller's book, The Story of my Life—an experience that ought surely to have effaced the word "impossible" from his mind in connection with the blind—makes the bold statement: "No blind person can tell colour."

Three instances of those for whom this power has been claimed are all that can be included here. The reader must attach so much credibility to them as he thinks fit:

1. From Wilson's Biography, as *ante*:

"The late family tailor (Macguire) of Mr M'Donald, of Clanronald, in Inverness-shire, lost his sight fifteen years before his death, yet he still continued to work for the family as before, not indeed with the same expedition, but with equal correctness. It is well known how difficult it is to make a tartan dress, because every stripe and colour (of which there are many) must fit each

other with mathematical exactness; hence even very few tailors who enjoy their sight are capable of executing that task.... It is said that Macguire could, by the sense of touch, distinguish all the colours of the tartan."

2. From the Dictionary of National Biography:

"M'Avoy, Margaret (1800-1820), blind lady, was born at Liverpool of respectable parentage on 28 June 1800. She was of a sickly constitution, and became totally blind in June 1816. Her case attracted considerable attention from the readiness with which she could distinguish by her touch the colours of cloth, silk, and stained glass; she could accurately describe, too, the height, dress, bearing, and other characteristics of her visitors; and she could even decipher the forms of letters in a printed book or clearly written manuscript with her fingers' ends, so as to be able to read with tolerable facility. Her needlework was remarkable for its extreme neatness. Within a few days of her death she wrote a letter to her executor. She died at Liverpool on 18 August 1820."

3. From The Daily Telegraph, 29th April 1922:

"American scientists are deeply interested in the discovery of a young girl of seventeen, Willetta Huggins, who, although totally blind and deaf, can 'see and hear' perfectly through a supernormal sense of smell and touch. Miss Huggins, who has been quite deaf since she was ten years old, and totally blind since she was fifteen, demonstrated to the satisfaction of physicians and scientists that she can hear perfectly over the telephone by placing her finger-tips upon the receiver and listening to conversation with friends by placing her fingers on the speakers' cheeks. She attends lectures and concerts, and hears by holding a thin sheet of paper between her fingers directed broadside towards the volume of sound, and reads newspaper headlines by running her finger-tips over large type. She discerns colours by odours, and before the Chicago Medical Society recently she separated several skeins of wool correctly and declared their colours by smelling them, and also recognised the various colours in a neck-tie."

The case of Miss Helen Keller has already been referred to. In America that case has become classic; indeed in its way the life of

Miss Keller is almost as remarkable as that of John Metcalf, but, needless to say the way is a very different one. Her book, The Story of My Life, is a very full and engrossing account of her education (in this instance "life" and "education" are interchangeable) from "the earliest time" until shortly after her entry into Radcliffe College in 1900, she then being in her twenty-first year. The book consists of three parts: (1) her autobiography; (2) her letters; (3) her biography from external sources, chiefly by the account of Miss Sullivan, who trained her.

The difficulty here was not merely blindness. When less than two years old not only sight, but hearing, and with hearing speech, were all lost. Her people were well-to-do, and skilled advice was frequently obtained, but no improvement came. As the months and the years went on, intelligent communication between the child and the world grew less, while a naturally impulsive nature deepened into sullenness and passion in the face of a dimly realised "difference," and of her inability to understand and to be understood. When Miss Sullivan came to live with the Kellers in 1887, on a rather forlorn hope of being able to do something with Helen, the child was six, and relapsing into primitive savagery. The first—and in the event the one and only—problem was that of opening up communication with the stunted mind, of raising or piercing the black veil that had settled around it four years before.

A month after her arrival Miss Sullivan wrote as follows:—"I must write you a line this morning because something very important has happened. Helen has taken the second great step in her education. She has learned that *everything has a name, and that the manual alphabet is the key to everything she wants to know*.

"In a previous letter I think I wrote you that 'mug' and 'milk' had given Helen more trouble than all the rest. She confused the nouns with the verb 'drink.' She didn't know the word for 'drink,' but went through the pantomime of drinking whenever she spelled 'mug' or 'milk.' This morning, while she was washing, she wanted to know the name for 'water.' When she wants to know the name of anything, she points to it and pats my hand. I spelled 'w-a-t-e-r' and thought no more about it until after breakfast. Then it

occurred to me that with the help of this new word I might succeed in straightening out the 'mug-milk' difficulty. We went out to the pump-house, and I made Helen hold her mug under the spout while I pumped. As the cold water gushed forth, filling the mug, I spelled 'w-a-t-e-r' in Helen's free hand. The word coming so close upon the sensation of cold water rushing over her hand seemed to startle her. She dropped the mug and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face. She spelled 'water' several times. Then she dropped on the ground and asked for its name and pointed to the pump and the trellis, and suddenly turning round she asked for my name. I spelled 'teacher.' Just then the nurse brought Helen's little sister into the pump-house, and Helen spelled 'baby' and pointed to the nurse. All the way back to the house she was highly excited, and learned the name of every object she touched, so that in a few hours she had added thirty new words to her vocabulary. Here are some of them: door, open, shut, give, go, come, and a great many more.

"*P.S.*—I didn't finish my letter in time to get it posted last night, so I shall add a line. Helen got up this morning like a radiant fairy. She has flitted from object to object, asking the name of everything and kissing me for very gladness. Last night when I got in bed, she stole into my arms of her own accord and kissed me for the first time, and I thought my heart would burst, so full was it of joy."

Seven months later we have this characteristic sketch. It may not be very much to the point here, but it would be difficult to excel its peculiar quality: "We took Helen to the circus, and had 'the time of our lives!' The circus people were much interested in Helen, and did everything they could to make her first circus a memorable event. They let her feel the animals whenever it was safe. She fed the elephants, and was allowed to climb up on the back of the largest, and sit in the lap of the 'Oriental Princess' while the elephant marched majestically around the ring. She felt some young lions. They were as gentle as kittens; but I told her they would get wild and fierce as they grew older. She said to the keeper: 'I will take the baby lions home and teach them to be mild.' The keeper of the bears made one big black fellow stand on his hind legs and hold out his great paw to us, which Helen shook

politely. She was greatly delighted with the monkeys and kept her hand on the star performer while he went through his tricks, and laughed heartily when he took off his hat to the audience. One cute little fellow stole her hair-ribbon, and another tried to snatch the flowers out of her hat. I don't know who had the best time, the monkeys, Helen, or the spectators. One of the leopards licked her hands, and the man in charge of the giraffes lifted her up in his arms so that she could feel their ears and see how tall they were. She also felt a Greek chariot, and the charioteer would have liked to take her round the ring; but she was afraid of 'many swift horses.' The riders and clowns and rope-walkers were all glad to let the little blind girl feel their costumes and follow their motions whenever it was possible, and she kissed them all, to show her gratitude. Some of them cried, and the Wild Man of Borneo shrank from her sweet little face in terror. She has talked about nothing but the circus ever since."

So far there is nothing in this case very material to the purpose of this Introduction. The story of Helen Keller is really the story of the triumph of Miss Sullivan, showing how, with infinite patience and resource, she presently brought a naturally keen and versatile mind out of bondage and finally led it, despite all obstacles, to the full attainment of its originally endowed powers. But the last resort of the blind—some of them—is the undeterminate quality to which the expression "sixth sense" has often been applied. On this subject, Helen being about seven years old at this time, Miss Sullivan writes: "On another occasion while walking with me she seemed conscious of the presence of her brother, although we were distant from him. She spelled his name repeatedly and started in the direction in which he was coming.

"When walking or riding she often gives the names of the people we meet almost as soon as we recognise them."

And a year later:

"I mentioned several instances where she seemed to have called into use an inexplicable mental faculty; but it now seems to me, after carefully considering the matter, that this power may be explained by her perfect familiarity with the muscular variations of

those with whom she comes into contact, caused by their emotions.... One day, while she was walking out with her mother and Mr Anagnos, a boy threw a torpedo, which startled Mrs Keller. Helen felt the change in her mother's movements instantly, and asked, 'What are we afraid of?' On one occasion, while walking on the Common with her, I saw a police officer taking a man to the station-house. The agitation which I felt evidently produced a perceptible physical change; for Helen asked excitedly, 'What do you see?'

"A striking illustration of this strange power was recently shown while her ears were being examined by the aurists in Cincinnati. Several experiments were tried, to determine positively whether or not she had any perception of sound. All present were astonished when she appeared not only to hear a whistle, but also an ordinary tone of voice. She would turn her head, smile, and act as though she had heard what was said. I was then standing beside her, holding her hand. Thinking that she was receiving impressions from me, I put her hands upon the table, and withdrew to the opposite side of the room. The aurists then tried their experiments with quite different results. Helen remained motionless through them all, not once showing the least sign that she realised what was going on. At my suggestion, one of the gentlemen took her hand, and the tests were repeated. This time her countenance changed whenever she was spoken to, but there was not such a decided lighting up of the features as when I held her hand.

"In the account of Helen last year it was stated that she knew nothing about death, or the burial of the body; yet on entering a cemetery for the first time in her life she showed signs of emotion—her eyes actually filling with tears....

"While making a visit at Brewster, Massachusetts, she one day accompanied my friend and me through the graveyard. She examined one stone after another, and seemed pleased when she could decipher a name. She smelt of the flowers, but showed no desire to pluck them; and, when I gathered a few for her, she refused to have them pinned on her dress. When her attention was drawn to a marble slab inscribed with the name Florence in relief, she dropped upon the ground as though looking for something,

then turned to me with a face full of trouble, and asked, 'Where is poor little Florence?' I evaded the question, but she persisted. Turning to my friend, she asked, 'Did you cry loud for poor little Florence?' Then she added: 'I think she is very dead. Who put her in big hole?' As she continued to ask these distressing questions, we left the cemetery. Florence was the daughter of my friend, and was a young lady at the time of her death; but Helen had been told nothing about her, nor did she even know that my friend had had a daughter. Helen had been given a bed and carriage for her dolls, which she had received and used like any other gift. On her return to the house after her visit to the cemetery, she ran to the closet where these toys were kept, and carried them to my friend, saying, 'They are poor little Florence's.' This was true, although we were at a loss to understand how she guessed it."

"Muscular variation" would rather seem to be capable of explaining away most of the occult phenomena if this is it. But at all events the latest intelligence of Miss Keller is quite tangible and undeniably "in the picture." According to Who's Who in America, she "Appears in moving picture-play, Deliverance, based on her autobiography." This, doubtless, is another record in the achievements of the blind: Miss Keller has become a "movie."

THE EYES OF
MAX CARRADOS

I

The Virginiola Fraud

If there was one thing more than another about Max Carrados that came as a continual surprise, even a mild shock, to his acquaintances, it was the wide and unrestricted scope of his amusements. Had the blind man displayed a pensive interest in chamber music, starred by an occasional visit to the opera, taken a daily walk in the park on his attendant's arm, and found his normal recreation in chess or in being read to, the routine would have seemed an eminently fit and proper one. But to call at The Turrets and learn that Carrados was out on the river punting, or to find him in his gymnasium, probably with the gloves on, outraged one's sense of values. The only extraordinary thing in fact about his recreations was their ordinariness. He frequently spent an afternoon at Lord's when there was the prospect of a good game being put up; he played golf, bowls, croquet and cards; fished in all waters, and admitted that he had never missed the University Boat Race since the great finish of '91. When he walked about the streets anywhere within two miles of his house he was quite independent of any guidance, and on one occasion he had saved a mesmerized girl's life on Richmond Bridge by dragging her into one of the recesses just in time to escape an uncontrollable dray that had jumped the kerb.

This prelude is by way of explaining the attitude of a certain Mr Marrable whom Carrados knew, as he knew a hundred strange and useful people. Marrable had chambers in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly which he furnished and decorated on a lavish and expensive scale. His bric-à-brac, pictures, books and appointments, indeed, constituted the man's means of living, for he was one of the best all-round judges of art and the antique in London, and with a nonchalant air of indifference he very pleasantly and profitably lounged his way through life on the honey extracted from one facile transaction after another. Living

on his wits in a strictly legitimate sense, he enjoyed all the advantages of being a dealer without the necessity of maintaining a place of business. It was not even necessary for him to find "bargains" in the general sense, for buying in the ordinary market and selling in a very special and restricted one disclosed a substantial margin. This commercial system, less rare than one might imagine, involved no misrepresentation: his wealthy and exclusive clients were quite willing to pay the difference for the *cachet* of Mr Marrable's connoisseurship and also, perhaps, for the amiable reluctance with which he carried on his operations.

The business that took Carrados to the amateur dealer's rooms one day in April has nothing to do with this particular incident. It was quite friendly and satisfactory on both sides, but it was not until Carrados rose to leave that the tangent of the visit touched the circle of the Virginiola.

"I am due at Gurnard's at about three-thirty," remarked Marrable, glancing at a Louis XVI. ormolu clock for which he had marked off a certain musical comedy countess at two hundred and fifty guineas. "Your way at all?"

"Gurnard & Lane's—the auctioneers?"

"Yes. They have a book sale on this afternoon."

"I hope I haven't been keeping you," apologised Carrados.

"Oh, not at all. There is nothing I want among the earlier lots." He picked up a catalogue from a satinwood desk in which Mademoiselle Mars had once kept her play-bills and glanced down the pages. "No. 191 is the first I have marked: An Account of the Newly Discovered Islands of Sir George Sommers, called 'Virginiola.' You aren't a competitor, by the way?"

"No," replied Carrados; "but if you don't mind I should like to go with you."

Marrable looked at him with slightly suspicious curiosity.

"You'd find it uncommonly dull, surely, seeing nothing," he remarked.

"I generally contrive to extract some interest from what is going on," said Carrados modestly. "And as I have never yet been at a book sale——"

"Oh, come, by all means," interposed the other. "I shall be very glad of your company. Only I was surprised for the moment at the idea. I should warn you, however, that it isn't anything great in the way of a dispersal—no Caxtons or first-folio Shakespeares. Consequently there will be an absence of ducal bibliophiles and literary Cabinet ministers, and we shall have a crowd of more or less frowsy dealers."

They had walked down into the street as they conversed. Marrable held up a finger to the nearest taxi-cab on an adjacent rank, opened the door for Carrados, and gave the driver the address of the auction rooms of which he had spoken.

"I don't expect to get very much," he speculated, turning over the later pages of the catalogue, which he still carried in his hand. "I've marked a dozen lots, but I'm not particularly keen on half of them. But I should certainly like to land the Virginiola."

"It is rare, I suppose?" inquired Carrados. Indifferent to books from the bibliophile's standpoint, he was able to feel the interest that one collector is generally willing to extend to the tastes of another.

"Yes," assented Marrable with weighty consideration. "Yes. In a way it is extremely rare. But this copy is faulty—the Dedication and Address pages are missing. That will bring down the bidding enormously, and yet it is just the defect that makes it attractive to me."

For a moment he was torn between the secretiveness bred of his position and a human desire to expound his shrewdness. The weakness triumphed.

"A few months ago," he continued, "I came cross another copy of the Virginiola among the lumber of a Bristol second-hand book-dealer's stock. It was altogether a rotten specimen—both covers gone, scores of pages ripped away, and most of those that remained appallingly torn and dirty. It was a fragment in fact, and I was not tempted even at the nominal guinea that was put upon it. But now——"

"Quite so," agreed Carrados.

"The first few pages were just the scrap that was presentable. I have a wonderful memory for details like that. The pages I want were discoloured, but they were sound. Sunshine or a chloride of lime bath will restore them to condition. If I get *this* Virginiola I shall run down to Bristol to-morrow."

"I congratulate you," said Carrados. "Unless, of course, your Bristol friend runs up to London to-day!"

Mr Marrable started rather violently. Then he shook his head with a knowing look.

"No; he won't do that. He is only a little back-street huckster. True, if he found out that a Virginiola short of the pages he possesses was being sold he might have written to a London dealer, but he won't find out. For some reason they have overlooked the defect in cataloguing. Of course every expert will spot the omission at once, as I did this morning, and the book will be sold as faulty, but if my Bristol friend, as you call him, did happen to see a catalogue there would be nothing to suggest any profitable opening to him."

"Splendid," admitted the blind man. "What would a perfect Virginiola be worth?"

"Auction price? Oh, about five hundred guineas."

"And to-day's copy?"

"Ah, that's more difficult ground. You see, every perfect copy is alike, but every imperfect copy is different. Well, say anything from a hundred and fifty to three hundred, according to who wants it. I shall be very content to take it half-way."

"Two hundred and twenty-five? Yes, I suppose so. Five hundred, less two twenty-five plus one leaves two hundred and seventy-four guineas to the good. You shall certainly pay for the taxi!"

"Oh, I don't mind standing the taxi," declared Mr Marrable magniloquently, "but don't pin me down to five hundred—that's the auction price. I should want a trifle above—if I decided to let the book go out of my own library, that is to say. Probably I should keep it. Well, here we are."

The cab had drawn to the kerb opposite the door of Messrs Gurnard's unpretentious frontage. Mr Marrable piloted his friend

into the saleroom and to a vacant chair by the wall, and then went off to watch the fray at closer quarters. Carrados heard the smooth-tongued auctioneer referring to an item as No. 142, and for the next fifty lots he followed the strangely unexciting progress of the sale with his own peculiar speculative interest.

"Lot 191," announced the easy, untiring voice. "An Account of the Newly Discovered Islands, etc." At last the atmosphere pulsed to a faint thrill of expectation. "Unfortunately we had not the book before us when the catalogue was drawn up. Lot 191 is imperfect and is sold not subject to return; a very desirable volume all the same. What may I say for Lot 191, please? An Account, etc., in original leather, faulty, and not subject to return."

As Mr Marrable had indicated, the defective Virginiola occupied a rather special position. Did anyone else want it? was in several minds; and if so, how much did he want it? Everyone waited until at last the question seemed to fine down into: Did *anyone* want it?

"May I say two hundred guineas?" suggested the auctioneer persuasively.

A large, heavy-faced man, who might have been a cattle-dealer from the North by every indication that his appearance gave, opened the bidding. He, at any rate, could have dissipated the uncertainty and saved the room the waiting. Holding, as he did, two commissions, he was bound to make the price a point above the lower of the orders.

"A hundred and twenty-one pounds."

"Guineas," came back like a slap from across the tables.

"A hundred and twenty-eight pounds."

"Guineas."

"A hundred and thirty-five."

"Guineas."

"A hundred and fifty."

"Guineas."

The duel began to resemble the efforts of some unwieldy pachyderm to shake off the attack of a nimble carnivore by fruitless twists and plunges. But now other voices, nods and

uplifted eyebrows joined in, complicating a direct issue, and the forked arithmetic played in among pounds and guineas with bewildering iteration. Then, as suddenly as it had grown, the fusillade shrivelled away, leaving the 2 original antagonists like two doughty champions emerging from a mêlée.

"Two hundred and thirty."

"Guineas."

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Guineas."

"Two hundred and seventy."

There was no response. The large man in the heavy ulster and pot-hat was to survive the attack after all, apparently: the elephant to outlast the jaguar.

"Two hundred and seventy pounds?" The auctioneer swept a comprehensive inquiry at every participant in the fray and raised his hammer. "It's against you, sir. No advance? At two hundred and seventy pounds…?"

The hammer began to fall. A score of pencils wrote "£270" against Lot 191.

"And eighty!"

The voice of the new bidder cut in crisp and business-like. Without ostentation it conveyed the cheerful message: "Now we are just beginning. I feel uncommonly fit." It caught the hammer in mid-air and arrested it. It made the large man feel tired and discouraged. He pushed back his hat, shook his head slowly, with his eyes fixed on his catalogue, and remained in stolid meditation. Carrados smiled inwardly at the restraint and strategy of his friend.

"Two hundred and eighty. Thank you, sir. Two hundred and eighty pounds…?" He knew by intuition that the price was final and the hammer fell decisively. "Mr Marrable…. Lot 192, History and Antiquities of the County, etc. Put it in the bidding, please. One pound…?"

After the sale Mr Marrable came round to Carrados's chair in very good spirits. Certainly he had had to give a not insignificant

price for the Virginiola, but the attendant circumstances had elated him. Then he had secured the greater part of the other lots he wanted, and at quite moderate valuations.

"I've paid my cheque and got my delivery note," he explained. "I shall send my men round for the books when I get back. What do you think of the business?"

"Vastly entertaining," replied Carrados. "I have enjoyed myself thoroughly."

"Oh, well.... But they were out for the Virginiola, weren't they?"

"Yes," admitted Carrados. "I feel that it is my turn to stand a taxi. Can I drop you?"

Mr Marrable assented graciously and they set out again.

"Look here," said that gentleman as they approached his door, "I think that I can put my hand on the Rimini cameo I told you about, if you don't mind coming up again. Do you care to, now that you are here?"

"Certainly," replied Carrados. "I should like to handle it."

"May as well turn off the taxi then. There is a stand quite near."

The cameo proved interesting and led to the display of one or two other articles of bijouterie. The host rang for tea and easily prevailed on Carrados—who could be entertained by anyone except the rare individual who had no special knowledge on any subject whatever—to remain. Thus it came about that the blind man was still there when the servant arrived with the books.

"I say, Carrados," called out Mr Marrable.

He had crossed the room to speak with his man, who had come up immediately on his return. The servant continued to explain, and it was evident that something annoying had happened. "Here's a devilish fine thing," continued Mr Marrable, dividing his attention between the two. "Felix has just been to Gurnard's and they tell him that the Virginiola cannot be found!"

"'Mislaid for the moment,' the gentleman said," amplified Felix.

"They send me back my cheque pending the book's recovery, but did you ever hear of such a thing? I was going down to Bristol by an early train to-morrow. Now I don't know what the deuce to do."

“Why not go back and find out what has really happened?” suggested Carrados. “They will tell you more than they would tell your man. If the book is stolen you may as well put off your journey. If it is mislaid—taken off by someone else in mistake, I expect they mean—it may be on its way back by now.”

“Yes; I suppose I’d better go. You’ve had enough of it, I suppose?”

“On the contrary I was going to ask you to let me accompany you. It may be getting interesting.”

“I hope not,” retorted Marrable. “Come if you can spare the time, but the very tamest ending will suit me the best.”

Felix had called up another cab by the time they reached the door, and for the second time that afternoon they spun through the West End streets with the auction rooms for their destination.

“Your turn to pay again, I think,” proposed Carrados when they arrived. “You take the odd numbers and I’ll take the even!”

Inside, most of the staff were obviously distracted by the strain of the untoward event and it was very evident that barbed words had been on the wing. In the private office to which Mr Marrable’s card gained them immediate admittance they found all those actually concerned in the loss engaged in saying the same things over to each other for the hundredth time.

“The book isn’t on the shelves now and there’s the number in the delivery note; that’s all I know about it,” a saleroom porter was reiterating with the air of an extremely reasonable martyr.

“Yes, yes,” admitted the auctioneer who had conducted the sale, “no one——Oh, I’m glad you are here, Mr Marrable. You’ve heard of our—er—eh——”

“My man came back with something about the book—the Virginiola—being mislaid,” replied Mr Marrable. “That is all I know so far.”

“Well, it’s very regrettable, of course, and we must ask your indulgence; but what has happened is simple enough and I hope it isn’t serious.”

"What concerns me," interposed Mr Marrable, "is merely this: Am I to have the book, and when?"

"We hope to deliver it into your hands—well, in a very short time. As I was saying, what has happened is this: Another purchaser bought certain lots. Among them was Lot 91. My sale clerk, in the stress of his duties, inadvertently filled in the delivery note as Lot 191." A gesture of despairing protest from the unfortunate young man referred to passed unheeded. "Consequently, as this gentleman took away his purchases at the end of the sale, he carried off the Virginiola among them. When he comes to look into the parcel he will at once discover the substitution and—er—of course return the volume."

"I see," assented Mr Marrable. "That seems straightforward enough, but the delay is unfortunate for me. Have you sent after the purchaser, by the way?"

"We haven't sent after the purchaser because he happens to live in Derbyshire," was the reply. "Here is his card. We are writing at once, but the probability is that he is staying in London overnight at least."

"You might wire."

"We will, of course, wire if you ask us to do so, Mr Marrable, but it seems to indicate an attitude of distrust towards Mr—er—Mr Dillworthy of Cullington Grange that I see no reason to entertain."

"Assuming the whole incident to be accidental, I think you are doing quite right. But in order to save time mayn't it perhaps be worth while anticipating that something else may have been at work?"

They all looked at Mr Carrados, who advanced this suggestion diffidently. The young man in the background breathed an involuntary "Ah!" of agreement and came a little more to the front.

"Do you suggest that Mr Dillworthy of Cullington Grange would actually deny possession of the book?" inquired the auctioneer a little cuttingly.

"Pardon me," replied Carrados blandly, "but do you know Mr Dillworthy of Cullington Grange?"

"No, certainly, I——"

"Nor, of course, the purchaser of Lot 91? That naturally follows. Then for the purpose of our hypothesis I would suggest that we eliminate Mr Dillworthy, who quite reasonably may not have been within a hundred miles of Charing Cross to-day. What remains? His visiting-card, that would cost about a crown at the outside to reproduce, or might much more cheaply be picked up from a hundred halls or office tables."

The auctioneer smiled.

"An elaborate plant, eh? Have you any practical knowledge, sir, of the difficulty, the impossibility, that would attend the disposal of this imperfect copy the moment our loss is notified?"

"But suppose it should become a perfect copy in the meantime? That might throw dust in their eyes. Eh, Marrable?"

"I say!" exclaimed the virtuoso, with his ideas forcibly directed into a new channel. "Yes, there is that, you know, Mr Trenchard."

"Even in that very unlikely event the Virginiola remains a white elephant. It cannot be got off to-day nor yet to-morrow. Any bookseller would require time in which to collate the volume; it dare not be offered by auction. It is like a Gainsborough or a Leonardo illegally come by—so much unprofitable lumber after it is stolen."

"Then," hazarded Carrados, "there is the alternative, which might suggest itself to a really intelligent artist, of selling it before it is stolen."

The conditions were getting a little beyond Mr Trenchard's easy access. "Sell it before it is stolen?" he repeated. "Why?"

"Because of the extreme difficulty, as you have proved, of selling it after."

"But how, I mean?"

"I think," interposed a quiet voice from the doorway, "that we had better accept Mr Carrados's advice, if he does us the great service of offering it, without discussion, Leonard. I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr Max Carrados, have I not?" continued a white-haired old gentleman, advancing into the room. "My young friend Trenchard, in his jealousy for the firm's reputation, starts with the conviction that it is impossible for us to be victimised. You

and I know better, Mr Carrados. Now will you tell me—I am Mr Ing, by the way—will you tell me what has really happened?"

"I wish I could," admitted Carrados frankly. "Unfortunately I know less of the circumstances than you do, and although I was certainly present during a part of the sale, I never even 'saw' the book"—he spread out the fingers of a hand to illustrate—"and probably I was not within several yards of it or its present holder."

"But you have some idea of the method adopted—some theory," persisted Mr Ing. "You can tell us what to do."

"Even there I can only put two and two together and suggest investigation on common-sense lines."

"It is necessary to go to an expert even for that sometimes," submitted the old gentleman with a very comical look. "Now, Mr Carrados, pray enlighten us."

"May I put a few questions then?"

"By all means."

"Do you require me, sir?" inquired Mr Trenchard distantly.

"Not if you will kindly leave the sale-book and papers, I think, thank you," replied Carrados. "This young gentleman, though." The sale clerk came forward eagerly. "You have the delivery note there? No, I don't want it. This gentleman, whom we will refer to as Mr Dillworthy—91 is the first thing he bought?"

"Yes, sir."

"The price?"

"Three pounds fifteen."

"Is that a good price or a bargain?"

The clerk looked towards Mr Ing.

"It's Coulthorp's Marvellous Recoveries, sir; the edition of 1674," he explained.

"A fair price," commented the old gentleman. "Yes, quite a good auction figure."

"The Virginiola is folio, I believe. What size is Marvellous Recoveries?"

"It is folio also."

"What was the next lot that Mr Dillworthy bought?"

"Lot 198."

"Any others?"

"Yes, sir. Lots 211, 217 and 234."

"And the prices of these four lots?"

"Lot 198, a guinea; 211, twelve-and-six; 217, fifteen shillings; 234, twenty-three shillings."

"Those must be very low prices?"

"They are books in no great demand. At every sale from mixed sources there are a certain number of make-weight lots."

"We find, then, that Mr Dillworthy bought 91 at a good price. After that he did nothing until 191 had passed. Then he at once secured four lots of cheap books. This gives a certain colour to suspicion, but it may be pure coincidence. Now," he continued, addressing himself to the clerk again, "after the delivery slip had been made out, did Mr Dillworthy borrow a pen from you?"

The youth's ingenuous face suddenly flashed to a recollection.

"Suffering Moses!" he exclaimed irrepressibly. "Well——"

"Then he did?" demanded Mr Ing, too keenly interested to stop to reprove the manner.

"Not exactly, sir. He didn't borrow a pen, but I lent him one."

"Ah!" remarked Carrados, "that sounds even better. How did it come about?"

"His bill was six pounds twelve and six. He gave me seven pounds and I made out the delivery form and gave it to him with the change. Then he said: 'Could you do with a fiver instead of five ones, by the way? I may run short of change,' and he held out a bank-note. 'Certainly, if you will kindly write your name and address on the back,' I replied, and I gave him a pen."

"The one you had been using?"

"Yes, it was in my hand. He turned away and I thought that he was doing what I asked, but before he would have had time to do that he handed me the pen back and said: 'Thanks; after all, I'll leave it as it is.'"

"Who sent in the book for sale?"

"Described as 'the property of a gentleman,'" contributed Mr Marrable. "I wondered."

"If you will excuse me for a moment," said Mr Ing, "I will find out."

He returned from another office smiling amiably but shaking his head.

"'The property of a gentleman,'" he repeated with senile deliberateness. "I find that the owner expressed a definite wish for the transaction to be treated confidentially. It is no unusual thing for a client to desire that. On certain points of etiquette, Mr Carrados, I am just as jealous for the firm as Trenchard could be, so that until we can obtain consent I am afraid that the gentleman must remain anonymous."

"The question is," volunteered Mr Marrable, "where has the volume got to, rather than where has it come from?"

"Sometimes," remarked the blind man, "after looking in many unlikely places one finds the key in the lock itself. At all events we seem to have come to the end of our usefulness here. Unless one of your people happens to come forward with a real clue, Mr Ing, I venture to predict that you will find more profit in investigating farther afield."

"But what are we to do?" exclaimed the old gentleman rather blankly, when he saw that Carrados was preparing to go. "We are absolute babes at this sort of thing—at least I know that I am."

"The remedy for that is quite simple. Put the case into the hands of the police."

"True, true; but it is not so absolutely simple to us. We have various interests and, yes, let us say, old-fashioned prejudices to consider. I suppose"—he became quite touchingly wistful—"I suppose that you could not be persuaded, Mr Carrados——?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Carrados. "I have other irons in the fire just now. But before you do call in the police, by the way, there is Mr Trenchard's view to be considered."

"You mean?"

"I mean that it would be as well to make sure that the Virginiola has been stolen."

"By wiring to Cullington Grange?"

"Assuming that there is a Cullington Grange. Then there is a harmless experiment in collateral proof that you might like to make in the meantime if the reply is delayed, as it reasonably may be through a dozen causes."

"And what is that, Mr Carrados?"

"Send up Charing Cross Road and find out among the second-hand shops whether the other books Mr Dillworthy took away with him were sold there immediately after the sale. They were only bought to round off the operation. They would be a dangerous incubus to keep, but if our man is a cool hand he may contrive to realise a pound or so for them before anything is known. You might even learn something else in the process."

"Aye, aye, to be sure," acquiesced Mr Ing. "We'll do that at once. And then, Mr Carrados, just a parting hint. If you were taking up the case what would *you* do then?"

The temptation to be oracular was irresistible. Carrados smiled inwardly.

"I should try to find a tall, short-sighted, Welsh book-dealer who smokes perique tobacco, suffers from a weak chest, wears thick-soled boots and always carries an umbrella," he replied with impressive gravity.

Mr Ing, the saleroom porter, the young clerk and Mr Marrable all looked at each other and then began to repeat the varied attributes of the required individual.

"There's that—what's his name?—old chap with a red waistcoat who's always here," hopefully suggested the porter in an aside. "He wears specs, and I've never seen him without an umbrella."

"He's a Scotchman and stands about five feet three, fathead!" whispered the clerk. "Isn't Mr Powis Welsh, sir?"

"To be sure. Powis of Redmayne Street is the man," assented Mr Ing. "Isn't that correct, Mr Carrados?"

"I don't know," replied Carrados, "but if he answers to the description it probably is."

"And then?"

"Then I think I should call and encourage him to talk to me—about Shakespeare."

"Why, dash it, Carrados," cried Mr Marrable, "you said that you knew nothing of book-collecting and yet you seem to be aware that Powis specialises Shakespeariana and to know that the Virginiola would interest him. I wonder how much you have been getting at me!"

"Oh, I suppose that I'm beginning to pick up a thing or two," admitted the blind man diffidently.

In the course of his experience of crime, fragments of many mysteries had been brought to Carrados's notice—detached chapters of chequered human lives to which the opening and the finis had never been supplied. Some had fascinated him and yet remained impenetrable to the end, yet the theft of the Virginiola, a mere coup of cool effrontery in which he felt no great interest after he had pierced the method, was destined to unfold itself before his mind without an effort on his part.

The sale at Gurnard's had taken place on a Wednesday. Friday brought Carrados a reminder of the stone that he had set rolling in the appearance of a visiting-card bearing the name and address of Mr Powis of Redmayne Street. Mr Powis was shown in and proved to be a tall, mild-looking man with a chronic cough. He carried a moderate parcel in one hand and, despite the bright, settled condition of the weather, an umbrella in the other.

"I'm an antiquarian bookseller, Mr Carrados," he remarked by way of introduction. "I haven't the honour of your custom that I know of, but I dare say you can guess what brings me here."

"You might tell me," replied Carrados.

"Oh yes, Mr Carrados, I will tell you. Certainly I will tell you," retorted Mr Powis, in a rather louder voice than was absolutely necessary. "Mr Ing looked in at my place of pizzness yesterday. He said that he was 'just passing'—'just passing,' you understand." Mr

Powis emphasised the futility of the subterfuge by laughing sardonically.

"A charming old gentleman," remarked Carrados pleasantly. "I don't suppose that he would deceive a rabbit."

"I don't suppose that he could," asserted Mr Powis. "'By the way,' he said, 'did you see the Virginiola we sold yesterday?' 'By the way!' Yes, that was it."

Carrados nodded his smiling appreciation.

"'Oh-ho,' I thought, 'the Virginiola!' 'Yes, Mr Ing,' I said, 'it was a nice copy parring the defect, but a week ago I could have shown you a nicer and a perfect one to poot.'

"'You've got one too, have you?' he asked.

"'Certainly I have,' I replied, 'or I should not say so. At least I had, but it may be sold now. It has gone to a gentleman in Rutland.'

"'Rutland; that's a little place,' he remarked thoughtfully. 'Have you any objection to mentioning your customer's name?'

"'Not in the least, Mr Ing,' I told him. 'Why should I have? It has taken me five and twenty years to make my connection, but let all the trade have it. Sir Roland Chargrave of Densmore Hall is the gentleman.'

"Now, look you, Mr Carrados, I could see by the way Mr Ing gasped when I told him that things are not all right. It seems to be your doing that I am brought into it and I want to know where I stand."

"Have you any misgivings as to where you stand?" inquired Carrados.

"No, Mr Carrados, I have not," exclaimed the visitor indignantly. "I pought my Virginiola three or four weeks ago and I paid a goot price for it."

"Then you certainly have nothing to trouble about."

"Put I have a goot deal to trouble about," vociferated Mr Powis. "I have a copy of the Virginiola to dispose of——"

"Oh, you still have it, then?"

"Yes, Mr Carrados, I have. Thanks to what is peing said pehind my pack, the pook was returned to me this morning. My name has been connected with a stolen copy and puyers are very shy, look you, when they hear that. And word, it travels; oh yes. You may not know how, but to-day they will be saying in Wales: 'Have you heard what is peing said of Mr Powis of London?' And to-morrow in Scotland it will be: 'That old tamn rascal Powis has been caught at last!'"

In spite of Mr Powis's desperate seriousness Carrados could not restrain a laugh at the forcefulness of the recital. "Come, come, Mr Powis," he said soothingly, "it isn't as bad as that, you know. In any case you have only to display your receipt."

"Oh, very goot, very goot indeed!" retorted the Welshman in an extremity of satire. "Show a buyer my receipt! Excellent! That would be a capital way to carry on the antiquarian pook pizzness! Besides," he added, rather lamely, "in this case it happens that I do not possess a receipt."

"Isn't that—rather an oversight?" suggested Carrados.

"No doubt I could easily procure one. Let me tell you the circumstances, Mr Carrados. I only want to convince you that I have nothing to conceal." With this laudable intention Mr Powis's attitude became more and more amiable and his manner much less Welsh. He had, in fact, used up all the indignation that he had generated in anticipation of a wordy conflict—a species of protective mimicry common to mild-tempered men. "I bought this book from the Rev. Mr Winch, the vicar of Fordridge, in Leicestershire. A few weeks ago I received a registered parcel from Fordridge containing a fine copy of the Virginiola. The same post brought me a letter from Mr Winch. I dare say I have it here.... No, never mind; it was to the effect that the book had been in the writer's family for many generations. Being something of a collector, he had never wished to sell it, but an unexpected misfortune now obliged him to raise a sum of money. He had contracted blood-poisoning in his hand and he had to come up to London for an operation. After that he would have to take a long sea voyage. He went on to say that he had heard of me as a likely

buyer and would call on me in a day or two. In the meantime he sent the book to give me full opportunity of examining it.

"Nothing could be more straightforward, Mr Carrados. Two days later Mr Winch walked into my place. We discussed the price, and finally we agreed upon—well, a certain figure."

"You can rely upon my discretion, Mr Powis."

"I paid him £260."

"That would be a fair price in the circumstances?"

"I thought so, Mr Carrados. I don't say that it wasn't a bargain, but it wasn't an outrageous bargain."

"You have occasionally done better?" smiled Carrados.

"Frequently. If I buy a book for threepence and sell it again for a shilling I do better, although it doesn't sound so well. Of course I am a dealer and I have to live on my profits and to pay for my bad bargains with my good bargains. Now if I had had an immediate customer in view the book might have been worth a good deal more to me. I may say that Wednesday's price at Gurnard's surprised me. Prices have certainly been going up, but only five years ago it would have required a practically perfect copy to make that."

"At all events, Mr Winch accepted?"

"I think I may say that he was perfectly satisfied," amended Mr Powis. "You see, Mr Carrados, he wanted the money at once, and, apart from the uncertainty and expense, he could not have waited for an auction. I was making out a cheque when he reminded me that his right hand was useless and asked me to initial it to 'bearer.' That is why I come to have no receipt."

"Yes," assented Carrados. "Yes, that is it. How was the letter signed?"

"It was typewritten, like the rest of it. You remember that his hand was bad when he wrote."

"True. Did you notice the postmark—was it Fordridge?"

"Yes; you should understand that Mr Winch posted on the book before he left Fordridge for London." It seemed to the visitor that Mr Carrados was rather slow even for a blind man.

"I think I am beginning to grasp the position," said Carrados mildly. "Of course you had no occasion to write to him at Fordridge?"

"Nothing whatever. Besides, he was coming to London almost immediately. If I wrote it was to be to the Fitzalan Hotel, off the Strand. Now here is the book, Mr Carrados. You saw—you examined, that is, the auction Virginiola?"

"No, unfortunately I did not."

"I am sorry. You would now have recognised how immeasurably superior my copy is, even apart from the missing pages."

"I can quite believe it." He was turning over the leaves of the book, which Mr Powis had passed to him. "But this writing on the dedication page?"

"Oh, that," said the dealer carelessly. "Some former owner has written his name there."

"I suppose it constitutes a blot?"

"Why, yes, in a small way it does," admitted Mr Powis. "Had it been 'Wm. Shakespeare,' it would have added a thousand guineas; as it's only 'Wm. Shoelack,' it knocks two or three off."

"Possibly," suggested Carrados, "it was this blemish that decided Sir Roland Chargrave against the book?"

"No, no," insisted Mr Powis. "Someone has hinted something to him. I don't say that you are to blame, Mr Carrados, but a suspicion has been created; it has got about."

"But Sir Roland is the one man whom it could not affect," pointed out Carrados. "He, at any rate, would know that this copy is unimpeachable, because when the other was being stolen this was actually in his hands and had been for—for how long?"

"Five or six days; he kept it for about a week. And that no doubt is true as a specific case; but a malicious rumour is wide, Mr Carrados. So-and-so is unreliable; he deals in questionable property; better be careful. It is enough. No, no; Mr Chatton said nothing about any objection to the book, merely that Sir Roland had decided not to retain it."

"Mr Chatton?"

“He is the secretary or the librarian there. I have frequently done business with him in the old baronet’s time. This man is a nephew who succeeded only a few months ago. Well, Mr Carrados, I hope I have convinced you that I came by this Virginiola in a legitimate manner?”

“Scarcely that.”

“I haven’t!” exclaimed Mr Powis in blank astonishment.

“I never doubted it. At the sale I happened to hear you remark to a friend that you had recently bought a copy. My suggestion to Mr Ing was merely to hint that, with your exceptional knowledge, your unique experience, you would probably be able to put them on the right line as to the disposal of the stolen copy and so on. An unfortunate misunderstanding.”

Mr Powis stared and then nodded several times with an expression of acute resignation.

“That old man is past work,” he remarked feelingly. “I might have saved myself a journey. Well, I’ll go now, Mr Carrados.”

“Not yet,” declared Carrados hospitably; “I am going to persuade you to stay and lunch with me, Mr Powis. I want”—he was still fingering the early pages of the Virginiola with curious persistence—“I want you to explain to me the way in which these interesting old books were bound.”

With the departure of Mr Powis a few hours later Carrados might reasonably conclude that he had heard the last of the Virginiola theft, for he was now satisfied that it would never reach publicity as a police court case. But, willy-nilly, the thing pursued him. Mr Carlyle was to have dined with him one evening in the following week. It was a definite engagement, but during the day the inquiry agent telephoned his friend to know what he should do. A young gentleman who had been giving him some assistance in a case was thrown on his hands for the evening.

“You are the most amiable of men, Max,” chirruped Mr Carlyle; “but, really, I don’t like to ask——”

“Bring him by all means,” assented the most amiable of men. “I expect two or three others to turn up to-night.” So Mr Carlyle brought him.

"Mr Chatton, Max."

An unobtrusive young man, whose face wore a perpetual expression of docile willingness, shook hands with Carrados. Anything less like the sleek, competent self-assurance of the conventional private secretary it would be difficult to imagine. Mr Chatton's manner was that of a well-meaning man who habitually blundered from a too conscientious sense of duty, knew it all along, and was pained at the inevitableness of the recurring catastrophe.

"I have just taken up a case that might interest you, Max," said Mr Carlyle, as the three of them stood together. "Simple enough, but it involves a valuable old book that has been stolen. Gurnard's called me in"—and he proceeded to outline the particulars of the missing Virginiola.

"And you went down yourself to Gurnard's to look into it, Mr Chatton?" said Carrados, masking the species of admiration that he felt for his new acquaintance.

"Well, I don't know about looking into it," confessed Mr Chatton. "You see, it doesn't really concern Sir Roland at all now. But I thought that I ought to offer them any information—a description or something of that sort might be wanted—when I heard of their loss. Of course," he added, with a deepening of his habitual look of rueful perturbation, "we can't help it, but it's very distressing to think of them losing so much money over our affair."

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it," cried Mr Carlyle heartily. "It's all in the way of business and Gurnard's won't feel a touch like that. Very good of you to take all the trouble you have, I say." He turned his beaming, self-confident eye towards his host to explain. "I happened to meet Mr Chatton there this morning and ever since he has been helping me to put about inquiries in likely quarters and so on. I haven't any doubt of pulling our man up in a week or two, unless it's the work of a secret bibliomaniac, and Gurnard's don't entertain that."

"Wednesday last, you say," pondered Carrados. "Aren't they rather late in turning it over to you?"

"Just what I complained of. Then it came out that they had been pinning their faith to the advice of some officious idiot who happened to be present at the sale. Nothing came of it, of course."

"They did not happen to mention the idiot's name?" inquired Max tentatively.

"No. The old gentleman—Mr Ing—said that he had already got into hot water once through doing that." Mr Carlyle began to laugh in his hearty way over a recollection of the incident. "Do you know what this genius's brilliant idea was? He put them on the track of a copy of this book that had been recently sold to a dealer, assuming that it must necessarily be the stolen copy. And so it had been recently sold, Max, but it happened to be *before* the other was stolen!"

"Very amusing," agreed Carrados.

"Do you know, I can't help thinking that I was somehow to blame for that," confessed Mr Chatton in a troubled voice. "You remember, I told you——"

"No, no," protested Mr Carlyle encouragingly. "How could it be your fault?"

"Well, it's very good of you to reassure me," continued the young man, relieved but not convinced. "But I really think I may have introduced a confusing element. I should like Mr Carrados to judge.... When I learned from Sir Roland that he intended sending this Virginiola to Gurnard's, knowing that it was a valuable book, I saw the necessity of going over it carefully with another copy—'collating' it is called—to find out whether anything was missing. The British Museum doesn't possess an example, and in any case I could not well spare a day just then to come to London for the purpose. So I wrote to a few dealers, rather, I am afraid, giving them the impression that we wished to buy a copy. In this way I got what I wanted sent up on approval and I was able to go through the two thoroughly. At the moment I argued that my duty to my employer justified the subterfuge, but I don't know, I don't know; I really question whether it was quite legitimate."

“Oh, nonsense,” remonstrated Mr Carlyle, to whom the subtleties did not appeal. “Rather a smart way of getting what you wanted in the circumstances, don’t you think, Max?”

Carrados paid a willing if equivocal tribute to the wider problem of Mr Chatton’s brooding conscientiousness.

“Very ingenious altogether,” he admitted.

Mr Carlyle did not pull his man up in a few weeks; in fact he never reached him at all. For the key to the disappearance of the Virginiola he had to wait two years. He was at The Turrets one day when his host was called away for a short time to see a man who had come on business.

Carlyle had picked up a newspaper, when Carrados came back from the door and opening one of the inner drawers of his desk threw out a long envelope.

“There,” he remarked as he went on again, “is something that may interest you more.”

He was quite right. The inquiry agent cut open the envelope that was addressed to himself and read the following narrative:—

In the year 1609 a seafaring gentleman called Somers—Sir George Somers—was wrecked on an island in the Atlantic. This island—one of a group—although destitute of human inhabitants, was overrun by pigs. During the first part of their enforced residence there the shipwrecked mariners were much concerned by unearthly shrieks and wailings that filled the night. With the simple piety of the time these were attributed to the activity of witches, imps and demons. In fact, in addition to the varied appellations of Virginiola, Bermoothes, Somers Islands, etc., the place was enticingly called “The Ile of Divels.”

In due course the castaways were rescued and returned to England. In due course, also, there appeared a variety of printed accounts of their adventures. (We are prone to think that the tendency is modern, Louis, but it is not.) One of these coming into the hands of a cynical, middle-aged playwright on the look-out for a new plot to annex, was at once pressed into his scheme. Doubtless he saw behind the shadowy “divels” the substantial

outlines of the noisy "hogges." However, the idea was good enough for a background. He wrote his play and called it The Tempest.

This is the explanation offered to me of the high and increasing value of rare early works on Bermuda. They can be classed among the Shakespeariana. There is also another reason: they can be classed among the Americana.

About three hundred years later a certain young gentleman who combined fairly expensive tastes with good commercial ability succeeded to a title and its appendages. Among the latter were a mansion in Rutlandshire, which he determined was too expensive, a library in which he was not vastly interested, and a private secretary whose services he continued to retain.

One day about six months after his succession Sir Roland Chargrave called in his secretary to receive instructions.

"Look here, Chatton," he said, "I have decided to let this place furnished for a time. See Turvey about the value and then advertise it for something more than he advises. It ought to bring in a decent rental. Then there are some valuable things here that are no earthly good to me. I'll start with the library."

"You intend to dispose of the library, Sir Roland?" faltered the secretary.

"No. The library gives a certain distinction to a fellow and the Chargraves have always had one. I'll keep the library, but I'll weed out all the old stuff that will make high prices. Uncle Vernon left a valuation list which appears to have been made out about ten years ago. One book alone—An Account of Virginiola—he puts down at £300. Then there are a dozen others that ought to bring another £200 among them. I require £500 just now. Here is a list of the books I have picked out. Send them off to Gurnard's to be sold as soon as possible. Don't have my name catalogued. I don't want it to be known that I'm selling anything. That's all."

The secretary withdrew with an accentuation of his unhappy manner. It was very distressing to him, this dispersal of the family heirlooms. It was also extremely inconvenient personally, because he had already sold the Virginiola himself only a week before. For he also had expenses. Perhaps he had fallen into the hands of the

Jews; perhaps it was the Jewesses. At all events, like Sir Roland, he required money, and again like Sir Roland, the Virginiola had seemed the most suitable method. He had quietly withdrawn the book about the time of his former master's death, and thus saved the new baronet quite an item in duty. He had secured Sir Vernon's valuation list and after six months had concluded that he was safe. He had taken extraordinary pains to cover his identity in selling the book and the old dotard appeared to have made two lists and to have deposited one elsewhere!

Like a wise man Mr Chatton set about discovering how he could retrieve himself. He had had charge of the library and he knew that it was too late to report the book as lost. In any case he would be dismissed; if inquiry was made at that stage he would be prosecuted. From the depths of his brooding melancholy Mr Chatton evolved a scheme.

The first thing was to get back the Virginiola a little before the sale. By that time he had sent in the list, but not the books. Doubtless he still had some of the illicit funds in hand. Now the Virginiola had been valued at £300 by old Sir Vernon, but if at the sale it was discovered to be imperfect in an important detail then it might realise only a fraction of that sum. There was also another consideration. A name had been indelibly written on one of the early pages, and if Mr Powis was not to recognise his property that page must be temporarily removed.

I think it was Chatton's undoubted intention to buy back the book if possible and run no further risk with it. What he had not taken into account was the enormous rise in the value of this class of work. What had been reasonably worth £300 ten years before, the market now apprised at nearly double. Even the imperfect copy reached nearly the original estimate and thereby Chatton's first string failed.

But this painstakingly conscientious young man had not been content to risk all on a single chance. What form his second venture took it will be unnecessary to recall to you. He calculated on the chances of the saleroom, and he succeeded. The Virginiola was recovered; the abstracted sheet was cunningly replaced,

probably certain erasable marks that had been put in for fuller disguise were removed, and Mr Powis received back his property with formal regrets.

I anticipate an indignant question rising to your lips. I did not tell you this before, Louis, because of one curious fact. The story is entirely speculative on my part so far as demonstrable proof is concerned. Chatton, who is rather a remarkable young man, did not leave behind him one solitary shred of evidence that would stand before a jury. Time and Mr Chatton's future career can alone bring my justification, but some day if we have the opportunity (I am committing this to paper in case we should not) we will go over the evidence together. In the meanwhile Gurnard's can, as you said, stand the loss.

Here the typewritten account ended, but at the foot of the last page Carrados had pasted a newspaper cutting. From it Mr Carlyle learned that "Vernon Howard, alias Digby Skeffington, etc., etc., whose real name was said to be Chatton, well connected," had, the week before, been convicted, chiefly on the King's evidence of a female accomplice, of obtaining valuable jewellery under false pretences. Sentence had been deferred, pending further inquiries.

II

The Disappearance of Marie Severe

"I wonder if you might happen to be interested in this case of Marie Severe, Mr Carrados?"

If Carrados's eyes had been in the habit of expressing emotion they would doubtless have twinkled as Inspector Beedel thus casually introduced the subject of the Swanstead on Thames schoolgirl whose inexplicable disappearance two weeks earlier had filled column upon column of every newspaper with excited speculation until the sheer impossibility of keeping the sensation going without a shred of actual fact had relegated Marie Severe to the obscurity of an occasional paragraph.

"If you are concerned with it, I am sure that I shall be interested, Inspector," said the blind man encouragingly. "It is still being followed, then?"

"Why, yes, sir, I have it in hand, but as for following it—well, 'following' is perhaps scarcely the word now."

"Ah," commented Carrados. "There was very little to follow, I remember."

"I don't think that I've ever known a case of the kind with less, sir. For all the trace she left, the girl might have melted out of existence, and from that day to this, with the exception of that printed communication received by the mother—you remember that, Mr Carrados?—there hasn't been a clue worth wasting so much as shoe leather on."

"You have had plenty of hints all the same, I suppose?"

Inspector Beedel threw out a gesture of mild despair. It conveyed the patient exasperation of the conscientious and long-suffering man.

"I should say that the case 'took on' remarkably, Mr Carrados. I doubt if there has been a more popular sensation of its kind for years. Mind you, I'm all in favour of publicity in the circumstances;

the photographs and description *may* bring important facts to light, but sometimes it's a bit trying for those who have to do the work at our end. 'Seen in Northampton,' 'seen in Ealing,' 'heard of in West Croydon,' 'girl answering to the description observed in the waiting-room at Charing Cross,' 'suspicious-looking man with likely girl noticed about the Victoria Dock, Hull,' 'seen and spoken to near Chorley, Lancs,' 'caught sight of apparently struggling in a luxurious motor car on the Portsmouth Road,' 'believed to have visited a Watford picture palace'—they've all been gone into as carefully as though we believed that each one was the real thing at last."

"And you haven't, eh?"

The Inspector looked round. He knew well enough that they were alone in the study at The Turrets, but the action had become something of a mannerism with him.

"I don't mind admitting to *you*, sir, that I've never had any other opinion than that the father of the little girl went down that day and got her away. Where she is now, and whether dead or alive, I can't pretend to say, but that he's at the bottom of it I'm firmly convinced. And what's more," he added with slow significance, "I *hope* so."

"Why in particular?" inquired the other.

Beedel felt in his breast-pocket, took out a formidable wallet, and from among its multitudinous contents selected a cabinet photograph sheathed in its protecting envelope of glazed transparent paper.

"If you could make out anything of what this portrait shows, you'd understand better what I mean, Mr Carrados," he replied delicately.

Carrados shook his head but nevertheless held out his hand for the photograph.

"No good, I'm afraid," he confessed before he took it. "A print of this sort is one of the few things that afford no graduation to the sense of touch. No, no"—as he passed his finger-tips over the paper—"a gelatino-chloride surface of mathematical uniformity, Inspector, and nothing more. Now had it been the negative——"

"I am sure that that could be procured if you wished to have it, Mr Carrados. Anyway, I dare say that you've seen in some of the papers what this young girl is like. She is ten years old and big—or at least tall—for her age. This picture is the last taken—some time this year—and I am told that it is just like her."

"How should you describe it, Inspector?"

"I am not much good at that sort of thing," said the large man with a shy awkwardness, "but it makes as sweet a picture as ever I've seen. She is very straight-set, and yet with a sort of gracefulness such as a young wild animal might have. It's a full-faced position, and she is looking straight out at you with an expression that is partly serious and partly amused, and as noble and gracious with it all as a young princess might be. I have children of my own, Mr Carrados, and of course I think they're very nice and pretty, but this—this is quite a different thing. Her hair is curly without being in separate curls, and the description calls it black. Eyes dark brown with straight eyebrows, complexion a sort of glowing brown, small regular teeth. Of course we have a full description of what she was wearing and so forth."

"Yes, yes," assented Carrados idly. "The Van Brown Studio, Photographers, eh? These people are quite well off, then?"

"Oh yes; very nice house and good position—Mrs Severe, that is to say. You will remember that she obtained a divorce from her husband four or five years ago. I've turned up the particulars and it wasn't what you'd call a bad case as things go, but the lady seemed determined, and in the end Severe didn't defend. She had five or six hundred a year of her own, but he had nothing beyond his salary, and he threw his position up then, and ever since he has been going steadily down. He's almost on the last rung now and picks up his living casual."

"What's the case against him?"

"Well, it scarcely amounts to a case as yet because there is no evidence of his being seen with the child, nor is there anything to connect him with her after the disappearance. Still, it is a working hypothesis. If it was the act of a tramp or a maniac, experience goes to show that we should have found her, dead or alive, by now.

Mrs Severe is all for it being her husband. Of course the decree gave her the custody of Marie. Severe asked to be allowed to see her occasionally, and at first a servant took the child to have tea with him once a month. That was at his rooms. Then he asked to be met in one of the parks or at a gallery. He hadn't got so much as a room then, you see, sir. At last the servant reported that he had grown so shabby as to shame her that the child should be seen with him, though she did say that he was always sober and very kind to Marie, bringing her a little toy or something even when he didn't seem to have sixpence for himself. After that the visits were stopped altogether. Then about a month ago these two, husband and wife, met accidentally in the street. Severe said that he hoped to be doing a bit better soon, and asked for the visits to be continued. How it would have gone I cannot say, but Mrs Severe happened to have a friend with her, an American lady called Miss Julp, who seems to be living with her now, and the middle-aged female—she's a hard sister, that Cornelia Julp, I should say—pushed her way into the conversation and gave her views on his conduct until Severe must have had some trouble with his hands. Finally Mrs Severe had an unfortunate impulse to end the discussion by giving her husband a bank-note. She says she got the most awful look she ever saw on any face. Then Severe very deliberately tore up the note, dropped the pieces down a gutter grid that they were standing near, dusted his fingers on his handkerchief, raised his hat and walked away without another word. That was the last she saw of him, but she professes to have been afraid of something happening ever since."

"Then something happens, and so, of course, it must be Severe?" suggested Carrados.

"It does look a bit like that so far, I must admit, sir," assented the Inspector. "Still, Mrs Severe's opinions aren't quite all. Severe's account of his movements on the afternoon in question—say between twelve-thirty and four in particular—are not satisfactory. Latterly he has been occupying a miserable room off Red Lion Street. He went out at twelve and returned about five—that he doesn't deny. Says he spent the time walking about the streets and in the Holborn news-room, but can mention no one who saw him

during those five hours. On the other hand, a porter at Swanstead station identifies him as a passenger who alighted there from the 1.17 that afternoon."

"From a newspaper likeness?"

"In the first instance, Mr Carrados. Afterwards in person."

"Did they speak, or is it merely visual?"

"Only from what he saw of him."

"Struck, I suppose, by the remarkable fact that the passenger wore a hat and a tie—as shown in the picture; or inspired to notice him closely by something indescribably suggestive in the passenger's way of giving up his ticket? It may be all right, Beedel, I admit, but I heartily distrust the weight of importance that these casual identifications are being given on vital points nowadays. Are you satisfied with this yourself?"

"Only as corroborative, sir. Until we find the girl or some trace of her we're bound to make casts in the hope of picking up a line. Well, then there's the letter Mrs Severe received."

"Have you that with you?"

The Inspector took up the wallet that he had not yet returned to his pocket and selected another enclosure.

"It's a very unusual form," he commented as he handed the envelope to Mr Carrados and waited for his opinion.

The blind man passed his finger-tips across the paper and at once understood the point of singularity. The lines were printed, but not in consecutive form, every letter being on a little separate square of paper. It was evident that they had been cut out from some other sheet and then pasted on the envelope to form the address.

"London, E.C., 5.30 P.M., 15th May," read Carrados from the postmark.

"The day of the kidnapping. There is a train from Swanstead arriving at Lambeth Bridge at 4.47," remarked Beedel.

"What was your porter doing when that left?"

"He was off duty, sir."

Carrados took out the enclosure and read it off as he had already done the envelope, but with a more deliberative touch, for the print was smaller. The type and the paper were suggestive of a newspaper origin. In most cases whole words had been found available.

"Do not be alarmed," ran the patchwork message. "The girl is in good hands. Only risk lies in pressing search. Wait and she will return uninjured."

"You have identified the newspaper?"

"Yes; it is all cut from The Times of May the 13th. The printing on the back of the words fixes it absolutely. Premeditated, Mr Carrados."

"The whole incident points to that. The date of the newspaper means little, but the deliberate selection of words, the careful way they have been cut out and aligned, taken in conjunction with the time the child disappeared and the time that this was posted—yes, I think you may assume premeditation, Inspector."

"Stationery of the commonest description; immediate return to London, and the method of a man who used this print because he feared that under any disguise his handwriting might be recognised."

Carrados nodded.

"Severe cannot hope to retain the child, of course," he remarked casually. "What motive do you infer?"

"Mrs Severe is convinced that it is to distress her, out of revenge."

"And this letter is to reassure her?"

The Inspector bit his lip as he smiled at the quiet thrust.

"It might also be to influence her towards suspending search," he suggested.

"At all events I dare say that it has reassured her?"

"In a certain way, yes, it has. It has enabled us to establish that the act is not one of casual lust or vagabondage. There is an alternative that we naturally did not suggest to her."

"And that is?"

"Another Thelby Wood case, Mr Carrados. The maniacal infatuation of someone who would be the last to be suspected. Some man of good position, a friend and neighbour possibly, who sees this beautiful young creature—the school friend of his own daughters or sitting before him in church it may be—and becomes the slave of his diseased imagination until he is prepared to risk everything for that one overpowering object. A primitive man for the time, one may say, or, even worse, a satyr or a gorilla."

"I wonder," observed Carrados thoughtfully, "if you also have ever felt that you would like to drop it and become a monk, Inspector. Or a stylite on a pole."

Beedel laughed softly and then rubbed his chin in the same contemplative spirit.

"I think I know what you mean, sir," he admitted. "It's a black page. But," he added with wholesome philosophy, "after all, it *is* only a page in a longish book. And if I was in a monastery there'd be one or two more things done that I've helped to keep undone."

"Including the cracking of my head, Inspector? Very true. We must take the world as we find it and ourselves as we are. And I wish that I could agree with you about Severe. It would be a more endurable outlook: spite and revenge are at least decent human motives. Unfortunately, the only hint I can offer is a negative one." He indicated the printed cuttings on the sheet that Beedel had submitted to him. "This photo-mountant costs about sixpence a pot, but you can buy a bottle of gum for a penny."

"Well, sir," said Beedel, "I did think of having that examined, but I waited for you to see the letter as it stood. After all, it didn't strike me as a point one could put much reliance on."

"Quite right," assented Mr Carrados, "there is nothing personal or definite in it. It may suggest a photographer, amateur or professional, but it would be preposterous to assume so much from this alone. Severe, even, may have——There are hundreds of chances. I should disregard it for the moment."

"There is nothing more to be got from the letter?"

"There may be, but it is rather elusive at present. What has been done with it?"

"I received it from Mrs Severe and it has been in my possession ever since."

"You haven't submitted it to a chemist for any purpose?"

"No, sir. I gave a copy of the wording to some newspaper gentlemen, but no one but myself has handled it."

"Very good. Now if you care to leave it with me for a few days——"

Inspector Beedel expressed his immediate willingness and would have added his tribute of obligation for Mr Carrados's service, but the blind man cut him short.

"Don't rely on anything, Inspector," he warned him. "I am afraid that this resolves itself into a game of chance. Just one touch of luck may give us a winning point, or it may go the other way. In any case there is no reason why I should not motor round by Swanstead one of these days when I am out. If anything fresh turns up before you hear from me you had better telephone me. Now exactly where did this happen?"

The actual facts surrounding the disappearance of Marie Severe constituted the real mystery of the case. Arling Avenue, Swanstead, was one of those leisurely suburban roads where it is impossible to imagine anything happening hurriedly from the delivery of an occasional telegram to the activity of the local builder. Houses, detached houses each surrounded by its rood or more of garden, had been built here and there along its length at one time or another, but even the most modern one had now become matured, and the vacant plots between them had reverted from the condition of "eligible sites" into very passable fields of buttercups and daisies again, so that Arling Avenue remained a pleasant and exclusive thoroughfare. One side of the road was entirely unbuilt on and afforded the prospect of a level meadow where hay was made and real animals grazed in due season. The inhabitants of Arling Avenue never failed to point out to visitors this evidence of undeniable rurality. It even figured in the prospectus of Homewood, the Arling Avenue day school for girls and little boys which the Misses Chibwell had carried on with equal success and

inconspicuousness until the Severe affair suddenly brought them into the glare of a terrifying publicity.

Mrs Severe's house, The Hollies, was the first in the road, as the road was generally regarded—that is to say, from the direction of the station. Beedel picked up a loose sheet of paper and scored it heavily with a plan of the neighbourhood as he explained the position with some minuteness. Next to The Hollies came Arling Lodge. After Arling Lodge there was one of the vacant plots of ground before the next house was reached, but between the Lodge and the vacant plot was a broad grassy opening, unfenced towards the road, and here the Inspector's pencil underlined the deepest significance, culminating in an ominous X about the centre of the space. Originally the opening had doubtless marked the projection of another road, but the scheme had come to nothing. Occasionally a little band of exploring children with the fictitious optimism of youth pecked among its rank and tangled growth in the affectation of hoping to find blackberries there; once in a while a passing chair-mender or travelling tinker regarded it favourably for the scene of his midday siesta, but its only legitimate use seemed to be that of affording access to the side door of Arling Lodge garden. The Inspector pencilled in the garden door as an afterthought, with the parenthesis that it was seldom used and always kept locked. Then he followed out the Avenue as far as the school, indicating all the houses and other features. The whole distance traversed did not exceed two hundred yards.

A few minutes before two o'clock on the afternoon of her disappearance Marie Severe set out as usual for Miss Chibwell's school. Since the incident of the unfortunate encounter with her former husband Mrs Severe had considered it necessary to exercise a peculiar vigilance over her only child. Thenceforward Marie never went out alone; never, with the exception of the short walk to school and back, that is to say, for in that quiet straight road, in the full light of day, it was ridiculous to imagine that anything could happen. It was ridiculous, but all the same the vaguely uneasy woman generally walked to the garden gate with the little girl and watched her until the diminished figure passed,

with a last gay wave of hand or satchel, out of her sight into the school-yard.

"That's how it would have been on this occasion," narrated Beedel, "only just as they got to the garden gate a tradesman whom Mrs Severe wanted to speak with drove up and passed in by the back way. The lady looked along the avenue, and as it happened at that moment Miss Chibwell was standing in the road by her gate. No one else was in sight, so it isn't to be wondered at that Mrs Severe went back to the house immediately without another thought.

"That was the last that has been seen of Marie. As a matter of fact, Miss Chibwell turned back into her garden almost as soon as Mrs Severe did. When the child did not appear for the afternoon school the mistress thought nothing of it. She is a little short-sighted and although she had seen the two at their gate she concluded that they were going out together somewhere. Consequently it was not until four o'clock, when Marie did not return home, that the alarm was raised."

Continuous narration was not congenial to Inspector Beedel's mental attitude. He made frequent pauses as though to invite cross-examination. Sometimes Carrados ignored the opening, at others he found it more convenient to comply.

"The inference is that someone was waiting in this space just beyond Arling Lodge?" he now contributed.

"I think it is reasonable to assume that, sir. Premeditated, we both admit. Doubtless a favourable opportunity was being looked for and there it was. At all events there"—he tapped the X as the paper lay beneath Carrados's hand—"there is the very last trace that we can rely on."

"The scent, you mean?"

"Yes, Mr Carrados. We got one of our dogs down the next morning and put him on the trail. We gave him the scent of a boot and from the gate he brought us without a pause to where I have marked this X. There the line ended. There can be no doubt that from that point the girl had been picked up and carried. That is a very remarkable thing. It could scarcely have been done openly

past the houses. The fences on all sides are of such a nature that it is incredible for any man to have got an unwilling or insensible burden of that sort over without at least laying it down in the process. If our dog is to be trusted, it wasn't laid down. Some sort of a vehicle remains. We find no recent wheel-marks and no one seems to have seen anything that would answer about at that time."

"You are determined to mystify me, Inspector," smiled Carrados.

"I'm that way myself, sir," said the detective.

"And I know you too well to ask if you have done this and that——"

"I've done everything," admitted Beedel modestly.

"Is this X spot commanded by any of the houses? Here is Arling Lodge——"

"There is one window overlooking, but now the trees are too much out for anything to be seen. Besides, it's only a passage window. Dr Ellerslie took me up there himself to settle the point."

"Ellerslie—Dr Ellerslie?"

"The gentleman who lives there. At least he doesn't live altogether there, as I understand that he has it for a week-end place. Boating, I believe, sir. His regular practice is in town."

"Harley Street? Prescott Ellerslie, do you know?"

"That is the same, Mr Carrados."

"Oh, a very well-known man. He has a great reputation as an operator for peritonitis. Nothing less than fifty guineas a time, Inspector." Perhaps the fee did not greatly impress Mr Carrados, but he doubtless judged that it would interest Inspector Beedel. "And this house on the other side—Lyncote?"

"A retired Indian army colonel lives there—Colonel Doige."

"I mean as regards overlooking the spot."

"No; it is quite cut off from there. It cannot be seen."

Carrados's interpreting finger stopped lightly over a detail of the plan that it was again exploring. The Inspector's pencil had now added a line of dots leading from The Hollies gate to the X.

“The line the dog took,” Beedel explained, following the other’s movement. “You notice that the girl turned sharply out of the avenue into this opening at right angles.”

“I was just considering that.”

“Something took her attention suddenly or someone called her there—I wonder what, Mr Carrados.”

“I wonder,” echoed the blind man, raising the anonymous letter to his face again.

Mr Carrados frequently professed to find inspiration in the surroundings of light and brilliance to which his physical sense was dead, but when he wished to go about his work with everyone else at a notable disadvantage he not unnaturally chose the dark. It was therefore night when, in accordance with his promise to Beedel, he motored round by Swanstead, or, more exactly, it was morning, for the clock in the square ivied tower of the parish church struck two as the car switchbacked over the humped bridge from Middlesex into Surrey.

“This will do, Harris; wait here,” he said a little later. He knew that there were trees above and wide open spaces on both sides. The station lay just beyond, and from the station to Arling Avenue was a negligible step. Even at that hour Arling Avenue might have been awake to the intrusion of an alien car of rather noticeable proportions.

The adaptable Harris picked out Mr Carrados’s most substantial rug and went to sleep, to dream of a wayside cycle shop and tea-rooms where he could devote himself to pedigree Wyandottes. With Parkinson at his elbow Carrados walked slowly on to Arling Avenue. What was lacking on Beedel’s plan Parkinson’s eyes supplied; on a subtler plane, in the moist, warm night, full of quiet sounds and earthy odours, other details were filled in like the work of a lightning cartoonist before the blind man’s understanding.

They walked the length of the avenue once and then returned to the grassy opening where the last trace of Marie Severe had evaporated.

“I will stay here. You walk on back to the highroad and wait for me. I may be some time. If I want you, you will hear the whistle.”

"Very good, sir." Parkinson knew of old that there were times when his master would have no human eye upon him as he went about his work, and with a magnificent stolidity the man had not a particle of curiosity. It did not even occur to him to wonder. But for nearly half-an-hour the more inquiring creatures of the night looked down—or up, according to their natures—to observe the strange attitudes and quiet persistence of the disturber of the solitude as he crossed and recrossed their little domain, studied its boundaries, and explored every corner of its miniature thickets. A single petal picked up near the locked door to the garden of Arling Lodge seemed a small return for such perseverance, but it is to be presumed that the patient search had not been in vain, for it was immediately after the discovery that Carrados left the opening, and with the cool effrontery that marked his methods he opened the front gate of Dr Ellerslie's garden and made his way with slow but unerring insight along the boundary wall.

"A blind man," he had once replied to Mr Carlyle's nervous remonstrance—"a blind man carries on his face a sufficient excuse for every indiscretion."

It was nearly three o'clock when, by the light of the street lamp at the corner of the avenue and the highroad, Parkinson saw his master approaching. But to the patient and excellent servitor's disappointment Carrados at that moment turned back and retraced his steps in the same leisurely manner. As a matter of fact, a new consideration had occurred to the blind man and he continued to pace up and down the footpath as he considered it.

"Oh, sir!"

He stopped at once, but betraying no surprise, without the start which few can restrain when addressed suddenly in the dark. It was always dark to him, but was it ever sudden? Was he indeed ignorant of the obscure figure that had appeared at the gate during his perambulation?

"I have seen you walking up and down at this hour and I wondered—I wondered whether you had any news."

"Who are you?" he asked.

“I am Mrs Severe. My little girl Marie disappeared from here two weeks ago. You must surely know about it; everybody does.”

“Yes, I know,” he admitted. “Inspector Beedel told me.”

“Oh, Inspector Beedel!” There was obvious disappointment in her voice. “He is very kind and promises—but nothing comes of it, and the days go on, the days go on,” she repeated tragically.

“Ida! Ida!” Someone was calling from one of the upper windows, but Carrados was speaking also and Mrs Severe merely waved her hand back towards the house without responding.

“Your little girl was very fond of flowers?”

“Oh yes, indeed.” The pleasant recollection dwarfed the poor lady’s present sense of calamity and for a moment she was quite bright. “She loved them. She would bury her face in a bunch of flowers and drink their scent. She almost lived in the garden. They were more to her than toys or dolls, I am sure. But how do you know?”

“I only guessed.”

“Ida! Ida!” The rather insistent, nasally querulous voice was raised again and this time Mrs Severe replied.

“Yes, dear, immediately,” she called back, still lingering, however, to discover whether she had anything to hope from this outlandish visitant.

“Had Marie been ill recently?” Carrados detained her with the question.

“Ill! Oh no.” The reply was instant and emphatic. It was almost—if one could credit a mother’s pride in her child’s health being carried to such a length—it was almost resentful.

“Nothing that required the services of a doctor?”

“Marie never requires the services of a doctor.” The tone, distant and constrained, made it clear that Mrs Severe had given up any expectations in this quarter. “My child, I am glad to say, does not know what illness means,” she added deliberately.

“Ida! Oh, here you are.” The very unromantically accoutred form of a keen-visaged, middle-aged female, padding heavily in

bedroom slippers along the garden walk, gave its quietus to the situation. “What a scare you gave me, dearie. Why, whoever——”

“Good-night,” said Mrs Severe, turning from the gate.

Carrados raised his hat and resumed his interrupted stroll. He had not sought the interview and he made no effort to prolong it, for there was little to be got from that source.

“A strange flare of maternal pride,” he remarked in his usual detached fashion as he rejoined Parkinson.

About five o’clock on the same day—five o’clock in the afternoon, let it be understood—Inspector Beedel was called to the telephone.

“Oh, nothing fresh so far, Mr Carrados,” he reported when he identified his caller. “I shan’t forget to let you know whenever there is.”

“But I think that possibly there is,” replied Mr Carrados. “Or at least there might be if you went down to Arling Lodge and insisted on seeing the child who slept there last night.”

“Arling Lodge? Dr Ellerslie’s? You don’t mean to say, sir——”

“That is for you to satisfy yourself. Dr Ellerslie is a widower with no children. Marie Severe was drugged by phronolal on some flowers which she was given. Phronolal is a new anæsthetic which is practically unknown outside medical circles. She was carried into the garden of Arling Lodge and into the house. The bunch of flowers was thrown down temporarily inside the wall, probably while the door was relocked. The girl’s hair caught on a raspberry cane six yards from the back door along the path leading there. Ellerslie had previously sent away the two people who look after the place—a housekeeper and her husband who sees to the garden. That letter, by the way, was associable with phronolal. Now you have all that I know, Inspector, and I hope to goodness that I am clear of it.”

“But, good heavens, Mr Carrados, this is really terrible!” protested Beedel, moved to emotion in spite of his rich experience of questionable humanity. “A man in his position! Is he a maniac?”

“I don’t know. To tell you frankly, Inspector, I haven’t gone an inch further than I was compelled to go in order to be sure. Make

use of the information as you like, but I don't want to have anything more to do with the case. It isn't a pleasant thing to have pulled down a man like Ellerslie—a callous, exacting machine in the operating-room, one hears, but a man who was doing fine work—saving useful lives every day. I'm sick of it, Beedel, that's all."

"I understand, sir. Still, there's the other side, isn't there, after all? Of course I'll keep your name out of it as you wish, but I shall be given a good deal of credit that I oughtn't to accept. If you don't do anything for a few weeks the papers are always more complimentary when you do do it."

"I'm afraid that you will have to put up with that," replied Carrados drily.

There was an acquiescent laugh from the other end and a reference to the speaker's indebtedness. Then: "Well, I'll get the necessary authority and go down at once, sir."

"Yes. Good-bye," said Carrados. He hung up the receiver with the only satisfaction that he had experienced since he had fixed on Ellerslie—satisfaction to have done with it. The thing was unpalatable enough in itself, and to add another element of distaste, through one or two circumstances that had come his way in the past, he had an actual regard for the surgeon whom some called brutal, but who was universally admitted to be splendidly efficient. It would have been a much more congenial business to the blind man to clear him than to implicate. He betook himself to a tray of Sicilian coins of the autonomous period to get the taste out of his mouth and swore that he would not read a word of any stage of the proceedings.

"A Mr Severe wishes to see you, sir."

So it happened that about an hour after he had definitely shelved his interest in the case Max Carrados was again drawn into its complications. Had Severe been merely a well-to-do suppliant, perhaps … but the blind man had enough of the vagabond spirit to ensure his sympathy towards one whom he knew, on the contrary, to be extremely ill-to-do. In a flash of imagination he saw the outcast walking from Red Lion Street to Richmond, and, denied

admission, from Richmond back to Red Lion Street again, because he hadn't sixpence to squander, the man who always bought a little toy....

"It is nearly seven, isn't it, Parkinson? Mr Severe will stay and dine with me," were almost the first words the visitor heard.

"Very well, sir."

"I? Dine?" interposed Severe quickly. "No, no. I really——"

"If you will be so good as to keep me company," said Carrados with suave determination. Parkinson retired, knowing that the thing was settled. "I am quite alone, Mr Severe, and my selfishness takes that form. If a man calls on me about breakfast-time he must stay to breakfast, at lunch-time to lunch, and so on."

"Your friends, doubtless," suggested Severe with latent bitterness.

"Well, I am inclined to describe anyone who will lighten my darkness for an hour as a friend. You would yourself in the circumstances, you know." And then, quite unconsciously, under this treatment the years of degradation suddenly slipped from Severe and he found himself accepting the invitation in the conventional phrases and talking to his host just as though they were two men of the same world in the old times. Guessing what had brought him, and knowing that it mattered little or nothing then, Carrados kept his guest clear of the subject of the disappearance until they were alone again after dinner. Then, to be denied no longer, Severe tackled it with a blunt inquiry:

"Scotland Yard has been consulting you about Marie, Mr Carrados?"

"Surely that is not in the papers?"

"I don't know," replied Severe, "but they aren't my authority. Among the people I have mostly to do with many shrewd bits of information circulate that never get into the Press. Sometimes they are mere bead-work, of course, but quite often they have ground. Just at present I am something of a celebrity in my usual haunts—I am 'Jones' in town, by the way, but my identity has come out—and everything to do with the notorious Severe affair comes round to

me. I hear that Inspector Beedel, who has the case in hand, has just been to see you. Your co-operation is inferred."

"And if so?" queried Carrados.

"If so," continued his visitor, "I have a word to say. Beedel got it into his thick, unimaginative skull that I must be the kidnapper because, on the orthodox 'motive' lines, he couldn't fix on anyone else. As a matter of fact, Mr Carrados, I have rather too much affection for my little daughter to have taken her out of a comfortable home. My unfortunate wife may have her faults—I don't mind admitting that she has—serious faults and a great many of them, but she would at least give Marie decent surroundings. When I heard of the child's disappearance—it was in the early evening papers the next morning—I was distracted. I dreaded every edition to see a placard announcing that the body had been found and to read the usual horrible details of insane or bestial outrage. I searched my pockets and found a shilling and a few coppers. Without any clear idea of what I expected to do, I tore off to the station and spent my money on a third single to Swanstead."

"Oh," interposed Carrados, "the 1.17 arrival?"

Severe laughed contemptuously.

"The station porter, you mean?" he said. "Yes; that bright youth merely predated his experience by twenty-four hours when he saw that there was bunce in it a few days later. Oh, I dare say he really thought it then. As for me, before I had got to Swanstead I had realised my mistake. What could I do in any case? Nothing that the least efficient local bobby could not do much better. Least of all did I wish to meet Ida—Mrs Severe. No; I walked out of the station, turned to the right instead of the left and padded back to town."

"And you have come now, a fortnight or more after, to tell me this, Mr Severe?"

"Well, I have come to have small hopes of Beedel. At first I didn't care two straws what they thought, expecting every hour to hear the worst. But that may not have happened. Two weeks have passed without anything being found, so that the child may be alive somewhere. If you are taking it up there is a

chance—provided only that you don't let them obsess you with the idea that I have had anything to do with it."

"I don't imagine that you have had anything to do with it, Mr Severe, and I believe that Marie is still alive."

"Thank God for that," said Severe with sudden intensity. "I am very, very glad to hear you express that opinion, Mr Carrados. I don't suppose that I shall see much of the girl as time goes on or that she will be taught to regard the Fifth Commandment very seriously. All the same, the relief of hearing that makes me your debtor for ever.... Anxious as I am, I will be content with that. I won't worry you for your clues or your ideas ... but I will tell you one thing. It may amuse you. *My* notion, a few days ago, of what might have happened——"

"Yes?" encouraged his host.

"It shows you the wild ideas one gets in such circumstances. My former wife is, if I may be permitted to say so, the most amiable and devoted creature in the world. Subject to that, I will readily concede that a more self-opinionated, credulous, dogmatically wrong-headed and crank-ridden woman does not exist. There isn't a silly fad that she hasn't taken up—and what's more tragic, absolutely believed in for the time—from ozonised milk to rhythmic yawning. Some time ago she was swept into Christian Science. An atrocious harpy called Julp—a professional 'healer'—fastened on her and has dominated her ever since. Well, fantastic as it seems now, I was actually prepared to believe that Marie had been ill and under their really sincere but grotesque 'healing' had died. Then to hide the failure of their creed or because they got panic-stricken——"

Then Carrados interrupted, an incivility he rarely committed.

"Yes, yes, I see," he said quickly. "But your daughter never is ill?"

"Never ill? Marie? Oh, isn't she! In the past six months I've——"

"But Mrs Severe deliberately said—her words—that Marie 'does not know what illness means.'"

"That's their jargon. They hold that illness does not exist and so it has no meaning. But I should describe Marie as a delicate child on the whole—bilious attacks and so on."

"Christian Scientists ... gastric trouble ... Prescott Ellerslie? Good heavens! This comes of half doing a thing," muttered Carrados.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" ventured the visitor.

"Wait." Severe wondered what the deuce turn the business was taking, but there being no incentive to do anything else, he waited. Coffee, rather more fragrant than that purveyed at the nocturnal stall, and fat Egyptian cigarettes of a subtle aroma somehow failed nevertheless to make the time pass quickly. Yet five minutes would have covered Carrados's absence.

"Nothing wrong, but an unfortunate oversight," he remarked when he returned. "I was too late to catch Beedel, so we must try to mend matters at the other end if we can. I shall have to ask you to go with me. I have ordered the car and I can tell you how we stand on the way."

"I shall be glad if you can make any use of me," said Severe.

"I hope that I may. And as for anything being wrong," added Carrados with deliberation, "so far as Marie is concerned I think we may find that the one thing necessary for her future welfare has been achieved."

"That's all I ask," said Severe.

"But it isn't all that I ask," retorted the blind man almost sharply.

This time there was nothing clandestine about the visit to Arling Avenue. On the contrary, the pace they kept up made it necessary that the horn should give pretty continuous notice of their presence. If it was a race, however, they had the satisfaction of being successful: the manner—more suggestive of the trained nurse than the domestic servant—of the maid who came to the door of Arling Lodge made it clear to Carrados, apart from any other indication, that the catastrophe of Beedel's arrival had not yet been launched. When the young person at the door began conscientiously, but with obvious inexperience, to prevaricate with

the truth, the caller merely accepted her statements and wrote a few words on his card.

"When Dr Ellerslie does return, will you please give him this at once?" he said. "I will wait."

It is to be inferred that the great specialist's return had been providentially timed, for Carrados was scarcely seated when Prescott Ellerslie hurried into the room with the visiting-card in his hand.

"Mr Carrados?" he postulated. "Will you please explain this rather unusually worded request for an interview?"

"Certainly I will," replied Carrados. "The wording is prompted by the necessity of compelling your immediate attention. The interview is the outcome of my desire to be of use to you."

"Thank you," said Ellerslie with non-committal courtesy. "And the occasion?"

"The occasion is the impending visit of Inspector Beedel from Scotland Yard, not, this time, to look out of your landing window, but to demand the surrender of the missing Marie Severe and, if you deny any knowledge of her, armed with authority to search your house."

"Oh," replied the doctor with astonishing composure. "And if the situation develops on the lines which you have so pointedly indicated, how do you propose to help me?"

"That depends a little on your explanation of the circumstances."

"Surely between Mr Carrados and Scotland Yard there is nothing that remains to be explained!"

"Mr Carrados can only speak for himself," replied the blind man with unmoved good humour. "And in his case there are several things to be explained. There is probably not a great deal of time before the Inspector's arrival, but there may be enough if you are disposed——"

"Very well," acquiesced Ellerslie. "You are quite right in assuming Marie Severe to be in this house. I had her brought here

... out of revenge, to redress an old and very grievous injury. Perhaps you had guessed that?"

"Not in those terms," said Carrados mildly.

"Yet so it was. Ten years ago a very sweet and precious little child, my only daughter, was wantonly done to death by an ignorant and credulous woman who had charge of her, in the tenets of her faith. It is called Christian Science. The opportunity was put before me and to-day I stand convicted of having outraged every social and legal form by snatching Marie Severe from just that same fate."

Carrados nodded gravely.

"Yes," he assented. "That is the thing I missed."

"I used to see her on her way to school, whenever I was here," went on the doctor wistfully, "and soon I came to watch for her and to know the times at which she ought to pass. She was of all living creatures the gayest and the most vivid, glowing and vibrant with the compelling joy of life, a little being of wonderful grace, delicacy and charm. She had, I found when I came to know her somewhat, that distinction of manner which one is prone to associate unreasonably only with the children of the great and wealthy—a young nobility. In much she reminded me constantly of my own lost child; in other ways she attracted me by her diversity. Such, Mr Carrados, was the nature of my interest in Marie Severe.

"I don't know the Severes and I have never even spoken to the mother. I believe that she has only lived here about a year, and in any case I have no concern in the social life of Swanstead. But a few months ago my worthy old housekeeper struck up an acquaintance with one of Mrs Severe's servants, a staid, middle-aged person who had gone into the family as Marie's nurse. The friendship begun down our respective gardens—they adjoin—developed to the stage of these two dames taking tea occasionally with one another. My Mrs Glass is a garrulous old woman. Hitherto my difficulty had often been to keep her quiet. Now I let her talk and deftly steered the conversation. I learned that my neighbours were Christian Scientists and had a so-called

‘healer’ living with them. The information struck me with a sudden dread.

“‘I suppose they are never ill, then?’ I inquired carelessly.

“Mrs Severe had not been ill since she had embraced Christian Science, and Miss Julp was described in a phrase obviously of her own importing as being ‘all selvage.’ The servants were allowed to see a doctor if they wished, although they were strongly pressed to have done with such ‘trickery’ in dispelling a mere ‘illusion.’

“‘And isn’t there a child?’ I asked.

“Marie, it appeared, had from time to time suffered from the ‘illusion’ that she had not felt well—had suffered pain. Under Miss Julp’s spiritual treatment the ‘hallucination’ had been dispelled. Mrs Glass had laughed, looked very knowing and then given her friend away in her appreciation of the joke. The faithful nurse had accepted the situation and as soon as her mistress’s back was turned had doctored Marie according to her own simple notions. Under this double influence the child had always picked up again, but the two women had ominously speculated what would happen if she fell ‘really ill.’ I led her on to details of the sicknesses—their symptoms, frequency and so on. It was a congenial topic between the motherly old creature and the nurse and I could not have had a better medium. I learned a good deal from her chatter. It did not reassure me.

“From that time, without allowing my interest to appear, I sought better opportunities to see the child. I inspired Mrs Glass to suggest to the nurse that Miss Marie might come and explore the garden here—it is a large and tangled place, such as an adventuring child would love to roam in, and this one, as I found, was passionately fond of flowers and growing things and birds and little animals. I got a pair of tame squirrels and turned them loose here. You can guess her enchantment when she discovered them. I went out with nuts for her to give them and we were friends at once. All the time I was examining her without her knowledge. I don’t suppose it ever occurred to her that I might be a doctor. The result practically confirmed the growing suspicion that everything I had heard pointed to. And the tragic irony of the situation was

that it had been appendicitis that my child—*my* child—had perished from!"

"Oh, so this was appendicitis, then?"

"Yes. It was appendicitis of that insidious and misleading type to which children are particularly liable. These apparently negligible turns at intervals of weeks were really inflammation of the appendix and the condition was inevitably passing into one of general suppurative peritonitis. Very soon there would come another 'illusion' according to the mother and Miss Julp, another 'bilious turn' according to the nurse, similar to those already experienced, but apparently more obstinate. The Christian Scientists would argue with it, Hannah would surreptitiously dose it. This time, however, it would hang on. Still there would be no really very alarming symptoms to wring the natural affection of the mother, nothing severe enough to drive the nurse into mutiny. The pulse running at about 140 would be the last thing they would notice."

"And then?" Ellerslie was pacing the room in savage indignation, but Carrados had Beedel's impending visit continually before him.

"Then she would be dead. Quite suddenly and unceremoniously this fair young life, which in ten minutes I could render immune from this danger for all the future, would go clean out—extinguished to demonstrate that appendicitis does not exist and that Mind is All in All. If my diagnosis was correct there could be no appeal, no shockful realisation of the true position to give the mother a chance. It would be inevitable, but it would be quite unlooked for.

"What was I to do, should you say, Mr Carrados, in this emergency? I had dealt with these fanatics before and I knew that if I took so unusual a course as to go to Mrs Severe I should at the best be met by polite incredulity and a text from Mrs Mary Baker Eddy's immortal work. And by doing that I should have made any other line of action risky, if not impossible. You, I believe, are a humane man. What was I to do?"

“What you did do,” said his visitor, “was about the most dangerous thing that a doctor could be mixed up in.”

“Oh no,” replied Ellerslie, “he does a much more dangerous thing whenever he operates on a septiferous subject, whenever he enters a fever-stricken house. To career and reputation, you would say; but, believe me, Mr Carrados, life is quite as important as livelihood, and every doctor does that sort of thing every day. Well, like many very ordinary men whom you may meet, I am something of a maniac and something of a mystic. Incredible as it will doubtless seem to the world to-morrow, I found that, at the risk of my professional career, at the risk, possibly, of a criminal conviction, the greatest thing that I should ever do would be to save this one exquisite young life. Elsewhere other men just as good could take my place, but here it was I and I alone.”

“Well, you did it?” prompted Carrados. “I must remind you that the time presses and I want to know the facts.”

“Yes, I did it. I won’t delay with the precautions I had taken in securing the child or with the scheme that I had worked out for returning her. I believed that I had a very good chance of coming through undiscovered and I infer that I have to thank you that I did not. Marie has not the slightest idea where she is and when I go into the room I am sufficiently disguised. She thinks that she has had an accident.”

“Of course you must have had assistance?”

“I have had the devoted help of an assistant and two nurses, but the whole responsibility is mine. I managed to send off Mrs Glass and her husband for a holiday so as to keep them out of it. That was after I had decided upon the operation. To justify what I was about to do there had to be no mistake about the necessity. I contrived a final test.

“Less than three weeks ago I saw Hannah and the little girl come to the house one afternoon. Shortly afterwards Mrs Glass knocked at my door. Could she ask Hannah to tea and, as Mrs Severe and her friend were being out until late, might Miss Marie also stay? There was, as she knew, no need for her to ask me, but my housekeeper is primitive in her ideas of duty. Of course I readily

assented, but I suggested that Marie should have tea with me; and so it was arranged.

"Before tea she amused herself about the garden. I told her to gather me a bunch of flowers and when she came in with them I noticed that she had scratched her arm with a thorn. I hurried through the meal, for I had then determined what to do. When we had finished, without ringing the bell, I gave her a chair in front of the fire and sat down opposite her. There was a true story about a clever goose that I had promised her.

"'But you are going to sleep, Marie,' I said, looking at her fixedly. 'It is the heat of the fire.'

"'I think I must be,' she admitted drowsily. 'Oh, how silly. I can scarcely keep my eyes open.'

"'You are going to sleep,' I repeated. 'You are very, very tired.' I raised my hand and moved it slowly before her face. 'You can hardly see my hand now. Your eyes are closed. When I stop speaking you will be asleep.' I dropped my hand and she was fast asleep.

"I had made my arrangements and had everything ready. From her arm, where the puncture of the needle was masked by the scratch, I secured a few drops of blood. Then I applied a simple styptic to the place and verified by a more leisurely examination some of the symptoms I had already looked for. When I woke her, a few minutes later, she had no inkling of what had passed.

"'Why,' I was saying as she awakened, 'I don't believe that you have heard a word about old Solomon!'

"I applied the various laboratory tests to the blood which I had obtained without delay. The result, taken in conjunction with the other symptoms, was conclusive. I was resolved upon my course from that moment. The operation itself was simple and completely successful. The condition demonstrated the pressing necessity for what I did. Marie Severe will probably outlive her mother now—especially if the lady remains faithful to Christian Science. As for the sequel ... I am sorry, but I don't regret."

"A surprise, eh, Inspector?"

Inspector Beedel, accompanied by Mrs Severe and—if the comparative degree may be used to indicate her relative importance—even more accompanied by Miss Julp, had arrived at Arling Lodge and been given immediate admission. It was Carrados who thus greeted him.

Beedel looked at his friend and then at Dr Ellerslie. With unconscious habit he even noticed the proportions of the room, the position of the door and window, and the chief articles of furniture. His mind moved rather slowly, but always logically, and in cases where "sound intelligence" sufficed he was rarely unsuccessful. He had brought Mrs Severe to identify Marie, whom he had never seen, and his men remained outside within whistle-call in case of any emergency. He now saw that he might have to shift his ground and he at once proceeded cautiously.

"Well, sir," he admitted, "I did not expect to see you here."

"Nor did I anticipate coming. Mrs Severe"—he bowed to her—"I think that we have already met informally. Your friend, Miss Julp, unless I am mistaken? It is a good thing that we are all here."

"That is my name, sir," struck in the recalcitrant Cornelia, "but I am not aware——"

"At the gate early—very early—this morning, Miss Julp. I recognise your step. But accept my assurance, my dear lady"—for Miss Julp had given a start of maidenly confusion at the recollection—"that although I heard, I did *not* see you. Well, Inspector, I have since found that I misled you. The mistake was mine—a fundamental error. You were right. Mrs Severe was right. Dr Ellerslie is unassailably right. I speak for him because it was I who fastened an unsupportable motive on his actions. Marie Severe is in this house, but she was received here by Dr Ellerslie in his professional capacity and strictly in the relation of doctor and patient.... Mr Severe has at length admitted that he alone is to blame. You see, you were right after all."

"Arthur! Oh!" exclaimed Mrs Severe, deeply moved.

"But why," demanded the other lady hostilely, "why should the man want her here?"

"Mr Severe was apprehensive on account of his daughter's health," replied Carrados gravely. "His story is that, fearing something serious, he submitted her to this eminent specialist, who found a dangerous—a critical—condition that could only be removed by immediate operation. Dr Ellerslie has saved your daughter's life, Mrs Severe."

"Fiddlesticks!" shouted Miss Julp excitedly. "It's an outrage—a criminal outrage. An operation! There was no danger—there couldn't be with *me* at hand. You've done it this time, *Doctor* Ellerslie. My gosh, but this will be a case!"

Mrs Severe sank into a chair, pale and trembling.

"I can scarcely believe it," she managed to say. "It is a crime. Dr Ellerslie—no doctor had the right. Mr Severe has no authority whatever. The court gave me sole control of Marie."

"Excuse me," put in Carrados with the blandness of perfect self-control and cognisance of his point, "excuse me, but have you ever informed Dr Ellerslie of that ruling?"

"No," admitted Mrs Severe with faint surprise. "No. Why should I?"

"Quite so. Why should you? But have you any knowledge that Dr Ellerslie is acquainted with the details of your unhappy domestic differences?"

"I do not know at all. What do these things matter?"

"Only this: Why should Dr Ellerslie question the authority of a parent who brings his child? It shows at least that he is the one who is concerned about her welfare. For all Dr Ellerslie knew, you might be the unauthorised one, Mrs Severe. A doctor can scarcely be expected to withhold a critical operation while he investigates the family affairs of his patients."

"But all this time—this dreadful suspense. He must have known."

Carrados shrugged his shoulders and seemed to glance across the room to where their host had so far stood immovable.

"I did know, Mrs Severe. I could not help knowing. But I knew something else, and to a doctor the interests of his patient must

overrule every ordinary consideration. Should the occasion arise, I shall be prepared at any time to justify my silence."

"Oh, the occasion will arise and pretty sharp, don't you fear," chimed in the irrepressible Miss Julp. "There's a sight more in this business, Ida, than we've got at yet. A mighty cute idea putting up Severe now. I never did believe that he was in it. He's a piece too mean-spirited to have the nerve. And where is Arthur Severe now? Gone, of course; quit the country and at someone else's expense."

"Not at all," said Carrados very obligingly. "Since you ask, Miss Julp"—he raised his voice—"Mr Severe!"

The door opened and Severe strolled into the room with great sang-froid. He bowed distantly to his wife and nodded familiarly to the police official.

"Well, Inspector," he remarked, "you've cornered me at last, you see."

"I'm not so sure of that," retorted Beedel shortly.

"Oh, come now; you are too modest. My unconvincing alibi that you broke down. The printed letter so conclusively from my hand. And Grigson—your irrefutable, steadfast witness from the station here, Inspector. There's no getting round Grigson now, you know."

Beedel rubbed his chin helpfully but made no answer. Things seemed to have reached a momentary impasse.

"Perhaps we may at least all sit down," suggested Ellerslie, to break the silence. "There are rather a lot of us, but I think the chairs will go round."

"If I wasn't just dead tired I would sooner drop than sit down in the house of a man calling himself a doctor," declared Miss Julp. Then she sat down rather heavily. Sharp on the action came a piercing yell, a deep-wrung "Yag!" of pain and alarm, and the lady was seen bounding to her feet, to turn and look suspiciously at the place she had just vacated.

"It was a needle, Cornelia," said Mrs Severe, who sat next to her. "See, here it is."

“Dear me, how unfortunate,” exclaimed Ellerslie, following the action; “one of my surgical needles. I do hope that it has been properly sterilised since the last operation.”

“What’s that?” demanded Miss Julp sharply.

“Well,” explained the doctor slowly, “I mean that there is such a thing as blood-poisoning. At least,” he amended, “for me there is such a thing as blood-poisoning. For you, fortunately, it does not exist. Any more than pain does,” he added thoughtfully.

“Do you mean,” demanded Miss Julp with slow precision, “that through your carelessness, your criminal carelessness, I run any risk of blood-poisoning?”

“Cornelia!” exclaimed Mrs Severe in pale incredulity.

“Of course not,” retorted the surgeon. “How can you if such a thing does not exist?”

“I don’t care whether it exists or not——”

“Cornelia!” repeated her faithful disciple in horror.

“Be quiet, Ida. This is my business. It isn’t like an ordinary illness. I’ve always had a horror of blood-poisoning. I have nightmare about it. My father died of it. He had to have glass tubes put in his veins, and the night he died——Oh, I tell you I can’t stand the thought of it. There’s nothing else I believe in, but blood-poisoning——” She shuddered. “I tell you, doctor,” she declared with a sudden descent to the practical, “if I get laid up from this you’ll have to stand the racket, and pretty considerable damages as well.”

“But at the worst this is a very simple matter,” protested Ellerslie. “If you will let me dress the place——”

Miss Julp went as red as a swarthy-complexioned lady of forty-five could be expected to go.

“How can I let you dress the place?” she snapped. “It is——”

“Oh, Cornelia, Cornelia!” exclaimed Mrs Severe reproachfully, through her disillusioned tears, “would you really be so false to the great principles which you have taught me?”

“I have a trained nurse here,” suggested the doctor. “She would do it as well as I could.”

“Are you really going?” demanded Mrs Severe, for there was no doubt that Miss Julp was going and going with alacrity.

“I don’t abate one iota of my principles, Ida,” she remarked. “But one has to discriminate. There are natural illnesses and there are unnatural illnesses. We say with truth that there can be no death, but no one will deny that Christian Scientists do, as a matter of fact, in the ordinary sense, die. Perhaps this is rather beyond you yet, dear, but I hope that some day you will see it in the light of its deeper mystery.”

“Do you?” replied Mrs Severe with cold disdain. “At present I only see that there is one law of indulgence for yourself and another for your dupes.”

“After all,” interposed Ellerslie, “this embarrassing discussion need never have arisen. I now see that the offending implement is only one of Mrs Glass’s darning needles. How careless of her! You need have no fear, Miss Julp.”

“Oh, you coward!” exclaimed Miss Julp breathlessly. “You coward! I won’t stay here a moment longer. I will go home.”

“I won’t detain you,” said Mrs Severe as Cornelia passed her. “Your home is in Chicago, I believe? Ann will help you to pack.”

Carrados rose and touched Beedel on the arm.

“You and I are not wanted here, Inspector,” he whispered. “The bottom’s dropped out of the case,” and they slipped away together.

Mrs Severe looked across the room towards her late husband, hesitated and then slowly walked up to him.

“There is a great deal here that I do not understand,” she said, “but is not this so, that you were willing to go to prison to shield this man who has been good to Marie?”

Severe flushed a little. Then he dropped his deliberate reply.

“I am willing to go to hell for this man for his goodness to Marie,” he said curtly.

“Oh!” exclaimed Mrs Severe with a little cry. “I wish——You never said that you would go to hell for me!”

The outcast stared. Then a curious look, a twisted smile of tenderness and half-mocking humour crossed his features.

“My dear,” he responded gravely, “perhaps not. But I often thought it!”

Dr Ellerslie, who had followed out the last two of his departing guests, looked in at the door.

“Marie is awake, I hear,” he said. “Will you go up now, Mrs Severe?”

With a shy smile the lady held out her hand towards the shabby man.

“You must go with me, Arthur,” she stipulated.

III

The Secret of Dunstan's Tower

It was a peculiarity of Mr Carrados that he could drop the most absorbing occupation of his daily life at a moment's notice if need be, apply himself exclusively to the solution of some criminological problem, possibly a matter of several days, and at the end of the time return and take up the thread of his private business exactly where he had left it.

On the morning of the 3rd of September he was dictating to his secretary a monograph to which he had given the attractive title, "The Portrait of Alexander the Great, as Jupiter Ammon, on an unedited octadrachm of Macedonia," when a telegram was brought in. Greatorex, the secretary, dealt with such communications as a matter of course, and, taking the envelope from Parkinson's salver, he cut it open in the pause between a couple of sentences.

"This is a private matter of yours, sir," he remarked, after glancing at the message. "Handed in at Netherhempsfield, 10.48 A.M. Repeated. One step higher. Quite baffled. Tulloch."

"Oh yes; that's all right," said Carrados. "No reply, Parkinson. Have you got down 'the Roman supremacy'?"

"'... the type of workmanship that still enshrined the memory of Spartan influence down to the era of Roman supremacy,'" read the secretary.

"That will do. How are the trains for Netherhempsfield?"

Greatorex put down the notebook and took up an "ABC."

"Waterloo departure 11——" He cocked an eye towards the desk clock. "Oh, that's no good. 12.17, 2.11, 5.9, 7.25."

"The 5.9 should do," interposed Carrados. "Arrival?"

"6.48."

"Now what has the gazeteer to say about the place?"

The yellow railway guide gave place to a weightier volume, and the secretary read out the following details:

"Netherhempsfield, parish and village, pop. 732, South Downshire. 2728 acres land and 27 water; soil rich loam, occupied as arable, pasture, orchard and woodland; subsoil various. The church of St Dunstan (restored 1740) is Saxon and Early English. It possesses an oak roof with curious grotesque bosses, and contains brasses and other memorials (earliest 13th century) of the Aynosforde family. In the 'Swinefield,' 1½ miles south-west of the village, are 15 large stones, known locally as the Judge and Jury, which constitute the remains of a Druidical circle and temple. Dunstan's Tower, a moated residence built in the baronial style, and probably dating from the 14th century, is the seat of the Aynosfordes."

"I can give three days easily," mused Carrados. "Yes, I'll go down by the 5.9."

"Do I accompany you, sir?" inquired Greatorex.

"Not this time, I think. Have three days off yourself. Just pick up the correspondence and take things easy. Send on anything to me, care of Dr Tulloch. If I don't write, expect me back on Friday."

"Very well, Mr Carrados. What books shall I put out for Parkinson to pack?"

"Say ... Gessner's Thesaurus and—yes, you may as well add Hilarion's Celtic Mythology."

Six hours later Carrados was on his way to Netherhempsfield. In his pocket was the following letter, which may be taken as offering the only explanation why he should suddenly decide to visit a place of which he had never even heard until that morning:—

"Dear Mr Carrados ('old Wynn,' it used to be),—Do you remember a fellow at St Michael's who used to own insects and the name of Tulloch—'Earwigs,' they called him? Well, you will find it at the end of this epistle, if you have the patience to get there. I ran across Jarvis about six months ago on Euston platform—you'll recall him by his red hair and great feet—and we had a rapid and comprehensive pow-wow. He told me who you were, having heard of you from Lessing, who seems to be editing a high-class review. He always was a trifle eccentric, Lessing.

"As for yours t., well, at the moment I'm local demon in a G-f-s little place that you'd hardly find on anything less than a 4-inch ordnance. But I won't altogether say it mightn't be worse, for there's trout in the stream, and after half-a-decade of Cinder Moor, in the Black Country, a great and holy peace broods on the smiling land.

"But you will guess that I wouldn't be taking up the time of a busy man of importance unless I had something to say, and you'd be right. It may interest you, or it may not, but here it is.

"Living about two miles out of the village, at a sort of mediæval stronghold known as Dunstan's Tower, there is an ancient county family called Aynosforde. And, for the matter of that, they are about all there is here, for the whole place seems to belong to them, and their authority runs from the power to charge you twopence if you sell a pig between Friday night and Monday morning to the right to demand an exchange of scabbards with the reigning sovereign whenever he comes within seven bowshot flights of the highest battlement of Dunstan's Tower. (I don't gather that any reigning sovereign ever has come, but that isn't the Aynosfordes' fault.) But, levity apart, these Aynosfordes, without being particularly rich, or having any title, are accorded an extraordinary position. I am told that scarcely a living duchess could hold out against the moral influence old dame Aynosforde could bring to bear on social matters, and yet she scarcely ever goes beyond Netherhempsfield now.

"My connection with these high-and-mighties ought to be purely professional, and so, in a manner, it is, but on the top of it I find myself drawn into a full-blooded, old haunted house mystery that takes me clean out of my depth.

"Darrish, the man whose place I'm taking for three months, had a sort of arrangement that once a week he should go up to the Tower and amuse old Mrs Aynosforde for a couple of hours under the pretence of feeling her pulse. I found that I was let in for continuing this. Fortunately the old dame was quite amiable at close quarters. I have no social qualifications whatever, and we got

on very well together on those terms. I have heard that she considers me 'thoroughly responsible.'

"For five or six weeks everything went on swimmingly. I had just enough to do to keep me from doing nothing. People have a delightful habit of not being taken ill in the night, and there is a comfortable cob to trot round on.

"Tuesday is my Dunstan's Tower day. Last Tuesday I went as usual. I recall now that the servants about the place seemed rather wild and the old lady did not keep me quite as long as usual, but these things were not sufficiently noticeable to make any impression on me at the time. On Friday a groom rode over with a note from Swarbrick, the butler. Would I go up that afternoon and see Mrs Aynosforde? He had taken the liberty of asking me on his own responsibility as he thought that she ought to be seen. Deuced queer it struck me, but of course I went.

"Swarbrick was evidently on the look-out. He is a regular family retainer, taciturn and morose rather than bland. I saw at once that the old fellow had something on his mind, and I told him that I should like a word with him. We went into the morning-room.

"'Now, Swarbrick,' I said, 'you sent for me. What is the matter with your mistress since Tuesday?'

"He looked at me dourly, as though he was still in two minds about opening his mouth. Then he said slowly:

"'It isn't since Tuesday, sir. It was on that morning.'

"'What was?' I asked.

"'The beginning of it, Dr Tulloch. Mrs Aynosforde slipped at the foot of the stairs on coming down to breakfast.'

"'She did?' I said. 'Well, it couldn't have been very serious at the time. She never mentioned it to me.'

"'No, sir,' the old monument assented, with an appalling surface of sublime pride, 'she would not.'

"'Why wouldn't she if she was hurt?' I demanded. 'People do mention these things to their medical men, in strict confidence.'

"'The circumstances are unusual, sir,' he replied, without a ruffle of his imperturbable respect. 'Mrs Aynosforde was not hurt, sir. She did not actually fall, but she slipped—on a pool of blood.'

"'That's unpleasant,' I admitted, looking at him sharply, for an owl could have seen that there was something behind all this. 'How did it come there? Whose was it?'

"'Sir Philip Bellmont's, sir.'

"I did not know the name. 'Is he a visitor here?' I asked.

"'Not at present, sir. He stayed with us in 1662. He died here, sir, under rather unpleasant circumstances.'

"There you have it, Wynn. That is the keystone of the whole business. But if I keep to my conversation with the still reluctant Swarbrick I shall run out of foolscap and into midnight. Briefly, then, the 'unpleasant circumstances' were as follows:—Just about two and a half centuries ago, when Charles II. was back, and things in England were rather gay, a certain Sir Philip Bellmont was a guest at Dunstan's Tower. There were dice, and there was a lady—probably a dozen, but the particular one was the Aynosforde's young wife. One night there was a flare-up. Bellmont was run through with a rapier, and an ugly doubt turned on whether the point came out under the shoulder blade, or went in there. Dripping on to every stair, the unfortunate man was carried up to his room. He died within a few hours, convinced, from the circumstances, of treachery all round, and with his last breath he left an anathema on every male and female Aynosforde as the day of their death approached. There are fourteen steps in the flight that Bellmont was carried up, and when the pool appears in the hall some Aynosforde has just two weeks to live. Each succeeding morning the stain may be found one stair higher. When it reaches the top there is a death in the family.

"This was the gist of the story. As far as you and I are concerned, it is, of course, merely a matter as to what form our scepticism takes, but my attitude is complicated by the fact that my nominal patient has become a real one. She is seventy-two and built to be a nonagenarian, but she has gone to bed with the intention of dying on Tuesday week. And I firmly believe she will.

"'How does she know that she is the one?' I asked. There aren't many Aynosfordes, but I knew that there were some others.

"To this Swarbrick maintained a discreet ambiguity. It was not for him to say, he replied, but I can see that he, like most of the natives round here, is obsessed with Aynosfordism.

"'And for that matter,' I objected, 'your mistress is scarcely entitled to the distinction. She will not really be an Aynosforde at all—only one by marriage.'

"'No, sir,' he replied readily, 'Mrs Aynosforde was also a Miss Aynosforde, sir—one of the Dorset Aynosfordes. Mr Aynosforde married his cousin.'

"'Oh,' I said, 'do the Aynosfordes often marry cousins?'

"'Very frequently, sir. You see, it is difficult otherwise for them to find eligible partners.'

"Well, I saw the lady, explaining that I had not been altogether satisfied with her condition on Tuesday. It passed, but I was not able to allude to the real business. Swarbrick, in his respectful, cast-iron way, had impressed on me that Sir Philip Bellmont must not be mentioned, assuring me that even Darrish would not venture to do so. Mrs Aynosforde was certainly a little feverish, but there was nothing the matter with her. I left, arranging to call again on the Sunday.

"When I came to think it over, the first form it took was: Now who is playing a silly practical joke, or working a deliberate piece of mischief? But I could not get any further on those lines, because I do not know enough of the circumstances. Darrish might know, but Darrish is cruising off Spitzbergen, suffering from a nervous breakdown. The people here are amiable enough superficially, but they plainly regard me as an outsider.

"It was then that I thought of you. From what Jarvis had told me I gathered that you were keen on a mystery for its own sake. Furthermore, though I understand that you are now something of a dook, you might not be averse to a quiet week in the country, jogging along the lanes, smoking a peaceful pipe of an evening and yarning over old times. But I was not going to lure you down and then have the thing turn out to be a ridiculous and transparent

hoax, no matter how serious its consequences. I owed it to you to make some reasonable investigation myself. This I have now done.

"On Sunday when I went there Swarbrick, with a very long face, reported that on each morning he had found the stain one step higher. The patient, needless to say, was appreciably worse. When I came down I had made up my mind.

"'Look here, Swarbrick,' I said, 'there is only one thing for it. I must sit up here to-night and see what happens.'

"He was very dubious at first, but I believe the fellow is genuine in his attachment to the house. His final scruple melted when he learned that I should not require him to sit up with me. I enjoined absolute secrecy, and this, in a large rambling place like the Tower, is not difficult to maintain. All the maid-servants had fled. The only people sleeping within the walls now, beyond those I have mentioned, are two of Mrs Aynosforde's grandchildren (a girl and a young man whom I merely know by sight), the housekeeper and a footman. All these had retired long before the butler admitted me by an obscure little door, about half-an-hour after midnight.

"The staircase with which we are concerned goes up from the dining hall. A much finer, more modern way ascends from the entrance hall. This earlier one, however, only gives access now to three rooms, a lovely oak-panelled chamber occupied by my patient and two small rooms, turned nowadays into a boudoir and a bathroom. When Swarbrick had left me in an easy-chair, wrapped in a couple of rugs, in a corner of the dark dining hall, I waited for half-an-hour and then proceeded to make my own preparations. Moving very quietly, I crept up the stairs, and at the top drove one drawing-pin into the lintel about a foot up, another at the same height into the baluster opposite, and across the stairs fastened a black thread, with a small bell hanging over the edge. A touch and the bell would ring, whether the thread broke or not. At the foot of the stairs I made another attachment and hung another bell.

"'I think, my unknown friend,' I said, as I went back to the chair, 'you are cut off above and below now.'

"I won't say that I didn't close my eyes for a minute through the whole night, but if I did sleep it was only as a watchdog sleeps. A whisper or a creak of a board would have found me alert. As it was, however, nothing happened. At six o'clock Swarbrick appeared, respectfully solicitous about my vigil.

"'We've done it this time, Swarbrick,' I said in modest elation. 'Not the ghost of a ghost has appeared. The spell is broken.'

"He had crossed the hall and was looking rather strangely at the stairs. With a very queer foreboding I joined him and followed his glance. By heavens, Wynn, there, on the sixth step up, was a bright red patch! I am not squeamish; I cleared four steps at a stride, and stooping down I dipped my finger into the stuff and felt its slippery viscidity against my thumb. There could be no doubt about it; it was the genuine thing. In my baffled amazement I looked in every direction for a possible clue to human agency. Above, more than twenty feet above, were the massive rafters and boarding of the roof itself. By my side reared a solid stone wall, and beneath was simply the room we stood in, for the space below the stairway was not enclosed.

"I pointed to my arrangement of bells.

"'Nobody has gone up or down, I'll swear,' I said a little warmly. Between ourselves, I felt a bit of an ass for my pains, before the monumental Swarbrick.

"'No, sir,' he agreed. 'I had a similar experience myself on Saturday night.'

"'The deuce you did,' I exclaimed. 'Did you sit up then?'

"'Not exactly, sir,' he replied, 'but after making all secure at night I hung a pair of irreplaceable Dresden china cups in a similar way. They were both still intact in the morning, sir.'

"Well, there you are. I have nothing more to say on the subject. 'Hope not,' you'll be muttering. If the thing doesn't tempt you, say no more about it. If it does, just wire a time and I'll be at the station. Welcome isn't the word.—Yours as of yore,

"

Jim Tulloch.

"*P.S.*—Can put your man up all right.

"J. T."

Carrados had "wired a time," and he was seized on the platform by the awaiting and exuberant Tulloch and guided with elaborate carefulness to the doctor's cart, which was, as its temporary owner explained, "knocking about somewhere in the lane outside."

"Splendid little horse," he declared. "Give him a hedge to nibble at and you can leave him to look after himself for hours. Motors? He laughs at them, Wynn, merely laughs."

Parkinson and the luggage found room behind, and the splendid little horse shook his shaggy head and launched out for home. For a mile the conversation was a string of, "Do you ever come across Brown now?" "You know Sugden was killed flying?" "Heard of Marling only last week; he's gone on the stage." "By the way, that appalling ass Sanders married a girl with a pot of money and runs horses now," and doubtless it would have continued in a similar strain to the end of the journey if an encounter with a farmer's country trap had not interrupted its tenor.

The lane was very narrow at that point and the driver of the trap drew into the hedge and stopped to allow the doctor to pass. There was a mutual greeting, and Tulloch pulled up also when their hubs were clear.

"No more sheep killed, I hope?" he called back.

"No, sir; I can't complain that we have," said the driver cheerfully. "But I do hear that Mr Stone, over at Daneswood, lost one last night."

"In the same way, do you mean?"

"So I heard. It's a queer business, doctor."

"It's a blackguardly business. It's a marvel what the fellow thinks he's doing."

"He'll get nabbed, never fear, sir. He'll do it once too often."

"Hope so," said the doctor. "Good-day." He shook the reins and turned to his visitor. "One of our local 'Farmer Jarges.' It's part of the business to pass the time o' day with them all and ask after the

cow or the pig, if no other member of the family happens to be on the sick list."

"What is the blackguardly business?" asked Carrados.

"Well, that is a bit out of the common, I'll admit. About a week ago this man, Bailey, found one of his sheep dead in the field. It had been deliberately killed—head cut half off. It hadn't been done for meat, because none was taken. But, curiously enough, something else had been taken. The animal had been opened and the heart and intestines were gone. What do you think of that, Wynn?"

"Revenge, possibly."

"Bailey declares that he hasn't got the shadow of an enemy in the world. His three or four labourers are quite content. Of course a thing like that makes a tremendous sensation in a place like this. You may see as many as five men talking together almost any day now. And here, on the top if it, comes another case at Stone's. It looks like one of those outbreaks that crop up from time to time for no obvious reason and then die out again."

"No reason, Jim?"

"Well, if it isn't revenge, and if it isn't food, what is there to be got by it?"

"What is there to be got when an animal is killed?"

Tulloch stared without enlightenment.

"What is there that I am here to trace?"

"Godfrey Dan'l, Wynn! You don't mean to say that there is any connection between——?"

"I don't say it," declared Carrados promptly. "But there is very strong reason why we should consider it. It solves a very obvious question that faces us. A pricked thumb does not produce a pool. Did you microscope it?"

"Yes, I did. I can only say that it's mammalian. My limited experience doesn't carry me beyond that. Then what about the entrails, Wynn? Why take those?"

"That raises a variety of interesting speculations certainly."

"It may to you. The only thing that occurs to me is that it might be a blind."

"A very unfortunate one, if so. A blind is intended to allay curiosity—to suggest an obvious but fictitious motive. This, on the contrary, arouses curiosity. The abstraction of a haunch of mutton would be an excellent blind. Whereas now, as you say, what about the entrails?"

Tulloch shook his head.

"I've had my shot," he answered. "Can you suggest anything?"

"Frankly, I can't," admitted Carrados.

"On the face of it, I don't suppose anyone short of an oracle could. Pity our local shrine has got rusty in the joints." He levelled his whip and pointed to a distant silhouette that showed against the last few red streaks in the western sky a mile away. "You see that solitary old outpost of paganism——"

The splendid little horse leapt forward in indignant surprise as the extended whip fell sharply across his shoulders. Tulloch's ingenuous face seemed to have caught the rubicundity of the distant sunset.

"I'm beastly sorry, Wynn, old man," he muttered. "I ought to have remembered."

"My blindness?" contributed Carrados. "My dear chap, everyone makes a point of forgetting that. It's quite a recognised form of compliment among friends. If it were baldness I probably should be touchy on the subject; as it's only blindness I'm not."

"I'm very glad you take it so well," said Tulloch. "I was referring to a stone circle that we have here. Perhaps you have heard of it?"

"The Druids' altar!" exclaimed Carrados with an inspiration. "Jim, to my everlasting shame, I had forgotten it."

"Oh, well, it isn't much to look at," confessed the practical doctor. "Now in the church there are a few decent monuments—all Aynosfordes, of course."

"Aynosfordes—naturally. Do you know how far that remarkable race goes back?"

“A bit beyond Adam I should fancy,” laughed Tulloch. “Well, Darrish told me that they really can trace to somewhere before the Conquest. Some antiquarian Johnny has claimed that the foundations of Dunstan’s Tower cover a Celtic stronghold. Are you interested in that sort of thing?”

“Intensely,” replied Carrados; “but we must not neglect other things. This gentleman who owned the unfortunate sheep, the second victim, now? How far is Daneswood away?”

“About a mile—mile and a half at the most.”

Carrados turned towards the back seat.

“Do you think that in seven minutes’ time you would be able to distinguish the details of a red mark on the grass, Parkinson?”

Parkinson took the effect of three objects, the sky above, the herbage by the roadside, and the back of his hand, and then spoke regretfully.

“I’m afraid not, sir; not with any certainty,” he replied.

“Then we need not trouble Mr Stone to-night,” said Carrados philosophically.

After dinner there was the peaceful pipe that Tulloch had forecast, and mutual reminiscences until the long clock in the corner, striking the smallest hour of the morning, prompted Tulloch to suggest retirement.

“I hope you have everything,” he remarked tentatively, when he had escorted the guest to his bedroom. “Mrs Jones does for me very well, but you are an unknown quantity to her as yet.”

“I shall be quite all right, you may be sure,” replied Carrados, with his engagingly grateful smile. “Parkinson will already have seen to everything. We have a complete system, and I know exactly where to find anything I require.”

Tulloch gave a final glance around.

“Perhaps you would prefer the window closed?” he suggested.

“Indeed, I should not. It is south-west, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And a south-westerly breeze to bring the news. I shall sit here for a little time.” He put his hand on the top rail of a chair with

unhesitating precision and drew it to the open casement. “There are a thousand sounds that you in your arrogance of sight ignore, a thousand individual scents of hedge and orchard that come to me up here. I suppose it is quite dark to you now, Jim? What a lot you seeing people must miss!”

Tulloch guffawed, with his hand on the door knob.

“Well, don’t let your passion for nocturnal nature study lead you to miss breakfast at eight. My eyes won’t, I promise you. Ta-ta.”

He jigged off to his own room and in ten minutes was soundly asleep. But the oak clock in the room beneath marked the quarters one by one until the next hour struck, and then round the face again until the little finger stood at three, and still the blind man sat by the open window that looked out over the south-west, interpreting the multitudinous signs of the quiet life that still went on under the dark cover of the warm summer night.

“The word lies with you, Wynn,” remarked Tulloch at breakfast the next morning—he was twelve minutes late, by the way, and found his guest interested in the titles of Dr Darrish’s excellent working library. “I am supposed to be on view here from nine to ten, and after that I am due at Abbot’s Farm somewhere about noon. With those reservations, I am at your disposal for the day.”

“Do you happen to go anywhere near the ‘Swinefield’ on your way to Abbot’s Farm?” asked Carrados.

“The ‘Swinefield’? Oh, the Druids’ circle. Yes, one way—and it’s as good as any other—passes the wheel-track that leads up to it.”

“Then I should certainly like to inspect the site.”

“There’s really nothing to see, you know,” apologised the doctor. “Only a few big rocks on end. They aren’t even chiselled smooth.”

“I am curious,” volunteered Carrados, “to discover why fifteen stones should be called ‘The Judge and Jury.’”

“Oh, I can explain that for you,” declared Tulloch. “Two of them are near together with a third block across the tops. That’s the Judge. The twelve jurymen are scattered here and there. But we’ll go, by all means.”

“There is a public right of way, I suppose?” asked Carrados, when, in due course, the trap turned from the highway into a field track.

“I don’t know about a right,” said Tulloch, “but I imagine that anyone goes across who wants to. Of course it’s not a Stonehenge, and we have very few visitors, or the Aynosfordes might put some restrictions. As for the natives, there isn’t a man who wouldn’t sooner walk ten miles to see a five-legged calf than cross the road to look at a Phidias. And for that matter,” he added thoughtfully, “this is the first time I’ve been really up to the place myself.”

“It’s on Aynosforde property, then?”

“Oh yes. Most of the parish is, I believe. But this ‘Swinefield’ is part of the park. There is an oak plantation across there or Dunstan’s Tower would be in sight.”

They had reached the gate of the enclosure. The doctor got down to open it, as he had done the former ones.

“This is locked,” he said, coming back to the step, “but we can climb over easy enough. You can get down all right?”

“Thanks,” replied Carrados. He descended and followed Tulloch, stopping to pat the little horse’s neck.

“He’ll be all right,” remarked the doctor with a backward nod. “I fancy Tommy’s impressionable years must have been spent between the shafts of a butcher’s cart. Now, Wynn, how do we proceed?”

“I should like to have your arm over this rough ground. Then if you will take me from stone to stone.”

They paced the broken circle leisurely, Carrados judging the appearance of the remains by touch and by the answers to the innumerable questions that he put. They were approaching the most important monument—the Judge—when Tulloch gave a shout of delight.

“Oh, the beauty!” he cried with enthusiasm. “I must see you closer. Wynn, do you mind—a minute——”

“Lady, Jim?” murmured Carrados. “Certainly not. I’ll stand like Tommy.”

Tulloch shot off with a laugh and Carrados heard him racing across the grass in the direction of the trilithon. He was still amused when he returned, after a very short interval.

"No, Wynn, not a lady, but it occurred to me that you might have been farther off. A beautiful airy creature very brightly clad. A Purple Emperor, in fact. I haven't netted a butterfly for years, but the sight gave me all the old excitement of the chase."

"Tolerably rare, too, aren't they?"

"Generally speaking, they are. I remember waiting in an oak grove with a twenty-foot net for a whole day once, and not a solitary Emperor crossed my path."

"An oak grove; yes, you said there was an oak plantation here."

"I didn't know the trick then. You needn't go to that trouble. His Majesty has rather peculiar tastes for so elegant a being. You just hang a piece of decidedly ripe meat anywhere near."

"Yes, Jim?"

"Do you notice anything?" demanded the doctor, with his face up to the wind.

"Several things," replied Carrados.

"Apropos of high meat? Do you know, Wynn, I lost that Purple Emperor here, round the blocks. I thought it must have soared, as I couldn't quite fathom its disappearance. This used to be the Druids' altar, they say. I don't know if you follow me, but it would be a devilish rum go if—eh?"

Carrados accepted the suggestion of following Jim's idea with impenetrable gravity.

"I haven't the least doubt that you are right," he assented. "Can you get up?"

"It's about ten feet high," reported Tulloch, "and not an inch of crevice to get a foothold on. If only we could bring the trap in here——"

"I'll give you a back," said Carrados, taking a position against one of the pillars. "You can manage with that?"

"Sure you can stand it?"

"Only be as quick as you can."

“Wait a minute,” said Tulloch with indecision. “I think someone is coming.”

“I know there is,” admitted Carrados, “but it is only a matter of seconds. Make a dash for it.”

“No,” decided Tulloch. “One looks ridiculous. I believe it is Miss Aynosforde. We’d better wait.”

A young girl with a long thin face, light hair and the palest blue eyes that it would be possible to imagine had come from the wood and was approaching them hurriedly. She might have been eighteen, but she was “dressed young,” and when she spoke she expressed the ideas of a child.

“You ought not to come in here,” was her greeting. “It belongs to us.”

“I am sorry if we are trespassing,” apologised Tulloch, coloring with chagrin and surprise. “I was under the impression that Mrs Aynosforde allowed visitors to inspect these ruins. I am Dr Tulloch.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” said the girl vaguely. “But Dunstan will be very cross if he sees you here. He is always cross if he finds that anyone has been here. He will scold me afterwards. And he makes faces in the night.”

“We will go,” said Tulloch quietly. “I am sorry that we should have unconsciously intruded.”

He raised his hat and turned to walk away, but Miss Aynosforde detained him.

“You must not let Dunstan know that I spoke to you about it,” she implored him. “That would be as bad. Indeed,” she added plaintively, “whatever I do always makes him cruel to me.”

“We will not mention it, you may be sure,” replied the doctor. “Good-morning.”

“Oh, it is no good!” suddenly screamed the girl. “He has seen us; he is coming!”

Tulloch looked round in the direction that Miss Aynosforde’s frightened gaze indicated. A young man whom he knew by sight as her brother had left the cover of the wood and was strolling

leisurely towards them. Without waiting to encounter him the girl turned and fled, to hide herself behind the farthest pillar, running with ungainly movements of her long, wispish arms and uttering a low cry as she went.

As young Aynosforde approached he courteously raised his hat to the two elder men. He appeared to be a few years older than his sister, and in him her colourless ovine features were moulded to a firmer cast.

"I am afraid that we are trespassing," said the doctor, awkward between his promise to the girl and the necessity of glossing over the situation. "My friend is interested in antiquities——"

"My unfortunate sister!" broke in Aynosforde quietly, with a sad smile. "I can guess what she has been saying. You are Dr Tulloch, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Our grandmother has a foolish but amiable weakness that she can keep poor Edith's infirmity dark. I cannot pretend to maintain that appearance before a doctor ... and I am sure that we can rely on the discretion of your friend?"

"Oh, certainly," volunteered Tulloch. "He is——"

"Merely an amateur," put in Carrados, suavely, but with the incisiveness of a scalpel.

"You must, of course, have seen that Edith is a little unusual in her conversation," continued the young man. "Fortunately, it is nothing worse than that. She is not helpless, and she is never violent. I have some hope, indeed, that she will outgrow her delusions. I suppose"—he laughed a little as he suggested it—"I suppose she warned you of my displeasure if I saw you here?"

"There was something of the sort," admitted Tulloch, judging that the circumstances nullified his promise.

Aynosforde shook his head slowly.

"I am sorry that you have had the experience," he remarked. "Let me assure you that you are welcome to stay as long as you like under the shadows of these obsolete fossils, and to come as often

as you please. It is a very small courtesy; the place has always been accessible to visitors."

"I am relieved to find that I was not mistaken," said the doctor.

"When I have read up the subject I should like to come again," interposed Carrados. "For the present we have gone all over the ground." He took Tulloch's arm, and under the insistent pressure the doctor turned towards the gate. "Good-morning, Mr Aynosforde."

"What a thing to come across!" murmured Tulloch when they were out of earshot. "I remember Darrish making the remark that the girl was simple for her years or something of that sort, but I only took it that she was backward. I wonder if the old ass knew more than he told me!"

They were walking without concern across the turf and had almost reached the gate when Carrados gave a sharp, involuntary cry of pain and wrenched his arm free. As he did so a stone of dangerous edge and size fell to the ground between them.

"Damnation!" cried Tulloch, his face darkening with resentment. "Are you hurt, old man?"

"Come on," curtly replied Carrados between his set teeth.

"Not until I've given that young cub something to remember," cried the outraged doctor truculently. "It was Aynosforde, Wynn. I wouldn't have believed it but I just caught sight of him in time. He laughed and ran behind a pillar when you were hit."

"Come on," reiterated Carrados, seizing his friend's arm and compelling him towards the gate. "It was only the funny bone, fortunately. Would you stop to box the village idiot's ears because he puts out his tongue at you?"

"Village idiot!" exclaimed Tulloch. "I may only be a thick-skulled, third-rate general practitioner of no social pretension whatever, but I'm blistered if I'll have my guests insulted by a long-eared pedigree blighter without putting up a few plain words about it. An Aynosforde or not, he must take the consequences; he's no village idiot."

"No," was Carrados's grim retort; "he is something much more dangerous—the castle maniac."

Tulloch would have stopped in sheer amazement, but the recovered arm dragged him relentlessly on.

"Aynosforde! Mad!"

"The girl is on the borderline of imbecility; the man has passed beyond the limit of a more serious phase. The ground has been preparing for generations; doubtless in him the seed has quietly germinated for years. Now his time has come."

"I heard that he was a nice, quiet young fellow, studious and interested in science. He has a workshop and a laboratory."

"Yes, anything to occupy his mind. Well, in future he will have a padded room and a keeper."

"But the sheep killed by night and the parts exposed on the Druids' altar? What does it mean, Wynn?"

"It means madness, nothing more and nothing less. He is the receptacle for the last dregs of a rotten and decrepit stock that has dwindled down to mental atrophy. I don't believe that there is any method in his midnight orgies. The Aynosfordes are certainly a venerable line, and it is faintly possible that its remote ancestors were Druid priests who sacrificed and practised haruspicy on the very spot that we have left. I have no doubt that on that questionable foundation you would find advocates of a more romantic theory."

"Moral atavism?" suggested the doctor shrewdly.

"Yes. Reincarnation. I prefer the simpler alternative. Aynosforde has been so fed up with pride of family and traditions of his ancient race that his mania takes this natural trend. You know what became of his father and mother?"

"No, I have never heard them mentioned."

"The father is in a private madhouse. The mother—another cousin, by the way—died at twenty-five."

"And the blood stains on the stairs? Is that his work?"

"Short of actual proof, I should say yes. It is the realisation of another family legend, you see. Aynosforde may have an insane grudge against his grandmother, or it may be simply apeish malignity, put into his mind by the sight of blood."

"What do you propose doing, then? We can't leave the man at large."

"We have nothing yet to commit him on. You would not sign for a reception order on the strength of seeing him throw a stone? We must contrive to catch him in the act to-night, if possible."

Tulloch woke up the little horse with a sympathetic touch—they were ambling along the highroad again by this time—and permitted himself to smile.

"And how do you propose to do that, Excellency?" he asked.

"By sprinkling the ninth step with iodide of nitrogen. A warm night ... it will dry in half-an-hour."

"Well, do you know, I never thought of that," admitted the doctor. "Certainly that would give us the alarm if a feather brushed it. But we don't possess a chemist's shop, and I very much doubt if I can put my hand on any iodine."

"I brought a couple of ounces," said Carrados with diffidence. "Also a bottle of ·880 ammonia to be on the safe side."

"You really are a bit of a *sine qua non*, Wynn," declared Tulloch expressively.

"It was such an obvious thing," apologised the blind man. "I suppose Brook Ashfield is too far for one of us to get over to this afternoon?"

"In Dorset?"

"Yes. Colonel Eustace Aynosforde is the responsible head of the family now, and he should be on the spot if possible. Then we ought to get a couple of men from the county lunatic asylum. We don't know what may be before us."

"If it can't be done by train we must wire or perhaps Colonel Aynosforde is on the telephone. We can go into that as soon as we get back. We are almost at Abbot's Farm now. I will cut it down to fifteen minutes at the outside. You don't mind waiting here?"

"Don't hurry," replied Carrados. "Few cases are matters of minutes. Besides, I told Parkinson to come on here from Daneswood on the chance of our picking him up."

"Oh, it's Parkinson, to be sure," said the doctor. "Thought I knew the figure crossing the field. Well, I'll leave you to him."

He hastened along the rutty approach to the farm-house, and Tommy, under the pretext of being driven there by certain pertinacious flies, imperceptibly edged his way towards the long grass by the roadside. In a few minutes Parkinson announced his presence at the step of the vehicle.

"I found what you described, sir," he reported. "These are the shapes."

Tulloch kept to his time. In less than a quarter of an hour he was back again and gathering up the reins.

"That little job is soon worked off," he remarked with mild satisfaction. "Home now, I suppose, Wynn?"

"Yes," assented Carrados. "And I think that the other little job is morally worked off." He held up a small piece of note-paper, cut to a neat octagon, with two long sides and six short ones. "What familiar object would just about cover that plan, Jim?"

"If it isn't implicating myself in any devilment, I should say that one of our four-ounce bottles would be about the ticket," replied Tulloch.

"It very likely does implicate you to the extent of being one of your four-ounce bottles, then," said Carrados. "The man who killed Stone's sheep had occasion to use what we will infer to be a four-ounce bottle. It does not tax the imagination to suggest the use he put it to, nor need we wonder that he found it desirable to wash it afterwards—this small, flat bottle that goes conveniently into a waistcoat pocket. On one side of the field—the side remote from the road, Jim, but in the direct line for Dunstan's Tower—there is a stream. There he first washed his hands, carefully placing the little bottle on the grass while he did so. That indiscretion has put us in possession of a ground plan, so to speak, of the vessel."

"Pity it wasn't of the man instead."

"Of the man also. In the field the earth is baked and unimpressionable, but down by the water-side the conditions are quite favourable, and Parkinson got perfect reproductions of the

footprints. Soon, perhaps, we may have an opportunity of making a comparison."

The doctor glanced at the neat lines to which the papers Carrados held out had been cut.

"It's a moral," he admitted. "There's nothing of the hobnailed about those boots, Wynn."

Swarbrick had been duly warned and obedience to his instructions had been ensured by the note that conveyed them bearing the signature of Colonel Aynosforde. Between eleven and twelve o'clock a light in a certain position gave the intelligence that Dunstan Aynosforde was in his bedroom and the coast quite clear. A little group of silent men approached the Tower, and four, crossing one of the two bridges that spanned the moat, melted spectrally away in a dark angle of the walls.

Every detail had been arranged. There was no occasion for whispered colloquies about the passages, and with the exception of the butler's sad and respectful greeting of an Aynosforde, scarcely a word was spoken. Carrados, the colonel and Parkinson took up their positions in the great dining hall, where Dr Tulloch had waited on the occasion of his vigil. A screen concealed them from the stairs and the chairs on which they sat did not creak—all the blind man asked for. The doctor, who had carried a small quantity of some damp powder wrapped in a saturated sheet of blotting-paper, occupied himself for five minutes distributing it minutely over the surface of the ninth stair. When this was accomplished he disappeared and the silence of a sleeping house settled upon the ancient Tower.

A party, however, is only as quiet as its most restless member, and the colonel soon discovered a growing inability to do nothing at all and to do it in absolute silence. After an exemplary hour he began to breathe whispered comments on the situation into his neighbour's ear, and it required all Carrados's tact and good humour to repress his impatience. Two o'clock passed and still nothing had happened.

"I began to feel uncommonly dubious, you know," whispered the colonel, after listening to the third clock strike the hour. "We stand

to get devilishly chaffed if this gets about. Suppose nothing happens?"

"Then your aunt will probably get up again," replied Carrados.

"True, true. We shall have broken the continuity. But, you know, Mr Carrados, there are some things about this portent, visitation—call it what you will—that even I don't fully understand down to this day. There is no doubt that my grandfather, Oscar Aynosforde, who died in 1817, did receive a similar omen, or summons, or whatever it may be. We have it on the authority——"

Carrados clicked an almost inaudible sound of warning and laid an admonishing hand on the colonel's arm.

"Something going on," he breathed.

The soldier came to the alert like a terrier at a word, but his straining ears could not distinguish a sound beyond the laboured ticking of the hall clock beyond.

"I hear nothing," he muttered to himself.

He had not long to wait. Half-way up the stairs something snapped off like the miniature report of a toy pistol. Before the sound could translate itself to the human brain another louder discharge had swallowed it up and out of its echo a crackling fusillade again marked the dying effects of the scattered explosive.

At the first crack Carrados had swept aside the screen. "Light, Parkinson!" he cried.

An electric lantern flashed out and centred its circle of brilliance on the stairs opposite. Its radiance pierced the nebulous balloon of violet smoke that was rising to the roof and brought out every detail of the wall beyond.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Colonel Aynosforde, "there is a stone out. I knew nothing of this."

As he spoke the solid block of masonry slid back into its place and the wall became as blankly impenetrable as before.

"Colonel Aynosforde," said Carrados, after a hurried word with Parkinson, "you know the house. Will you take my man and get round to Dunstan's workroom at once? A good deal depends upon securing him immediately."

“Am I to leave you here without any protection, sir?” inquired Parkinson in mild rebellion.

“Not without any protection, thank you, Parkinson. I shall be in the dark, remember.”

They had scarcely gone when Dr Tulloch came stumbling in from the hall and the main stairs beyond, calling on Carrados as he bumped his way past a succession of inopportune pieces of furniture.

“Are you there, Wynn?” he demanded, in high-strung irritation. “What the devil’s happening? Aynosforde hasn’t left his room, we’ll swear, but hasn’t the iodide gone off?”

“The iodide has gone off and Aynosforde has left his room, though not by the door. Possibly he is back in it by now.”

“The deuce!” exclaimed Tulloch blankly. “What am I to do?”

“Return——” began Carrados, but before he could say more there was a confused noise and a shout outside the window.

“We are saved further uncertainty,” said the blind man. “He has thrown himself down into the moat.”

“He will be drowned!”

“Not if Swarbrick put the drag-rake where he was instructed, and if those keepers are even passably expert,” replied Carrados imperturbably. “After all, drowning…. But perhaps you had better go and see, Jim.”

In a few minutes men began to return to the dining hall as though where the blind man was constituted their headquarters. Colonel Aynosforde and Parkinson were the first, and immediately afterwards Swarbrick entered from the opposite side, bringing a light.

“They’ve got him out,” exclaimed the colonel. “Upon my word, I don’t know whether it’s for the best or the worst, Mr Carrados.” He turned to the butler, who was lighting one after another of the candles of the great hanging centre-pieces. “Did you know anything of a secret passage giving access to these stairs, Swarbrick?” he inquired.

"Not personally, sir," replied Swarbrick, "but we always understood that formerly there was a passage and hiding chamber somewhere, though the positions had been lost. We last had occasion to use it when we were defeated at Naseby, sir."

Carrados had walked to the stairs and was examining the wall.

"This would be the principal stairway, then?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, until we removed the Elizabethan gallery when we restored in 1712."

"It is on the same plan as the 'Priest's Chamber' at Lapwood. If you investigate in the daylight, Colonel Aynosforde, you will find that you command a view of both bridges when the stone is open. Very convenient sometimes, I dare say."

"Very, very," assented the colonel absently. "Every moment," he explained, "I am dreading that Aunt Eleanor will make her appearance. She must have been disturbed."

"Oh, I took that into account," said Tulloch, catching the remark as he put his head in at the door and looked round. "I recommended a sleeping draught when I was here last—no, this evening. We have got our man in all right now," he continued, "and if we can have a dry suit——"

"I will accompany you, sir," said Swarbrick.

"Is he—violent?" asked the colonel, dropping his voice.

"Violent? Well," admitted Tulloch, holding out two dripping objects that he had been carrying, "we thought it just as well to cut his boots off." He threw them down in a corner and followed the butler out of the room.

Carrados took two pieces of shaped white paper from his pocket and ran his fingers round the outlines. Then he picked up Dunstan Aynosforde's boots and submitted them to a similar scrutiny.

"Very exact, Parkinson," he remarked approvingly.

"Thank you, sir," replied Parkinson with modest pride.

IV

The Mystery of the Poisoned Dish of Mushrooms

Some time during November of a recent year newspaper readers who are in the habit of being attracted by curious items of quite negligible importance might have followed the account of the tragedy of a St Abbots schoolboy which appeared in the Press under the headings, “Fatal Dish of Mushrooms,” “Are Toadstools Distinguishable?” or some similarly alluring title.

The facts relating to the death of Charlie Winpole were simple and straightforward and the jury sworn to the business of investigating the cause had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. The witnesses who had anything really material to contribute were only two in number, Mrs Dupreen and Robert Wilberforce Slark, M.D. A couple of hours would easily have disposed of every detail of an inquiry that was generally admitted to have been a pure formality, had not the contention of an interested person delayed the inevitable conclusion by forcing the necessity of an adjournment.

Irene Dupreen testified that she was the widow of a physician and lived at Hazlehurst, Chesset Avenue, St Abbots, with her brother. The deceased was their nephew, an only child and an orphan, and was aged twelve. He was a ward of Chancery and the Court had appointed her as guardian, with an adequate provision for the expenses of his bringing up and education. That allowance would, of course, cease with her nephew’s death.

Coming to the particulars of the case, Mrs Dupreen explained that for a few days the boy had been suffering from a rather severe cold. She had not thought it necessary to call in a doctor, recognising it as a mild form of influenza. She had kept him from school and restricted him to his bedroom. On the previous Wednesday, the day before his death, he was quite convalescent,

with a good pulse and a normal temperature, but as the weather was cold she decided still to keep him in bed as a measure of precaution. He had a fair appetite, but did not care for the lunch they had, and so she had asked him, before going out in the afternoon, if there was anything that he would especially fancy for his dinner. He had thereupon expressed a partiality for mushrooms, of which he was always very fond.

"I laughed and pulled his ear," continued the witness, much affected at her recollection, "and asked him if that was his idea of a suitable dish for an invalid. But I didn't think that it really mattered in the least then, so I went to several shops about them. They all said that mushrooms were over, but finally I found a few at Lackington's, the greengrocer in Park Road. I bought only half-a-pound; no one but Charlie among us cared for them and I thought that they were already very dry and rather dear."

The connection between the mushrooms and the unfortunate boy's death seemed inevitable. When Mrs Dupreen went upstairs after dinner she found Charlie apparently asleep and breathing soundly. She quietly removed the tray and without disturbing him turned out the gas and closed the door. In the middle of the night she was suddenly and startlingly awakened by something. For a moment she remained confused, listening. Then a curious sound coming from the direction of the boy's bedroom drew her there. On opening the door she was horrified to see her nephew lying on the floor in a convulsed attitude. His eyes were open and widely dilated; one hand clutched some bed-clothes which he had dragged down with him, and the other still grasped the empty water-bottle that had been by his side. She called loudly for help and her brother and then the servant appeared. She sent the latter to a medicine cabinet for mustard leaves and told her brother to get in the nearest available doctor. She had already lifted Charlie on to the bed again. Before the doctor arrived, which was in about half-an-hour, the boy was dead.

In answer to a question the witness stated that she had not seen her nephew between the time she removed the tray and when she found him ill. The only other person who had seen him within a few hours of his death had been her brother, Philip Loudham, who

had taken up Charlie's dinner. When he came down again he had made the remark: "The youngster seems lively enough now."

Dr Slark was the next witness. His evidence was to the effect that about three-fifteen on the Thursday morning he was hurriedly called to Hazlehurst by a gentleman whom he now knew to be Mr Philip Loudham. He understood that the case was one of convulsions and went provided for that contingency, but on his arrival he found the patient already dead. From his own examination and from what he was told he had no hesitation in diagnosing the case as one of agaric poisoning. He saw no reason to suspect any of the food except the mushrooms, and all the symptoms pointed to bhurine, the deadly principle of *Amanita Bhuroides*, or the Black Cap, as it was popularly called, from its fancied resemblance to the head-dress assumed by a judge in passing death sentence, coupled with its sinister and well-merited reputation. It was always fatal.

Continuing his evidence, Dr Slark explained that only after maturity did the Black Cap develop its distinctive appearance. Up to that stage it had many of the characteristics of *Agaricus campestris*, or common mushroom. It was true that the gills were paler than one would expect to find, and there were other slight differences of a technical kind, but all might easily be overlooked in the superficial glance of the gatherer. The whole subject of edible and noxious fungi was a difficult one and at present very imperfectly understood. He, personally, very much doubted if true mushrooms were ever responsible for the cases of poisoning which one occasionally saw attributed to them. Under scientific examination he was satisfied that all would resolve themselves into poisoning by one or other of the many noxious fungi that could easily be mistaken for the edible varieties. It was possible to prepare an artificial bed, plant it with proper spawn and be rewarded by a crop of mushroom-like growth of undoubted virulence. On the other hand, the injurious constituents of many poisonous fungi passed off in the process of cooking. There was no handy way of discriminating between the good and the bad except by the absolute identification of species. The salt test and the silver-spoon test were all nonsense and the sooner they were

forgotten the better. Apparent mushrooms that were found in woods or growing in the vicinity of trees or hedges should always be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

Dr Slark's evidence concluded the case so far as the subpœnaed witnesses were concerned, but before addressing the jury the coroner announced that another person had expressed a desire to be heard. There was no reason why they should not accept any evidence that was tendered, and as the applicant's name had been mentioned in the case it was only right that he should have the opportunity of replying publicly.

Mr Lackington thereupon entered the witness-box and was sworn. He stated that he was a fruiterer and greengrocer, carrying on a business in Park Road, St Abbots. He remembered Mrs Dupreen coming to his shop two days before. The basket of mushrooms from which she was supplied consisted of a small lot of about six pounds, brought in by a farmer from a neighbouring village, with whom he had frequent dealings. All had been disposed of and in no other case had illness resulted. It was a serious matter to him as a tradesman to have his name associated with a case of this kind. That was why he had come forward. Not only with regard to mushrooms, but as a general result, people would become shy of dealing with him if it was stated that he sold unwholesome goods.

The coroner, intervening at this point, remarked that he might as well say that he would direct the jury that, in the event of their finding the deceased to have died from the effects of the mushrooms or anything contained among them, there was no evidence other than that the occurrence was one of pure mischance.

Mr Lackington expressed his thanks for the assurance, but said that a bad impression would still remain. He had been in business in St Abbots for twenty-seven years and during that time he had handled some tons of mushrooms without a single complaint before. He admitted, in answer to the interrogation, that he had not actually examined every mushroom of the half-pound sold to Mrs Dupreen, but he weighed them, and he was confident that if a

toadstool had been among them he would have detected it. Might it not be a cooking utensil that was the cause?

Dr Slark shook his head and was understood to say that he could not accept the suggestion.

Continuing, Mr Lackington then asked whether it was not possible that the deceased, doubtless an inquiring, adventurous boy and as mischievous as most of his kind, feeling quite well again and being confined to the house, had got up in his aunt's absence and taken something that would explain this sad affair? They had heard of a medicine cabinet. What about tablets of trional or veronal or something of that sort that might perhaps look like sweets?——It was all very well for Dr Slark to laugh, but this matter was a serious one for the witness.

Dr Slark apologised for smiling—he had not laughed—and gravely remarked that the matter was a serious one for all concerned in the inquiry. He admitted that the reference to trional and veronal in this connection had, for the moment, caused him to forget the surroundings. He would suggest that in the circumstances perhaps the coroner would think it desirable to order a more detailed examination of the body to be made.

After some further discussion the coroner, while remarking that in most cases an analysis was quite unnecessary, decided that in view of what had transpired it would be more satisfactory to have a complete autopsy carried out. The inquest was accordingly adjourned.

A week later most of those who had taken part in the first inquiry assembled again in the room of the St Abbots Town Hall which did duty for the Coroner's Court. Only one witness was heard and his evidence was brief and conclusive.

Dr Herbert Ingpenny, consulting pathologist to St Martin's Hospital, stated that he had made an examination of the contents of the stomach and viscera of the deceased. He found evidence of the presence of the poison bhurine in sufficient quantity to account for the boy's death, and the symptoms, as described by Dr Slark and Mrs Dupreen in the course of the previous hearing, were consistent with bhurine poisoning. Bhurine did not occur naturally

except as a constituent of *Amanita Bhuroides*. One-fifth of a grain would be fatal to an adult; in other words, a single fungus in the dish might poison three people. A child, especially if experiencing the effects of a weakening illness, would be even more susceptible. No other harmful substance was present.

Dr Ingpenny concluded by saying that he endorsed his colleague's general remarks on the subject of mushrooms and other fungi, and the jury, after a plain direction from the coroner, forthwith brought in a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.

It was a foregone conclusion with anyone who knew the facts or had followed the evidence. Yet five days later Philip Loudham was arrested suddenly and charged with the astounding crime of having murdered his nephew.

It is at this point that Max Carrados makes his first appearance in the Winpole tragedy.

A few days after the arrest, being in a particularly urbane frame of mind himself, and having several hours with no demands on them that could not be fitly transferred to his subordinates, Mr Carlyle looked round for some social entertainment and with a benevolent condescension very opportunely remembered the existence of his niece living at Groat's Heath.

"Elsie will be delighted," he assented to the suggestion. "She is rather out of the world up there, I imagine. Now if I get there at four, put in a couple of hours…."

Mrs Bellmark was certainly pleased, but she appeared to be still more surprised, and behind that lay an effervescence of excitement that even to Mr Carlyle's complacent self-esteem seemed out of proportion to the occasion. The reason could not be long withheld.

"Did you meet anyone, Uncle Louis?" was almost her first inquiry.

"Did I meet anyone?" repeated Mr Carlyle with his usual precision. "Um, no, I cannot say that I met anyone particular. Of course——"

"I've had a visitor and he's coming back again for tea. Guess who it is? But you never will. Mr Carrados."

“Max Carrados!” exclaimed her uncle in astonishment. “You don’t say so. Why, bless my soul, Elsie, I’d almost forgotten that you knew him. It seems years ago——What on earth is Max doing in Groat’s Heath?”

“That is the extraordinary thing about it,” replied Mrs Bellmark. “He said that he had come up here to look for mushrooms.”

“Mushrooms?”

“Yes; that was what he said. He asked me if I knew of any woods about here that he could go into and I told him of the one down Stonecut Lane.”

“But don’t you know, my dear child,” exclaimed Mr Carlyle, “that mushrooms growing in woods or even near trees are always to be regarded with suspicion? They may look like mushrooms, but they are probably poisonous.”

“I didn’t know,” admitted Mrs Bellmark; “but if they are, I imagine Mr Carrados will know.”

“It scarcely sounds like it—going to a wood, you know. As it happens, I have been looking up the subject lately. But, in any case, you say that he is coming back here?”

“He asked me if he might call on his way home for a cup of tea, and of course I said, ‘Of course.’”

“Of course,” also said Mr Carlyle. “Motoring, I suppose.”

“Yes, a big grey car. He had Mr Parkinson with him.”

Mr Carlyle was slightly puzzled, as he frequently was by his friend’s proceedings, but it was not his custom to dwell on any topic that involved an admission of inadequacy. The subject of Carrados and his eccentric quest was therefore dismissed until the sound of a formidable motor car dominating the atmosphere of the quiet suburban road was almost immediately followed by the entrance of the blind amateur. With a knowing look towards his niece Carlyle had taken up a position at the farther end of the room, where he remained in almost breathless silence.

Carrados acknowledged the hostess’s smiling greeting and then nodded familiarly in the direction of the playful guest.

“Well, Louis,” he remarked, “we’ve caught each other.”

Mrs Bellmark was perceptibly startled, but rippled musically at the failure of the conspiracy.

"Extraordinary," admitted Mr Carlyle, coming forward.

"Not so very," was the dry reply. "Your friendly little maid"—to Mrs Bellmark—"mentioned your visitor as she brought me in."

"Is it a fact, Max," demanded Mr Carlyle, "that you have been to—er—Stonecut Wood to get mushrooms?"

"Mrs Bellmark told you?"

"Yes. And did you succeed?"

"Parkinson found something that he assured me looked just like mushrooms."

Mr Carlyle bestowed a triumphant glance on his niece.

"I should very much like to see these so-called mushrooms. Do you know, it may be rather a good thing for you that I met you."

"It is always a good thing for me to meet you," replied Carrados. "You shall see them. They are in the car. Perhaps I shall be able to take you back to town?"

"If you are going very soon. No, no, Elsie"—in response to Mrs Bellmark's protesting "Oh!"—"I don't want to influence Max, but I really must tear myself away the moment after tea. I still have to clear up some work on a rather important case I am just completing. It is quite appropriate to the occasion, too. Do you know all about the Winpole business, Max?"

"No," admitted Carrados, without any appreciable show of interest. "Do you, Louis?"

"Yes," responded Mr Carlyle with crisp assurance, "yes, I think that I may claim I do. In fact it was I who obtained the evidence that induced the authorities to take up the case against Loudham."

"Oh, do tell us all about it," exclaimed Elsie. "I have only seen something in the Indicator."

Mr Carlyle shook his head, hemmed and looked wise, and then gave in.

"But not a word of this outside, Elsie," he stipulated. "Some of the evidence won't be given until next week and it might be serious——"

"Not a syllable," assented the lady. "How exciting! Go on."

"Well, you know, of course, that the coroner's jury—very rightly, according to the evidence before them—brought in a verdict of accidental death. In the circumstances it was a reflection on the business methods or the care or the knowledge or whatever one may decide of the man who sold the mushrooms, a greengrocer called Lackington. I have seen Lackington, and with a rather remarkable pertinacity in the face of the evidence he insists that he could not have made this fatal blunder—that in weighing so small a quantity as half-a-pound, at any rate, he would at once have spotted anything that wasn't quite all right."

"But the doctor said, Uncle Louis——"

"Yes, my dear Elsie, we know what the doctor said, but, rightly or wrongly, Lackington backs his experience and practical knowledge against theoretical generalities. In ordinary circumstances nothing more would have come of it, but it happens that Lackington has for a lodger a young man on the staff of the local paper, and for a neighbour a pharmaceutical chemist. These three men talked things over more than once—Lackington restive under the damage that had been done to his reputation, the journalist stimulating and keen for a newspaper sensation, the chemist contributing his quota of practical knowledge. At the end of a few days a fabric of circumstance had been woven which might be serious or innocent according to the further development of the suggestion and the manner in which it could be met. These were the chief points of the attack:

"Mrs Dupreen's allowance for the care and maintenance of Charlie Winpole ceased with his death, as she had told the jury. What she did not mention was that the deceased boy would have come into an inheritance of some fifteen thousand pounds at age and that this fortune now fell in equal shares to the lot of his two nearest relatives—Mrs Dupreen and her brother Philip.

"Mrs Dupreen was by no means in easy circumstances. Philip Loudham was equally poor and had no assured income. He had tried several forms of business and now, at about thirty-five, was spending his time chiefly in writing poems and painting

watercolours, none of which brought him any money so far as one could learn.

"Philip Loudham, it was admitted, took up the food round which the tragedy centred.

"Philip Loudham was shown to be in debt and urgently in need of money. There was supposed to be a lady in the case—I hope I need say no more, Elsie."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs Bellmark with poignant interest.

"We do not know yet. A married woman, it is rumoured, I regret to say. It scarcely matters—certainly not to you, Elsie. To continue:

"Mrs Dupreen got back from her shopping in the afternoon before her nephew's death at about three o'clock. In less than half-an-hour Loudham left the house and going to the station took a return ticket to Euston. He went by the 3.41 and was back in St Abbots at 5.43. That would give him barely an hour in town for whatever business he transacted. What was that business?

"The chemist next door supplied the information that although bhurine only occurs in nature in this one form, it can be isolated from the other constituents of the fungus and dealt with like any other liquid poison. But it was a very exceptional commodity, having no commercial uses and probably not half-a-dozen retail chemists in London had it on their shelves. He himself had never stocked it and never been asked for it.

"With this suggestive but by no means convincing evidence," continued Mr Carlyle, "the young journalist went to the editor of The Morning Indicator, to which he acted as St Abbots correspondent, and asked him whether he cared to take up the inquiry as a 'scoop.' The local trio had carried it as far as they were able. The editor of the Indicator decided to look into it and asked me to go on with the case. This is how my connection with it arose."

"Oh, that's how newspapers get to know things?" commented Mrs Bellmark. "I often wondered."

"It is one way," assented her uncle.

"An American development," contributed Carrados. "It is a little overdone there."

"It must be awful," said the hostess. "And the police methods! In the plays that come from the States——" The entrance of the friendly handmaiden, bringing tea, was responsible for this platitudinous wave. The conversation, in deference to Mr Carlyle's scruples, marked time until the door closed on her departure.

"My first business," continued the inquiry agent, after making himself useful at the table, "was naturally to discover among the chemists in London whether a sale of bhurine coincided with Philip Loudham's hasty visit. If this line failed, the very foundation of the edifice of hypothetical guilt gave way; if it succeeded.... Well, it did succeed. In a street off Caistor Square, Tottenham Court Road—Trenion Street—we found a man called Lightcraft, who at once remembered making such a sale. As bhurine is a specified poison, the transaction would have to be entered, and Lightcraft's book contained this unassailable piece of evidence. On Wednesday, the sixth of this month, a man signing his name as 'J. D. Williams,' and giving '25 Chalcott Place' as the address, purchased four drachms of bhurine. Lightcraft fixed the time as about half-past four. I went to 25 Chalcott Place and found it to be a small boarding-house. No one of the name of Williams was known there."

If Mr Carlyle's tone of finality went for anything, Philip Loudham was as good as pinioned. Mrs Bellmark supplied the expected note of admiration.

"Just fancy!" was the form it took.

"Under the Act the purchaser must be known to the chemist?" suggested Carrados.

"Yes," agreed Mr Carlyle; "and there our friend Lightcraft may have let himself in for a little trouble. But, as he says—and we must admit that there is something in it—who is to define what 'known to' actually means? A hundred people are known to him as regular or occasional customers and he has never heard their names; a score of names and addresses represent to him regular or occasional customers whom he has never seen. This 'J. D. Williams' came in with an easy air and appeared at all events to know Lightcraft. The face seemed not unfamiliar and Lightcraft

was perhaps a little too facile in assuming that he *did* know him. Well, well, Max, I can understand the circumstances. Competition is keen—especially against the private chemist—and one may give offence and lose a customer. We must all live."

"Except Charlie Winpole," occurred to Max Carrados, but he left the retort unspoken. "Did you happen to come across any inquiry for bhurine at other shops?" he asked instead.

"No," replied Carlyle, "no, I did not. It would have been an indication then, of course, but after finding the actual place the others would have no significance. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Only don't you think that he was rather lucky to get it first shot if our St Abbots authority was right?"

"Yes, yes; perhaps he was. But that is of no interest to us now. The great thing is that a peculiarly sinister and deliberate murder is brought home to its perpetrator. When you consider the circumstances, upon my soul, I don't know that I have ever unmasked a more ingenious and cold-blooded ruffian."

"Then he has confessed, uncle?"

"Confessed, my dear Elsie," said Mr Carlyle, with a tolerant smile, "no, he has not confessed—men of that type never do. On the contrary, he asserted his outraged innocence with a considerable show of indignation. What else was he to do? Then he was asked to account for his movements between 4.15 and 5 o'clock on that afternoon. Egad, the fellow was so cocksure of the safety of his plans that he hadn't even taken the trouble to think that out. First he denied that he had been away from St Abbots at all. Then he remembered. He had run down to town in the afternoon for a few things.—What things?—Well, chiefly stationery.—Where had he bought it?—At a shop in Oxford Street; he did not know the name.—Would he be able to point it out?—He thought so.—Could he identify the attendant?—No, he could not remember him in the least.—Had he the bill?—No, he never kept small bills.—How much was the amount?—About three or four shillings.—And the return fare to Euston was three-and-eight-pence. Was it not rather an extravagant journey?—He could only say that he did so.—Three or four

shillings' worth of stationery would be a moderate parcel. Did he have it sent?—No, he took it with him.—Three or four shillings' worth of stationery in his pocket?—No, it was in a parcel.—Too large to go in his pocket?—Yes.—Two independent witnesses would testify that he carried no parcel. They were townsmen of St Abbots who had travelled down in the same carriage with him. Did he still persist that he had been engaged in buying stationery? Then he declined to say anything further—about the best thing he could do."

"And Lightcraft identifies him?"

"Um, well, not quite so positively as we might wish. You see, a fortnight has elapsed. The man who bought the poison wore a moustache—put on, of course—but Lightcraft will say that there is a resemblance and the type of the two men the same."

"I foresee that Mr Lightcraft's accommodating memory for faces will come in for rather severe handling in cross-examination," said Carrados, as though he rather enjoyed the prospect.

"It will balance Mr Philip Loudham's unfortunate forgetfulness for localities, Max," rejoined Mr Carlyle, delivering the thrust with his own inimitable aplomb.

Carrados rose with smiling acquiescence to the shrewdness of the riposte.

"I will be quite generous, Mrs Bellmark," he observed. "I will take him away now, with the memory of that lingering in your ears—all my crushing retorts unspoken."

"Five-thirty, egad!" exclaimed Mr Carlyle, displaying his imposing gold watch. "We must—or, at all events, I must. You can think of them in the car, Max."

"I do hope you won't come to blows," murmured the lady. Then she added: "When will the real trial come on, Uncle Louis?"

"The Sessions? Oh, early in January."

"I must remember to look out for it." Possibly she had some faint idea of Uncle Louis taking a leading part in the proceedings. At any rate Mr Carlyle looked pleased, but when adieux had been taken and the door was closed Mrs Bellmark was left wondering what the enigma of Max Carrados's departing smile had been.

Before they had covered many furlongs Mr Carlyle suddenly remembered the suspected mushrooms and demanded to see them. A very moderate collection was produced for his inspection. He turned them over sceptically.

"The gills are too pale for true mushrooms, Max," he declared sapiently. "Don't take any risk. Let me drop them out of the window?"

"No." Carrados's hand quietly arrested the threatened action. "No; I have a use for them, Louis, but it is not culinary. You are quite right; they are rank poison. I only want to study them for … a case I am interested in."

"A case! You don't mean to say that there is another mushroom poisoner going?"

"No; it is the same."

"But—but you said——"

"That I did not know all about it? Quite true. Nor do I yet. But I know rather more than I did then."

"Do you mean that Scotland Yard——"

"No, Louis." Mr Carrados appeared to find something rather amusing in the situation. "I am for the other side."

"The other side! And you let me babble out the whole case for the prosecution! Well, really, Max!"

"But you are out of it now? The Public Prosecutor has taken it up?"

"True, true. But, for all that, I feel devilishly bad."

"Then I will give you the whole case for the defence and so we shall be quits. In fact I am relying on you to help me with it."

"With the defence? I—after supplying the evidence that the Public Prosecutor is acting on?"

"Why not? You don't want to hang Philip Loudham—especially if he happens to be innocent—do you?"

"I don't want to hang anyone," protested Mr Carlyle. "At least—not—as a private individual."

"Quite so. Well, suppose you and I between ourselves find out the actual facts of the case and decide what is to be done. The more

usual course is for the prosecution to exaggerate all that tells against the accused and to contradict everything in his favour; for the defence to advance fictitious evidence of innocence and to lie roundly on everything that endangers his client; while on both sides witnesses are piled up to bemuse the jury into accepting the desired version. That does not always make for impartiality or for justice.... Now you and I are two reasonable men, Louis——"

"I hope so," admitted Mr Carlyle. "I hope so."

"You can give away the case for the prosecution and I will expose the weakness of the defence, so, between us, we may arrive at the truth."

"It strikes me as a deuced irregular proceeding. But I am curious to hear the defence all the same."

"You are welcome to all of it that there yet is. An alibi, of course."

"Ah!" commented Mr Carlyle with expression.

"So recently as yesterday a lady came hurriedly, and with a certain amount of secrecy, to see me. She came on the strength of the introduction afforded by a mutual acquaintanceship with Fromow, the Greek professor. When we were alone she asked me, besought me, in fact, to tell her what to do. A few hours before Mrs Dupreen had rushed across London to her with the tale of young Loudham's arrest. Then out came the whole story. This woman—well, her name is Guestling, Louis—lives a little way down in Surrey and is married. Her husband, according to her own account—and I have certainly heard a hint about it elsewhere—leads her a studiedly outrageous existence; an admired silken-mannered gentleman in society, a tolerable pole-cat at home, one infers. About a year ago Mrs Guestling made the acquaintance of Loudham, who was staying in that neighbourhood painting his pretty unsaleable country lanes and golden sunsets. The inevitable, or, to accept the lady's protestations, half the inevitable, followed. Guestling, who adds an insatiable jealousy to his other domestic virtues, vetoed the new acquaintance and thenceforward the two met hurriedly and furtively in town. Had either of them any money they might have snatched their destinies

from the hands of Fate and gone off together, but she has nothing and he has nothing and both, I suppose, are poor weak mortals when it comes to doing anything courageous and outright in this censorious world. So they drifted, drifting but not yet wholly wrecked."

"A formidable incentive for a weak and desperate man to secure a fortune by hook or crook, Max," said Carlyle drily.

"That is the motive that I wish to make you a present of. But, as you will insist on your side, it is also a motive for a weak and foolish couple to steal every brief opportunity of a secret meeting. On Wednesday, the sixth, the lady was returning home from a visit to some friends in the Midlands. She saw in the occasion an opportunity, and on the morning of the sixth a message appeared in the personal column of The Daily Telegraph—their usual channel of communication—making an assignation. That much can be established by the irrefutable evidence of the newspaper. Philip Loudham kept the appointment and for half-an-hour this miserably happy pair sat holding each other's hands in a dreary deserted waiting-room of Bishop's Road Station. That half-hour was from 4.15 to 4.45. Then Loudham saw Mrs Guestling into Praed Street Station for Victoria, returned to Euston and just caught the 5.7 St Abbots."

"Can this be corroborated—especially as regards the precise time they were together?"

"Not a word of it. They chose the waiting-room at Bishop's Road for seclusion and apparently they got it. Not a soul even looked in while they were there."

"Then, by Jupiter, Max," exclaimed Mr Carlyle with emotion, "you have hanged your client!"

Carrados could not restrain a smile at his friend's tragic note of triumph.

"Well, let us examine the rope," he said with his usual imperturbability.

"Here it is." It was a trivial enough shred of evidence that the inquiry agent took from his pocket-book and put into the

expectant hand; in point of fact, the salmon-coloured ticket of a "London General" motor omnibus.

"Royal Oak—the stage nearest Paddington—to Tottenham Court Road—the point nearest Trenion Street," he added significantly.

"Yes," acquiesced Carrados, taking it.

"The man who bought the bhurine dropped that ticket on the floor of the shop. He left the door open and Lightcraft followed him to close it. That is how he came to pick the ticket up, and he remembers that it was not there before. Then he threw it into a waste-paper basket underneath the counter, and that is where we found it when I called on him."

"Mr Lightcraft's memory fascinates me, Louis," was the blind man's unruffled comment. "Let us drop in and have a chat with him?"

"Do you really think that there is anything more to be got in that quarter?" queried Carlyle dubiously. "I have turned him inside out, you may be sure."

"True; but we approach Mr Lightcraft from different angles. You were looking for evidence to prove young Loudham guilty. I am looking for evidence to prove him innocent."

"Very well, Max," acquiesced his companion. "Only don't blame me if it turns out as deuced awkward for your man as Mrs G. has done. Shall I tell you what a counsel may be expected to put to the jury as the explanation of that lady's evidence?"

"No, thanks," said Carrados half sleepily from his corner. "I know. I told her so."

"Oh, very well. I needn't inform you, then," and debarred of that satisfaction Mr Carlyle withdrew himself into his own corner, where he nursed an indulgent annoyance against the occasional perversity of Max Carrados until the stopping of the car and the variegated attractions displayed in a shop window told him where they were.

Mr Lightcraft made no pretence of being glad to see his visitors. For some time he declined to open his mouth at all on the subject that had brought them there, repeating with parrot-like obstinacy to every remark on their part, "The matter is *sub judice*. I am

unable to say anything further," until Mr Carlyle longed to box his ears and bring him to his senses. The ears happened to be rather prominent, for they glowed with sensitiveness, and the chemist was otherwise a lank and pallid man, whose transparent ivory skin and well-defined moustache gave him something of the appearance of a waxwork.

"At all events," interposed Carrados, when his friend turned from the maddening reiteration in despair, "you don't mind telling me a few things about bhurine—apart from this particular connection?"

"I am very busy," and Mr Lightcraft, with his back towards the shop, did something superfluous among the bottles on a shelf.

"I imagine that the time of Mr Max Carrados, of whom even you may possibly have heard, is as valuable as yours, my good friend," put in Mr Carlyle with scandalised dignity.

"Mr Carrados?" Lightcraft turned and regarded the blind man with interest. "I did not know. But you must recognise the unenviable position in which I am put by this gentleman's interference."

"It is his profession, you know," said Carrados mildly, "and, in any case, it would certainly have been someone. Why not help me to get you out of the position?"

"How is that possible?"

"If the case against Philip Loudham breaks down and he is discharged at the next hearing you would not be called upon further."

"That would certainly be a mitigation. But why should it break down?"

"Suppose you let me try the taste of bhurine," suggested Carrados. "You have some left?"

"Max, Max!" cried Mr Carlyle's warning voice, "aren't you aware that the stuff is a deadly poison? One-fifth of a grain——"

"Mr Lightcraft will know how to administer it."

Apparently Mr Lightcraft did. He filled a graduated measure with cold water, dipped a slender glass rod into a bottle that was

not kept on the shelves, and with it stirred the water. Then into another vessel of water he dropped a single spot of the dilution.

"One in a hundred and twenty-five thousand, Mr Carrados," he said, offering him the mixture.

Carrados just touched the liquid with his lips, considered the impression and then wiped his mouth.

"Now for the smell."

The unstoppered bottle was handed to him and he took in its exhalation.

"Stewed mushrooms!" was his comment. "What is it used for, Mr Lightcraft?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"But your customer must have stated an application."

The pallid chemist flushed a little at the recollection of that incident.

"Yes," he conceded. "There is a good deal about the whole business that is still a mystery to me. The man came in shortly after I had lit up and nodded familiarly as he said: 'Good-evening, Mr Lightcraft.' I naturally assumed that he was someone whom I could not quite place. 'I want another half-pound of nitre,' he said, and I served him. Had he bought nitre before, I have since tried to recall and I cannot. It is a common enough article and I sell it every day. I have a poor memory for faces I am willing to admit. It has hampered me in business many a time. We chatted about nothing in particular as I did up the parcel. After he had paid and turned to go he looked back again. 'By the way, do you happen to have any bhurine?' he inquired. Unfortunately I had a few ounces. 'Of course you know its nature?' I cautioned him. 'May I ask what you require it for?' He nodded and held up the parcel of nitre he had in his hand. 'The same thing,' he replied, 'taxidermy.' Then I supplied him with half-an-ounce."

"As a matter of fact, is it used in taxidermy?"

"It does not seem to be. I have made inquiry and no one knows of it. Nitre is largely used, and some of the dangerous

poisons—arsenic and mercuric chloride, for instance—but not this. No, it was a subterfuge."

"Now the poison book, if you please."

Mr Lightcraft produced it without demur and the blind man ran his finger along the indicated line.

"Yes; this is quite satisfactory. Is it a fact, Mr Lightcraft, that not half-a-dozen chemists in London stock this particular substance? We are told that."

"I can quite believe it. I certainly don't know of another."

"Strangely enough, your customer of the sixth seems to have come straight here. Do you issue a price-list?"

"Only a localised one of certain photographic goods. Bhurine is not included."

"You can suggest no reason why Mr Phillip Loudham should be inspired to presume that he would be able to procure this unusual drug from you? You have never corresponded with him nor come across his name or address before?"

"No. As far as I can recollect, I know nothing whatever of him."

"Then as yet you must assume that it was pure chance. By the way, Mr Lightcraft, how does it come that *you* stock this rare poison, which has no commercial use and for which there is no demand?"

The chemist permitted himself to smile at the blunt terms of the inquiry.

"In the ordinary way I don't stock it," he replied. "This is a small quantity which I had over from my own use."

"Your own use? Oh, then it has a use after all?"

"No, scarcely that. Some time ago it leaked out in a corner of the photographic world that a great revolution in colour photography was on the point of realisation by the use of bhurine in one of the processes. I, among others, at once took it up. Unfortunately it was another instance of a discovery that is correct in theory breaking down in practice. Nothing came of it."

“Dear, dear me,” said Carrados softly, with sympathetic understanding in his voice; “what a pity. You are interested in photography, Mr Lightcraft?”

“It is the hobby of my life, sir. Of course most chemists dabble in it as a part of their business, but I devote all my spare time to experimenting. Colour photography in particular.”

“Colour photography; yes. It has a great future. This bhurine process—I suppose it would have been of considerable financial value if it had worked?”

Mr Lightcraft laughed quietly and rubbed his hands together. For the moment he had forgotten Loudham and the annoying case and lived in his enthusiasm.

“I should rather say it would, Mr Carrados,” he replied. “It would have been the most epoch-marking thing since Gaudin produced the first dry plate in ’54. Consider it—the elaborate processes of Dyndale, Eiloff and Jupp reduced to the simplicity of a single contact print giving the entire range of chromatic variation. Financially it will scarcely bear thinking about by artificial light.”

“Was it widely taken up?” asked Carrados.

“The bhurine idea?”

“Yes. You spoke of the secret leaking out. Were many in the know?”

“Not at all. The group of initiates was only a small one and I should imagine that, on reflection, every man kept it to himself. It certainly never became public. Then when the theory was definitely exploded, of course no one took any further interest in it.”

“Were all who were working on the same lines known to you, Mr Lightcraft?”

“Well, yes; more or less I suppose they would be,” said the chemist thoughtfully. “You see, the man who stumbled on the formula was a member of the Iris—a society of those interested in this subject, of which I was the secretary—and I don’t think it ever got beyond the committee.”

"How long ago was this?"

"A year—eighteen months. It led to unpleasantness and broke up the society."

"Suppose it happened to come to your knowledge that one of the original circle was quietly pursuing his experiments on the same lines with bhurine—what should you infer from it?"

Mr Lightcraft considered. Then he regarded Carrados with a sharp, almost a startled, glance and then he fell to biting his nails in perplexed uncertainty.

"It would depend on who it was," he replied.

"Was there by any chance one who was unknown to you by sight but whose address you were familiar with?"

"Paulden!" exclaimed Mr Lightcraft. "Paulden, by heaven! I do believe you're right. He was the ablest of the lot and he never came to the meetings—a corresponding member. Southem, the original man who struck the idea, knew Paulden and told him of it. Southem was an impractical genius who would never be able to make anything work. Paulden—yes, Paulden it was who finally persuaded Southem that there was nothing in it. He sent a report to the same effect to be read at one of the meetings. So Paulden is taking up bhurine again——"

"Where does he live?" inquired Carrados.

"Ivor House, Wilmington Lane, Enstead. As secretary I have written there a score of times."

"It is on the Great Western—Paddington," commented the blind man. "Still, can you get out the addresses of the others in the know, Mr Lightcraft?"

"Certainly, certainly. I have the book of membership. But I am convinced now that Paulden was the man. I believe that I did actually see him once some years ago, but he has grown a moustache since."

"If you had been convinced of that a few days ago it would have saved us some awkwardness," volunteered Mr Carlyle with a little dignified asperity.

“When you came before, Mr Carlyle, you were so convinced yourself of it being Mr Loudham that you wouldn’t hear of me thinking of anyone else,” retorted the chemist. “You will bear me out also that I never positively identified him as my customer. Now here is the book. Southem, Potter’s Bar. Voynich, Islington. Crawford, Streatham Hill. Brown, Southampton Row. Vickers, Clapham Common. Tidey, Fulham. All those I knew quite well—associated with them week after week. Williams I didn’t know so closely. He is dead. Bigwood has gone to Canada. I don’t think anyone else was in the bhurine craze—as we called it afterwards.”

“But now? What would you call it now?” queried Carrados.

“Now? Well, I hope that you will get me out of having to turn up at court and that sort of thing, Mr Carrados. If Paulden is going on experimenting with bhurine again on the sly I shall want all my spare time to do the same myself!”

A few hours later the two investigators rang the bell of a substantial detached house in Enstead, the little country town twenty miles out in Berkshire, and asked to see Mr Paulden.

“It is no good taking Lightcraft to identify the man,” Carrados had decided. “If Paulden denied it, our friend’s obliging record in that line would put him out of court.”

“I maintain an open mind on the subject,” Carlyle had replied. “Lightcraft is admittedly a very bending reed, but there is no reason why he should not have been right before and wrong to-day.”

They were shown into a ceremonial reception-room to wait. Mr Carlyle diagnosed snug circumstances and the tastes of an indoors, comfort-loving man in the surroundings.

The door opened, but it was to admit a middle-aged, matronly lady with good-humour and domestic capability proclaimed by every detail of her smiling face and easy manner.

“You wished to see my husband?” she asked with friendly courtesy.

“Mr Paulden? Yes, we should like to,” replied Carlyle, with his most responsive urbanity. “It is a matter that need not occupy more than a few minutes.”

“He is very busy just now. If it has to do with the election”—a local contest was at its height—“he is not interested in politics and scarcely ever votes.” Her manner was not curious, but merely reflected a business-like desire to save trouble all round.

“Very sensible too, ve-ry sensible indeed,” almost warbled Mr Carlyle with instinctive cajolery. “After all,” he continued, mendaciously appropriating as his own an aphorism at which he had laughed heartily a few days before in the theatre, “after all, what does an election do but change the colour of the necktie of the man who picks our pockets? No, no, Mrs Paulden, it is merely a—um—quite personal matter.”

The lady looked from one to the other with smiling amiability.

“Some little mystery,” her expression seemed to say. “All right; I don’t mind, only perhaps I could help you if I knew.”

“Mr Paulden is in his dark-room now,” was what she actually did say. “I am afraid, I am really afraid that I shan’t be able to persuade him to come out unless I can take a definite message.”

“One understands the difficulty of tempting an enthusiast from his work,” suggested Carrados, speaking for the first time. “Would it be permissible to take us to the door of the dark-room, Mrs Paulden, and let us speak to your husband through it?”

“We can try that way,” she acquiesced readily, “if it is really so important.”

“I think so,” he replied.

The dark-room lay across the hall. Mrs Paulden conducted them to the door, waited a moment and then knocked quietly.

“Yes?” sang out a voice, rather irritably one might judge, from inside.

“Two gentlemen have called to see you about something, Lance——”

“I cannot see anyone when I am in here,” interrupted the voice with rising sharpness. “You know that, Clara——”

“Yes, dear,” she said soothingly; “but listen. They are at the door here and if you can spare the time just to come and speak you will know without much trouble if their business is as important as they think.”

“Wait a minute,” came the reply after a moment’s pause, and then they heard someone approach the door from the other side.

It was a little difficult to know exactly how it happened in the obscure light of the corner of the hall. Carrados had stepped nearer to the door to speak. Possibly he trod on Mr Carlyle’s toe, for there was a confused movement; certainly he put out his hand hastily to recover himself. The next moment the door of the dark-room jerked open, the light was let in and the warm odours of a mixed and vitiated atmosphere rolled out. Secure in the well-ordered discipline of his excellent household, Mr Paulden had neglected the precaution of locking himself in.

“Confound it all,” shouted the incensed experimenter in a towering rage, “confound it all, you’ve spoiled the whole thing now!”

“Dear me,” apologised Carrados penitently, “I am so sorry. I think it must have been my fault, do you know. Does it really matter?”

“Matter!” stormed Mr Paulden, recklessly flinging open the door fully now to come face to face with his disturbers—“matter letting a flood of light into a dark-room in the middle of a delicate experiment!”

“Surely it was very little,” persisted Carrados.

“Pshaw,” snarled the angry gentleman; “it was enough. You know the difference between light and dark, I suppose?”

Mr Carlyle suddenly found himself holding his breath, wondering how on earth Max had conjured that opportune challenge to the surface.

“No,” was the mild and deprecating reply—the appeal *ad misericordiam* that had never failed him yet—“no, unfortunately I don’t, for I am blind. That is why I am so awkward.”

Out of the shocked silence Mrs Paulden gave a little croon of pity. The moment before she had been speechless with indignation

on her husband's behalf. Paulden felt as though he had struck a suffering animal. He stammered an apology and turned away to close the unfortunate door. Then he began to walk slowly down the hall.

"You wished to see me about something?" he remarked, with matter-of-fact civility. "Perhaps we had better go in here." He indicated the reception-room where they had waited and followed them in. The admirable Mrs Paulden gave no indication of wishing to join the party.

Carrados came to the point at once.

"Mr Carlyle," he said, indicating his friend, "has recently been acting for the prosecution in a case of alleged poisoning that the Public Prosecutor has now taken up. I am interested in the defence. Both sides are thus before you, Mr Paulden."

"How does this concern me?" asked Paulden with obvious surprise.

"You are experimenting with bhurine. The victim of this alleged crime undoubtedly lost his life by bhurine poisoning. Do you mind telling us when and where you acquired your stock of this scarce substance?"

"I have had——"

"No—a moment, Mr Paulden, before you reply," struck in Carrados with arresting hand. "You must understand that nothing so grotesque as to connect you with a crime is contemplated. But a man is under arrest and the chief point against him is the half-ounce of bhurine that Lightcraft of Trenion Street sold to someone at half-past five last Wednesday fortnight. Before you commit yourself to any statement that it may possibly be difficult to recede from, you should realise that this inquiry will be pushed to the very end."

"How do you know that I am using bhurine?"

"That," parried Carrados, "is a blind man's secret."

"Oh, well. And you say that someone has been arrested through this fact?"

"Yes. Possibly you have read something of the St Abbots mushroom poisoning case?"

"I have no interest in the sensational ephemera of the Press. Very well; it was I who bought the bhurine from Lightcraft that Wednesday afternoon. I gave a false name and address, I must admit. I had a sufficient private reason for so doing."

"This knocks what is vulgarly termed 'the stuffing' out of the case for the prosecution," observed Carlyle, who had been taking a note. "It may also involve you in some trouble yourself, Mr Paulden."

"I don't think that you need regard that very seriously in the circumstances," said Carrados reassuringly.

"They must find some scapegoat, you know," persisted Mr Carlyle. "Loudham will raise Cain over it."

"I don't think so. Loudham, as the prosecution will roundly tell him, has only himself to thank for not giving a satisfactory account of his movements. Loudham will be lectured, Lightcraft will be fined the minimum, and Mr Paulden will, I imagine, be told not to do it again."

The man before them laughed bitterly.

"There will be no occasion to do it again," he remarked. "Do you know anything of the circumstances?"

"Lightcraft told us something connected with colour photography. You distrust Mr Lightcraft, I infer?"

Mr Paulden came down to the heart-easing medium of the street.

"I've had some once, thanks," was what he said with terse expression. "Let me tell you. About eighteen months ago I was on the edge of a great discovery in colour photography. It was my discovery, whatever you may have heard. Bhurine was the medium, and not being then so cautious or suspicious as I have reason to be now, and finding it difficult—really impossible—to procure this substance casually, I sent in an order to Lightcraft to procure me a stock. Unfortunately, in a moment of enthusiasm I had hinted at the anticipated results to a man who was then my friend—a weakling called Southem. Comparing notes with

Lightcraft they put two and two together and in a trice most of the secret boiled over.

"If you have ever been within an ace of a monumental discovery you will understand the torment of anxiety and self-reproach that possessed me. For months the result must have trembled in the balance, but even as it evaded me, so it evaded the others. And at last I was able to spread conviction that the bhurine process was a failure. I breathed again.

"You don't want to hear of the various things that conspired to baffle me. I proceeded with extreme caution and therefore slowly. About two weeks ago I had another foretaste of success and immediately on it a veritable disaster. By some diabolical mischance I contrived to upset my stock bottle of bhurine. It rolled down, smashed to atoms on a developing dish filled with another chemical, and the precious lot was irretrievably lost. To arrest the experiments at that stage for a day was to lose a month. In one place and one alone could I hope to replenish the stock temporarily at such short notice and to do it openly after my last experience filled me with dismay.... Well, you know what happened, and now, I suppose, it will all come out."

A week after his arrest Philip Loudham and his sister were sitting together in the drawing-room at Hazlehurst, nervous and expectant. Loudham had been discharged scarcely six hours before, with such vindication of his character as the frigid intimation that there was no evidence against him afforded. On his arrival home he had found a letter from Max Carrados—a name with which he was now familiar—awaiting him. There had been other notes and telegrams—messages of sympathy and congratulation, but the man who had brought about his liberation did not include these conventionalities. He merely stated that he purposed calling upon Mr Loudham at nine o'clock that evening and that he hoped it would be convenient for him and all other members of the household to be at home.

"He can scarcely be coming to be thanked," speculated Loudham, breaking the silence that had fallen on them as the hour approached. "I should have called on him myself to-morrow."

Mrs Dupreen assented absent-mindedly. Both were dressed in black, and both at that moment had the same thought: that they were dreaming this.

"I suppose you won't go on living here, Irene?" continued the brother, speaking to make the minutes seem tolerable.

This at least had the effect of bringing Mrs Dupreen back into the present with a rush.

"Of course not," she replied almost sharply and looking at him direct. "Why should I, now?"

"Oh, all right," he agreed. "I didn't suppose you would." Then, as the front-door bell was heard to ring: "Thank heaven!"

"Won't you go to meet him in the hall and bring him in?" suggested Mrs Dupreen. "He is blind, you know."

Carrados was carrying a small leather case which he allowed Loudham to relieve him of, together with his hat and gloves. The introduction to Mrs Dupreen was made, the blind man put in touch with a chair, and then Philip Loudham began to rattle off the acknowledgment of gratitude of which he had been framing and rejecting openings for the last half-hour.

"I'm afraid it's no good attempting to thank you for the extraordinary service that you've rendered me, Mr Carrados," he began, "and, above all, I appreciate the fact that, owing to you, it has been possible to keep Mrs Guestling's name entirely out of the case. Of course you know all about that, and my sister knows, so it isn't worth while beating about the bush. Well, now that I shall have something like a decent income of my own, I shall urge Kitty—Mrs Guestling—to apply for the divorce that she is richly entitled to, and when that is all settled we shall marry at once and try to forget the experiences on both sides that have led up to it. I hope," he added tamely, "that you don't consider us really much to blame?"

Carrados shook his head in mild deprecation.

"That is an ethical point that has lain outside the scope of my inquiry," he replied. "You would hardly imagine that I should disturb you at such a time merely to claim your thanks. Has it occurred to you why I should have come?"

Brother and sister exchanged looks and by their silence gave reply.

"We have still to find who poisoned Charlie Winpole."

Loudham stared at their guest in frank bewilderment. Mrs Dupreen almost closed her eyes. When she spoke it was in a pained whisper.

"Is there anything more to be gained by pursuing that idea, Mr Carrados?" she asked pleadingly. "We have passed through a week of anguish, coming upon a week of grief and great distress. Surely all has been done that can be done?"

"But you would have justice for your nephew if there has been foul play?"

Mrs Dupreen made a weary gesture of resignation. It was Loudham who took up the question.

"Do you really mean, Mr Carrados, that there is any doubt about the cause?"

"Will you give me my case, please? Thank you." He opened it and produced a small paper bag. "Now a newspaper, if you will." He opened the bag and poured out the contents. "You remember stating at the inquest, Mrs Dupreen, that the mushrooms you bought looked rather dry? They were dry, there is no doubt, for they had then been gathered four days. Here are some more under precisely the same conditions. They looked, in point of fact, like these?"

"Yes," admitted the lady, beginning to regard Carrados with a new and curious interest.

"Dr Slark further stated that the only fungus containing the poison bhurine—the *Amanita* called the Black Cap, and also by the country folk the Devil's Scent Bottle—did not assume its forbidding appearance until maturity. He was wrong in one sense there, for experiment proves that if the Black Cap is gathered in its young and deceptive stage and kept, it assumes precisely the same appearance as it withers as if it was ripening naturally. You observe." He opened a second bag and, shaking out the contents, displayed another little heap by the side of the first. "Gathered four days ago," he explained.

“Why, they are as black as ink,” commented Loudham. “And the, phew! aroma!”

“One would hardly have got through without you seeing it, Mrs Dupreen?”

“I certainly hardly think so,” she admitted.

“With due allowance for Lackington’s biased opinion I also think that his claim might be allowed. Finally, it is incredible that whoever peeled the mushrooms should have passed one of these. Who was the cook on that occasion, Mrs Dupreen?”

“My maid Hilda. She does all the cooking.”

“The one who admitted me?”

“Yes; she is the only servant I have, Mr Carrados.”

“I should like to have her in, if you don’t mind.”

“Certainly, if you wish it. She is”—Mrs Dupreen felt that she must put in a favourable word before this inexorable man pronounced judgment—“she is a very good, straightforward girl.”

“So much the better.”

“I will——” Mrs Dupreen rose and began to cross the room.

“Ring for her? Thank you,” and whatever her intention had been the lady rang the bell.

“Yes, ma’am?”

A neat, modest-mannered girl, simple and nervous, with a face as full, as clear and as honest as an English apple. “A pity,” thought Mrs Dupreen, “that this confident, suspicious man cannot see her now.”

“Come in, Hilda. This gentleman wants to ask you something.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The round, blue eyes went appealingly to Carrados, fell upon the fungi spread out before her, and then circled the room with an instinct of escape.

“You remember the night poor Charlie died, Hilda,” said Carrados in his suavest tones, “you cooked some mushrooms for his supper, didn’t you?”

“No, sir,” came the glib reply.

"'No,' Hilda!" exclaimed Mrs Dupreen in wonderment. "You mean 'yes,' surely, child. Of course you cooked them. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, ma'am," dutifully replied Hilda.

"That is all right," said the blind man reassuringly. "Nervous witnesses very often answer at random at first. You have nothing to be afraid of, my good girl, if you will tell the truth. I suppose you know a mushroom when you see it?"

"Yes, sir," was the rather hesitating reply.

"There was nothing like this among them?" He held up one of the poisonous sort.

"No, sir; indeed there wasn't, sir. I should have known then."

"You would have known *then*? You were not called at the inquest, Hilda?"

"No, sir."

"If you had been, what would you have told them about these mushrooms that you cooked?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Come, come, Hilda. What could you have told them—something that we do not know? The truth, girl, if you want to save yourself?" Then with a sudden, terrible directness the question cleft her trembling, guilt-stricken little brain: "Where did you get the other mushrooms from that you put with those that your mistress brought?"

The eyes that had been mostly riveted to the floor leapt to Carrados for a single frightened glance, from Carrados to her mistress, to Philip Loudham, and to the floor again. In a moment her face changed and she was in a burst of sobbing.

"Oho, oho, oho!" she wailed. "I didn't know; I didn't know. I meant no harm; indeed I didn't, ma'am."

"Hilda! Hilda!" exclaimed Mrs Dupreen in bewilderment. "What is it you're saying? What have you done?"

"It was his own fault. Oho, oho, oho!" Every word was punctuated by a gasp. "He always was a little pig and making

himself ill with food. You know he was, ma'am, although you were so fond of him. I'm sure I'm not to blame."

"But *what* was it? What *have* you done?" besought her mistress.

"It was after you went out on that afternoon. He put on his things and slipped down into the kitchen without the master knowing. He said what you were getting for his dinner, ma'am, and that you never got enough of them. Then he told me not to tell about his being down, because he'd seen some white things from his bedroom window growing by the hedge at the bottom of the garden and he was going to get them. He brought in four or five and said they were mushrooms and asked me to cook them with the others and not say anything because you'd say too many were not good for him. And I didn't know any difference. Indeed I'm telling you the truth, ma'am."

"Oh, Hilda, Hilda!" was torn reproachfully from Mrs Dupreen. "You know what we've gone through. Why didn't you tell us this before?"

"I was afraid. I was afraid of what they'd do. And no one ever guessed until I thought I was safe. Indeed I meant no harm to anyone, but I was afraid that they'd punish me instead."

Carrados had risen and was picking up his things.

"Yes," he said, half musing to himself, "I knew it must exist: the one explanation that accounts for everything and cannot be assailed. We have reached the bed-rock of truth at last."

V

The Ghost at Massingham Mansions

"Do you believe in ghosts, Max?" inquired Mr Carlyle.

"Only as ghosts," replied Carrados with decision.

"Quite so," assented the private detective with the air of acquiescence with which he was wont to cloak his moments of obfuscation. Then he added cautiously: "And how don't you believe in them, pray?"

"As public nuisances—or private ones for that matter," replied his friend. "So long as they are content to behave as ghosts I am with them. When they begin to meddle with a state of existence that is outside their province—to interfere in business matters and depreciate property—to rattle chains, bang doors, ring bells, predict winners and to edit magazines—and to attract attention instead of shunning it, I cease to believe. My sympathies are entirely with the sensible old fellow who was awakened in the middle of the night to find a shadowy form standing by the side of his bed and silently regarding him. For a few minutes the disturbed man waited patiently, expecting some awful communication, but the same profound silence was maintained. 'Well,' he remarked at length, 'if you have nothing to do, I have,' and turning over went to sleep again."

"I have been asked to take up a ghost," Carlyle began to explain.

"Then I don't believe in it," declared Carrados.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a pushful, notoriety-loving ghost, or it would not have gone so far. Probably it wants to get into The Daily Mail. The other people, whoever they are, don't believe in it either, Louis, or they wouldn't have called you in. They would have gone to Sir Oliver Lodge for an explanation, or to the nearest priest for a stoup of holy water."

“I admit that I shall direct my researches towards the forces of this world before I begin to investigate any other,” conceded Louis Carlyle. “And I don’t doubt,” he added, with his usual bland complacence, “that I shall hale up some mischievous or aggrieved individual before the ghost is many days older. Now that you have brought me so far, do you care to go on round to the place with me, Max, to hear what they have to say about it?”

Carrados agreed with his usual good nature. He rarely met his friend without hearing the details of some new case, for Carlyle’s practice had increased vastly since the night when chance had led him into the blind man’s study. They discussed the cases according to their interest, and there the matter generally ended so far as Max Carrados was concerned, until he casually heard the result subsequently from Carlyle’s lips or learned the sequel from the newspaper. But these pages are primarily a record of the methods of the one man whose name they bear and therefore for the occasional case that Carrados completed for his friend there must be assumed the unchronicled scores which the inquiry agent dealt capably with himself. This reminder is perhaps necessary to dissipate the impression that Louis Carlyle was a pretentious humbug. He was, as a matter of fact, in spite of his amiable foibles and the self-assurance that was, after all, merely an asset of his trade, a shrewd and capable business man of his world, and behind his office manner nothing concerned him more than to pocket fees for which he felt that he had failed to render value.

Massingham Mansions proved to be a single block of residential flats overlooking a recreation ground. It was, as they afterwards found, an adjunct to a larger estate of similar property situated down another road. A porter, residing in the basement, looked after the interests of Massingham Mansions; the business office was placed among the other flats. On that morning it presented the appearance of a well-kept, prosperous enough place, a little dull, a little unfinished, a little depressing perhaps; in fact faintly reminiscent of the superfluous mansions that stand among broad, weedy roads on the outskirts of overgrown seaside resorts; but it was persistently raining at the time when Mr Carlyle had his first view of it.

“It is early to judge,” he remarked, after stopping the car in order to verify the name on the brass plate, “but, upon my word, Max, I really think that our ghost might have discovered more appropriate quarters.”

At the office, to which the porter had directed them, they found a managing clerk and two coltish youths in charge. Mr Carlyle’s name produced an appreciable flutter.

“The governor isn’t here just now, but I have this matter in hand,” said the clerk with an easy air of responsibility—an effect unfortunately marred by a sudden irrepressible giggle from the least overawed of the colts. “Will you kindly step into our private room?” He turned at the door of the inner office and dropped a freezing eye on the offender. “Get those letters copied before you go out to lunch, Binns,” he remarked in a sufficiently loud voice. Then he closed the door quickly, before Binns could find a suitable retort.

So far it had been plain sailing, but now, brought face to face with the necessity of explaining, the clerk began to develop some hesitancy in beginning.

“It’s a funny sort of business,” he remarked, skirting the difficulty.

“Perhaps,” admitted Mr Carlyle; “but that will not embarrass us. Many of the cases that pass through my hands are what you would call ‘funny sorts of business.’”

“I suppose so,” responded the young man, “but not through ours. Well, this is at No. 11 Massingham. A few nights ago—I suppose it must be more than a week now—Willett, the estate porter, was taking up some luggage to No. 75 Northanger for the people there when he noticed a light in one of the rooms at 11 Massingham. The backs face, though about twenty or thirty yards away. It struck him as curious, because 11 Massingham is empty and locked up. Naturally he thought at first that the porter at Massingham or one of us from the office had gone up for something. Still it was so unusual—being late at night—that it was his business to look into it. On his way round—you know where Massingham Mansions are?—he had to pass here. It was dark, for

we'd all been gone hours, but Willett has duplicate keys and he let himself in. Then he began to think that something must be wrong, for here, hanging up against their number on the board, were the only two keys of 11 Massingham that there are supposed to be. He put the keys in his pocket and went on to Massingham. Green, the resident porter there, told him that he hadn't been into No. 11 for a week. What was more, no one had passed the outer door, in or out, for a good half-hour. He knew that, because the door 'springs' with a noise when it is opened, no matter how carefully. So the two of them went up. The door of No. 11 was locked and inside everything was as it should be. There was no light then, and after looking well round with the lanterns that they carried they were satisfied that no one was concealed there."

"You say lanterns," interrupted Mr Carlyle. "I suppose they lit the gas, or whatever it is there, as well?"

"It is gas, but they could not light it because it was cut off at the meter. We always cut it off when a flat becomes vacant."

"What sort of a light was it, then, that Willett saw?"

"It was gas, Mr Carlyle. It is possible to see the bracket in that room from 75 Northanger. He saw it burning."

"Then the meter had been put on again?"

"It is in a locked cupboard in the basement. Only the office and the porters have keys. They tried the gas in the room and it was dead out; they looked at the meter in the basement afterwards and it was dead off."

"Very good," observed Mr Carlyle, noting the facts in his pocket-book. "What next?"

"The next," continued the clerk, "was something that had really happened before. When they got down again—Green and Willett—Green was rather chipping Willett about seeing the light, you know, when he stopped suddenly. He'd remembered something. The day before the servant at 12 Massingham had asked him who it was that was using the bathroom at No. 11—she of course knowing that it was empty. He told her that no one used the bathroom. 'Well,' she said, 'we hear the water running and splashing almost every night and it's funny with no one there.' He

had thought nothing of it at the time, concluding—as he told her—that it must be the water in the bathroom of one of the underneath flats that they heard. Of course he told Willett then and they went up again and examined the bathroom more closely. Water had certainly been run there, for the sides of the bath were still wet. They tried the taps and not a drop came. When a flat is empty we cut off the water like the gas."

"At the same place—the cupboard in the basement?" inquired Carlyle.

"No; at the cistern in the roof. The trap is at the top of the stairs and you need a longish ladder to get there. The next morning Willett reported what he'd seen and the governor told me to look into it. We didn't think much of it so far. That night I happened to be seeing some friends to the station here—I live not so far off—and I thought I might as well take a turn round here on my way home. I knew that if a light was burning I should be able to see the window lit up from the yard at the back, although the gas itself would be out of sight. And, sure enough, there was the light blazing out of one of the windows of No. 11. I won't say that I didn't feel a bit home-sick then, but I'd made up my mind to go up."

"Good man," murmured Mr Carlyle approvingly.

"Wait a bit," recommended the clerk, with a shamefaced laugh. "So far I had only had to make my mind up. It was then close on midnight and not a soul about. I came here for the keys, and I also had the luck to remember an old revolver that had been lying about in a drawer of the office for years. It wasn't loaded, but it didn't seem quite so lonely with it. I put it in my pocket and went on to Massingham, taking another turn into the yard to see that the light was still on. Then I went up the stairs as quietly as I could and let myself into No. 11."

"You didn't take Willett or Green with you?"

The clerk gave Mr Carlyle a knowing look, as of one smart man who will be appreciated by another.

"Willett's a very trustworthy chap," he replied, "and we have every confidence in him. Green also, although he has not been with us so long. But I thought it just as well to do it on my own, you

understand, Mr Carlyle. You didn't look in at Massingham on your way? Well, if you had you would have seen that there is a pane of glass above every door, frosted glass to the hall doors and plain over each of those inside. It's to light the halls and passages, you know. Each flat has a small square hall and a longish passage leading off it. As soon as I opened the door I could tell that one of the rooms down the passage was lit up, though I could not see the door of it from there. Then I crept very quietly through the hall into the passage. A regular stream of light was shining from above the end door on the left. The room, I knew, was the smallest in the flat—it's generally used for a servant's bedroom or sometimes for a box-room. It was a bit thick, you'll admit—right at the end of a long passage and midnight, and after what the others had said."

"Yes, yes," assented the inquiry agent. "But you went on?"

"I went on, tiptoeing without a sound. I got to the door, took out my pistol, put my hand almost on the handle and then——"

"Well, well," prompted Mr Carlyle, as the narrator paused provokingly, with the dramatic instinct of an expert raconteur, "what then?"

"Then the light went out. While my hand was within an inch of the handle the light went out, as clean as if I had been watched all along and the thing timed. It went out all at once, without any warning and without the slightest sound from the beastly room beyond. And then it was as black as hell in the passage and something seemed to be going to happen."

"What did you do?"

"I did a slope," acknowledged the clerk frankly. "I broke all the records down that passage, I bet you. You'll laugh, I dare say, and think you would have stood, but you don't know what it was like. I'd been screwing myself up, wondering what I should see in that lighted room when I opened the door, and then the light went out like a knife, and for all I knew the next second the door would open on me in the dark and Christ only knows what come out."

"Probably I should have run also," conceded Mr Carlyle tactfully. "And you, Max?"

“You see, I always feel at home in the dark,” apologised the blind man. “At all events, you got safely away, Mr——?”

“My name’s Elliott,” responded the clerk. “Yes, you may bet I did. Whether the door opened and anybody or anything came out or not I can’t say. I didn’t look. I certainly did get an idea that I heard the bath water running and swishing as I snatched at the hall door, but I didn’t stop to consider that either, and if it was, the noise was lost in the slam of the door and my clatter as I took about twelve flights of stairs six steps at a time. Then when I was safely out I did venture to go round to look up again, and there was that damned light full on again.”

“Really?” commented Mr Carlyle. “That was very audacious of him.”

“Him? Oh, well, yes, I suppose so. That’s what the governor insists, but he hasn’t been up there himself in the dark.”

“Is that as far as you have got?”

“It’s as far as we can get. The bally thing goes on just as it likes. The very next day we tied up the taps of the gas-meter and the water cistern and sealed the string. Bless you, it didn’t make a ha’peth of difference. Scarcely a night passes without the light showing, and there’s no doubt that the water runs. We’ve put copying ink on the door handles and the taps and got into it ourselves until there isn’t a man about the place that you couldn’t implicate.”

“Has anyone watched up there?”

“Willett and Green together did one night. They shut themselves up in the room opposite from ten till twelve and nothing happened. I was watching the window with a pair of opera-glasses from an empty flat here—85 Northanger. Then they chucked it, and before they could have been down the steps the light was there—I could see the gas as plain as I can see this ink-stand. I ran down and met them coming to tell me that nothing had happened. The three of us sprinted up again and the light was out and the flat as deserted as a churchyard. What do you make of that?”

“It certainly requires looking into,” replied Mr Carlyle diplomatically.

"Looking into! Well, you're welcome to look all day and all night too, Mr Carlyle. It isn't as though it was an old baronial mansion, you see, with sliding panels and secret passages. The place has the date over the front door, 1882—1882 and haunted, by gosh! It was built for what it is, and there isn't an inch unaccounted for between the slates and the foundation."

"These two things—the light and the water running—are the only indications there have been?" asked Mr Carlyle.

"So far as we ourselves have seen or heard. I ought perhaps to tell you of something else, however. When this business first started I made a few casual inquiries here and there among the tenants. Among others I saw Mr Belting, who occupies No. 9 Massingham—the flat directly beneath No. 11. It didn't seem any good making up a cock-and-bull story, so I put it to him plainly—had he been annoyed by anything unusual going on at the empty flat above?

"'If you mean your confounded ghost up there, I have not been particularly annoyed,' he said at once, 'but Mrs Belting has, and I should advise you to keep out of her way, at least until she gets another servant.' Then he told me that their girl, who slept in the bedroom underneath the little one at No. 11, had been going on about noises in the room above—footsteps and tramping and a bump on the floor—for some time before we heard anything of it. Then one day she suddenly said that she'd had enough of it and bolted. That was just before Willett first saw the light."

"It is being talked about, then—among the tenants?"

"You bet!" assented Mr Elliott pungently. "That's what gets the governor. He wouldn't give a continental if no one knew, but you can't tell where it will end. The people at Northanger don't half like it either. All the children are scared out of their little wits and none of the slaveys will run errands after dark. It'll give the estate a bad name for the next three years if it isn't stopped."

"It shall be stopped," declared Mr Carlyle impressively. "Of course we have our methods for dealing with this sort of thing, but in order to make a clean sweep it is desirable to put our hands on the offender *in flagranti delicto*. Tell your—er—principal not to

have any further concern in the matter. One of my people will call here for any further details that he may require during the day. Just leave everything as it is in the meanwhile. Good-morning, Mr Elliott, good-morning.... A fairly obvious game, I imagine, Max," he commented as they got into the car, "although the details are original and the motive not disclosed as yet. I wonder how many of them are in it?"

"Let me know when you find out," said Carrados, and Mr Carlyle promised.

Nearly a week passed and the expected revelation failed to make its appearance. Then, instead, quite a different note arrived:

"My dear Max,—I wonder if you formed any conclusion of that Massingham Mansions affair from Mr Elliott's refined narrative of the circumstances?

"I begin to suspect that Trigget, whom I put on, is somewhat of an ass, though a very remarkable circumstance has come to light which might—if it wasn't a matter of business—offer an explanation of the whole business by stamping it as inexplicable.

"You know how I value your suggestions. If you happen to be in the neighbourhood—not otherwise, Max, I protest—I should be glad if you would drop in for a chat. Yours sincerely,

"

Louis Carlyle

."

Carrados smiled at the ingenuous transparency of the note. He had thought several times of the case since the interview with Elliott, chiefly because he was struck by certain details of the manifestation that divided it from the ordinary methods of the bogy-raiser, an aspect that had apparently made no particular impression on his friend. He was sufficiently interested not to let the day pass without "happening" to be in the neighbourhood of Bampton Street.

"Max," exclaimed Mr Carlyle, raising an accusing forefinger, "you have come on purpose."

"If I have," replied the visitor, "you can reward me with a cup of that excellent beverage that you were able to conjure up from somewhere down in the basement on a former occasion. As a matter of fact, I have."

Mr Carlyle transmitted the order and then demanded his friend's serious attention.

"That ghost at Massingham Mansions——"

"I still don't believe in that particular ghost, Louis," commented Carrados in mild speculation.

"I never did, of course," replied Carlyle, "but, upon my word, Max, I shall have to very soon as a precautionary measure. Trigget has been able to do nothing and now he has as good as gone on strike."

"Downed—now what on earth can an inquiry man down to go on strike, Louis? Notebooks? So Trigget has got a chill, like our candid friend Elliott, Eh?"

"He started all right—said that he didn't mind spending a night or a week in a haunted flat, and, to do him justice, I don't believe he did at first. Then he came across a very curious piece of forgotten local history, a very remarkable—er—coincidence in the circumstances, Max."

"I was wondering," said Carrados, "when we should come up against that story, Louis."

"Then you know of it?" exclaimed the inquiry agent in surprise.

"Not at all. Only I guessed it must exist. Here you have the manifestation associated with two things which in themselves are neither usual nor awe-inspiring—the gas and the water. It requires some association to connect them up, to give them point and force. That is the story."

"Yes," assented his friend, "that is the story, and, upon my soul, in the circumstances—well, you shall hear it. It comes partly from the newspapers of many years ago, but only partly, for the circumstances were successfully hushed up in a large measure and it required the stimulated memories of ancient scandalmongers to fill in the details. Oh yes, it was a scandal, Max, and would have been a great sensation too, I do not doubt, only they had no proper

pictorial press in those days, poor beggars. It was very soon after Massingham Mansions had been erected—they were called Enderby House in those days, by the way, for the name was changed on account of this very business. The household at No. 11 consisted of a comfortable, middle-aged married couple and one servant, a quiet and attractive young creature, one is led to understand. As a matter of fact, I think they were the first tenants of that flat."

"The first occupants give the soul to a new house," remarked the blind man gravely. "That is why empty houses have their different characters."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," assented Mr Carlyle in his incisive way, "but none of our authorities on this case made any reference to the fact. They did say, however, that the man held a good and responsible position—a position for which high personal character and strict morality were essential. He was also well known and regarded in quiet but substantial local circles where serious views prevailed. He was, in short, a man of notorious 'respectability.'

"The first chapter of the tragedy opened with the painful death of the prepossessing handmaiden—suicide, poor creature. She didn't appear one morning and the flat was full of the reek of gas. With great promptitude the master threw all the windows open and called up the porter. They burst open the door of the little bedroom at the end of the passage, and there was the thing as clear as daylight for any coroner's jury to see. The door was locked on the inside and the extinguished gas was turned full on. It was only a tiny room, with no fireplace, and the ventilation of a closed well-fitting door and window was negligible in the circumstances. At all events the girl was proved to have been dead for several hours when they reached her, and the doctor who conducted the autopsy crowned the convincing fabric of circumstances when he mentioned as delicately as possible that the girl had a very pressing reason for dreading an inevitable misfortune that would shortly overtake her. The jury returned the obvious verdict.

"There have been a great many undiscovered crimes in the history of mankind, Max, but it is by no means every ingenious plot that carries. After the inquest, at which our gentleman doubtless cut a very proper and impressive figure, the barbed whisper began to insinuate and to grow in freedom. It is sheerly impossible to judge how these things start, but we know that when once they have been begun they gather material like an avalanche. It was remembered by someone at the flat underneath that late on the fatal night a window in the principal bedroom above had been heard to open, top and bottom, very quietly. Certain other sounds of movement in the night did not tally with the tale of sleep-wrapped innocence. Sceptical busybodies were anxious to demonstrate practically to those who differed from them on this question that it was quite easy to extinguish a gas-jet in one room by blowing down the gas-pipe in another; and in this connection there was evidence that the lady of the flat had spoken to her friends more than once of her sentimental young servant's extravagant habit of reading herself to sleep occasionally with the light full on. Why was nothing heard at the inquest, they demanded, of the curious fact that an open novelette lay on the counterpane when the room was broken into? A hundred trifling circumstances were adduced—arrangements that the girl had been making for the future down to the last evening of her life—interpretable hints that she had dropped to her acquaintances—her views on suicide and the best means to that end: a favourite topic, it would seem, among her class—her possession of certain comparatively expensive trinkets on a salary of a very few shillings a week, and so on. Finally, some rather more definite and important piece of evidence must have been conveyed to the authorities, for we know now that one fine day a warrant was issued. Somehow rumour preceded its execution. The eminently respectable gentleman with whom it was concerned did not wait to argue out the merits of the case. He locked himself in the bathroom, and when the police arrived they found that instead of an arrest they had to arrange the details for another inquest."

"A very convincing episode," conceded Carrados in response to his friend's expectant air. "And now her spirit passes the long

winter evenings turning the gas on and off, and the one amusement of his consists in doing the same with the bath-water—or the other way, the other way about, Louis. Truly, one half the world knows not how the other half lives!"

"All your cheap humour won't induce Trigget to spend another night in that flat, Max," retorted Mr Carlyle. "Nor, I am afraid, will it help me through this business in any other way."

"Then I'll give you a hint that may," said Carrados. "Try your respectable gentleman's way of settling difficulties."

"What is that?" demanded his friend.

"Blow down the pipes, Louis."

"Blow down the pipes?" repeated Carlyle.

"At all events try it. I infer that Mr Trigget has not experimented in that direction."

"But what will it do, Max?"

"Possibly it will demonstrate where the other end goes to."

"But the other end goes to the meter."

"I suggest not—not without some interference with its progress. I have already met your Mr Trigget, you know, Louis. An excellent and reliable man within his limits, but he is at his best posted outside the door of a hotel waiting to see the co-respondent go in. He hasn't enough imagination for this case—not enough to carry him away from what would be his own obvious method of doing it to what is someone else's equally obvious but quite different method. Unless I am doing him an injustice, he will have spent most of his time trying to catch someone getting into the flat to turn the gas and water on and off, whereas I conjecture that no one does go into the flat because it is perfectly simple—ingenious but simple—to produce these phenomena without. Then when Mr Trigget has satisfied himself that it is physically impossible for anyone to be going in and out, and when, on the top of it, he comes across this romantic tragedy—a tale that might psychologically explain the ghost, simply because the ghost is moulded on the tragedy—then, of course, Mr Trigget's mental process is swept away from its moorings and his feet begin to get cold."

“This is very curious and suggestive,” said Mr Carlyle. “I certainly assumed——But shall we have Trigget up and question him on the point? I think he ought to be here now—if he isn’t detained at the Bull.”

Carrados assented, and in a few minutes Mr Trigget presented himself at the door of the private office. He was a melancholy-looking middle-aged little man, with an ineradicable air of being exactly what he was, and the searcher for deeper or subtler indications of character would only be rewarded by a latent pessimism grounded on the depressing probability that he would never be anything else.

“Come in, Trigget,” called out Mr Carlyle when his employee diffidently appeared. “Come in. Mr Carrados would like to hear some of the details of the Massingham Mansions case.”

“Not the first time I have availed myself of the benefit of your inquiries, Mr Trigget,” nodded the blind man. “Good-afternoon.”

“Good-afternoon, sir,” replied Trigget with gloomy deference. “It’s very handsome of you to put it in that way, Mr Carrados, sir. But this isn’t another Tarporley-Templeton case, if I may say so, sir. That was as plain as a pikestaff after all, sir.”

“When we saw the pikestaff, Mr Trigget; yes, it was,” admitted Carrados, with a smile. “But this is insoluble? Ah, well. When I was a boy I used to be extraordinarily fond of ghost stories, I remember, but even while reading them I always had an uneasy suspicion that when it came to the necessary detail of explaining the mystery I should be defrauded with some subterfuge as ‘by an ingenious arrangement of hidden wires the artful Muggles had contrived,’ etc., or ‘an optical illusion effected by means of concealed mirrors revealed the *modus operandi* of the apparition.’ I thought that I had been swindled. I think so still. I hope there are no ingenious wires or concealed mirrors here, Mr Trigget?”

Mr Trigget looked mildly sagacious but hopelessly puzzled. It was his misfortune that in him the necessities of his business and the proclivities of his nature were at variance, so that he ordinarily presented the curious anomaly of looking equally alert and tired.

“Wires, sir?” he began, with faint amusement.

"Not only wires, but anything that might account for what is going on," interposed Mr Carlyle. "Mr Carrados means this, Trigget: you have reported that it is impossible for anyone to be concealed in the flat or to have secret access to it——"

"I have tested every inch of space in all the rooms, Mr Carrados, sir," protested the hurt Trigget. "I have examined every board and, you may say, every nail in the floor, the skirting-boards, the window frames and in fact wherever a board or a nail exists. There are no secret ways in or out. Then I have taken the most elaborate precautions against the doors and windows being used for surreptitious ingress and egress. They have not been used, sir. For the past week I am the only person who has been in and out of the flat, Mr Carrados, and yet night after night the gas that is cut off at the meter is lit and turned out again, and the water that is cut off at the cistern splashes about in the bath up to the second I let myself in. Then it's as quiet as the grave and everything is exactly as I left it. It isn't human, Mr Carrados, sir, and flesh and blood can't stand it—not in the middle of the night, that is to say."

"You see nothing further, Mr Trigget?"

"I don't indeed, Mr Carrados. I would suggest doing away with the gas in that room altogether. As a box-room it wouldn't need one."

"And the bathroom?"

"That might be turned into a small bedroom and all the water fittings removed. Then to provide a bathroom——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr Carlyle impatiently, "but we are retained to discover who is causing this annoyance and to detect the means, not to suggest structural alterations in the flat, Trigget. The fact is that after having put in a week on this job you have failed to bring us an inch nearer its solution. Now Mr Carrados has suggested"—Mr Carlyle was not usually detained among the finer shades of humour, but some appreciation of the grotesqueness of the advice required him to control his voice as he put the matter in its baldest form—"Mr Carrados has suggested that instead of spending the time measuring the chimneys and listening to the wall-paper, if you had simply blown down the gas-pipe——"

Carrados was inclined to laugh, although he thought it rather too bad of Louis.

"Not quite in those terms, Mr Trigget," he interposed.

"Blow down the gas-pipe, sir?" repeated the amazed man. "What for?"

"To ascertain where the other end comes out," replied Carlyle.

"But don't you see, sir, that that is a detail until you ascertain how it is being done? The pipe may be tapped between the bath and the cistern. Naturally, I considered that. As a matter of fact, the water-pipe isn't tapped. It goes straight up from the bath to the cistern in the attic above, a distance of only a few feet, and I have examined it. The gas-pipe, it is true, passes through a number of flats, and without pulling up all the floors it isn't practicable to trace it. But how does that help us, Mr Carrados? The gas-tap has to be turned on and off; you can't do that with these hidden wires. It has to be lit. I've never heard of lighting gas by optical illusions, sir. Somebody must get in and out of the flat or else it isn't human. I've spent a week, a very trying week, sir, in endeavouring to ascertain how it could be done. I haven't shirked cold and wet and solitude, sir, in the discharge of my duty. I've freely placed my poor gifts of observation and intelligence, such as they are, at the service——"

"Not 'freely,' Trigget," interposed his employer with decision.

"I am speaking under a deep sense of injury, Mr Carlyle," retorted Mr Trigget, who, having had time to think it over, had now come to the conclusion that he was not appreciated. "I am alluding to a moral attitude such as we all possess. I am very grieved by what has been suggested. I didn't expect it of you, Mr Carlyle, sir; indeed I did not. For a week I have done everything that it has been possible to do, everything that a long experience could suggest, and now, as I understand it, sir, you complain that I didn't blow down the gas-pipe, sir. It's hard, sir; it's very hard."

"Oh, well, for heaven's sake don't cry about it, Trigget," exclaimed Mr Carlyle. "You're always sobbing about the place over something or other. We know you did your best—God help you!" he added aside.

"I did, Mr Carlyle; indeed I did, sir. And I thank you for that appreciative tribute to my services. I value it highly, very highly indeed, sir." A tremulous note in the rather impassioned delivery made it increasingly plain that Mr Trigget's regimen had not been confined entirely to solid food that day. His wrongs were forgotten and he approached Mr Carrados with an engaging air of secrecy.

"What is this tip about blowing down the gas-pipe, sir?" he whispered confidentially. "The old dog's always willing to learn something new."

"Max," said Mr Carlyle curtly, "is there anything more that we need detain Trigget for?"

"Just this," replied Carrados after a moment's thought. "The gas-bracket—it has a mantle attachment on?"

"Oh no, Mr Carrados," confided the old dog with the affectation of imparting rather valuable information, "not a mantle on. Oh, certainly no mantle. Indeed—indeed, not a mantle at all."

Mr Carlyle looked at his friend curiously. It was half evident that something might have miscarried. Furthermore, it was obvious that the warmth of the room and the stress of emotion were beginning to have a disastrous effect on the level of Mr Trigget's ideas and speech.

"A globe?" suggested Carrados.

"A globe? No, sir, not even a globe, in the strict sense of the word. No globe, that is to say, Mr Carrados. In fact nothing like a globe."

"What is there, then?" demanded the blind man without any break in his unruffled patience. "There may be another way—but surely—surely there must be some attachment?"

"No," said Mr Trigget with precision, "no attachment at all; nothing at all; nothing whatsoever. Just the ordinary or common or penny plain gas-jet, and above it the whayoumaycallit thingamabob."

"The shade—gas consumer—of course!" exclaimed Carrados. "That is it."

"The tin thingamabob," insisted Mr Trigget with slow dignity. "Call it what you will. Its purpose is self-evident. It acts as a dispirator—a distributor, that is to say——"

"Louis," struck in Carrados joyously, "are you good for settling it to-night?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, if you can really give the time."

"Good; it's years since I last tackled a ghost. What about——?" His look indicated the other member of the council.

"Would he be of any assistance?"

"Perhaps—then."

"What time?"

"Say eleven-thirty."

"Trigget," rapped out his employer sharply, "meet us at the corner of Middlewood and Enderby Roads at half-past eleven sharp to-night. If you can't manage it I shall not require your services again."

"Certainly, sir; I shall not fail to be punctual," replied Trigget without a tremor. The appearance of an almost incredible sobriety had possessed him in the face of warning, and both in speech and manner he was again exactly the man as he had entered the room. "I regard it as a great honour, Mr Carrados, to be associated with you in this business, sir."

"In the meanwhile," remarked Carrados, "if you find the time hang heavy on your hands you might look up the subject of 'platinum black.' It may be the new tip you want."

"Certainly, sir. But do you mind giving me a hint as to what 'platinum black' is?"

"It is a chemical that has the remarkable property of igniting hydrogen or coal gas by mere contact," replied Carrados. "Think how useful that may be if you haven't got a match!"

To mark the happy occasion Mr Carlyle had insisted on taking his friend off to witness a popular musical comedy. Carrados had a few preparations to make, a few accessories to procure for the night's work, but the whole business had come within the compass of an hour and the theatre spanned the interval between dinner at

the Palm Tree and the time when they left the car at the appointed meeting-place. Mr Trigget was already there, in an irreproachable state of normal dejection. Parkinson accompanied the party, bringing with him the baggage of the expedition.

"Anything going on, Trigget?" inquired Mr Carlyle.

"I've made a turn round the place, sir, and the light was on," was the reply. "I didn't go up for fear of disturbing the conditions before you saw them. That was about ten minutes ago. Are you going into the yard to look again? I have all the keys, of course."

"Do we, Max?" queried Mr Carlyle.

"Mr Trigget might. We need not all go. He can catch us up again."

He caught them up again before they had reached the outer door.

"It's still on, sir," he reported.

"Do we use any special caution, Max?" asked Carlyle.

"Oh no. Just as though we were friends of the ghost, calling in the ordinary way."

Trigget, who retained the keys, preceded the party up the stairs till the top was reached. He stood a moment at the door of No. 11 examining, by the light of the electric lamp he carried, his private marks there and pointing out to the others in a whisper that they had not been tampered with. All at once a most dismal wail, lingering, piercing, and ending in something like a sob that died away because the life that gave it utterance had died with it, drawled forebodingly through the echoing emptiness of the deserted flat. Trigget had just snapped off his light and in the darkness a startled exclamation sprang from Mr Carlyle's lips.

"It's all right, sir," said the little man, with a private satisfaction that he had the diplomacy to conceal. "Bit creepy, isn't it? especially when you hear it by yourself up here for the first time. It's only the end of the bath-water running out."

He had opened the door and was conducting them to the room at the end of the passage. A faint aurora had been visible from that

direction when they first entered the hall, but it was cut off before they could identify its source.

"That's what happens," muttered Trigget.

He threw open the bedroom door without waiting to examine his marks there and they crowded into the tiny chamber. Under the beams of the lamps they carried it was brilliantly though erratically illuminated. All turned towards the central object of their quest, a tarnished gas-bracket of the plainest description. A few inches above it hung the metal disc that Trigget had alluded to, for the ceiling was low and at that point it was brought even nearer to the gas by corresponding with the slant of the roof outside.

With the prescience so habitual with him that it had ceased to cause remark among his associates Carrados walked straight to the gas-bracket and touched the burner.

"Still warm," he remarked. "And so are we getting now. A thoroughly material ghost, you perceive, Louis."

"But still turned off, don't you see, Mr Carrados, sir," put in Trigget eagerly. "And yet no one's passed out."

"Still turned off—and still turned on," commented the blind man.

"What do you mean, Max?"

"The small screwdriver, Parkinson," requested Carrados.

"Well, upon my word!" dropped Mr Carlyle expressively. For in no longer time than it takes to record the fact Max Carrados had removed a screw and then knocked out the tap. He held it up towards them and they all at once saw that so much of the metal had been filed away that the gas passed through no matter how the tap stood. "How on earth did you know of that?"

"Because it wasn't practicable to do the thing in any other way. Now unhook the shade, Parkinson—carefully."

The warning was not altogether unnecessary, for the man had to stand on tiptoes before he could comply. Carrados received the dingy metal cone and lightly touched its inner surface.

"Ah, here, at the apex, to be sure," he remarked. "The gas is bound to get there. And there, Louis, you have an ever-lit and yet a

truly ‘safety’ match—so far as gas is concerned. You can buy the thing for a shilling, I believe.”

Mr Carlyle was examining the tiny apparatus with interest. So small that it might have passed for the mummy of a midget hanging from a cobweb, it appeared to consist of an insignificant black pellet and an inch of the finest wire.

“Um, I’ve never heard of it. And this will really light the gas?”

“As often as you like. That is the whole bag of tricks.”

Mr Carlyle turned a censorious eye upon his lieutenant, but Trigget was equal to the occasion and met it without embarrassment.

“I hadn’t heard of it either, sir,” he remarked conversationally. “Gracious, what won’t they be getting out next, Mr Carlyle!”

“Now for the mystery of the water.” Carrados was finding his way to the bathroom and they followed him down the passage and across the hall. “In its way I think that this is really more ingenious than the gas, for, as Mr Trigget has proved for us, the water does not come from the cistern. The taps, you perceive, are absolutely dry.”

“It is forced up?” suggested Mr Carlyle, nodding towards the outlet.

“That is the obvious alternative. We will test it presently.” The blind man was down on his hands and knees following the lines of the different pipes. “Two degrees more cold are not conclusive, because in any case the water has gone out that way. Mr Trigget, you know the ropes, will you be so obliging as to go up to the cistern and turn the water on.”

“I shall need a ladder, sir.”

“Parkinson.”

“We have a folding ladder out here,” said Parkinson, touching Mr Trigget’s arm.

“One moment,” interposed Carrados, rising from his investigation among the pipes; “this requires some care. I want you to do it without making a sound or showing a light, if that is

possible. Parkinson will help you. Wait until you hear us raising a diversion at the other end of the flat. Come, Louis."

The diversion took the form of tapping the wall and skirting-board in the other haunted room. When Trigget presented himself to report that the water was now on Carrados put him to continue the singular exercise with Mr Carlyle while he himself slipped back to the bathroom.

"The pump, Parkinson," he commanded in a brisk whisper to his man, who was waiting in the hall.

The appliance was not unlike a powerful tyre pump with some modifications. One tube from it was quickly fitted to the outlet pipe of the bath, another trailed a loose end into the bath itself, ready to take up the water. There were a few other details, the work of moments. Then Carrados turned on the tap, silencing the inflow by the attachment of a short length of rubber tube. When the water had risen a few inches he slipped off to the other room, told his rather mystified confederates there that he wanted a little more noise and bustle put into their performance, and was back again in the bathroom.

"Now, Parkinson," he directed, and turned off the tap. There was about a foot of water in the bath.

Parkinson stood on the broad base of the pump and tried to drive down the handle. It scarcely moved.

"Harder," urged Carrados, interpreting every detail of sound with perfect accuracy.

Parkinson set his teeth and lunged again. Again he seemed to come up against a solid wall of resistance.

"Keep trying; something must give," said his master encouragingly. "Here, let me——" He threw his weight into the balance and for a moment they hung like a group poised before action. Then, somewhere, something did give and the sheathing plunger "drew."

"Now like blazes till the bath is empty. Then you can tell the others to stop hammering." Parkinson, looking round to acquiesce, found himself alone, for with silent step and quickened senses

Carrados was already passing down the dark flights of the broad stone stairway.

It was perhaps three minutes later when an excited gentleman in the state of disrobement that is tacitly regarded as falling upon the *punctum cæcum* in times of fire, flood and nocturnal emergency shot out of the door of No. 7 and bounding up the intervening flights of steps pounded with the knocker on the door of No. 9. As someone did not appear with the instantaneity of a jack-in-the-box, he proceeded to repeat the summons, interspersing it with an occasional "I say!" shouted through the letter-box.

The light above the door made it unconvincing to affect that no one was at home. The gentleman at the door trumpeted the fact through his channel of communication and demanded instant attention. So immersed was he with his own grievance, in fact, that he failed to notice the approach of someone on the other side, and the sudden opening of the door, when it did take place, surprised him on his knees at his neighbour's doorstep, a large and consequential-looking personage as revealed in the light from the hall, wearing the silk hat that he had instinctively snatched up, but with his braces hanging down.

"Mr Tupworthy of No. 7, isn't it?" quickly interposed the new man before his visitor could speak. "But why this—homage? Permit me to raise you, sir."

"Confound it all," snorted Mr Tupworthy indignantly, "you're flooding my flat. The water's coming through my bathroom ceiling in bucketfuls. The plaster'll fall next. Can't you stop it? Has a pipe burst or something?"

"Something, I imagine," replied No. 9 with serene detachment. "At all events it appears to be over now."

"So I should hope," was the irate retort. "It's bad enough as it is. I shall go round to the office and complain. I'll tell you what it is, Mr Belting: these mansions are becoming a pandemonium, sir, a veritable pandemonium."

"Capital idea; we'll go together and complain: two will be more effective," suggested Mr Belting. "But not to-night, Mr Tupworthy.

We should not find anyone there. The office will be closed. Say to-morrow——"

"I had no intention of anything so preposterous as going there to-night. I am in no condition to go. If I don't get my feet into hot water at once I shall be laid up with a severe cold. Doubtless you haven't noticed it, but I am wet through to the skin, saturated, sir."

Mr Belting shook his head sagely.

"Always a mistake to try to stop water coming through the ceiling," he remarked. "It will come, you know. Finds its own level and all that."

"I did not try to stop it—at least not voluntarily. A temporary emergency necessitated a slight rearrangement of our accommodation. I—I tell you this in confidence—I was sleeping in the bathroom."

At the revelation of so notable a catastrophe Mr Belting actually seemed to stagger. Possibly his eyes filled with tears; certainly he had to turn and wipe away his emotion before he could proceed.

"Not—not right under it?" he whispered.

"I imagine so," replied Mr Tupworthy. "I do not conceive that I could have been placed more centrally. I received the full cataract in the region of the ear. Well, if I may rely on you that it has stopped, I will terminate our interview for the present."

"Good-night," responded the still tremulous Belting. "Good-night—or good-morning, to be exact." He waited with the door open to light the first flight of stairs for Mr Tupworthy's descent. Before the door was closed another figure stepped down quietly from the obscurity of the steps leading upwards.

"Mr Belting, I believe?" said the stranger. "My name is Carrados. I have been looking over the flat above. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"What, Mr Max Carrados?"

"The same," smiled the owner of the name.

"Come in, Mr Carrados," exclaimed Belting, not only without embarrassment, but with positive affection in his voice. "Come in by all means. I've heard of you more than once. Delighted to meet

you. This way. I know—I know." He put a hand on his guest's arm and insisted on steering his course until he deposited him in an easy-chair before a fire. "This looks like being a great night. What will you have?"

Carrados put the suggestion aside and raised a corner of the situation.

"I'm afraid that I don't come altogether as a friend," he hinted.

"It's no good," replied his host. "I can't regard you in any other light after this. You heard Tupworthy? But you haven't seen the man, Mr Carrados. I know—I've heard—but no wealth of the imagination can ever really quite reconstruct Tupworthy, the shoddy magnifico, in his immense porcine complacency, his monumental self-importance. And sleeping right underneath! Gods, but we have lived to-night! Why—why ever did you stop?"

"You associate me with this business?"

"Associate you! My dear Mr Carrados, I give you the full glorious credit for the one entirely successful piece of low comedy humour in real life that I have ever encountered. Indeed, in a legal and pecuniary sense, I hold you absolutely responsible."

"Oh!" exclaimed Carrados, beginning to laugh quietly. Then he continued: "I think that I shall come through that all right. I shall refer you to Mr Carlyle, the private inquiry agent, and he will doubtless pass you on to your landlord, for whom he is acting, and I imagine that he in turn will throw all the responsibility on the ingenious gentleman who has put them to so much trouble. Can you guess the result of my investigation in the flat above?"

"Guess, Mr Carrados? I don't need to guess: I *know*. You don't suppose I thought for a moment that such transparent devices as two intercepted pipes and an automatic gas-lighter would impose on a man of intelligence? They were only contrived to mystify the credulous imagination of clerks and porters."

"You admit it, then?"

"Admit! Good gracious, of course I admit it, Mr Carrados. What's the use of denying it?"

“Precisely. I am glad you see that. And yet you seem far from being a mere practical joker. Does your confidence extend to the length of letting me into your object?”

“Between ourselves,” replied Mr Belting, “I haven’t the least objection. But I wish that you would have—say a cup of coffee. Mrs Belting is still up, I believe. She would be charmed to have the opportunity——No? Well, just as you like. Now, my object? You must understand, Mr Carrados, that I am a man of sufficient leisure and adequate means for the small position we maintain. But I am not unoccupied—not idle. On the contrary, I am always busy. I don’t approve of any man passing his time aimlessly. I have a number of interests in life—hobbies, if you like. You should appreciate that, as you are a private criminologist. I am—among other things which don’t concern us now—a private retributionist. On every side people are becoming far too careless and negligent. An era of irresponsibility has set in. Nobody troubles to keep his word, to carry out literally his undertakings. In my small way I try to set that right by showing them the logical development of their ways. I am, in fact, the sworn enemy of anything approaching sloppiness. You smile at that?”

“It is a point of view,” replied Carrados. “I was wondering how the phrase at this moment would convey itself, say, to Mr Tupworthy’s ear.”

Mr Belting doubled up.

“But don’t remind me of Tupworthy or I can’t get on,” he said. “In my method I follow the system of Herbert Spencer towards children. Of course you are familiar with his treatise on ‘Education’? If a rough boy persists, after warnings, in tearing or soiling all his clothes, don’t scold him for what, after all, is only a natural and healthy instinct overdone. But equally, of course, don’t punish yourself by buying him other clothes. When the time comes for the children to be taken to an entertainment little Tommy cannot go with them. It would not be seemly, and he is too ashamed, to go in rags. He begins to see the force of practical logic. Very well. If a tradesman promises—promises explicitly—delivery of his goods by a certain time and he fails, he finds that he is then

unable to leave them. I pay on delivery, by the way. If a man undertakes to make me an article like another—I am painstaking, Mr Carrados: I point out at the time how exactly like I want it—and it is (as it generally is) on completion something quite different, I decline to be easy-going and to be put off with it. I take the simplest and most obvious instances; I could multiply indefinitely. It is, of course, frequently inconvenient to me, but it establishes a standard."

"I see that you are a dangerous man, Mr Belting," remarked Carrados. "If most men were like you our national character would be undermined. People would have to behave properly."

"If most men were like me we should constitute an intolerable nuisance," replied Belting seriously. "A necessary reaction towards sloppiness would set in and find me at its head. I am always with minorities."

"And the case in point?"

"The present trouble centres round the kitchen sink. It is cracked and leaks. A trivial cause for so elaborate an outcome, you may say, but you will doubtless remember that two men quarrelling once at a spring as to who should use it first involved half Europe in a war, and the whole tragedy of Lear sprang from a silly business round a word. I hadn't noticed the sink when we took this flat, but the landlord had solemnly sworn to do everything that was necessary. Is a new sink necessary to replace a cracked one? Obviously. Well, you know what landlords are: possibly you are one yourself. They promise you heaven until you have signed the agreement and then they tell you to go to hell. Suggested that we'd probably broken the sink ourselves and would certainly be looked to to replace it. An excellent servant caught a cold standing in the drip and left. Was I to be driven into paying for a new sink myself? Very well, I thought, if the reasonable complaint of one tenant is nothing to you, see how you like the unreasonable complaints of fifty. The method served a useful purpose too. When Mrs Belting heard that old tale about the tragedy at No. 11 she was terribly upset; vowed that she couldn't stay alone in here at night on any consideration.

"'My dear,' I said, 'don't worry yourself about ghosts. I'll make as good a one as ever lived, and then when you see how it takes other people in, just remember next time you hear of another that someone's pulling the string.' And I really don't think that she'll ever be afraid of ghosts again."

"Thank you," said Carrados, rising. "Altogether I have spent a very entertaining evening, Mr Belting. I hope your retaliatory method won't get you into serious trouble this time."

"Why should it?" demanded Belting quickly.

"Oh, well, tenants are complaining, the property is being depreciated. The landlord may think that he has legal redress against you."

"But surely I am at liberty to light the gas or use the bath in my own flat when and how I like?"

A curious look had come into Mr Belting's smiling face; a curious note must have sounded in his voice. Carrados was warned and, being warned, guessed.

"You are a wonderful man," he said with upraised hand. "I capitulate. Tell me how it is, won't you?"

"I knew the man at 11. His tenancy isn't really up till March, but he got an appointment in the north and had to go. His two unexpired months weren't worth troubling about, so I got him to sublet the flat to me—all quite regularly—for a nominal consideration, and not to mention it."

"But he gave up the keys?"

"No. He left them in the door and the porter took them away. Very unwarrantable of him; surely I can keep my keys where I like? However, as I had another.... Really, Mr Carrados, you hardly imagine that unless I had an absolute right to be there I should penetrate into a flat, tamper with the gas and water, knock the place about, tramp up and down——"

"I go," said Carrados, "to get our people out in haste. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr Carrados. It's been a great privilege to meet you. Sorry I can't persuade you...."

VI

The Missing Actress Sensation

First nights are not what they were, even within the memory of playgoers who would be startled to hear anyone else refer to them as "elderly." But there are yet occasions of exception, and the production of Call a Spade—— at the Argosy Theatre was marked by at least one feature of note. The play itself was "sound," though not epoch-making. The performance of the leading lady was satisfactory and exactly what was to be expected from her. The leading gentleman was equally effective in a part which—as eight out of twelve dramatic critics happily phrased it on the morrow—"fitted him like a glove"; and on the same preponderance of opinion the character actor "contrived to extract every ounce of humour from the material at his disposal." In other words, Call a Spade—— might so far be relied upon to run an attenuating course for about fifty nights and then to be discreetly dropped, "pending the continuance of its triumphal progress at another West End house—should a suitable habitation become available."

But a very different note came into the reviews when the writers passed to the achievement of another member of the company—a young actress described on the programme as Miss Una Roscastle. Miss Roscastle was unknown to London critics and London audiences. She had come from Dublin with no very great dramatic reputation, but it is to be presumed that the quite secondary part which she had been given on her first metropolitan appearance was peculiarly suited to her talent. No one was more surprised than the author at the remarkable characterisation that "Mary Ryan" assumed in Miss Roscastle's hands. He was the more surprised because he had failed to notice anything of the kind at rehearsals. Dimly he suspected that the young lady had got more out of the part than he had ever put into it, and while outwardly loud in his expression of delight, he was secretly uncertain whether to be pleased or annoyed. The leading lady also went out of her

way to congratulate the young neophyte effusively on her triumph—and then slapped her unfortunate dresser on very insufficient provocation; but the lessee manager spoke of his latest acquisition with a curious air of restraint. At the end of the second act Miss Roscastle took four calls. After that she was only required for the first few minutes of the last act, and many among the audience noted with surprise that she did not appear with the company at the fall of the curtain—she had, in fact, already left the house. All the same the success of the piece constituted a personal triumph for herself. Thenceforth, instead of, "Oh yes, you might do worse than book seats at the Argosy," the people who had been, said, "Now don't forget; you positively *must* see Miss Roscastle in Call a Spade——," and as the Press had said very much the same, the difference to the box-office was something, but to the actress it was everything. Miss Roscastle, indeed, had achieved that rare distinction of "waking to find herself famous." Nothing could have seemed more assured and roseate than her professional future.

About a week later Max Carrados was interrupted one afternoon in the middle of composing an article on Sicilian numismatics by a telephone call from Mr Carlyle. The blind man smiled as he returned his friend's greeting, for Louis Carlyle's voice was wonderfully suggestive in its phases of the varying aspects of the speaker himself, and at that moment it conveyed a portrait of Mr Carlyle in his very best early-morning business manner—spruce and debonair, a little obtuse to things beyond his experience and impervious to criticism, but self-confident, trenchant and within his limits capable. In its crisp yet benign complacency Carrados could almost have sworn to resplendent patent boots, the current shade in suède gloves and a carefully selected picotee.

"If you are doing nothing better to-night, Max," continued the inquiry agent, "would you join me at the Argosy Theatre? I have a box, and we might go on to the Savoy afterwards. Now don't say you are engaged, there's a good fellow," he urged. "You haven't given me the chance of playing host for a month or more."

"The fact is," confessed Carrados, "I was there for the first night only a week ago."

"How unfortunate," exclaimed the other. "But don't you think that you could put up with it again?"

"I am sure I can," agreed Carrados. "Yes, I will join you there with pleasure."

"Delightful," crowed Mr Carlyle. "Let us say——" The essential details were settled in a trice, but the "call" had not yet expired and the sociable gentleman still held the wire. "Were you interested in Miss Roscastle, Max?"

"Decidedly."

"That is fortunate. My choice of a theatre is not unconnected with a case I have on hand. I may be able to tell you something about the lady."

"Possibly we shall not be alone?" suggested Carrados.

"Well, no; not absolutely," admitted Carlyle. "Charming young fellow, though. I'm sure you'll like him, Max. Trevor Enniscorthy, a younger son of old Lord Sleys."

"Conventional rotter, between ourselves?" inquired Max.

"Not a bit of it," declared Mr Carlyle loyally. "A young fellow of five and twenty is none the worse for being enamoured of a fascinating creature who happens to be on the stage. He is——Oh, very well. Good-bye, Max. Eight-fifteen, remember."

They were all punctual. In fact, "If Mr Enniscorthy could have got me along we should have been here before the doors opened," declared Mr Carlyle when the blind man joined them. "Now why are there no programmes about here, I wonder?"

"I hardly fancy they anticipate their box-holders arriving twenty minutes before the curtain rises," suggested Carrados.

"There are some," exclaimed Mr Enniscorthy, dashing out as an attendant crossed the circle. He was back in a moment, and standing in the obscurity of the box eagerly tore open the programme. "Still in," he muttered, coming forward and throwing the paper down for the others to refer to. "Oh, excuse my impatience," he apologised, colouring. "I am rather——" He left them to supply the rest.

"Mr Enniscorthy has given me permission to explain his position, Max," began Mr Carlyle, but the young man abruptly cut short the proposition stated in this vein of deference.

"I'd rather put it that if Mr Carrados would help me with his advice I should be most awfully grateful," he said in a very clear, rather highly pitched voice. "I suppose it's inevitable to feel no end of an ass over this sort of thing, but I'm desperately in earnest and I *must* go through with it."

"Admirable!" beamed Mr Carlyle's inextinguishable eye, and he murmured: "Very natural, I am sure," in the voice of a man who has just been told to go up higher.

"Perhaps you know that there is a Miss Roscastle put down as appearing in this piece?" went on Enniscorthy. "Well, I knew Miss Roscastle rather well in Ireland. I came to London because——I followed her here."

"Engaged?" dropped quietly from Carrados's lips.

"I cannot say that we were actually engaged," was the admission, "but it—well, you know how these things stand. At all events she knew what I felt towards her and she did not discourage my hopes."

"Did your people know of this, Mr Enniscorthy?"

"I had not spoken to my father or to my stepmother, but they might easily have heard something of it," replied the young man. "Miss Roscastle, although she did not go about much, was received by the very best people in Dublin. Of course for many things I did not like her being on the stage; in fact I detested it, but she had taken the step before I knew her, and how could I object? Then she got the offer of this London engagement. She was ambitious to get on in her profession, and took it. In a very short time I found it impossible to exist there without seeing her, so I made an excuse to get away and followed."

"Let me see," put in Mr Carlyle ingenuously; "I forget the exact dates."

"Miss Roscastle came on Monday, October the 4th," said Enniscorthy. "The piece opened on the following Thursday week—the 14th. I left Kingstown by the early boat yesterday. At

this end we were nearly an hour late, and after going to my hotel, changing and dining, I had just time to come on here and bag the last stall. I thought that I would send a note round after the first act and ask Una to give me a few minutes afterwards. But it never came to that. Instead I got a very large surprise. 'Mary Ryan' came on, and I looked—and looked again. I didn't need glasses, but I got a pair out of the automatic box in front of me and had another level stare. Well, it wasn't Miss Roscastle. This girl was like her. I suppose to most people they would be wonderfully alike, and her voice—although it wasn't really Irish—yes, her voice was similar. But to me there were miles of difference. I saw at once that she was an understudy, although 'Miss Una Roscastle' was still down in the programme, and I began to quake at the thought of something having happened to her.

"I slipped out into the corridor—I had an end seat—and got hold of a programme girl.

"'Do you know why Miss Roscastle is out of the cast to-night?' I asked her. 'Is she indisposed?'

"She took the programme out of my hand and pointed to a name in it.

"'She's in all right,' she replied—stupidly, I thought. 'There's her name.'

"'Yes, she is on the programme,' I replied, 'but not on the stage. Look through the glass there. That is not Miss Roscastle.'

"She glanced through the glazed door and then turned away as though she suspected me of chaffing her.

"'It's the only Miss Roscastle I've ever seen here,' she said as she went.

"I wandered about and interrogated one or two other attendants. They all gave me the same answer. I began to get frightened.

"'They must be misled by the resemblance,' I assured myself. 'It really is wonderful.' I went back to my seat and then remembered that I had got no further with my original inquiry, which was to find out whether Una was ill or not. I couldn't remain. I kept my eyes fixed on 'Mary Ryan' every time she was on the stage, and

every time I became more and more convinced. Finally I got up again and going round sent in my card to the manager."

"Stokesey?" asked Carrados.

"Yes. I didn't know who was technically the right man, but he, at any rate, had engaged Miss Roscastle. He saw me at once.

"'I have come across from Dublin to see Miss Roscastle,' I told him, 'and I am very disappointed to find her out of the cast. Can you tell me why she is away?'

"'Surely you are mistaken,' he replied, opening a programme that lay before him. 'Do you know Miss Roscastle by sight?'

"'Very well indeed,' I retorted. 'Better than your staff do. The "Mary Ryan" to-night is not Miss Roscastle.'

"'I will inquire,' he said, walking to the door. 'Please wait a minute.'

"He was rigidly courteous, but instinct was telling me all the time that it was sheer bluff. He had nothing to inquire. In a moment he was back again.

"'I am informed that the programme is correct,' he said with the same smooth insincerity, standing in the middle of the room for me to leave. 'Miss Roscastle is on the stage at this moment. The make-up must have deceived you, Mr Enniscorthy.'

"I had nothing to reply, because I did not even know what to think. I simply proceeded to walk out.

"'One moment.' I had reached the door when Mr Stokesey spoke. 'You are a friend of Miss Roscastle, I suppose?'

"'Yes,' I replied. 'I think I may claim that.'

"'Then I would merely suggest to you that to start a rumour crediting her with being out of the piece is a service she would fail to appreciate. Good-evening.'

"I left the theatre because I despaired of getting any real information after that, and it occurred to me that I could do better elsewhere. Although Una and I did not correspond, I had begged her, before she left, to let me know that she arrived safely, and she had sent me just half-a-dozen lines. I now took a taxi and drove off

to the address she had given—a sort of private hotel or large boarding-house near Holborn.

"'Can you tell me if Miss Roscastle is in?' I asked at the office.

"'Roscastle?' said the fellow there. 'Oh, the young lady from the theatre. Why, she left us more than a week ago—nearer two, I should say.'

"This was another facer.

"'Can you give me the address she went to?' I asked.

"'Couldn't; against our rule,' he replied. 'Any letters for her were to be sent to the theatre.'

"I didn't think it would be successful to offer him a bribe, so I thanked him and walked away. As the hall porter opened the door for me I dropped him a word. In two minutes he came out to where I was waiting.

"'A Miss Roscastle left here a week or two ago,' I said. 'They won't give me her address, but you can get it. Here's a Bradbury. I'll be here again in half-an-hour and if you've got the address—the house, not the theatre—there'll be another for you when I've verified it.'

"He looked a bit doubtful. Evidently a decent fellow, I thought.

"'It's quite all right,' I assured him. 'We are engaged, but I've only just come over.'

"He was waiting for me when I returned. The first thing he did was to tender me the note back again—a piece of superfluous honesty that prepared me for the worst.

"'I'm sorry, sir, but it's no go,' he explained. 'The young lady left no address beyond the theatre.'

"'You called a cab for her when she went?' I suggested.

"'Yes, sir, but she gave the directions while I was bringing out her things. I never heard where it was to go.'"

"And that is as far as we have got up to this moment, Max," struck in Mr Carlyle briskly.

"I'm afraid it is," corroborated Enniscorthy. "I got round to the stage door here in time to see most of the people leave, but neither Miss Roscastle nor the girl like her were among them."

“She is off half-an-hour before the piece finishes,” explained Carrados. “And of course she might not leave by the stage door.”

“In any case it is an extraordinary enough business, is it not, Mr Carrados?” said Enniscorthy, rather anxious not to be set down a blundering young idiot for his pains. “What does it mean?”

“So far I would describe it as—curious,” admitted Carrados guardedly. “Investigation may justify a stronger term. In the meanwhile we need not miss the play.”

By this time the theatre had practically filled and the orchestra was tuning up for the overture. With nothing to occupy his attention, Mr Enniscorthy began to manifest an unhappy restlessness that increased until the play had been proceeding for some few minutes. Then Carrados heard Mr Carlyle murmur, “Charming! Charming!” in a tone of mature connoisseurship; there was a spontaneous round of applause and “Mary Ryan” was on the scene.

“The understudy again,” Enniscorthy whispered to his companions.

“Well,” remarked Mr Carlyle when the curtain descended for the first interval, “you are still equally convinced, Mr Enniscorthy?”

“There isn’t the shadow of a doubt,” he replied.

Carrados had been writing a few lines on one of his cards. He now summoned an attendant.

“Mr Stokesey is in the house?” he asked. “Then give him this, please—when you next go that way.”

Before the curtain rose the girl came round to the box again.

“Mr Carrados?” she inquired. “Mr Stokesey told me to say that he would save you the trouble by looking in here during the next interval.”

“Shall I remain?” asked Enniscorthy.

“Oh yes. Stokesey is a most amiable man to do with. I know him slightly. His attitude to you was evidently the outcome of the circumstances. We shall all get along very nicely.”

The second act was the occasion of “Mary Ryan’s” great opportunity and again she carried the enthusiasm of the audience.

After the curtain the young actress had to respond to an insistent call. In the darkness Mr Stokesey entered the box and stood waiting at the back.

"Glad to see you here again, Mr Carrados," he remarked, shaking hands with the blind man as soon as the lights were up. Then he looked at the other occupants. "My word, I have put my head into the lion's den!" he continued, his smile deepening into a good-natured grin. "Don't shoot, Mr Enniscorthy; I will climb down without. I see that the game is up."

"What are you going to tell us?" asked Carrados.

"Everything I know. The lady who has just gone off is not Miss Roscastle. Mr Enniscorthy was quite right; she wasn't here last night either."

"Then why is her name still in the programme, and why do you and your people keep up the fiction?" demanded Enniscorthy.

"Because I hoped that Miss Roscastle might have returned to the cast to-night, and, failing to-night, I hope that she will return to-morrow. Because we happen to have a substitute in Miss Linknorth so extraordinarily like the original lady in appearance and voice that no one—excluding yourself—will have noticed the difference, and because I have a not unreasonable objection to announcing that the chief attraction of my theatre is out of the cast. Is there anything very unaccountable in that?"

Mr Carlyle nodded acquiescence to this moderate proposition; Enniscorthy seemed to admit it reluctantly; it remained for Carrados to accept the challenge.

"Only one thing," he replied with some reluctance.

"And what is that?"

"That Miss Roscastle will not return to the cast and that you are well aware why she never can return to it."

"I—what?" demanded the astonished manager.

"Miss Roscastle cannot *return* to the cast because she has never been in it."

Stokesey wavered, burst into a roar of laughter and sat down.

"I give in," he exclaimed heartily. "That's my last ditch. Now you really do know everything that I do."

"But why has she not been in?" demanded Enniscorthy.

"Better ask the lady herself. I cannot even guess."

"I will when I can find her." Not for the first time the young man was assailed by a horrid fear that he might have been making a fool of himself. "Where in the meantime is she?"

"The Lord alone knows," retorted Mr Stokesey feelingly. "Don't annihilate me, Mr Enniscorthy; I don't mean a member of the peerage. But, I'll tell you, the lady put me in a very deuced fix."

"Won't you take us into your confidence?" suggested Carrados.

"I will, Mr Carrados, because I want a consideration from you in return. I can put it into a very few words. Twenty minutes before the curtain went up on the first night a note was sent in to Miss Roscastle. She read it, put on her hat and coat and went out hurriedly by the stage door."

"Well?" said Carlyle encouragingly.

"That is all. That is the last we saw of her—heard of her. She never returned."

"But—but——" stammered Enniscorthy, and came up short before the abysmal nature of the prospect confronting him.

"There are a good many 'buts' to be taken into consideration, Mr Enniscorthy," said the manager, with a rather cryptic look. "Fortunately we had Miss Linknorth, and the first costume, as you know, is immaterial. Up to the last possible moment we hung on to Miss Roscastle's return. Then the other had to go on."

"With not very serious consequences to the success of the play, apparently," remarked Carrados.

"That's the devilment of it," exclaimed Stokesey warmly. "Don't you see the hole it has put me into? If 'Mary Ryan' had remained a negligible quantity it wouldn't have mattered two straws. But for her own diabolical vanity Miss Linknorth made a confounded success of the part. Of course it was too late to have any alteration printed on the first night and now Miss Roscastle is the draw of the

piece. People come to see Miss Roscastle. Miss Roscastle *is* the piece."

"But if you explained that Miss Linknorth was really the creator of the part——" suggested Mr Carlyle.

Stokesey rattled a provocative laugh at the back of his throat.

"You run a theatre for a few seasons, my dear fellow, and then talk," he retorted. "You can't explain; you can't do anything; you can only just sit there. People cease to be rational beings when they set out for a theatre. If you breathe on a howling success it goes out. If you move a gold mine of a piece from one theatre to another, next door, everyone promptly decides to stay away. Don't ask me the reasons; there are none. It isn't a business; it ought to come under the Gaming Act."

"Mr Stokesey is also faced by the alternative that after he had announced Miss Linknorth, Miss Roscastle might appear any time and claim her place."

The manager nodded. "That's another consideration," he said.

"But could she?" inquired Mr Carlyle. "After absenting herself in this way?"

"Oh, goodness knows; I dare say she could—agreements are no good when it comes to anything happening. At any rate here am I with an element of success after a procession of distinct non-stops. If we get well set, whatever happens will matter less. Now I haven't gone to any Machiavellian lengths in arranging this, but I have taken the chance as it came along. I've told you everything I know. Is there any reason why you shouldn't do us all a good turn by keeping it strictly to yourselves?"

"I don't know that I particularly owe you any consideration, Mr Stokesey, or that you owe me any," announced Mr Enniscorthy. "Just now I am only concerned in discovering what has become of Miss Roscastle. You know her address?"

"In Kensington?"

"Well, yes."

"74 Westphalia Mansions."

"You sent there of course?"

“Heavens, yes! The various forms of messages must be six inches deep all over the hall by now. Last Friday I had a man sitting practically all day on her doorstep.”

“But she has someone there—a housekeeper or maid?”

“I don’t think so. She told me that she was taking a little furnished flat—asked me if the neighbourhood was a suitable one. I imagine there was something about a daily woman until she found how she liked it. We’ve had no one from there anyway.”

“Then it comes to this, that for a week there has been absolutely no trace of Miss Roscastle’s existence! Do you quite realise your responsibility, Mr Stokesey?” demanded Enniscorthy with increased misgivings.

The manager, who had turned to go, caught Mr Carlyle’s eye over the concerned young man’s shoulder. “I don’t think that Miss Roscastle’s friends need have any anxiety about her personal safety,” he replied with expression. “At all events I’ve done everything I can for you; I hope that you will not fail to meet my views. If there’s anything else that occurs to you, Mr Carrados, I shall be in my office. Good-night.”

“Callous brute!” muttered Mr Enniscorthy. “He ought to have put it in the hands of the police a week ago.”

Mr Carlyle glanced at Carrados, who had transferred his interest to the rendering of the last musical item of the interval.

“Possibly Miss Roscastle would prefer a less public investigation if she had a voice in the matter,” said the professional man.

“If she happens to be shut up in some beastly underground cellar I imagine she would prefer whatever gets her out the soonest. I dare say it sounds fantastic, but such things really do happen now and then, you know, and why not?”

“You don’t know of any threats or blackmailing letters?”

“No,” admitted the young man; “but I do know this, that if Una was at liberty she would never allow another actress to take her place and use her name in this way.”

“A very significant suggestion,” put in Carrados from his detached attitude. “Mr Enniscorthy has given you a really valuable hint, Louis.”

“I don’t mean that Miss Roscastle is really out-of-the-way jealous,” Enniscorthy hastened to add, “but in her profession——”

“Oh, most natural, most natural,” agreed the urbane Carlyle. “Everyone has to look after his own interest. Now——”

“I don’t suppose that you are particularly keen on this act,” interposed the blind man. “Are you, Mr Enniscorthy?”

“I’d much rather be doing something,” was the reply.

“I was going to suggest that you might go round to Westphalia Mansions, just to make sure that there is no one there now. Then if you would find your way to our table at the Savoy we could hear your report.”

“Yes, certainly. I shall be glad to think that I can be of some assistance by going.”

Mr Carlyle’s optimistic temper was almost incapable of satire, but he could not refrain from, “You can—poor beggar!” on Enniscorthy’s departure. “I suppose,” he continued, turning to his friend, “I suppose you think that Stokesey may——? Eh?”

“I fancy that in the absence of our young friend he may be induced to become more confidential. He may have some good ground for believing that the missing lady will not upset his ingenious plan. He, at all events, discounts the ‘underground cellar.’”

“Oh, that!” commented Carlyle with an indulgent smile. “But, after all, what is the answer, Max? Enniscorthy is a thoroughly eligible young fellow and this was the first chance of her career. What is the inducement?”

“That much we can safely emphasise. What, in a word, would induce an ambitious young lady to throw up a good engagement, Louis?”

“A better?” suggested Mr Carlyle.

“Exactly,” agreed Carrados; “a better.”

It is unnecessary to follow the course of Mr Carlyle's inquiry on the facts already disclosed, for, less than twenty-four hours later, the whole situation was changed and Mr Stokesey's discreet prevarication had been torn into shreds. The manager had calculated in vain—if he had calculated and not just accepted the chance that presented itself. At all events the fiction proved too elaborate to be maintained and late in the afternoon of the following day all the evening papers blazed out with the

"SENSATIONAL DISAPPEARANCE OF

POPULAR LONDON ACTRESS"

The event was particularly suited to the art of the contents bill, for when the news came to be analysed there was little else to be learned beyond the name of the missing actress and the fact that "at the theatre a policy of questionable reticence is being maintained towards all inquiry." That phrase caused two men at least to smile as they realised the embarrassment of Mr Stokesey's dubious position.

The conditions being favourable, the Missing Actress sensation caught on at once and effectually asphyxiated public interest in all the other sensations that up to that moment had been satisfying the mental requirements of the nation—a "Mysterious Submarine," an "Eloping Dean" (three wives), and an "Are We Becoming Too Intellectual?" correspondence. Supply followed demand, and it very soon became difficult to decide, not where Miss Roscastle was, but where she was not. Public opinion wavered between Genoa, on the authority of a retired lime and slate merchant of Hull who had had a presentiment while directing a breathless lady to the docks, when a Wilson liner was on the point of sailing; Leatherhead, the suggestion of a booking-office clerk who had been struck by the peculiar look in a veiled lady's eyes as she asked for a third-class return to Cheam; and Accrington, where a young lady with a marked Irish accent and a theatrical manner had inquired about lodgings at three different houses and then abruptly left, saying that she would come back if she thought any more about it.

Before the novelty was two days old Scotland Yard had been stirred into recognising its existence. A London clue was forthcoming, apparently the wildest and most circumstantial of them all. A plain-clothes constable of the A Division reported that an hour after midnight three days before he had noticed a shabby-genteel man, who seemed to be waiting for someone, loitering on the Embankment near the Boadicea statue. There was nothing in the circumstance to interest him, but when he repassed the spot ten minutes later the man had been joined by a woman. The sharp eyes of the constable told him that the woman was well and even fashionably dressed, although she had made some precaution to conceal it, and the fact quickened his observation. As he shambled past—an Embankment dead-beat for the occasion—he heard the name "Roscastle" spoken by one of the two. He could not distinguish by which, nor the sense in which the word was used, but his notebook, with the name written down under the correct date, corroborated so much. On neither occasion had he seen the face of the man distinctly—the threadbare individual had sought the shadows—but he was able to describe that of the woman in some detail. He was shown half-a-dozen photographs and at once identified that of Miss Roscastle. The crowning touch requisite to make this story entirely popular was supplied by an inspector of river police. According to the newspaper account, the patrol boat was off the Embankment near Westminster Bridge between one and a quarter-past on the night in question when a distinct splash was heard. The crew made for the spot, flashed the lights about and drifted up and down several times, but without finding a trace of any human presence. At once the public voice demanded that the river should be dragged from Chelsea to The Pool, and, pending the result, every shabby wastrel who appeared on the Embankment arrested.

In his private office Mr Carlyle threw down the last of his morning papers with an expression that began as a knowing smile but ended rather dubiously. For his own part he would have much preferred that the disappearance of Miss Roscastle had not leaked out—that he had been left to pursue his course unaided, but, in the

circumstances, he carefully read everything on the chance of a useful hint. The Embankment story both amused and puzzled him.

He dismissed the subject to its proper mental pigeonhole and had turned to deal with his most confidential correspondence when something very like an altercation breaking the chaste decorum of his outer office caused him to stop and frown. The next moment there was a hurrying step outside, the door was snatched open and Mr Enniscorthy, pale and distracted, stumbled into the room. Behind him appeared the indignant face of Mr Carlyle's chief clerk. Then the visitor extinguished the outraged vision by flinging back the door as he went forward.

"Have you seen the papers?" he demanded. "Is there anything dreadful in them?"

"I have seen the papers, yes," replied the puzzled agent. "I am not aware——"

"I mean the evening papers—just out. No, I see you haven't. Here, read that and tell me. I haven't—I dare not look."

Mr Carlyle took the journal that Enniscorthy thrust under his eyes—it was the earliest Star—glanced into his visitor's face a little severely and then focussed on the column.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what is this! 'MISSING ACTRESS. EMBANKMENT CLUE. BODY FOUND!'"

"Ah!" groaned Enniscorthy. "That was on the bills. Is it——?"

"It's all right, it's all right, my dear sir," reported Mr Carlyle, glancing along the lines. "This is the body of a man ... the man who was seen ... most extraordinary...."

"My God!" was wrung from the distressed young man as he dropped into a chair. "Oh, my God! I thought——" He took out his handkerchief, wiped and fanned his face, and for the next few minutes looked rather languidly on things.

"Very distressing," commiserated Mr Carlyle when he had come to the end of the report. "Can I get you anything—brandy, a glass of water——? The mere act of sipping, I am medically informed, has a beneficial effect in case of faintness. I have——"

“Nothing, thanks. I shall be all right now. Sorry to have made an ass of myself. You have heard—anything?”

“Nothing definite so far,” was the admission. “But there may be something worth following in this story after all. I shall go down to the mortuary shortly. Do you care to accompany me?”

“No, thanks,” replied the visitor. “I have had enough of that particular form of excitement for one morning…. Unless, of course, there is anything I——”

He was assured that there was nothing to be effected by his presence and half-an-hour later Mr Carlyle made his way alone to the obscure mortuary where the unclaimed dead hold their grim reception.

An inspector of the headquarters investigation staff who had been put on to the case was standing by the side of one of the shells when Carlyle entered. He was a man whom the private agent had more than once good-naturedly obliged in small matters that had come within his reach. He now greeted Mr Carlyle with consideration and stood aside to allow him to approach the body.

“The Embankment case, I suppose, sir?” he remarked. “Not very attractive, but I’ve seen many worse in here.” He jerked off the upper part of the rough coverlet and exposed a visage that caused Mr Carlyle to turn away with a “Tch, tch!” of emotion. Then a sense of duty drew him round again and he proceeded to note the descriptive points of the dead man in his pocket-book.

“No marks of violence, I suppose?” he asked.

“Nothing beyond the usual abrasions that we always find. A clear case of drowning—suicide—it seems to be.”

“And the things?”

The inspector nodded towards a seedy suit laid out for identification and an overcoat, once rakish of its fashion and now frayed and mouldering, put with it.

“Fur collar too, Mr Carlyle,” pointed out his guide. “‘Velvet and rags,’ isn’t it? ‘Where moth and rust doth corrupt.’ A sermon could be made out of this.”

"Very true; very true indeed," replied Mr Carlyle, who always responded to the sentimentally obvious. "It is a sermon, inspector. But what have we here?"

Beside the garments had been collected together a heap of metal discs—quite a considerable heap, numbering some hundreds. Carlyle took up a few and examined them. They were all alike—flat, perfectly round and somewhat under an inch in diameter. They were quite plain and apparently of lead.

"H'm, curious," he commented. "In his pockets?"

"Yes; both overcoat pockets. Very determined, wasn't he? They would have kept him down till the Day of Judgment. I've counted them—just five hundred."

"Any money?"

The inspector smiled his tragi-comic appreciation—the coin embellished the moral of his unwritten sermon—and pointed.

"A halfpenny!" he replied.

"Poor fellow!" said Mr Carlyle. "Well, well; perhaps it is better as it is. You might pull up the cloth again now, please.... There are no letters or papers, I see."

The detective hesitated a moment and then recalled the obligation he was under.

"There is a scrap of paper that I have kept from the Press so far," he admitted. "It was tightly clenched in the man's right hand—so tight that we had to use a screw-driver to get it out, and the water had barely reached it." He was extracting a slip of paper from his notebook as he spoke and he now unfolded it. "You won't put it about, will you, Mr Carlyle? I don't know that there's anything tangible in it, but—well, see for yourself."

"Extraordinary!" admitted the gentleman. He read the words a second time: "'Fool! What does it matter now?' Why, it might almost——"

"It might be addressed to the coroner, or to anyone who tries to find out who he is or what it means, you would say. Well, so it might, sir. Anyhow, that is all."

"By the way, I suppose he *is* the man your fellow saw?"

“Everything tallies, Mr Carlyle—length of immersion, place, and so on. Our man thinks he is the same, but you may remember that he didn’t claim to be very positive on this point.”

There seemed nothing else to be learned and Mr Carlyle took his departure. His acquaintance had also finished and their ways lay together as far as Trafalgar Square. Before they parted the inspector had promised to communicate with Mr Carlyle as soon as the dead man was identified.

“And if he has a room anywhere he probably will be, with all this talk about Miss Roscastle. Then we may find something there that will help us,” he predicted. “If he is purely casual the chances are we shall never hear.”

His experience was justified and he kept his promise. Two days later Carlyle heard that the unknown had been identified as the occupant of a single room in a Lambeth lodging-house. He had only occupied it for a few weeks and he was known there as Mr Hay. Tenement gossip described him as a foreigner and credited him with having seen better days—an easy enough surmise in the circumstances. Mr Carlyle had been on the point of turning his attention to a Monte Carlo Miss Roscastle when this information reached him. He set off at once for Lambeth, but at Tubb’s Grove disappointment met him at the door. The landlady of the ramshackle establishment—a female with a fluent if rather monotonous delivery—was still smarting from the unappreciated honour of the police officials’ visit and the fierce light of publicity that it had thrown upon her house. All Mr Carlyle’s bland cajolery was futile and in the end he had to disburse a sum that bore an appreciable relation to a week’s rent before he was allowed to inspect the room and to command conversation that was not purely argumentative.

Then the barrenness of the land was revealed. Mr Hay had been irregular with his rent at the best, and when he disappeared he was a week in arrears. After two days’ absence, with the easy casuistry of her circumstances, the lady had decided that he was not returning and had proceeded to “do out” the room for the next tenant. The lodger’s “few things” she had bundled together into a

cupboard, whence they had been retrieved by the police, in spite of her indignant protest. But the lodger's "papers and such-like rubbish" she confessed to burning, to get them out of the way. Mr Carlyle spent a profitless half-hour and then returned, calling at Scotland Yard on his way back. His friend the inspector shook his head; there was nothing among the seized property that afforded any clue.

It was at this point that Mr Carlyle's ingenuous mind suggested looking up Carrados, whom he had not seen since the visit to the theatre.

"Max was interested in this case from the first; I am sure he will be expecting to hear from me about it," was the form in which the proposal conveyed itself to him. The same evening he ran down to Richmond for an hour, after ascertaining that his friend was at home and disengaged.

"You might have brought Enniscorthy with you," remarked Carrados when the subject had been started. "Nice, genuine young fellow. Evidently deeply in love with the girl, but he is young enough to take the attack safely. What have you told him?"

"He is back in Ireland just now—got an idea that he might learn something from some people there, and rushed off. What I have told him—well"—experience endowed Mr Carlyle with sudden caution—"what would you have told him, Max?"

Carrados smiled at the innocent guile of the invitation.

"To answer that I should have to know just what you know," he replied. "I suppose you have gone into this Embankment development?"

"Yes." He had come intending to make some show of his progress and to sound Carrados discreetly, but once again in the familiar room and under the sway of the clear-visioned blind man's virile personality he suddenly found himself submitting quite naturally to the suave, dominating influence. "Yes; but I must confess, Max, that I am unable to explain much of that incident. It suggests blackmail at the bottom, and if the plain-clothes man was correct and saw Miss Roscastle there last Thursday——"

"It was blackmail; but the plain-clothes man was not correct, though he had every excuse for making the mistake. There is one quiet, retiring personage in this drama who has been signally overlooked in all the clamour."

"You mean——?"

"I suggest that if Miss Linknorth had been subpœnaed for the inquest and asked to account for her movements after leaving the theatre on Thursday last it might have turned public speculation into another channel—though probably a wrong one."

"Miss Linknorth!" The idea certainly turned Mr Carlyle's thoughts into a new channel.

"Has it occurred to you what an extraordinary act of self-effacement it must have been on the part of this young unknown actress to allow her well-earned success to be credited to another? As Enniscorthy reminded us, ladies of the profession are rather keen on their chances."

"Yes; but Stokesey, you remember, insisted on keeping it dark."

"I am not overlooking that. But although it was to Stokesey's interest to keep up the fiction, and also to the interest of everyone else about the theatre—people who were merely concerned in the run of the piece—it would have richly paid the Linknorth to have her identity established while the iron was hot, whatever the outcome. A paragraph to the Press the next day would have done it. There wasn't a hint. I am not overlooking the fact that Miss Linknorth's name now appears on the programme, but that is an unforeseen development so far as she is concerned, and her golden opportunity has gone by. With the exception of the first row of the pit and of the gallery you won't find that one per cent. of the house now really knows who created 'Mary Ryan' or regards the Linknorth as anything but a makeshift."

"Then what was the incentive?"

"Suppose it has been made worth Miss Linknorth's while? It is not necessarily a crude question of money. Friendship might make it worth her while, or ambition in some quarter we have not looked for, or a dozen other considerations—anything but the box-office of

the Argosy Theatre, which certainly did not make it worth her while."

"Yes, that is feasible enough, Max, but how does it help us?"

"Do you ever have toothache, Louis?" demanded Carrados inconsequently.

"No, I am glad to say," admitted Mr Carlyle. "Have you got a turn now, old man? Never mind this confounded 'shop.' I'll go and then you can——"

"Not at all," interposed Carrados, smiling benignly at his friend's consideration; "and don't be too ready to condemn toothache indiscriminately. I have sometimes found it very stimulating. The only way to cure it is to concentrate the mind so terrifically that you forget the ache. Then it stops. I imagine that a mathematician could succeed by working out a monumental problem. I have frequently done it by 'discovering' a hoard of Greek coins of the highest art period on one of the islands and classifying the find. On Monday night I thought that I was in for a devil of a time. I at once set myself to discover a workable theory for everyone's conduct in this affair, one, of course, that would stand the test of every objection based on fact. The correct hypothesis must, indeed, be strengthened by every new circumstance that came out. At twelve o'clock, after two hours' mental sudation, I began to see light—excuse the phrase. By this time the toothache had gone, but I was so taken up with the idea that I called out Harris and drove to Scotland Yard then and there on the chance of finding Beedel or one of the others I know.... Why on earth didn't you let me have that 'Fool!' message, Louis?"

"My dear fellow," protested Mr Carlyle, "I can't beat up for advice on every day of my life."

"At all events it might have saved me an hour's strenuous thinking."

"Well, you know, Max, perhaps that would have left you in the middle of the toothache. Now the message——?"

"The message? Oh, that settled it. You may take it as assured, Louis, that although Miss Roscastle's departure from the theatre was hurried, in order to allow her to catch the boat-train from

Charing Cross, she had enough time to think out the situation and to secure Miss Linknorth's allegiance. Whether Stokesey knows any more than he admits, we need not inquire. The great thing is that Miss Roscastle had some reason—some fairly strong reason—for not wanting her absence from the cast to become public. We agreed, Louis, that a better engagement would alone satisfactorily explain her defection. What better engagement would you suggest—it could scarcely be a theatrical one?"

"A brilliant marriage?"

"Our minds positively ident, Louis. 'A brilliant marriage'—my exact expression. One, moreover, that suddenly becomes possible and cannot be delayed. One—here we are on difficult ground—one that may be jeopardised if at that early stage Miss Roscastle's identity in it comes to light, or if, possibly, her absence from London is discovered. That sign-post," said Carrados, with his unseeing eyes fixed on the lengthening vistas that rose before his mind, "points in a good many directions."

"The blackmailer?" hazarded Carlyle.

"I gave a good deal of attention to every phase of that gentleman's presence," replied Carrados. "It corroborates, but it does not entirely explain. I would say that he merely intervened. In my view, Miss Roscastle would have acted precisely as she did if there had been no Mr Hay. At all events he *did* intervene and had to be dealt with."

"It had occurred to me, Max, whether it was Miss Linknorth's job to impersonate the other?"

"It may have been originally. If so, it failed, for Hay proceeded with his demand. His price was five hundred pounds in English or French gold—an interesting phase of your ordinary blackmailer's antipathy to paper—merely an *hors d'œuvre* to the solid things to come, of course. But he was not dealing with a fool. Whether Miss Roscastle frankly had not five hundred pounds just then, or whether she was better advised, we cannot say. She temporised, the Linknorth being the intermediary. Then the dummy pieces? Hay *was* a menace and had to be held off. At one point there may well have been the pretence of handing over the cash and then at

the last moment some specious difficulty, necessitating a short delay, is raised. That would account for the otherwise unnecessary detail of the lead counterfeits, for there is no need of them on Thursday. Then, when the danger is past, when the tricked scoundrel has lost his sting, *then* there is no attempt at evasion or compromise. 'Fool! What does it matter now?' is the contemptuously unguarded message and the five hundred doits are pressed upon him to complete his humiliation. Why doesn't it matter, Louis? Is there any other answer than that Miss Roscastle is safely married?"

"It certainly looks like it," agreed Mr Carlyle. "But if there was anything so serious as to have compromised the marriage, surely Hay could still have held it over her, as against her husband?"

"If it was as against the husband before—yes, perhaps. But suppose the chink in the armour was the good grace of some third person whose consent was necessary? This brilliant marriage.... Well, I don't commit myself any further. At any rate, in the lady's estimation she is safe, and if she had deliberately sought to goad Hay into suicide she couldn't have done better. He read the single line that shattered his greedy dreams and its disdainful triumph struck him like a whip. He had spent literally his last penny on pressing his unworthy persecution, and now he stood, beggared and beaten, on the Embankment at midnight—'he, a gentleman.' ... It doesn't matter how he took it. He went over, and the muddy waters of the Thames closed over the last page of his rotten history."

"Max!" exclaimed Mr Carlyle with feeling. "Remember the poor beggar, with all his failings, is dead now. Not that I should mind," he added cheerfully, "but I saw him afterwards, you know. Enniscorthy had the sense to keep away. And, by Gad! Max, that reminds me that this is rather rough on my confiding young client—running up a bill to have a successful rival sprung upon his hopes. Have you any idea who he is?"

"Yes," admitted Carrados, "I have an idea, but to-day it is nothing more than that. When does Enniscorthy return?"

"He ought to be back in London on Friday morning."

"By then I should know something definite. If you will make an appointment with him for Friday at half-past eleven I will look in on my way through town."

"Certainly, Max, certainly." There was a note of faithful expectation in Mr Carlyle's voice that caused his friend to smile. He crossed the room to his most-used desk and opened one of the smaller drawers.

"For this simple demonstration, Louis, I require only two appliances, neither of which, as you will see, is a rabbit or a handkerchief. In other and saner words, there are only two exhibits. That is from The Morning Mail; this is from the Westminster street refuse tip."

"This" was a small brown canvas bag. Traces of red sealing-wax still marked the neck and across it were stamped the words:

BANQUE DE L'UNION

CLAIRVAUX

Mr Carlyle looked inside. It was empty, but a few specks of dull grey metal still lodged among the cloth. He turned to the other object, as Carrados had indicated an extract from the daily Press. It was a mere slip of paper and consisted of the following paragraph:

"From Clairvaux, in the Pas de Calais, France, where he purchased a country estate when he was driven into exile, it is reported that ex-King Constantine of Villalyia has been lying dangerously ill for the past week."

"Quite so, quite so," murmured Carlyle, quietly turning over the cutting to satisfy himself that he was reading the right side.

"I see that you haven't anything very hopeful to report," said Mr Enniscorthy—he and Max Carrados had entered Mr Carlyle's office within a minute of each other two days later—"but let me have it out."

"It isn't quite a matter of being hopeful or the reverse," replied the blind man. "It is merely final to your ambition. You know Prince Ulric of Villalyia?"

"I have been presented. He hunted in Ireland last season."

"He knew Miss Roscastle?"

"They were acquainted, she has told me."

"It went deeper than you imagined. Miss Roscastle is Princess Ulric of Villalyia to-day."

"Una! Oh," cried Enniscorthy, "but—but that is impossible! You don't mean that she——"

"I mean exactly what I say. They were married within a week of her disappearance from London."

Enniscorthy's pained gaze went from face to face. The fatal presentiment that had always just robbed him of the heroic—the fear that he might be making an ass of himself—again assailed him.

"But isn't Ulric in the line of succession? They couldn't be really married without the king's consent. Of course Villalyia is a republic now, but——"

"But it may not be to-morrow if the expected war breaks out? Quite true, Mr Enniscorthy. And in the meanwhile the forms and ceremonies are maintained at the exile Court of Clairvaux. Yet the king gave his consent."

"Gave his consent! For his son to marry an actress?"

"Ah, there was a little sleight of hand there. He only knew Miss Roscastle as Miss Eileen O'Rourke, the last representative of a line of Irish kings. She was a Miss O'Rourke?"

"Yes. Roscastle was only her stage name. The O'Rourkes were a very old but impoverished family."

"Royal, we may assume. This business was the outcome of one of the interminable domestic squabbles that the Villalyia Petrosteins seemed to wage in order to supply the Continental comic papers with material. Ex-King Constantine recently quarrelled simultaneously and irrevocably with his eldest son Robert and his first cousin Michael. Robert, who lives in Paris, has respectably married a robust minor princess who has presented him with six unattractive daughters and now, by all report, stopped finally. Hating both son and cousin almost equally, old Constantine, who had fumed himself into a fever, sent off for his other son, Ulric, and demanded that he should at once marry and found a prolific line of sons to embitter Robert and cut out the posterity of Michael. Prince Ulric merely replied that there was

only one woman whom he wished to marry and she was not of sufficiently exalted station, and as she refused to marry him morganatically—yes, Mr Enniscorthy—there was no prospect of his ever marrying at all. The king suddenly found that he was very ill. Ulric was obdurate. The constitution allowed the reigning monarch to sanction such an alliance, provided there were no religious difficulties, and I understand that Miss Roscastle is a Catholic. Constantine recognised that if he was to gratify his whim he must consent, and that at once, as he was certainly dying. As things were, Ulric would probably renounce and marry ignominiously or die unmarried and the hated Michaels would step in, for, once king, the conventional Robert would never give his consent to such an alliance. Besides, it would be a 'damned slap in the face' to half the remaining royalty of Europe, and Constantine had always posed as a democratic sovereign—that was why his people ran him out. He coughed himself faint and then commanded the lady to be sent for."

"If only Una had confided in me I would—yes, I would willingly have flown to serve her."

"I think that Miss Roscastle was well qualified to serve herself," responded Carrados dryly. "Now you can put together the whole story, Mr Enniscorthy. Many pages of it are necessarily obscure. What the man Hay knew and threatened—whether it was with him in view or the emissaries of the hostile Robert and Michael that she took the sudden chance of concealing her absence and cloaking her identity—what other wheels there were, what other influences at work—these are only superfluities. The essential thing is that, in spite of cross-currents, everything went well—for her, and perhaps for you; the lady's married and there's an end of it."

"I hope that she will be as happy as I should have tried to make her," said Enniscorthy rather shakily. "I shall always think of her. Mr Carrados, I will write to thank you when I am better able to express myself. Mr Carlyle, you know my address. Good-morning."

"A very manly way of taking it and very properly expressed—very well indeed," declared Mr Carlyle with warm

approval as the door closed. “Max, that is the outcome of good blood—blood and breeding.”

“Nonsense, you romantic old humbug,” said Carrados with affectionate contempt. “I have heard exactly the same words in similar circumstances once before and they were spoken by a Canning Town bricklayer’s labourer.”

One incident only remains to be added. A month later Mr Carlyle was passing the Kemble Club when he became conscious of someone trying to avoid him. With a not unnatural impulse he made for his acquaintance and insisted on being recognised.

“Ah, Mr Stokesey,” he exclaimed, “Call a Spade—— is still going strong, I see.”

“Mr Carlyle, to be sure,” said the manager. “Bother me if I didn’t mistake you for a deadhead who always strikes me for a pass. Good heavens! yes; they come in droves and companies to see the part that the romantic Princess Ulric of Villalyia didn’t create! I’ve had three summonses for my pit queue. Didn’t I tell you it was a gamble? When I have to find a successor—*when*, mind, I say—I’m going to put on You Never Can Tell! What?”

VII

The Ingenious Mr Spinola

"You seem troubled, Parkinson. Have you been reading the Money Article again?"

Parkinson, who had been lingering a little aimlessly about the room, exhibited symptoms of embarrassed guilt. Since an unfortunate day, when it had been convincingly shown to the excellent fellow that to leave his accumulated savings on deposit at the bank was merely an uninviting mode of throwing money away, it is not too much to say that his few hundreds had led Parkinson a sorry life. Inspired by a natural patriotism and an appreciation of the advantage of 4½ over 1¼ per cent., he had at once invested in consols. A very short time later a terrible line in a financial daily—"Consols weak"—caught his agitated eye. Consols were precipitately abandoned and a "sound industrial" took their place. Then came the rumours of an impending strike and the Conservative press voiced gloomy forebodings for the future of industrial capital. An urgent selling order, bearing Mr Parkinson's signature, was the immediate outcome.

In the next twelve months Parkinson's few hundreds wandered through many lands and in a modest way went to support monarchies and republics, to carry on municipal enterprise and to spread the benefits of commerce. And, through all, they contrived to exist. They even assisted in establishing a rubber plantation in Madagascar and exploiting an oil discovery in Peru and yet survived. If everything could have been lost by one dire reverse Parkinson would have been content—even relieved; but with her proverbial inconsequence Fortune began by smiling and continued to smile—faintly, it is true, but appreciably—on her timorous votary. In spite of his profound ignorance of finance each of Parkinson's qualms and tremors resulted in a slight pecuniary margin to his credit. At the end of twelve months he had drawn a respectable interest, was somewhat to the good in capital, and as a

waste product had acquired an abiding reputation among a small but choice coterie as a very "knowing one."

"Thank you, sir, but I am sorry if I seemed engrossed in my own affairs," he apologised in answer to Mr Carrados's inquiry. "As a matter of fact," he added, "I hoped that I had finished with Stock Exchange transactions for the future."

"Ah, to be sure," assented Carrados. "A block of cottages Acton way, wasn't it to be?"

"I did at one time consider the investment, but on reflection I decided against property of that description. The association with houses occupied by the artisan class would not have been congenial, sir."

"Still, it might have been profitable."

"Possibly, sir. I have, however, taken up a mortgage on a detached house standing in its own grounds at Highgate. It was strongly recommended by your own estate agents—by Mr Lethbridge himself, sir."

"I hope it will prove satisfactory, Parkinson."

"I hope so, sir, but I do not feel altogether reassured now, after seeing it."

"After seeing it? But you saw it before you took it up, surely?"

"As a matter of fact, no, sir. It was pointed out to me that the security was ample, and as I had no practical knowledge of house-valuing there was nothing to be gained by inspecting it. At the same time I was given the opportunity, I must admit; but as we were rather busy then—it was just before we went to Rome, sir—I never went there."

"Well, after all," admitted Carrados, "I hold a fair number of mortgage securities on railways and other property that I have never been within a thousand miles of. I am not in a position to criticise you, Parkinson. And this house—I suppose that it does really exist?"

"Oh yes, sir. I spent yesterday afternoon in the neighbourhood. Now that the trees are out there is not a great deal that can be

actually seen from the road, but I satisfied myself that in the winter the house must be distinctly visible from several points."

"That is very satisfactory," said Carrados with equal seriousness. "But, after all, the title is the chief thing."

"So I am given to understand. Doubtless it would not be sound business, sir, but I think that if the title had been a little worse, and the appearance of the grounds a little better, I should have felt more secure. But what really concerned me is that the house is being talked about."

"Talked about?"

"Yes. It is in a secluded position, but there are some old-fashioned cottages near and these people notice things, sir. It is not difficult to induce them to talk. Refreshments are procurable at one of the cottages and I had tea there. I have since thought, from a remark made to me on leaving, that the idea may have got about that I was connected with the Scotland Yard authorities. I had no apprehension at the time of creating such an impression, sir, but I wished to make a few casual inquiries."

Carrados nodded. "Quite so," he murmured encouragingly.

"It was then that I discovered what I have alluded to. These people, having become suspicious, watch all that is to be seen at Strathblane Lodge—as it is called—and talk. They do not know what goes on there."

"That must be very disheartening for them."

"Well, sir, they find it trying. Up to less than a year ago the house was occupied by a commercial gentleman and everything was quite regular. But with the new people they don't know which are the family and who are the servants. Two or three men having the appearance of mechanics seem to be there continually, and sometimes, generally in the evening, there are visitors of a class whom one would not associate with the unpretentious nature of the establishment. Gentlemen for the most part, but occasionally ladies, I was told, coming in taxis or private motor cars and generally in evening dress."

"That ought to reassure these neighbours—the private cars and evening dress."

"I cannot say that it does, sir. And what I heard made me a little nervous also."

Something was evidently on the ingenuous creature's mind. The blind man's face wore a faintly amused smile, but he gauged the real measure of his servant's apprehension.

"Nervous of what, Parkinson?" he inquired kindly.

"Some thought that it might be a gambling-house, but others said it looked as if a worse business was carried on there. I should not like there to be any scandal or exposure, sir, and perhaps the mortgage forfeited in consequence."

"But, good heavens, man! you don't imagine that a mortgage is like a public-house licence, to be revoked in consequence of a rowdy tenant, surely?"

Parkinson's dubious silence made it increasingly plain that he had, indeed, associated his security with some such contingency, a conviction based, it appeared, when he admitted his fears, on a settled belief in the predatory intentions of a Government with whom he was not in sympathy.

"Don't give the thing another thought," counselled his employer. "If Lethbridge recommended the investment you may be sure that it is all right. As for what goes on there—that doesn't matter two straws to you, and in any case it is probably idle chatter."

"Thank you, sir. It is a relief to have your assurance. I see now that I ought to have paid no attention to such conversation, but being anxious—and seeing Sir Fergus Copling go there——"

"Sir Fergus Copling? You saw him there?"

"Yes, sir. I thought that I remembered a car that was waiting for the gate to be opened. Then I recognised Sir Fergus: it was the small dark blue car that he has come here in. And just after what I had been hearing——"

"But Sir Fergus Copling! He's a testimonial of propriety. Do you know what you are talking about, Parkinson?"

The excellent man looked even more deeply troubled than he had been about his money.

“Not in that sense, sir,” he protested. “I only understood that he was a gentleman of position and a very large income, and after just listening to what was being said——”

Carrados’s scepticism was intelligible. Copling was the last man to be associated with a scandal of fast life. He had come into his baronetcy quite unexpectedly a few years previously while engaged in the drab but apparently congenial business of teaching arithmetic at a public school. The chief advantage of the change of fortune, as it appeared to the recipient, was that it enabled him to transfer his attention from the lower to the higher mathematics. Without going out of his way to flout the conventions, he set himself a comparatively simple standard of living. He was too old and fixed, he said, to change much—forty and a bachelor—and the most optimistic spinster in town had reluctantly come to acquiesce.

Carrados had not forgotten this conversation when next he encountered Sir Fergus a week or so later. He knew the man well enough to be able to lead up to the subject and when an identifiable footstep fell on his ear in the hall of the Metaphysical (the dullest club in Europe, it was generally admitted) he called across to the baronet, who, as a matter of fact, had been too abstracted to notice him or anyone else.

“You aren’t a member, are you?” asked Copling when they had shaken hands. “I didn’t know that you went in for this sort of thing.” The motion of his head indicated the monumental library which he had just quitted, but it might possibly be taken as indicating the general atmosphere of profound somnolence that enveloped the Metaphysical.

“I am not a member,” admitted Carrados. “I only came to gather some material.”

“Statistics?” queried Copling with interest. “We have a very useful range of works.” He suddenly remembered his acquaintance’s affliction. “By the way, can I be of any use to you?”

“Yes, if you will,” said Carrados. “Let me go to lunch with you. There is an appalling bore hanging about and he’ll nab me if I don’t get past under protection.”

Copling assented readily enough and took the blind man's arm.

"Where, though?" he asked at the door. "I generally"—he hesitated, with a shy laugh—"I generally go to an A.B.C. tea-shop myself. It doesn't waste so much time. But, of course——"

"Of course, a tea-shop by all means," assented Carrados.

"You are sure that you don't mind?" persisted the baronet anxiously.

"Mind? Why, I'm a shareholder!" chuckled Carrados.

"This suits me very well," remarked the ex-schoolmaster when they were seated in a remote corner of a seething general room. "Fellows used to do their best to get me into the way of going to swell places, but I always seem to drift back here. I don't mind the prices, Carrados, but hang me if I like to pay the prices simply to be inconvenienced. Yes, *hot* milk, please."

Carrados endorsed this reasonable philosophy. Carlton or Coffee-house, the Ritz or the tea-shop, it was all the same to him—life, and very enjoyable life at that. He sat and, like the spider, drew from within himself the fabric of the universe by which he was surrounded. In that inexhaustible faculty he found perfect content: he never required "to be amused."

"No, not statistics," he said presently, returning to the unfinished conversation of the club hall. "Scarcely that. More in the nature of topography, perhaps. Have you considered, Copling, how everything is specialised nowadays? Does anyone read the old-fashioned, unpretentious Guide-book to London still? One would hardly think so to see how the subject is cut up. We have 'Famous London Blind-alleys,' 'Historical West-Central Door-Knockers,' 'Footsteps of Dr Johnson between Gough Square and John Street, Adelphi,' 'The Thames from Hungerford Bridge to Charing Cross Pier,' 'Oxford Street Paving Stones on which De Quincey sat,' and so on."

"They are not familiar to me," said Sir Fergus simply.

"Nor to me; yet they sound familiar. Well, I touched journalism myself once, years ago. What do you say to 'Mysterious Double-fronted Houses of the outer Northern Suburbs'? Too comprehensive?"

"I don't know. The subject must be limited. But do you seriously contemplate such a work?"

"If I did," replied Carrados, "what could you tell me about Strathblane Lodge, Highgate?"

"Oh!" A slow smile broke on Copling's face. "That is rather extraordinary, isn't it? Do you know old Spinola? Have you been there?"

"So far I don't know the venerable Mr Spinola and I have not been there. What is the peculiarity?"

"But you know of the automatic card-player?"

The words brought a certain amount of enlightenment. Carrados had heard more than once casual allusions to a wonderful mechanical contrivance that played cards with discrimination. He had not thought anything more of it, classing it with Kempelen's famous imposture which had for a time mystified and duped the chess world more than a century ago. So far, also, some reticence appeared to be observed about the modern contrivance, as though its inventor had no desire to have it turned into a popular show: at all events not a word about it had appeared in the Press.

"I have heard something, but not much, and I certainly have not seen it. What is it—a fraud, surely?"

Copling replied with measured consideration between the process of investigating his lightly boiled egg. It was plain that the automaton had impressed him.

"I naturally approached the subject with scepticism," he admitted, "but at the end of several demonstrations I am converted to a position of passive acquiescence. Spinola, at all events, is no charlatan. His knowledge of mathematics is profound. As you know, Carrados, the subject is my own and I am not likely to be imposed on in that particular. It was purely the scientific aspect of the invention that attracted me, for I am not a gambler in the ordinary sense. Spinola's explanation of the principles of the contrivance, when he found that I was capable of following them, was lucid and convincing. Of course he does not disclose all the details of the mechanism, but he shows enough."

"It is a gamble, then, not a mere demonstration?"

“He has spent many years on the automaton, and it must have cost thousands of pounds in experiment and construction. He makes no secret of hoping to reimburse his outlay.”

“What do you play?”

“Piquet—rubicon piquet. The figure could, he claims, be set to play any game by changing or elaborating the mechanism. He had to construct it for one definite set of chances and he selected piquet as a suitable medium.”

“It wins?”

“Against me invariably in the end.”

“Why should it win, Copling? In a game that is nine-tenths chance, why should it win?”

“I am an indifferent player. If the tactics of the game have been reduced to machinery and the combinations are controlled by a dispassionate automaton, the one-tenth would constitute a winning factor.”

“And against expert players?”

Sir Fergus admitted that to the best of his knowledge the figure still had the advantage. In answer to Carrados’s further inquiry he estimated his losses at two or three hundred pounds. The stakes were whatever the visitor suggested—Spinola was something of a grandee, one inferred—and at half-crown points Sir Fergus had found the game quite expensive enough.

“Why do people go if they invariably lose?” asked the blind man.

“My dear fellow, why do they go to Monte Carlo?” was the retort, accompanied by a tolerant shrug. “Besides, I don’t positively say that they always lose. One hears of people winning, though I have never seen it happen. Then I fancy that the novelty has taken with a certain set. It is a thing at the moment to go up there and have the rather bizarre experience. There is an element of the creep in it, you know—sitting and playing against that serene and unimpressionable contrivance.”

“What do the others do? There is quite a company, I gather.”

“Oh yes, sometimes. Occasionally one may find oneself alone. Well, the others often watch the play. Sometimes sets play bridge

on their own. Then there is coffee and wine. Nothing formal, I assure you."

"Rowdy ever?"

"Oh no. The old man has a presence; I doubt if anyone would feel encouraged to go too far under Spinola's eye. Yet practically nothing seems to be known of him, not even his nationality. I have heard half-a-dozen different tales from as many cocksure men—he is a South American Spaniard ruined by a revolution; a Jesuit expelled from France through politics; an Irishman of good family settled in Warsaw, where he stole the plans from a broken-down Polish inventor; a Virginia military man, supposed to have a dash of the negroid, who suddenly found that he was dying from cancer and is doing this to provide a fortune for an only and beautiful daughter, and so on."

"Is there a beautiful daughter?"

"Not that I have ever seen. No, the man just cropped up, as odd people do in great capitals. Nobody really knows anything about him, but his queer salon has caught on to a certain extent."

Now any novel phase of life attracted Carrados. The mixed company that Spinola's enterprise was able to draw to an out-of-the-way suburb—the peculiar blend of science and society—was not much in itself. The various constituents could be met elsewhere to more advantage, but the assemblage might engender piquancy. And the man himself and his machine? In any case they should repay attention.

"How does one procure the entrée?" he inquired.

Copling raised a quizzical eyebrow.

"You also?" he replied. "Oh, I see; you think——Well, if you are going to discover any sleight-of-hand about the business I don't mind——"

"Yes?" prompted Carrados, for Sir Fergus had pulled up on an obvious afterthought.

"I did not intend going up again," said Copling slowly. "As a matter of fact, I have seen all that interests me. And—I suppose I may as well tell you, Carrados—I made someone a sort of promise

to have nothing to do with gambling. She feels very strongly on the subject."

"She is very wise," commented the blind man.

Elation mingled with something faintly apologetic in the abrupt bestowal of the baronet's unexpected confidence.

"It was really quite a sudden and romantic happening," he continued, led on by the imperceptible encouragement of his companion's attitude. "She is called Mercia. She does not know who I am—not that that's anything," he added modestly. "She is an orphan and earns her own living. I was able to be of some slight service to her in the science galleries at South Kensington, where she was collecting material for her employer. Then we met there again and had lunch together, and so on."

"At tea-shops?"

"Oh yes. Her tastes are very simple. She doesn't like shows and society and all that."

"I congratulate you. When is it to be?"

"It? Oh! Well, we haven't settled anything like that yet. Of course this is all in confidence, Carrados."

"Absolutely—though the lady has done me rather an ill turn."

"How?"

"Well, weren't you going to introduce me to Mr Spinola?"

"True," assented Sir Fergus. "And I don't see why I shouldn't," he added valiantly. "I need not play, and if there is any bunkum about the thing I should certainly like to see how it is done. What evening will suit you?"

An early date had suited both, and shortly after eight o'clock—an hour at which they were likely to find few guests before them—Carrados's car drew up at Strathblane Lodge. By arrangement he had picked up Copling, who lived—"of all places in the world," as people had said when they heard of it—in an unknown street near Euston. Parkinson, out of regard for the worthy man's feelings, had been left behind on the occasion and in ignorance of his master's destination.

The appearance of the place was certainly not calculated to reassure a nervous investor. The entirely neglected garden seemed to convey a hint that the tenant might be contemplating a short occupation and a hasty flight. Nor did the exterior of the house do much to remove the unfortunate impression. Only a philosopher or an habitual defaulter would live in such a state.

The venerable Mr Spinola received them in the salon set apart for the display of the automaton and for cards in general. It was a room of fair proportions—doubtless the largest in the house—and quite passably furnished, though in a rather odd and incongruous style. But probably any furniture on earth would have seemed incongruous to the strange, idol-like presence which the inventor had thought fit to adapt to the uses of his mechanism. The figure was placed on a low pedestal, sufficiently raised from the carpet on four plain wooden legs for all the space underneath to be clearly visible. The body was a squat, cross-legged conception, typical of an Indian deity, the head singularly life-like through the heavy gilding with which the face was covered, and behind the merely contemplative expression that dominated the golden mask the carver had by chance or intention lined a faint suggestion of cynical contempt.

"You have come to see my little figure—Aurelius, as we call him among ourselves?" said the bland old gentleman benignly. "That is right; that is right." He shook hands with them both, and received Mr Carrados, on Sir Fergus's introduction, as though he was a very dear friend from whom he had long been parted. It was difficult indeed for Max to disengage himself from the effusive Spinola's affection without a wrench.

"Mr Carrados happens to be blind, Mr Spinola," interposed Copling, seeing that their host was so far in ignorance of the fact.

"Impossible! Impossible!" exclaimed Spinola, riveting his own very bright eyes on his guest's insentient ones. "Yet," he added, "one would not jest——"

"It is quite true," was the matter-of-fact corroboration. "My hands must be my eyes, Mr Spinola. In place of seeing, will you permit me to touch your wonderful creation?"

The old man's assent was immediate and cordial. They moved across the room towards the figure, the inventor modestly protesting:

"You flatter me, my dear sir. After all, it is but a toy in large; nothing but a toy."

A weary-looking youth, the only other occupant of the room, threw down the illustrated weekly that he had picked up on the new arrivals' entrance and detained Copling.

"Yes, I had been toying a little before you arrived," he remarked flippantly. "I came early to cut Dora Lascelle off from the idle crowd and the silly little rabbit isn't coming, it appears. I didn't want to play, because, for a fact, I have no money, but the old thing bored me to hysterics. Good God! how he can talk so little on anything really entertaining, like The Giddy Flappers or Trixie Fluff's divorce, and so much about strange, unearthly things that no other living creature has ever seen even in a dream, baffles my imagination. What's an 'integral calculus,' Copling? No, don't tell me, after all. Let me forget the benumbing episode as soon as possible."

"Do you wish for a game, Sir Fergus?" broke in Spinola's soft voice from across the room. "Doubtless Mr Carrados might like to follow someone else's play before he makes the experiment."

Copling hesitated. He had not come to play, as he had already told his friend, but Max gave no sign of coming to his assistance.

"Perhaps you, Crediton?" said the mathematician; but young Crediton shook his head and smiled wisely: Copling was too easy-going to stand out. He crossed the room and sat down at the automaton's table.

"And the stake?"

"Suppose we merely have a guinea on the game?" suggested the visitor.

Spinola acquiesced with the air of one to whom a three-penny bit or a kingdom would have been equally indifferent. The deal fell to Copling and the automaton therefore had the first "elder hand," with the advantage of a discard of five cards against its opponent's three.

Carrados had already been shown the theory of the contrivance. He now followed Spinola's operations as the game proceeded. The old man picked up the twelve cards dealt to the automaton and carefully arranged them in their proper places on a square shield that was connected with the front of the figure. As each fell into its slot it registered its presence on the delicate mechanism that the figure contained.

"The discard," remarked Spinola, and moved a small lever. The left hand of the automaton was raised, came over the shield which hid its cards from the opponent, touched one with an extended finger, and affixing it by suction, lifted the selected card from the slot and dropped it face downwards on the table.

"A little slow, a little cumbersome," apologised the inventor as the motions were repeated until five cards had been thrown out. "The left hand is used for the discard alone, as a different movement is necessary." He picked up the five new cards from the stock and arranged them as he had done the hand. "Now we proceed to the play."

Crediton strolled across to watch the game. He stood behind Copling, while Carrados remained near the automaton. Spinola opened the movements.

"Aurelius has no voice, of course," he said, studying the display of cards, "so I—point of five."

"Good," conceded the opponent.

Spinola registered the detail on one of an elaborate set of dials that produced a further development in the machinery.

"Spades," he announced, declaring the suit that he had won the "point" on. "Tierce major."

"Quart to the queen—hearts," claimed Copling, and Spinola moved another dial to register the opponent's advantage.

"Three kings."

"Good," was the reply.

"Three tens," added the senior player, as his three kings, being good against the other hand, enabled him to count the lower trio also. "Five for the point and two trios—eleven." Every detail of the

scoring and of the ensuing play was registered as the other things had been.

This finished the preliminaries and the play of the hands began. The automaton, in response to the release of the machinery, moved its right arm with the same deliberation that had marked its former action and laid a card face upwards on the table. For the blind man's benefit each card was named as it was played. At the end of the hand Copling had won "the cards"—a matter of ten extra points—with seven tricks to five and the score stood to his advantage at 27—17.

"Not bad for the junior hand," commented Crediton. "Do you know"—he addressed the inventor—"there is a sort of 'average,' as they call it, that you are supposed to play up to? I forget how it goes, but 27 is jolly high for the minor hand, I know."

"I have heard of it," replied Spinola politely. Crediton could not make out why the other two men smiled broadly.

The succeeding hands developed no particular points of interest. The scoring ruled low and in the end Copling won by 129 to 87. Spinola purred congratulation.

"I am always delighted to see Aurelius lose," he declared, paying out his guinea with a princely air.

"Why?" demanded Crediton.

"Because it shows that I have succeeded beyond expectation, my dear young sir: I have made him almost human. Now, Mr Carrados——"

"With pleasure," assented the blind man. "Though I am afraid that I shall not afford you the delight of losing, Mr Spinola."

"One never knows, one never knows," beamed the old man. "Shall we say——"

"Half-crown points—for variety?"

"Very good. Ah, our deal." He dealt the hands and proceeded to dispose the twelve that fell to the automaton on the shield. There was a moment of indecision. "Pray, Mr Carrados, do you not arrange your cards?"

"I have done so." He had, in fact, merely spread out his hand in the usual fan formation and run an identifying finger once round the upper edges. The cards remained as they had been dealt, face downwards.

"Wonderful! And that enables you to distinguish them?"

"The ink and the impression on a plain surface—oh yes." He threw out the full discard as he spoke and took in the upper five of the stock.

"You overwhelm us; you accentuate the tiresome deliberation of poor Aurelius." Spinola was hovering about the external fittings of the figure with unusual fussiness. When at length he released the left hand it seemed for an almost perceptible moment that the action hung. Then the arm descended and carried out the discard.

"Point of five," said Carrados.

"Good."

"In spades. Quint major in spades also, tierce to the knave in clubs, fourteen aces"—*i.e.* four aces; "fourteen" in the language of piquet as they score that number. He did not wait for his opponent to assent to each count, knowing, after the point had passed, that the other calls were good against anything that could possibly be held. "Five, twenty, twenty-three, ninety-seven." Having reached thirty before his opponent scored, and without a card having so far been played, his score automatically advanced by sixty. That is the "repique."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Crediton, "that's the first time I've ever known Aurelius repiqued."

"Oh, it has happened," retorted Spinola almost testily.

The play of the hand was bound to go in Carrados's favour—he held eight certain tricks. He won "the cards" with two tricks to spare and the round closed at 119—5.

"You look like being delighted again, Mr Spinola," remarked Crediton a little cruelly.

"Suppose you make yourself useful by dealing for me," interposed Carrados. "Of course," he reminded his host, "it does not do for me to handle any cards but my own."

"I had not thought of that," replied Spinola, looking at him shrewdly. "If you had no conscience you would be a dangerous opponent, Mr Carrados."

"The same might be said of any man," was the reply. "That is why it is so satisfactory to play an automaton."

"Oh, Aurelius has no conscience, you know," chimed in Crediton sapiently. "Mr Spinola couldn't find room for it among the wheels."

The second hand was not eventful. Each player had to be content to make about the "average" which Crediton had ingenuously discovered. It raised the scores to 33—130. Two hands followed in the same prudent spirit; the fifth—Carrados's "elder"—found the position 169—67.

"Only two this time," remarked Carrados, taking in.

"Jupiter!" murmured Crediton. It is unusual for the senior hand to leave even one of the five cards to which he is entitled. It indicated an unusually strong hand. The automaton evidently thought so too. It availed itself of all the six alternative cards and, as the play disclosed, completely cut up its own hand to save the repique by beating Carrados on the point. It won the point, to find that its opponent only held a low quart, a tierce and three kings. As a result Carrados won "the cards" and the score stood 199—79. The discard was, in fact, an experiment in bluff. Carrados *might* have held a quint and fourteen kings for all the opposing hand disclosed.

"What on earth did you do that for?" demanded Copling. He himself always played an eminently straightforward game—and generally lost.

"I'll bet I know," put in Crediton. "You are getting rather close, Mr Spinola—the last hand and you need twenty-one to save the rubicon." The "rubicon" means that instead of the loser's score being deducted from the winner's in arriving at the latter's total, it is *added* to it—a possible difference of nearly 200 points.

"We shall see; we shall see," muttered Spinola with a little less than his usual suavity.

Whatever concern he had, however, was groundless, for the game ended tamely enough. Carrados ought to have won the point

and divided tricks, leaving his opponent a minor quart and a solitary trio—about 15 on the hand. By a careless discard he threw away both chances and the final score stood at 205—112. Copling, who had come to regard his friend's play as rather excellent, was silent. Crediton almost shrieked his disapproval and seizing the cards demonstrated to his heart's content.

"Ninety-three and the hundred for the game—twenty-four pounds and one half-crown," said the loser, counting out notes and coin to the amount. "It has been an experience for both of us—Aurelius and myself."

"And certainly for me," added Carrados.

"Look here," interposed Crediton, "Aurelius seems off his play. If you don't mind taking my paper, Mr Spinola, I should like another go."

"As you please," assented the old man. "Your undertaking is, of course——" The gesture suggested "quite equal to that of the cashier of the Bank of England." The venerable person had, in fact, regained his lofty pecuniary indifference. "The same point?"

"Right-o," cheerfully assented the youth.

"I will go and think over my shortcomings," said Carrados.

He started to cross the room to a seat and ran into a couch. With a gasp Copling hastened to his assistance. Then he found his arm detained and heard the whisper.

"Sit down with me."

Across the room the play had begun again and with a little care they could converse without the possibility of a word being overheard.

"What is it?" asked Sir Fergus.

"The golden one will win. It is only when the cards are not exposed that you play on equal terms."

"But I won?"

"Because it is well to lose sometimes and, by choice, when the stake is low. That witless youth will have to pay for both of us."

"But how—how on earth do you suggest that it is done?"

“Look round cautiously. What eyes overlook Crediton’s hand as he sits there?”

“What eyes? Good gracious! is there anything in that?”

“What is it?”

“There is a trophy of Japanese arms high up on the wall. An iron mask surmounts it. It has glass eyes. I have never seen anything like that before.”

“Any others round the walls?”

“There is a stuffed tiger’s head on our right and a puma’s or something of that sort on the left.”

“In case a suspicious player asks to have the places changed or holds his cards awkwardly. Working the automaton from other positions is probably also arranged for.”

“But how can a knowledge of the opponent’s cards affect the automaton? The dials——”

“The dials are all bunkum. While you were playing I took the liberty of altering them and for a whole hand the dials indicated that you must inevitably be holding eight clubs and four spades. All the time you were leading out hearts and diamonds and the automaton serenely followed suit. The only effective machinery is that indicating the display of cards on the shield and controlling the hands, and that is worked by a keyboard and electric current from the room below. The watcher behind the mask telephones the opposing hand, the discard and the take-in. The automaton’s hand has already been indicated below. You see the enormous advantage the hidden player has? When he is the minor hand he knows everything that is to be known before he discards. When he is the elder he knows almost everything. By concentrating on one detail he can practically always balk the pique, the repique and the kapot, if it is necessary to play for safety. You remember what Crediton said—that he had never known Aurelius repiqued before. The leisurely manipulation of the dials gives plenty of time. An even ordinary player in that position can do the rest.”

Copling scarcely knew whether to believe or not. It sounded plausible, but it reflected monstrously.

"You speak of a telephone," he said. "How can you definitely say that such a thing is being used? You have never been in the room before and we've scarcely been here an hour. It—it may be awfully serious, you know."

Carrados smiled.

"Can you hear the kitchen door being opened at this moment or detect the exact aroma of our host's mocha?" he demanded.

"Not in the least," admitted Copling.

"Then of course it is hopeless to expect you to pick up the whisper of a man behind a mask a score of feet away. How fearfully in the dark you seeing folk must be!"

"Can you possibly do that?" Even as he was speaking the door opened and a servant entered, bringing coffee and an assortment of viands sufficiently exotic to maintain the rather Oriental nature of entertainment.

"Stroll across and see how the game is going," suggested Carrados. "Have a look at Crediton's discard and then come back."

Sir Fergus did not quite follow the purpose, but he nodded and proceeded to comply with his usual amiable spirit.

"It stands at 137 to 75 against Crediton and they are playing the last hand. Our young friend looks like losing thirty or forty pounds."

"And his discard?"

"Oh—seven and nine of clubs and the knave of hearts."

Carrados held out a slip of paper on which he had already pencilled a few words. The baronet took it, looked and whistled softly. He had read: "Clubs, seven, nine. Hearts, knave."

"Conjuring?" he interrogated.

"Quite as simple—listening."

"I suppose I must accept it. What staggers me is that you can pick out a whisper when the room is full of other louder sounds. Now if there had been absolute stillness——"

"Merely use. There's nothing more in it than in seeing a mouse and a mountain, or a candle and the sun, at the same time. Well, what are we going to do about it?"

Copling began to look acutely unhappy.

"I suppose we must do something," he ruminated, "but I must say that I wish we needn't. I mean, I wish we hadn't dropped on this. You know, Carrados, whatever is going on, Spinola is no charlatan. He does understand mathematics."

"That makes him all the more dangerous. But I should like to produce more definite proof before we do anything.... Does he ever leave us in the room?"

"I have never known it. No, he hovers round his Aurelius."

"Never mind. Ah, the game is finished."

The game was finished and it needed no inquiry to learn how it had gone. Mr Crediton was handing the venerable Spinola a memorandum of indebtedness. His words and attitude did not convey the impression of a graceful loser.

"I wish you two men would give me the tip for beating this purgatorial image," he grumbled as they came up. "I thought that he'd struck a losing line after your experience and this is the result." He indicated the spectacle of their amiable host folding up his I.O.U. preparatory to dropping it carelessly into a letter-rack, and shrugged his shoulders with keen disgust.

"I'll tell you if you like," suggested Sir Fergus. "Hold the better cards."

"And play them better," added Carrados. "Good heavens!"

A very untoward thing had happened. They had all been standing together round the table, Spinola purring appreciatively, Crediton fuming his ill-restrained annoyance, and the other two mildly satirical at his expense. Carrados held a cup of coffee in his hand. He reached towards the table with it, seemed to imagine that he was a full foot nearer than he was, and before anyone had divined his mistake, cup, saucer and the entire contents had dropped neatly upon Mr Spinola's startled feet, saturating his lower extremities to the skin.

"Good heavens! What on earth have I done?"

Crediton shrieked out his ill-humour in gratified amusement; Sir Fergus reddened deeply with embarrassment at his friend's mishap. Victim and culprit stood the ordeal best.

"My unfortunate defect!" murmured Carrados with feeling. "How ever can I——"

"I who have eyes ought to have looked after my guest better," replied Spinola with antique courtliness. He reduced Crediton with a glance of quiet dignity and declined Carrados's handkerchief with a reassuring touch on the blind man's arm. "No, no, my dear sir, if you will excuse me for a few minutes. It is really nothing, really nothing, I do assure you."

He withdrew from the room to change. Copling began to prepare a reassuring phrase to meet Carrados's self-reproaches when they should break forth again. But the blind man's tone had altered; he was no longer apologetic.

"Play them better," he repeated to Crediton, as if there had been no interruption, "and play under conditions that are equal. For instance, it might be worth while making sure that a Japanese mask does not conceal a pair of human eyes. If I were a loser I should be inclined to have a look."

Not until then did it occur to Sir Fergus that his friend's clumsiness had been a calculated ruse to force Spinola to withdraw for a few minutes. Later on he might be able to admire the simple ingenuity of the trick, but at that moment he almost hated Carrados for the cool effrontery with which he had duped all their feelings.

No such subtleties, however, concerned Crediton. He stared at the blind man, followed the indication of his gesture and all at once grasped the significance of the hint.

"By George, I shouldn't wonder if you aren't right!" he exclaimed. "There are one or two things——" Without further consideration he rushed a table against the wall, swung up a chair on to it, and mounting the structure began to wrench the details of the trophy from side to side and up and down in his excited efforts to displace them.

“Hurry up,” urged Copling, more nervous than excited. “He won’t be long.”

“Hurry up?” Crediton paused, panting from his furious efforts, and found time to look down upon his accomplices. “I don’t think that it’s for us to concern ourselves, by George!” he retorted. “Spinola had better hurry up and bolt for it, I should say. There’s light behind here—a hole through the wall. I believe the place is a regular swindling hell.”

His eyes went to the group of weapons again and the sight gave him a new idea.

“Aha, what price this?” he cried, and pulling a short sword out of its sheath he drove it in between mask and wall and levered the shell away, nails and all. “By God, if the eyes aren’t a pair of opera-glasses! And there’s a regular paraphernalia here——”

“So,” interrupted a quiet voice behind them, “you have been too clever for an old man, Mr Carrados?”

Spinola had returned unheard and was regarding the work of detection with the utmost benignness. Copling looked and felt ridiculously guilty; the blind man betrayed no emotion at all and both were momentarily silent. It fell to Crediton to voice retort.

“My I.O.U., if you don’t mind, Mr Spinola,” he demanded, tumbling down from his perch and holding out an insistent hand.

“With great pleasure,” replied Spinola, picking it out from the contents of the letter-rack. “Also,” he continued, referring to the contents of his pocket-book, while his guest tore up the memorandum into very small pieces and strewed them about the carpet, “also the sum of fifty-seven pounds, thirteen shillings which I feel myself compelled to return to you in spite of your invariable grace in losing. I have already rung; you will find the front door waiting open for you, Mr Crediton.”

“‘Compelled’ is good,” sneered Crediton. “You will probably find a train waiting for you at Charing Cross, Mr Spinola. I advise you to catch it before the police arrive.” He nodded to the other two men and departed, to spread the astounding news in the most interested quarters.

Spinola continued to beam irrepressible benevolence.

"You are equally censorious, if more polite than Mr Crediton in expressing it, eh, my dear young friends?" he said.

"I thought that you were a genuine mathematician—I vouched for it," replied Sir Fergus with more regret than anything else. "And the extent of your achievement has been to contrive a vulgar imposture—in the guise of an ingenious inventor to swindle society by a sham automaton that doesn't even work."

"You thought that—you still think that?"

"What else is there to think? We have seen with our own eyes."

"And"—turning to his other guest—"Mr Carrados, who does not see?"

"I am waiting to hear," replied the blind man.

"But you, Sir Fergus, you who are also—in an elementary way—a mathematician, and one with whom I have conversed freely, you regard me as a common swindler and think that this—this tawdry piece of buffoonery that is only designed to appeal to the vapid craze for novelty of your foolish friends—this is, as you say, the extent of my achievement?"

Copling gave a warning cry and sprang forward, but it was too late to avert what he saw coming. In his petulant annoyance at the comparison Spinola had laid an emphasising hand upon Aurelius and half unconsciously had given the figure a contemptuous push. It swayed, seemed to poise for a second, and then toppling irretrievably forward crashed to the floor with an impact that snapped the golden head from off its shoulders and shook the room and the very house itself.

"There, there," muttered the old man, as though he was doing no more than regretting a broken tea-cup; "let it lie, let it lie. We have finished our work together, Aurelius and I. Now let the whole world——"

It would have been too much to expect the remainder of the mysterious household, whoever its members were, to ignore the tempestuous course of events taking place within their midst. The door was opened suddenly and a young lady, with consternation charged on every feature of her attractive face, burst into the room.

For the moment her eyes took in only two figures of the curious group—the aged Spinola and his fallen handiwork.

"Granda!" she cried, "whatever's happened? What is it all? Oh, are you hurt?"

"It is nothing, nothing at all; a mere contretemps of no importance," he reassured her quickly. Then, with a recurrence of his most grandiloquent manner, he recalled her to the situation. "Mercia, our guests—Sir Fergus Copling, Mr Carrados. Sir Fergus, Mr Carrados—Miss Dugard."

"Then it *is* Mercia!" articulated the bewildered baronet. "Mercia, you here! What does it mean? What are you doing?"

"What are you doing, Sir Fergus?" retorted the girl in cold reproach. "Is this the way you generally keep your promises? Gambling!"

"Well, really," stammered the abashed gentleman, "I—I only——"

"Sir Fergus only played a game for a mere nominal stake, to demonstrate the working to his friend," interposed Spinola with a shrewd glance—a curious blend of serpentine innocence and dove-like cunning—at the estranged young people.

"And won," added Sir Fergus *sotto voce*, as if that fact condoned his offence.

"Won indeed!" flashed out Miss Dugard. "Of course you won—I let you. Do you think that we wished to take money from you now?"

"You—*you* let me!" muttered Sir Fergus helplessly. "Good heavens!"

"I am grateful that your consideration also extends to your friend's friend," put in Carrados pleasantly.

Miss Dugard smiled darkly at the suavely-given thrust and showed her pretty little teeth almost as though she would like to use them.

"There, there, that will do, my child," said the old man indulgently. "Sir Fergus and Mr Carrados are entitled to an explanation and they shall have it. The moment is opportune; the

work of a lifetime is complete. You have seen, Sir Fergus, the sums that Aurelius—assisted, as we will now admit, by a little external manipulation—has gathered into our domestic exchequer. Where have they gone, these hundreds and thousands that you may estimate? In lavish living and a costly establishment? Observe this very ordinary apartment—the best the house possesses. Recall the grounds through which you entered. Sum up the simple hospitality of which you have partaken. In expensive personal tastes and habits? I assure you, Sir Fergus, that I am a man of the most frugal life; my granddaughter inherits the propensity. In what, then? In advancing science, in benefitting humanity, in furthering human progress. I am going to prove to you that I have perfected one of the greatest mechanical inventions of all ages, and I ask you to credit the plain statement that all my private fortune and all the winnings that you have seen upon this table—with the exception of a bare margin for the necessities of life—have been spent in perfecting it."

He paused with a senile air of triumph and seemed to challenge comment.

"But surely," ventured Copling, "surely on the strength of this you would have had no difficulty in obtaining direct financial support. Well, I myself——"

Spinola smiled a peculiar smile, shaking his head sagely.

"Take care, my generous young friend, take care. You may not quite comprehend what you are saying."

"Why?"

Still swayed by his own gentle amusement, the old man crossed the room to a desk, selected a letter from a bulky pile and handed it to his guest without a word.

Copling glanced at the heading and signature, then read the contents and frowned annoyance.

"This is from my secretary," he commented lamely.

"That is what a secretary is for, is it not—to save his employer trouble?" insinuated Spinola. "He took me for a crank or a begging-letter impostor, of course." Then came the pathetic whisper. "They *all* took me for that."

Sir Fergus folded the letter and handed it back again.

"I am very sorry," he said simply.

"It was natural, perhaps. Still, something had to be done. My work was all arrested. I could no longer pay my two skilled mechanics. Time was pressing. I am a very old man—I am more than a hundred years old——"

The girl shot a sudden, half-frightened, pleading glance at her lover, then at Mr Carrados. It checked the exclamation that would have come from Copling; the blind man passed the monstrous claim without betraying astonishment.

"—a very old man and my work was yet incomplete. So I contrived Aurelius. I could, of course, have perfected a model that would have done all that has been claimed for this—mere child's play to me—but what would have been the good? Such a mechanical player would have lost as often as he would have won. Hence our little subterfuge, a means amply justified by so glorious an end."

He was smiling happily—the weeks of elaborate deception were, at the worst, an innocent ruse to him—and concluded with an emphasising nod to each in turn, to Mercia, who regarded him with implicit faith and veneration, to Copling, who at that moment surely had ample justification for declaring to himself that he was dashed if he knew what to think, and to Carrados, whose sightless look agreed to everything and gave nothing in reply. Then the old man stood up and produced his keys.

"Come, my friends," he continued; "the moment has arrived. I am going to show you now what no other eye has yet been privileged to see. My mechanics worked on the parts under my instruction, but in ignorance of the end. Even Mercia—a good girl, a very clever girl—has never yet passed this door." He had led them through the house and brought them to a brick-built, windowless shed, isolated in the garden at the back. "I little thought that the first demonstration——But things have fallen so, things have fallen, and one never knows. Perhaps it is for the best." An iron door had yielded to his patent key. He entered, turned on a bunch of electric lights and stood aside. "Behold!"

The room was a workshop, fitted with the highly finished devices of metal-working and littered with the scraps and débris of their use. In the middle stood a more elaborate contrivance—the finished product of brass and steel—a cube scarcely larger than a packing-case, but seemingly filled with wheels and rods, relay upon relay, and row after row, all giving the impression of exquisite precision in workmanship and astonishing intricacy of detail.

"Why, it's a calculating machine," exclaimed Sir Fergus, going forward with immense interest.

"It is an analytical engine, or, to use the more common term, a calculating machine, as you say," assented the inventor. "I need hardly remind you, of course, that one does not spend a lifetime and a fortune in contriving a machine to do single calculations, however involved, but for the more useful and practical purpose of working out involved series with absolute precision. Still, for the purpose of a trial demonstration we will begin with an ordinary proposition, if you, Sir Fergus, will kindly set one. My engine now is constructed to work to fifty places of figures and twelve orders of difference."

"If you have accomplished that," remarked Copling, accepting the pencil and the slip of paper offered him, "you have surpassed the dreams of Babbage, Mr Spinola."

There was a sudden gasp from Mercia, but it passed unheeded in the keen excitement of the great occasion. Spinola received the paper with its row of signs and figures and turned to operate his engine. He paused to look back gleefully.

"So you never guessed, Sir Fergus?" he chuckled cunningly. "We kept the secret well, but it doesn't matter now. *I am Charles Babbage!*"

The noise of wheel and connecting-rod cut off the chance of a reply, even if anyone had been prepared to make one. But no one, in that bewildering moment, was.

"The solution," announced Spinola with a flourish, and he passed a little slip of metal stamped with a row of figures into Sir Fergus's hand. Then, with a curious indifference to their verdict,

he turned away from the group and applied himself to the machine again.

"What is it? Is it not correct?" demanded Mercia in an agonised whisper. She had not looked at the solution, but at her lover's face, and her hand suddenly gripped his arm.

"It is incomprehensible," replied Sir Fergus, dropping his voice so that the old man could not overhear. "It isn't a matter of right or wrong—it is a mere farrago of nonsense."

"But harmless nonsense—quite harmless," interposed Carrados softly from behind them. "Come, we can safely leave him here; you will always be able to leave him safely here. Help Miss Dugard out, Copling. It is better, believe me, to leave him now."

Spinola did not turn. He was bending over the machine to which he had given life, brain and fortune, touching its wheels and sliding rods with loving fingers. They passed silently from his presence and crept back to the deserted salon, where the deposed head of Aurelius leered cynically at them from the floor.

VIII

The Kingsmouth Spy Case

"Not guilty, my lord!" There was a general laugh in the lounge of the Rose and Plumes, the comfortable old Cliffhurst hotel that upheld the ancient traditions unaffected by the flaunting rivalry of Grand or Metropole. The jest hidden in the retort was a small one, but it was at the expense of a pompous, pretentious bore, and the speaker was a congenial wag who had contrived in the course of a few weeks to win a facile popularity on all sides.

Across the room one of the later arrivals—"the blind gentleman," as he was sympathetically alluded to, for few had occasion to learn his name—turned slightly towards the direction of the voice and added a pleasantly appreciative smile to the common tribute. Then his attention again settled on the writing-table at which he sat, and for the next few minutes his pencil travelled smoothly, with an occasional pause for consideration, over the block of telegraphic forms that he had picked out. At the end of ten minutes he rang for a waiter and directed that his own man should be sent to him.

"Here are three telegrams to go off, Parkinson," he said in the suave, agreeable voice that scarcely ever varied, no matter what the occasion might be. "You will take them yourself at once. After that I shall not require you again to-night."

The attendant thanked him and withdrew. The blind man closed his letter-case, retired from the writing-table to the obscurity of a sequestered corner and sat unnoticed with his sightless eyes, that always seemed to be quietly smiling, looking placidly into illimitable space as he visualised the scene before him, and the laughter, the conversation and the occasional whisper went on unchecked around.

Max Carrados had journeyed down to Cliffhurst a few days previously, good-naturedly, but without any enthusiasm. Indeed it had needed all Mr Carlyle's persuasive eloquence to move him.

"The Home Office, Max," urged the inquiry agent, "one of the premier departments of the State! Consider the distinction! Surely you will not refuse a commission of that nature direct from the Government?" Carrados, looking a little deeper than a Melton overcoat and a glossy silk hat, had once declared his friend to be the most incurably romantic of idealists. He now took a malicious pleasure in reducing the situation to its crudest terms.

"Why can't the local police arrest a solitary inoffensive German spy themselves?" he inquired.

"To tell the truth, Max, I believe that there are two or three fingers in that pie at the present moment," replied Mr Carlyle confidentially. "It doesn't concern the Home Office alone. And after that Guitry Bay fiasco and the unmerciful chaffing that we got in the German papers—with rather a nasty rap or two over the knuckles from the Kölnische Zeitung—both Whitehall and Downing Street are in a blue funk lest they should do the wrong thing, either let the man slip away with the papers or arrest him without them."

"Contingencies with which I am sure you could grapple successfully, Louis."

Mr Carlyle's bland complacency did not suggest that he, at any rate, had any doubt on that score.

"But, you know, Max, I am pledged to carry through the Vandeeming affair here in town. And—um—well, the Secretary did make a point of you being the man they relied on."

"Oh! someone there must read the papers, Louis. But I wonder … why they did not communicate with me direct."

Mr Carlyle contrived to look extremely ingenuous. Even he occasionally forgot that looks went for nothing with Carrados.

"I imagine that they thought that a friendly intermediary—or something of that sort."

"Possibly Inspector Beedel hinted to the Commissioner that you would have more influence with me than a whole Government Department?" smiled Carrados. "And so you have, Louis; so you have. If it's your ambition to get the Government on your books you can tell your clients that I'll take on their job!"

“By Jupiter, Max, you are a good fellow if ever there was one!” exclaimed Mr Carlyle with gentlemanly emotion. “But I owe too much to you already.”

“This won’t make it any more, then. I have another reason, quite different, for going.”

“Of course you have,” assented the visitor heartily. “You are not one to talk about patriotism, and all that, but you can’t hoodwink me with your dilettantish pose, Max, and I know that deep down in your nature there is a passionate devotion to your country——”

“Thank you, Louis,” interrupted Carrados. “It is very nice to learn that. But I am really going to Kingsmouth because there’s a man there—a curate—who has the second best private collection in Europe of autonomous coins of Thessaly.”

For a few seconds Mr Carlyle looked his unutterable feelings. When he did speak it was with crushing deliberation.

“‘Mrs Carrados,’ I shall say—if ever there is a Mrs Carrados, Max—‘Mrs Carrados, two things are necessary for your domestic happiness. In the first place, pack up your husband’s tetradrachms in a brown-paper parcel and send them with your compliments to the British Museum. In the second, at the earliest possible opportunity, exact from him an oath that he will never touch another Greek coin as long as you both live.’”

“If ever there is a Mrs Carrados,” was the quick retort, “I shall probably be independent of the consolation of Greek coins as, also, Louis, of the distraction of criminal investigation. In the meantime, what are you going to tell me about this case?”

Mr Carlyle at once became alert. He would have become absolutely professional had not Carrados tactfully obtruded the cigar-box. The digression, and the pleasant aroma that followed it, brought him back again to the merely human.

“It began, like a good many other cases, with an anonymous letter.” He took a slip of paper from his pocket-book and handed it to Carrados. “Here is a copy.”

“A copy!” The blind man ran his finger lightly along the lines and read aloud what he found there:

“A friend warns you that an attempt is being successfully made on behalf of another Power to obtain naval information of vital importance. You have a traitor within your gates.”

Then he crumpled up the paper and dropped it half-contemptuously into the waste-paper basket. “A copy is no use to us, Louis,” he remarked. “Indeed it is worse than useless; it is misleading.”

“That is all they had here. The original was addressed to the Admiral-Superintendent at the Kingsmouth Dockyard. This was sent up with the report. But I am assured that the other contained no clue to the writer’s identity.”

“Not even a watermark, ‘Jones, stationer, High Street, Kingsmouth’!” said Carrados dryly. “Really, Louis! Every piece of paper contains at least four palpable clues.”

“And what are they, pray?”

“A smell, a taste, an appearance and a texture. This one, in addition, bears ink, and with it all the characteristics of an individual handwriting.”

“In capitals, Max,” Mr Carlyle reminded him. “Our anonymous friend is up to that.”

“Yes; I wonder who first started that venerable illusion.”

“Illusion?”

“Certainly an illusion. Capitals, or ‘printed handwriting’ as one sees them called, are just as idiomorphic as a cursive form.”

“But much less available for comparison. How are you going to obtain a specimen of anyone’s printed handwriting for comparison?”

Carrados reflected silently for a moment.

“I think I should ask anyone I suspected to do one for me,” he replied.

Carlyle resisted the temptation to laugh outright, but mordacity lurked in his voice.

“And you imagine that the writer of this, who evidently has good reason for anonymity, will be simple enough to comply?”

“I think so; if I ask him nicely.”

“Look here, Max, I will bet you a box of any cigars you care to name——”

“Yes, Louis?”

Mr Carlyle had hesitated. He was recalling one or two things from the past, and on those occasions his friend’s unemotional face had looked just as devoid of guile as it did now.

“No, Max, I won’t bet this time, but I should like to send across a small box of Monterey Coronas for Parkinson to pack among your things. Well, so much for the letter.”

“Not quite all,” interposed Carrados. “I must have the original.”

The visitor made a note in his pocket diary.

“It shall be sent to you at once. I stipulated an absolutely free hand for you. Oh, I took a tolerably high tone! I can assure you, Max. You will find everything at Kingsmouth very pleasant, and there, of course, you will learn all the details. Here they don’t seem to know very much. I was not informed whether the Dockyard authorities had already had their suspicions aroused or whether the letter was the first hint. At all events they acted with tolerable promptness. The letter, you will see, is undated, but it was delivered on the seventeenth—last Thursday. On Friday they put their hands on a man in the construction department—a fellow called Brown. He made no fight of it when he was cornered, but although he owned up to the charge of betraying information, there was one important link that he could not supply and one that he would not. He could not tell them who the spy collecting the information was, because there was an intermediary; and he would not betray the intermediary on any terms. And, by gad! I for one can’t help respecting the beggar for that remnant of loyalty.”

“A woman?” suggested Carrados.

“Even that, I believe, is not known, but very likely you have hit the mark. A woman would explain the element of chivalry that prompts Brown’s attitude. He is under open arrest now—nobody outside is supposed to know, but of course he can’t buy an evening paper without it being noted. They are in hope of something more definite turning up. At present they have pitched their suspicions on a German visitor staying at Cliffhurst.”

"Why?"

"I don't know, Max. They must fix on someone, you know. It's expected. All the same they are deucedly nervous at this end about the outcome."

"Did they say what Brown had given away?"

"Yes, egad! Do you know anything of the Croxton-Delahey torpedo?"

"A little," admitted Carrados.

"What does it do?" asked Mr Carlyle, with the rather sublime air of casual interest which he attached to any subject outside his own knowledge.

"It's rather an ingenious contrivance. It is fired like any other uncontrolled torpedo. At the end of a straight run—anything up to ten thousand yards at 55 knots with the superheated system—the diabolical creature stops and begins deliberately to slash a zigzag course over any area you have set it for. If in its roving it comes within two hundred feet of any considerable mass of iron it promptly makes for it, cuts its way through torpedo netting if any bars its progress, explodes its three hundredweight of gun-cotton and finishes its existence by firing a 24 lb. thorite shell through the breach it has made."

"'Um," mused Mr Carlyle, "I don't like the weapon, Max, but I would rather that we kept it to ourselves. Well, Mr Brown has given away the plans."

Carrados disposed of the end of his cigar and crossed the room to his open desk. From its appointed place he took a book inscribed "Engagements," touched a few pages and scribbled a line of comment here and there. Then he turned to his guest again.

"All right. I'll go down to Kingsmouth by the 12.17 to-morrow morning," he said. "Now I want you to look up the following points for me and let me have the particulars before I go."

Mr Carlyle again took out his pocket diary and beamed approvingly.

As a matter of fact the tenor of the replies he received influenced Carrados to make some change in his plans. Accompanied by

Parkinson he left London by the appointed train on the next day, but instead of proceeding to Kingsmouth he alighted at Cliffhurst, the pretty little seaside resort some five miles east of the great dockport. After securing rooms at the Rose and Plumes—an easy enough matter in October—he directed his attendant to take him to a sheltered seat on the winding paths below the promenade and there leave him for an hour.

"Very nicely kept, these walks and shrubberies, sir," remarked an affable voice from the other end of the bench. A leisurely pedestrian whose clothes and manner proclaimed him to be an aimless holiday-maker had sauntered along and, after a moment's hesitation, had sat down on the same form.

"Yes, Inspector," replied Carrados genially. "Almost up to the standard of our own Embankment Gardens, are they not?"

Detective-Inspector Tapling, of New Scotland Yard, went rather red and then laughed quietly.

"I wasn't quite sure at first if it was you, Mr Carrados," he apologised, moving nearer and lowering his voice. "I was to report to you here, sir, and to give you any information and assistance you might require."

"How are you getting on?" inquired Carrados.

"We think that we have got hold of the right man, sir; but for reasons that you can guess the Chief is very anxious to have no mistake this time."

"Muller?"

"Yes, sir. He has a furnished villa here in Cliffhurst and is very open-handed. The time he came fits in, so far as we can tell, with the beginning of the inquiries in Kingsmouth. Then, whatever his real name is, it isn't Muller."

"He is a German?"

"Oh yes; he's German right enough, sir. We've looked up telegrams to him from Lubeck—nothing important though—and he has changed German notes in Kingsmouth. He spends a lot of time over there—says the fishing is better, but that's all my eye, only the Kingsmouth boatmen get hold of the dockyard talk and

know more of the movements than the men about here. Then there's a lady."

"The intermediary?"

"That's further than we can go at the moment, but there is a lady at the furnished villa. She's not exactly Mrs Muller, we believe, but she lives there, if you understand what I mean, sir."

"Perfectly," acquiesced Carrados in the same modest spirit.

"So that all the necessary conditions can be shown to exist," concluded Tapling.

"But so far you have not a single positive fact connecting Muller with Brown?"

The Inspector admitted that he had not, but added hopefully that he was in immediate expectation of information that would enable him to link up the detached surmises into a conclusive chain of direct evidence.

"And if I might ask the favour of you, sir," he continued, "you would be doing us a great service if you would allow us to continue our investigation for another twenty-four hours. I think that by then we shall be able to show something solid. And if you certify what we have done, that's all to our credit, whereas if you take it out of our hands now——You see what I mean, Mr Carrados, but of course it lies entirely with you."

Carrados assented with his usual good nature. His actual business was only to examine the evidence before the arrest was made and to guarantee that the Home Office should not be involved in another spy-scare fiasco. He knew Tapling to be a reliable officer, and he did not doubt that the line he was working was the correct one. Least of all did he wish to deprive the man of his due credit.

"I can very well put in a day on my own account," he accordingly replied. "And so long as Muller is here there does not appear to be any special urgency. I suppose the odds are that the papers have been got away before you began to watch?"

"There is just a chance yet, we believe, sir; and the Admiralty is very keen on recovering those torpedo plans if it's to be done. Some of these foreign spies like to keep the thing as much as

possible in their own hands. There's more credit to it, and more cash, too, at headquarters if they do. Then if it comes to a matter of touch-and-go, a letter, and especially a letter from abroad, may be stopped on the way. You will say that a man may be, for that matter, but there's been another reason against posting valuable papers about here for the past week."

"Of course," assented Carrados with enlightenment. "The Suffragettes down here are out."

"I never thought to have any of that lot helping me," said the Inspector, absent-mindedly stroking his right shin; "but they may have turned the scale for us this time. There isn't a posting place from a rural pillar-box to the head office at Kingsmouth that has been really safe from them. They've even got at the registered letters in the sorting-rooms somehow. That's why I think there's a chance still."

Parkinson's approaching figure announced that an hour had passed. Carrados and the Inspector rose to walk away in different directions, but before they parted the blind man put a question that had confronted him several times, although he had as yet given only a glancing attention to the case.

"Now that Muller has got the plans of the torpedo, Inspector, why is he remaining here?"

It was a simple and an obvious inquiry, but before he replied Inspector Tapling looked round suspiciously. Then he further reduced the distance between them and dropped his voice to a whisper.

St Ethelburga's boasted the most tin-potty bell and the highest ritual of any church in Kingsmouth. Outside it resembled a brick barn, inside a marble palace, and its ministration overworked a vicar and two enthusiastic curates. It stood at the corner of Jubilee Street and Lower Dock Approach, a conjunction that should render further description of the neighbourhood superfluous.

The Rev. Byam Hosier, the senior curate, whose magnetic eloquence filled St Ethelburga's from chancel steps to porch, lodged in Jubilee Street, and there Mr Carrados found him at ten o'clock on the following morning. The curate had just finished his

breakfast, and the simultaneous correction of a batch of exercise books. He apologised for the disorder without justifying himself by explaining the cause, for instead of being a laggard Mr Hosier had already taken an early celebration, and afterwards allowed himself to be intercepted on his way back to attend to a domestic quarrel, a lost cat, and the arrangements for a funeral.

"I got your note last night, Mr Carrados," he said, after guiding his guest to a seat, for Parkinson had been dismissed to make himself agreeable elsewhere. "I am glad to show you my small collection, and still more so to have an opportunity of thanking you for the help you have given me from time to time."

Carrados lightly disclaimed the obligation. It was the first time the two had met, though, as the outcome of a review article, they had frequently corresponded. The clergyman went to his single cabinet, took out the top tray and put it down before his visitor on the now available table.

"Pherae," he said.

"May I touch the surfaces?" asked the blind man.

"Oh, certainly. Pray do. I am sorry——" He did not quite know what to say before the spectacle of the blind expert, with his eyes fixed elsewhere, passing a critical touch over the details that he himself loved to gaze upon.

In this one thing the Rev. Byam was fastidious. His clothes were generally bordering on the shabby, and he allowed himself to wear boots that shocked or amused the feminine element in the first half-dozen pews of St Ethelburga's. He might—as he frequently did, indeed—make a breakfast of weak tea, bread and butter and marmalade without any sense of deficiency, but in the matter of Greek coins his taste was exacting and his standard exact. His one small mahogany cabinet was pierced for five hundred specimens, and it was far from full, but every coin was the exquisite production of the golden era of the world's creative art.

It did not take Carrados three minutes to learn this. Occasionally he dropped a word of comment or inquiry, but for the most part tray succeeded tray in fascinated silence.

"Still Larissa," announced the clergyman, sliding out the last tray.

Under each coin was a circular ticket with written particulars of the specimen accompanying it. For some time Carrados took little interest in these commentaries, but presently Hosier noticed that his guest was submitting many of them to a close but quiet scrutiny.

"Excuse my asking, Mr Carrados," he said at length, "but are you quite blind?"

"Quite," was the unconcerned reply. "Why?"

"Because I noticed that you held some of the labels close to your eyes and I fancied that perhaps——"

"It is my way."

"Forgive my curiosity——"

"I can assure you, Mr Hosier, that other people are much more touchy about my blindness than I am. Now will you do me a kindness? I should like a copy of the inscriptions on half-a-dozen of these gems."

"With pleasure." The curate discovered pen and ink and paper and waited.

"This didrachm of the nymph Larissa wearing earrings; this of Artemis and the stag; this, and this, and this." The trays had been left displayed upon the table and Carrados's hand selected from them with unerring precision.

Hosier took the chosen coins and noted down the legends in their bold Greek capitals. "Shall I describe the type of each as well?" he asked.

"Thank you," assented his visitor. "If you don't mind writing that also in capitals and not blotting I shall read it so much the easier."

He accepted the sheet of paper and delicately touched the lettering along each line.

"I have a friend who will be equally interested in this," he remarked, taking out his pocket-book.

The clergyman had turned to remove a tray from the table when a sheet of paper, fluttering to the ground, caught his eye. He picked

it up and was returning it into the blind man's hand when he stopped in a sudden arrest of every movement.

"Good heavens, Mr Carrados!" he exclaimed in an agitated voice, "how does this come in your possession?"

"Your note?"

"You know that it is mine?"

"Yes—now," replied Carrados quietly. "It was sent to me by the Admiral-Superintendent of the Yard here. He wished to communicate with the writer."

"I am bewildered at the suddenness of this," protested the poor young man in some distress. "Let me tell you the circumstances—such at least as do not violate my promise."

He procured himself a glass of water from the sideboard, drank half of it and began to pace the room nervously as he talked.

"On Wednesday last, after taking Evensong at the church, I was leaving the vestry when a lady stepped forward and asked if she might speak to me privately. It is a request which a clergyman cannot refuse, Mr Carrados, but I endeavoured first to find out what she required, because people frequently come to one or another of us on business that really has to do with the clerk, or the organist, or something of that sort.

"She assured me that it was a personal matter and that no other official would do.

"The lights had by this time been extinguished in the church, and doubtless the apparitor had left. I gave her my address here and asked her if she would call in ten or twenty minutes. I preferred that she should present herself in the ordinary way.

"There is no need to go into extraneous details. The unhappy lady wished to unburden her conscience by making explicit confession, and she had come to me in consequence of a sermon which she had heard me preach on the Sunday before.

"It is not expedient to weigh considerations of time or circumstance in such a case. I allowed her to proceed, and she made her confession under the seal of inviolable confidence. It involved other persons besides herself. I besought her to undo as

far as possible the great harm she had done by making a full statement to the authorities, but this she was too weak—too terrified—to do. This clumsy warning of mine"—he pointed to the paper now lying on the table between them—"was the utmost concession that I could wring from her."

He stopped and looked at his visitor with a troubled face that seemed to demand some sort of assent to the dilemma.

"You are an Englishman, Mr Hosier, and you know what this might mean in a conflict—you know that one of our most formidable weapons has been annexed."

"My dear sir!" rapped out the distressed curate, "don't you think that I haven't worried about that? But behind the Englishman stands something more primitive, more just—the man. I gave my assurance as a man, and the Admiralty can go hang!"

"Besides," he added, in petulant reaction, "the poor woman is dying, and then everyone can know. Of course it may be too late."

"Do you mind telling me if the lady gave you the names of her accomplices?"

"How can I tell you, Mr Carrados? It may identify her in some way. I am too confounded by your unexpected appearance in the affair to know what is important and what is not."

"It will not implicate her. I have no concern there."

"Then, yes, she did. She gave me every detail."

"I ask because a man is suspected and on the point of arrest. He may be innocent. I have no deeper motive, but if the one for whom she is working is not a German called, or passing as, Muller, you might have some satisfaction in exonerating him."

The curate reflected a moment.

"He is not, Mr Carrados," he replied decidedly. "But please don't ask me anything more."

"Very well, I won't," said Carrados, rising. "Our numismatic conversation has taken a strange turn, Mr Hosier. There is a text for you—Money at the root of everything! By the way, I can do you one trifling service." He picked up the anonymous letter, tore it

across and held it out. “You have done all you could. Burn this and then you are clear of the matter.”

“Thanks, thanks. But won’t it get you into trouble with the Admiralty?”

“I make my own terms,” replied Carrados. “Now Mr Hosier, I have been an ill-omened bird, but I had no suspicion of this when I came. The ‘long arm’ has landed us this time. Will you come and dine with me one day this week, and I promise you not a single reference to this troublesome business?”

“You are very good,” assented Hosier.

“I am at Cliffhurst——”

“Cliffhurst?” was Hosier’s quick exclamation.

“Yes, at the Rose and Plumes.”

“I—I am very sorry, Mr Carrados,” stammered the curate, “but, after all, I am afraid that I must cry off. This week——”

“If the distance takes up too much of your time, may I send a car?”

“No, no, it isn’t that—at least, of course, one has to consider time and work. Thank you, Mr Carrados; you are very kind, but, really, if you don’t mind——”

Carrados courteously accepted the refusal without further pressure. He turned the momentary embarrassment by hoping that Hosier would not fail to call on him when next in London, and the curate availed himself of the compromise to protest the pleasure that it would afford him. Parkinson was summoned and the strangely developed visit came to an end.

Parkinson doubtless found his master a dull companion on the way back. Carrados had to rearrange his ideas from the preconception which he had so far tentatively based on Inspector Tapling’s report, and he was faced by the necessity of discovering whose presence made the Rose and Plumes Hotel inexplicably distasteful to Mr Hosier just then. Only two flashes of conversation broke the journey, both of which may be taken as showing the trend of Max Carrados’s mind, and demonstrating the sound common sense exhibited by his henchman.

"It is a mistake they often make, Parkinson, to begin looking with a fixed idea of what they are going to find."

"Yes, sir."

And, ten minutes later:

"But I don't know that it would be safe yet to ignore the obvious altogether."

"No, sir," replied Parkinson.

"Not guilty, my lord!"

That was the link for which Carrados had been waiting patiently each day since his visit to Kingsmouth; or, more exactly, since the sound of a voice heard in the hotel on his return had stirred a memory that he could not materialise. Parkinson had described the man with photographic exactness and still recognition was balked. Tapling, who found himself at a deadlock before the furnished villa, both by reason of his want of progress and at Carrados's recommendation, contributed his observation, which was guardedly negative. Everyone about knew Mr Slater—"a pleasant, open-handed gentleman, with a word and a joke for all"—but no one knew anything of him, as, indeed, who should know of a leisurely bird of passage staying for a little time at a seaside hotel?

Then across the lounge rang the mock-serious repartee, and enlightenment cut into the patient listener's brain like a flash of inspiration.

These were the three telegrams which immediately came into existence as a result of that ray, deciphered here from their code obscurity:

"*To* Greatorex, Turrets, Richmond, Surrey.

"Extract Times full report trial Henry Frankworth, convicted embezzlement early 1906, and forward express.—Carrados."

"*To* Wrattesley, Home Office, Whitehall, S.W.

"Will you please have Lincoln authorities instructed to send me confidential report antecedents Henry Frankworth, embezzler, native Trudstone that county. Urgent.—Wynn Carrados."

"*To* Carlyle, 72a Bampton St., W.C.

"My dear Louis,—Why not come down week-end talk things over? Meanwhile make every effort discover subsequent history Henry Frankworth convicted embezzlement Central Criminal Court early 1906. Beedel will furnish police records. Pressing.—Max."

On his way upstairs a few hours later Carrados looked in at the reception office to inquire if there were any letters.

"By the by," he remarked, after he had turned to leave, "I wonder if you happen to have a room a little—just a little—farther away from the drawing-room?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the clerk. "Does the playing annoy you? They do keep it up rather late sometimes, don't they?"

"No, it doesn't annoy me," admitted Carrados; "on the contrary, I am passionately fond of it. But it tempts me into lying awake listening when I ought to be asleep."

The young lady laughed pleasantly. It was her business to be agreeable.

"You are considerate!" she rippled. "Well, there's the further corridor; or, of course, a floor above——"

"The floor above would do nicely. Not on the front if possible. The sea is rather noisy."

"Second floor, west corridor." She glanced at her keyboard. "No. 15?"

"Is that the side overlooking the——?"

"The High Street," she prompted.

"I am such a poor sleeper," he apologised.

"No. 21 on the other side, overlooking the gardens?" she suggested.

"I am sure that will do admirably," he said, with the gratitude that is always so touching from the blind. "Thank you for taking so much trouble to pick it for me. Good-night."

"I will have your things transferred to-morrow," she nodded after him.

An hour later Mr Slater, generally the last man to leave the lounge, strolled across to the office for his key.

"No. 22, sir, isn't it?" she hazarded, unhooking it without waiting for the number.

"Good little girl," he assented approvingly. "What a brain beneath that fascinating aureola. Eh bien, au revoir, petite! You ought to be about snuffing the candle yourself, my dear."

The young lady laughed just as pleasantly. It was her business to be equally agreeable to all.

Mr Carrados was sitting in an alcove of the lounge on the following morning when Parkinson brought him a letter. It proved to be the extract from The Times, written on the special typewriter. The day was bright and inviting and the room was deserted. On his master's instruction Parkinson sat down and waited while the blind man rapidly deciphered the half-dozen sheets of typewriting.

"You have been with me to the Old Bailey several times," remarked Carrados, as he slowly replaced the document. "Do you remember an occasion in February 1906?"

Parkinson looked unnecessarily wise, but was unable to acquiesce. Carrados gave him another guide.

"A man named Frankworth was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for an ingenious system of theft. He had also fraudulently disposed of information to trade rivals of his employer."

"I apprehend the circumstances now, sir."

"Can you recall the appearance of the prisoner?"

Parkinson thought that he could, but he did not rise to the suggestion and Carrados was obliged to follow the direct line.

"Have you seen anyone lately—here in the hotel—who might be Frankworth?"

"I can't say that I have, sir."

"Take Mr Slater now. Shave off his beard and moustache."

Parkinson began to look respectfully uncomfortable.

"Do you mean, sir——"

"By an effort of the imagination, Parkinson. Close your eyes and picture Mr Slater as a clean-shaven man, some years younger, standing in the dock——"

"Yes, sir. There is a distinct resemblance."

With this Max Carrados had to be satisfied for the time. Long memory was not Parkinson's strong point, but he had his own pre-eminent gift, and of this his master was to have an immediate example that outweighed every possible deficiency.

"Speaking of Mr Slater, sir, I noticed a curious thing that I intended to mention, as you told me to be particularly observant."

Carrados nodded encouragingly.

"I was talking to Herbert early this morning as he cleaned the boots. He is a very bigoted Free Trader, sir, and is thinking of becoming a Mormon, and I was speaking to him about it. Presently he came to No. 22's—Mr Slater's. They were muddy, for Mr Slater went out for a walk last night—I saw him as he returned. But the boots that Mr Slater put out to be cleaned last night were not the boots that he went out in and got wet, although they were exactly the same make."

"That is certainly curious," admitted Carrados slowly. "There was only one pair put out?"

"That is all, sir; and they were not the boots that Mr Slater has worn every day since I began to notice him particularly. He always does wear the same pair, morning, noon and night."

"Wait," said Carrados briskly. An idea bordering on the fantastic flashed between a sentence in the report which he had just been reading and Parkinson's discovery. He took out the sheets, ran his finger along the lines and again read—"stated that the prisoner was the son of a respectable bootmaker, and had followed the occupation himself." "I know how accurate you are, Parkinson, but this may be of superlative importance. You see that?"

"I had not contemplated it in that light, sir."

"But what did the incident suggest to you?"

"I inferred, sir, that Mr Slater must have had some reason for going out again after the hotel was closed."

"Yes, that might explain half; but what if he did not?" persisted Carrados.

Parkinson wisely dismissed the intellectual problem as outside his sphere.

"Then I am unable to suggest why the gentleman cleaned his muddy boots himself and muddied his clean boots, sir."

"Yes, that is what it comes to. He is wearing the same pair again this morning?"

"Yes, sir. The boots that were dirty at ten o'clock last night."

"Pay particular attention to Mr Slater's boots in future. I have transferred to No. 21, so you will have every opportunity. Talk to Herbert about Tariff Reform to-morrow morning. In the meanwhile—Are they any particular make?"

"'Moorland hand-made waterproof,' a heavy shooting boot, sir. Size 7. Rossiter, of Kingsmouth, is the maker."

"In the meanwhile go to Kingsmouth and buy an identical pair. Before you go cut the sole off one of your oldest boots and bring me a piece about three inches square. Buy yourself another pair. Here is a note. Do you know which chamber-maid has charge of No. 21?"

"I could ascertain, sir."

"It would be as well. You might buy her a bangle out of the change—if you have no personal objection to the young lady's society. And, Parkinson——"

"Yes, sir?"

"I know you to be discreet and reliable. The work we are engaged on here is exceptionally important and equally honourable. A mistake might ruin it. That is all."

"Thank you, sir." Parkinson marched away with his head a little higher for the guarded compliment. It was the essence of the man's extraordinary value to his master that while on some subjects he thought deeply, on others he did not think at all; and he contrived automatically to separate everything into its proper compartment.

"Here is what you require, sir," he said, returning with the square of leather.

"Come across to the fireplace," said Carrados. "There is still no one else in the lounge?"

"No, sir."

“Who would be the last servant to see to this room at night—to leave the fire safe and the windows fastened?”

“The hall porter, sir.”

“Where is he now?”

“In the outer hall.”

Carrados bent towards the fire. “It’s a million-to-one chance,” he thought, “but it’s worth trying.” He dropped the leather on to the red coals, waited until it began to smoke fiercely, and then, lifting it out with the tongs, he allowed the pungent aromatic odour to diffuse into the air for a few seconds. A minute later the charred fragment had lost its identity among the embers.

“Go now, and on your way tell the hall porter that I want to speak to him.”

The hall porter came, a magnificent being, but full of affable condescension.

“You sent for me, sir?”

Carrados was sitting at a table near the fire.

“Yes. I am a little nervous. Do you smell anything burning?”

The porter sniffed the air—superfluously but loudly, so that the blind gentleman should hear that he was not failing in his duty. Then he looked comprehensively around.

“There certainly is a sort of hottish smell somewhere, sir,” he admitted.

“It isn’t any woodwork about the fireplace scorching? We blind are so helpless.”

“That’s all right, sir.” He laid a broad hand on the mantelpiece and then rapped it reassuringly. “Solid marble that, sir. You needn’t be afraid; I’ll give a look across now and then.”

“Thank you, if you will,” said Carrados, with relief in his voice. “And, by the way, will you ring for Maurice as you go?”

A distant bell churred. Across the room, like a strangely balancing bird, skimmed a waiter.

“Sair?”

“Oh, is that you, Maurice? I want——By the way, what’s that burning?”

"Burning, sair?"

"Yes; don't you smell anything?"

"There is an odour of smell," admitted Maurice sagely, "but it is nothing to see."

"You don't know the smell?"

The waiter shook his head and looked vague. Carrados divined perplexity.

"Oh, I dare say it's nothing," he declared carelessly. "Will you get me a sherry and khoosh?"

The million-to-one chance had failed.

"Sherry and bittaire, sair."

Maurice deposited the glass with great precision, regarded it sadly and then moved it three inches to the right.

"I 'ave recollect this odour, sair," he remarked, "although I cannot give actuality. I 'ave met him here before, but—less—less forcefully."

"When?"

"Oh, one week since, perhaps."

"Something in the coals?" suggested Carrados.

"I imagine yes," pondered Maurice conscientiously. "I was 'brightening up,' you say, for the night, and the fire was low down. I squash it with the poker still more for safety."

"Oh, then the lounge would be empty?"

"Yes—of people. Only Mr Slataire already departing."

Carrados indicated that he did not want the change and dismissed the subject.

"So long as nothing's on fire," he said with indifference.

"Thank you, sair."

The million-to-one chance had come off after all.

Two days later, walking beyond the usual limit of the conventional promenade, Carrados reached a rough wooden hut such as contractors erect during the progress of their work. Having accompanied his master to the door, Parkinson returned towards

the promenade and sat down to admire the seascape from the nearest bench.

Inside the hut three men had been waiting. One of the trio, a tall, military-looking man with the air of a personage, had been sitting on a whitewash-splashed trestle reading The Times. Of the others, one was Inspector Tapling, and the third a dwarfish, wizened creature with the air of a converted ostler. He had passed the time by watching the Cliffhurst side through a knot-hole in a plank. With the entrance of Carrados the tall man folded his newspaper and a period of expectancy seemed to have come to an end.

"Good-morning, Colonel, Inspector and you there, Bob."

"You found your way, Mr Carrados?" remarked the Colonel.

"Yes; it is not really I who am late. I had a letter this morning from Wrattesley holding me up for a wire at 10.30. It did not arrive till 10.45."

"Ah, it did come! Then we may regard everything as settled?"

"No, Colonel. On the contrary, we must accept everything as upset."

"What, sir?"

Carrados took out the slim pocket-book, extracted a telegram and held it out.

"What is this?" demanded the Colonel, peering through his glasses in the indifferent light. "'Laburnum edifice plaster dark dark late herald same dome aurora dark vitiate camp encase.' I don't know the code."

"Oh, it's Westneath's arrangement," explained Carrados. "'The individual with whom we are concerned must not be arrested on charge, but it is of the gravest importance that the papers in question be recovered. There must be no public proceedings even if conviction assured.'"

There was a moment of stupefaction.

"This—this is a bombshell!" exclaimed the Colonel. "What does it mean?"

"Politics," replied Carrados tersely.

"Ah!" soliloquised Tapling, walking to the door and looking sympathetically out at the gloomy prospect of sea and sky.

"But I've had no notification," protested the Colonel. "Surely, Mr Carrados——"

"The wire is probably at the station."

"True; you said 10.45. Well, what do you propose doing now?"

"Scrapping all our arrangements and recovering the papers without arresting Slater."

"In what way?"

"At the moment I have not the faintest idea."

The Inspector left the door and came back moodily to his old position.

"We have reason to think that he is becoming suspicious, Mr Carrados," he remarked. "He may decide to go any hour."

"Then the sooner we act the better."

The stunted pigmy in the background had been listening to the conversation with rapt attention, fastening his eyes unwinkingly on each face in turn. He now glided forward.

"Listen to me, gents," he said, throwing round a cunning leer; "how does this sound? This afternoon...."

That afternoon Mr Slater had been for what he termed "a blow of the briny," as his custom was on a fine day. He was returning in the dusk and had crossed the spacious promenade when, at a corner, he almost ran into the broad figure of a policeman who stood talking to a woman on the path.

"That's the man!" exclaimed the woman with almost vicious certainty.

Mr Slater fell back a step in momentary alarm; then, recovering his self-control, he went forward with admirable composure.

"Beg pardon, sir," explained the constable, "but this young lady has just lost her purse. She says she was sitting next to you on a seat——"

"And the minute after he had gone—the very minute—my bag was open like you see it now and my purse vanished," interposed the lady volubly.

“On the seat by the lifeboat where I passed you, sir,” amplified the constable.

“This is ridiculous,” said Mr Slater with a breath of relief. “I am a gentleman and I have no need to steal purses. My name is Slater, and I am staying at the Rose and Plumes.”

“Yes, sir,” assented the policeman respectfully. “I know you by sight, sir, and have seen you go there. You hear what the gentleman says, miss?”

“Gentleman or no gentleman, I know my purse has gone,” snapped the girl. “If he hasn’t got it why did it vanish—where is it now? That’s all I ask—where is it now?”

“You’ve seen nothing of it, I take it, sir?”

“No, of course I haven’t,” retorted the gentleman contemptuously. “I was sitting on a seat. The woman may have sat next to me—someone reading certainly did. Then I got up, walked once or twice up and down and came across. That’s all.”

“What was in the purse, miss?” inquired the constable.

“A postal order for a sovereign—and, thank the Lord, I’ve got the tag of it—a half-crown, two shillings and a few coppers, a Kruger sixpence with a hole through, a gold gipsy ring with pearls, the return half of my ticket, some hairpins and a few recipes, a book of powder papers, a pocket mirror——”

“That ought to be enough to identify it by,” said the constable, catching Mr Slater’s eye in humorous sympathy. “Well, miss, you’d better come to the station and report the loss. Perhaps you’ll look in as well, sir?”

“Does that mean,” demanded Mr Slater with a dark gleam, “that I am to be charged with theft?”

“Bless you, no, sir,” was the easy reassurance. “We couldn’t take a charge in the circumstances—not with a gentleman of respectable position and known address. But it might save you some inquiry and bother later, and if it was myself I should like to get it done with while it was red-hot, so to speak.”

“I will go now,” decided Mr Slater. “Do I walk with——?”

"Just as you like, sir. You can go before or follow on. It's only just down Bank Street."

The two went on and the gentleman followed at a few yards' interval. Three minutes and a blue lamp indicated their destination. No other pedestrian was in sight; the door stood hospitably open and Mr Slater walked in.

The station Inspector was seated at a desk when they entered and a couple of other officials stood about the room. The policeman explained the circumstances of the loss, the Inspector noting the details in the record-book.

"This gentleman voluntarily accompanied us as he had been brought into the case," concluded the policeman.

"Here is my card, Superintendent," said Mr Slater with some importance. He had determined to be agreeable, but dignified, and to enlist the Inspector on his side. "I am staying at the Rose and Plumes. It's deuced unpleasant, you know, for a gentleman in my position to have to answer to a charge like this. That's why I came at once to clear the matter up."

"Quite so, sir," replied the Inspector; "but there is no charge at present." He turned to the girl. "You understand that if you sign the charge-sheet and it turns out that you are mistaken it may be a serious matter?"

"I only want my purse and money back," replied the young woman mulishly.

"We will try to find it for you; but there is nothing beyond your suspicion that this gentleman has ever seen it. Probably, sir, you don't possess a sovereign postal order, or a Kruger coin, or any of the other articles, even of your own?"

"I don't," replied Mr Slater. "Except, of course, some silver and copper. If it will satisfy you I will turn out my pockets."

The Inspector looked at the complainant.

"You hear that, miss?"

"Oh, very well," she retorted. "If he really hasn't got it I shall be the one to look silly, shan't I?"

On this encouragement Mr Slater made a display of his various possessions, turning out each pocket as he emptied it. The contents were laid before the Inspector, who satisfied himself by a glance of their innocent nature.

"I should warn you that I am going to bring out a loaded revolver," said Mr Slater when he came to his hip-pocket. "I travel a good deal abroad and often in wild parts, where it is necessary to carry a pistol for protection."

The Inspector nodded and examined the weapon with a knowing touch. The last pocket was displayed.

"That's not what I mean," objected the girl with a dogged air, as everyone began to regard her in varying degrees of inquiry. "You don't suppose that anyone would keep the things in their pocket, do you? I thought you meant properly."

The Inspector addressed himself to Mr Slater again in a matter-of-fact, business manner.

"Perhaps you would like one of my men to put his hand over you to settle the matter, sir?" he asked.

For just a couple of seconds there was the pause of hesitation.

"If nothing is found you withdraw all imputation against this gentleman?" demanded the Inspector of the girl.

"Suppose I must," she admitted with an admirable pose of sulky acquiescence. In less exciting moments the young lady was a valued member of the Kingsmouth Amateur Dramatic Society.

"Oh, all right," assented Mr Slater. "Only get it over."

"You quite understand that the search is entirely voluntary on your part, sir. Hilldick!"

One of the other policemen came forward.

"You can stand where you are, sir," he directed. With the practised skill of, say, a Custom House officer from Kingsmouth, he used his fingers dexterously about the gentleman's clothing. "Now, sir, will you sit down and remove your boots for a moment?"

"My boots!" The man's eyes narrowed and his mouth took another line. He glanced at the Inspector. "Is it really necessary——?"

“That’s it!” came from the girl in a fiercely exultant whisper. “He’s slipped them in his boots!”

“Idiot!” commented Mr Slater. He sat down and slowly drew slack the laces.

“Thank you,” said Hilldick. He picked up both boots and with them turned to the table underneath the light. The next moment there was a sound like the main-spring of a clock going wrong and the sole and the upper of one boot came violently apart.

“You scoundrel!” screamed Slater, leaping from the chair.

But the grouping of the room had undergone a quiet change. Two men closed in on his right and left, and Mr Slater sat down again. The Inspector opened the desk, dropped in the revolver and turned the key. Then all eyes went again to Hilldick and saw—nothing.

“The other boot,” came in a quiet voice from the doorway to the inner room. “But just let me have it for a second.”

It was put into his hands, and Carrados examined it in unmoved composure, while unpresentable words flowed in a blistering stream from Slater’s lips.

“Yes, it is very good workmanship, Mr Frankworth,” remarked the blind man. “You haven’t forgotten your early training. All right, Hilldick.”

The tool cut and rasped again and the stitches flew. But this time from the opening, snugly lying in a space cut out among the leathers, a flat packet slid down to the ground.

Someone tore open the oiled silk covering and spread out the contents. Six sheets of fine tracing paper, each covered with signs and drawings, were disclosed.

The finality of the discovery acted on the culprit like a douche of water. He ceased to revile, and a white and deadly calm came over him.

“I don’t know who is responsible for this atrocious outrage,” he said between his clenched teeth, “but everyone concerned shall pay dearly for it. I am a naturalised Frenchman, and my adopted country will demand immediate satisfaction.”

“Your adopted country is welcome to you, and it’s going to have you back again,” said the Inspector grimly. “Here is a pair of boots exactly like your own—we only retain the papers, which do not belong to you. You are allowed twenty-four hours to be clear of the country. If you have not sailed by this time to-morrow you will be arrested as Henry Frankworth for failing to report yourself when on licence and sent to serve the unexpired portion of your sentence. If you return at any time the same course will be followed. Inspector Tapling, here is the warrant. You will keep Frankworth under observation and act as the circumstances demand.”

Henry Frankworth glared round the room vindictively, drew himself up and clenched his fists. Then his figure drooped, and he turned and walked dully out into the darkening night.

“So you let the German spy slip through your fingers after all,” protested Mr Carlyle warmly. “I know that it was on instructions, and not your doing, Max; but why, why on earth, why?”

Carrados smiled and pointed to the heading of a column in an evening paper that he picked up from his side.

“There is your answer, Louis,” he replied.

“‘Position of the Entente. What does France Mean?’” read the gentleman. “What has that got to do with it?”

“Your German spy was a French spy, Louis, and just at this moment a certain section of the public, led by a certain gang of politicians and aided by a certain interest in the Press, is doing its best to imperil the Entente. The Government has no desire to have the Entente imperilled. Hence your wail. If the dear old emotional, pig-headed, Rule-Britannia! public had got it that French spies were stalking through the land at this crisis, then, indeed, the fat would have been in the fire!”

“But, upon my soul, Max——Well, well; I hope that I am the last man to be led by newspaper clap-trap, but I think that it’s a deuced queer proceeding all the same. Why should our ally want our secret plans?”

“Why not, if he can get them?” demanded Max Carrados philosophically. “One never knows what may happen next. We

ought to have plans and knowledge of all the French strategic positions as well as of the German. I hope that we have, but I doubt it. It would be a guarantee of peace and good relations."

"There are times, Max," declared Mr Carlyle severely, "when I suspect you of being—er—paradoxical."

"Can you imagine, Louis, an Archbishop of Canterbury, or a Poet Laureate, or a Chancellor of the Exchequer being friendly—perhaps even dining—with the editor of The Times?"

"Certainly; why not?"

"Yet in the editor's office, drawn up by his orders, there is probably a three-column obituary notice of each of those impersonalities. Does it mean that the editor wishes them to die—much less has any intention of poisoning their wine? Ridiculous! He merely, as a prudent man, prepares for an eventuality, so as not to be caught unready by a misfortune which he sincerely hopes will never take place—in his time, that is to say."

"Well, well," said Mr Carlyle benignantly—they were lunching together at Vitet's, on Carrados's return—"I am glad that we got the papers. One thing I cannot understand. Why didn't the fellow get clear as soon as he had the plans?"

"Ah," admitted the blind man, "why not, indeed? Even Inspector Tapling bated his breath when he suggested the reason to me."

"And what was that?" inquired Carlyle with intense interest.

Mr Carrados looked extremely mysterious and half-reluctant for a moment. Then he spoke.

"Do you know, Louis, of any great secret military camp where a surprise fleet of dirigibles and flying machines of a new and terrible pattern is being formed by a far-seeing Government as a reserve against the day of Armageddon?"

"No," admitted Mr Carlyle, with staring eyes, "I don't."

"Nor do I," contributed Carrados.

IX

The Eastern Mystery

It could scarcely be called Harris's fault, whatever the driver next behind might say in the momentary bitterness of his heart. In the two-fifths of a second of grace at his disposal Mr Carrados's chauffeur had done all that was possible and the bunt that his radiator gave the stair-guard of the London General in front was insignificant. Then a Railway Express Delivery skated on its dead weight into his luggage platform and a Pickford, turning adroitly out of the mêlée, slewed a stationary Gearless round by its hand-rail stanchion to spread terror among the other line of traffic.

The most unconcerned person, to all appearance, was the driver of the London General, the vehicle whose sudden stoppage had initiated the riot of confusion. He had seen a man, engrossed to the absolute exclusion of his surroundings by something that took his eye on the opposite footpath, dash into the road and then, brought up suddenly by a realisation of his position, attempt to retrace his steps. He had pulled up so expertly that the man escaped, so smoothly that not a passenger was jarred, and now he sat with a dazed and vacant expression on his face, leaning forward on his steering wheel, while caustic inquiry and retort winged unheeded up and down the line behind him.

It was not until the indispensable ceremony of everyone taking everyone else's name and number had been observed under the authority of the tutelary constable that the single occupant of the private car stirred to show any interest in the proceedings.

"Parkinson," he called quietly, summoning his attendant to the window. "Ask Mr Tulloch if he will come round here when he has finished with the policeman."

"Mr Tulloch, sir?"

"Yes; you remember Dr Tulloch of Netherhempsfield? He is on in front there."

A moment later Jim Tulloch, as genial as of old, but his exuberance temporarily damped by the cross-bickering in which he had just been involved, thrust his head and arm through the sash.

"Lord, lord, it really is you then, Wynn, old man?" he cried. "When your Parkinson came up I couldn't believe it for a minute, simply couldn't believe it. The world grows smaller, I declare."

"At all events this car does," responded Carrados, wringing the hearty, outstretched hand. "They've got us two inches less than the makers ever intended. Is it really your doing, Jim?"

"Did ever you hear such a thing?" protested Tulloch. "And yet that wall-eyed atrocity yonder has kidded the copper that if he hadn't stopped dead—well, I should."

"Was it a near thing?" asked Carrados confidentially.

"Well, strictly between ourselves, I don't mind admitting that it might have been something of a shave," confessed Tulloch, with a cheerful grin. "But, lord bless you, Wynn, the streets of London are paved with 'em nowadays, paved with them. You don't merely take your life in your hands if you want to get about; you carry it on each foot."

"Look here," said Carrados. "You never let me know that you were up in town, Tulloch. What are you doing to-day?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted Parkinson's respectful voice, "but the policeman wishes to speak with you, sir."

"With me?" queried Tulloch restlessly. "Oh, good lord! have we to go into all that again?"

"It's only the bus-driver, sir," apologised the constable with the tactful deference that the circumstances seemed to demand. "As you are a doctor—I think there's something the matter with him."

"I'm sure there is," assented Tulloch. "All right, I'm coming. Are you in a hurry, Wynn?"

"I'll wait," was the reply.

The doctor found his patient propped up on a doorstep. Having, as he expressed it afterwards, "run the rule over him," he

prescribed a glass of water and an hour's rest. The man was shaken, that was all.

"Nerves, Wynn," he announced when he returned to his friend. "I don't quite understand his emotion, but the shock of not having run over me seems to have upset the poor fellow."

"I was asking you whether you were doing anything to-day," said Carrados. "Can you come back with me to Richmond?"

"I'm not doing anything as far as that goes," admitted Tulloch. "In fact," he added ruefully, "that's the plague of it. I'm waiting to hear from a man who's waiting to hear from another man, and *he's* depending on something that may or mayn't, you understand."

"Then you can come along now anyway. Get in."

"If it's dinner you mean, I can't come straight away, you know," protested Tulloch. "Look at me togs"—he stood back to display a serviceable Norfolk suit—"all right for the six-thirty sharp of a Bloomsbury boarding-house, but—eh, what?"

"Don't be an ass, Jim," said the blind man amiably. "I can't see your silly togs."

"No ladies or any of your tony friends?"

"Not a soul."

"The fact is," confided Tulloch, taking his place in the car, "I've been out of things for a bit, Wynn, and I'm finding civilisation a shade cast-iron now. I've been down in the wilds since you were with me."

"I wondered where you were. I wrote to you about six months ago and the letter came back."

"Did it actually? Now that must have been almighty careless of someone, Wynn. I'm sorry; I'm a bit of a rolling stone, I suppose. When Darrish came back to Netherhempsfield my job was done there. I felt uncommonly restless. I hadn't much chance of buying a practice or dropping into a partnership worth having and I jibbed at setting up in some God-forsaken backwater and slipping into middle age 'building up a connection.' Lord, lord, Carrados, the tragic monotony of your elderly professional nonentity! I've known men who've whispered to me between the pulls at confidential

pipes that they've come to hate the streets and the houses and the same old everlasting silly faces that they met day after day until they began to think very queer thoughts of how they might get away from it all."

"Yes," said Carrados.

"Anyway, 'Not yet,' I promised myself, and when I got the chance of a temporary thing on a Red Cable liner I took it like a shot. That was something. If there was a mighty sameness about it after a bit, it wasn't the sameness I'd been accustomed to. Then, as luck of one sort or another would have it, I got laid out with a broken ankle on a Bombay quay."

Carrados voiced commiseration.

"But you made a very good mend of it," he said. "It's the left, of course. I don't suppose anyone ever notices it."

"I took care of that," replied Tulloch. "But it was a slow business and threw all my plans out. I was on a very loose end when one day, outside the Secretariat, as they call it, I ran up against a man called Fraser whom I'd known building a viaduct or something of that sort in the Black Country.

"'What on earth are *you* doing here?' we naturally both said at once, and he was the first to reply.

"'I'm just off to repair an irrigation "bund" a thousand miles more or less away, and I'm looking for a doctor who can speak six words of Hindustani, and doesn't mind things as they are, to physic the camp. What are you doing?'

"'Good lord! old man,' I said, 'I was looking for you!'"

It only required an occasional word to keep Tulloch going, and Carrados supplied it. He heard much that did not interest him—of the journey inland, of the face of the country, the surprising weather, the great work of irrigation and the other impressive wonders of man and nature. These things could be got from books, but among the weightier cargo Tulloch now and again touched off some inimitable phase of life or told an uninventable anecdote of native character that lived.

Yet the buoyant doctor had something on his mind, for several times he stopped abruptly on the edge of a reminiscence, as though

he was doubtful, if not of the matter, at least of the manner in which he should begin. These indications were not lost on his friend, but Carrados made no attempt to press him, being very well assured that sooner or later the ingenuous Jim would find himself beyond retreat. The occasion came with the cigarettes after dinner. There had been a reference to the language.

"I often wished that I was a better stick at it," said Tulloch. "I'd picked up a bit in Bombay and of course I threw myself into it when Fraser got me the post. I managed pretty well with the coolies in the camp, but when I tried to have a word with the ryots living round—little twopenny ha'penny farmers, you know—I could make no show of it. A lot of queer fish you come across out there, in one way or another, you take my word. You never know whether a man's a professional saint of extreme holiness or a hereditary body-snatcher whose shadow would make a begging leper consider himself unclean until he had walked seventy miles to drink a cupful of filthy water out of a stinking pond that a pock-marked ascetic had been sitting in for three years in order to contemplate quietly."

"Possibly he really was unclean—in consequence or otherwise," suggested Carrados.

"Help!" exclaimed Tulloch tragically. "There are things that have to be seen. But then so was the sanctified image, so that there's nothing for an outsider to go by. And then all the different little lots with their own particular little heavens and their own one exclusive way of getting there, and their social frills and furbelows—Jats and Jains and Thugs and Mairs and Gonds and Bhills and Toms, Dicks and Harrys—suburban society is nothing to it, Wynn, nothing at all. There was a strange old joker I've had in mind to tell you about, though it was no joke for him in the end. God alone knows where he came from, but he was in the camp one evening juggling for stray coppers in a bowl. Pretty good juggling too it seemed to be, of the usual Indian kind—growing a plant out of a pumpkin seed, turning a stick into a live snake, and the old sword and basket trick that every Eastern conjurer keeps up his sleeve; but all done out in the open, with people squatting round and a simplicity of appliance that would have taken all the curl out

of one of your music-hall magicians. With him he had a boy, his son, a misshapen, monkey-like anatomy of about ten, but there was no doubt that the man was desperately fond of his unattractive offspring.

"That night this ungainly urchin, taking a cooler in one of the big irrigation canals, got laid hold of by an alligator and raised the most unearthly screech anything human—if he really was human—ever got out. I seemed to have had something prominent to do with the damp job of getting as much of him away from the creature as we could, and old Calico—that's what we anglicised the juggler's name into—had some sort of idea of being grateful in consequence. Although I don't doubt that he'd have put much more faith in a local wizard if one had been available, he let us take the boy into the hospital tent and do what we could for him. It wasn't much, and I told my assistant to break it to poor old Calico that he must be prepared for the worst. A handy man, that assistant, Wynn. He was a half-bred 'Portugoose,' as they say in Bombay, with the name of Vasque d'Almeydo, and I understood that he'd had some training. When we got out there he said that it was all the same to him, but he admitted quite blandly that he was really a cook and nothing more. What about his excellent testimonials? I asked him, and he replied with cheerful impenitence that he had hired them in the open market for one rupee eight, adding feelingly that he would willingly have given twice as much to qualify for my honorable service. In the end he did pretty much as he liked, and as he could speak five languages and scramble through seven dialects I was glad to have him about on any terms. I don't quite know how he broke it, but when I saw him later he said that Calico was a 'great dam fool.' He was a conjurer and knew how tricks were done and yet he had set out at once for some place thirty miles away—to procure a charm of some sort, the Portuguese would swear from a hint he had got. Vasque—of course by this time he'd become Valasquez to us—laughed pleasantly as he commented on native credulity. He was a Roman Catholic himself, so that he could afford it. The next day the boy died and an hour later poor Calico came reeling in. He'd got a nasty cut over the eye and a map of the route drawn

over him in thorns and blisters and sand-burns, but he'd got something wrapped away in a bit of rag carried in the left armpit, and I felt for the poor old heathen. When he understood, he borrowed a spade and, taking up the child just as he was, he went off into the pagan solitude to bury him. I'd got used to these simple ways by that time.

"I thought that I'd seen the end of the incident, but late that night I heard the sentry outside challenge someone—we'd had so many tools and things looted by 'friendlies' that they'd lent us half a company of Sikhs from Kharikhas—and a moment later Calico was salaaming at the tent door. As it happened, Valasquez was away at a thing they called a village trafficking for some ducks, and I had to grapple with the conversation as best I could—no joke, I may tell you, for the juggler's grasp on conventional Urdu was about as slender as my own. And the first thing he did was to put his paws on to my astonished feet, then up to his forehead, and to prostrate himself to the ground.

"'Sahib,' he protested earnestly, 'I am thy slave and docile elephant for that which thou hast done for the man-child of my house.'

"Now you know, Carrados, I simply can't stand that sort of thing. It makes me feel such a colossal ass. So I tried, ungraciously enough I dare swear, to cut him short. But it couldn't be done. Poor old Calico had come to discharge what weighed on him as a formidable obligation and my 'Don't mention it, old chap,' style was quite out of the picture. Finally, from some obscure fold of his outfit, he produced a little screw of cloth and began to unwrap it.

"'Take it, O sahib, and treasure it as you would a cup of water in the desert, for it has great virtue of the hidden kind. Condescend to accept it, for it is all I have worthy of so great a burden.'

"'I couldn't think of it, Khaligar,' I said, trying to give his name a romantic twist, for the other sounded like guying him. 'I've done nothing, you know, and in any case this is much more likely to work with you than with me—an unbeliever. What is it, anyway?'

"'It is the sacred tooth of the ape-god Hanuman and it protects from harm,' he replied, reverently displaying what looked to me

like an old rusty nail. ‘Had I but been able to touch so much as the hem of the garment of my manlet with it before the hour of his outgoing he would assuredly have recovered.’

“‘Then keep it for your own protection,’ I urged. ‘I expect that you run more risks than I do.’

“‘When the flame has been extinguished from a candle the smoke lingers but a moment before it also fades away,’ he replied. ‘Thy mean servant has no wish to live now that the light of his eyes has gone out, nor does he seek to avert by magic that which is written on his forehead.’

“‘Then it is witchcraft?’ I said, pointing to the amulet.

“‘I know not, my lord,’ he answered; ‘but if it be witchcraft it is of the honourable sort and not the goety of Sahitan. For this cause it is only of avail to one who acquires it without treachery or guile. Take it, sahib, but do not suffer it to become known even to those of your own table.’

“‘Why not?’ I asked.

“‘Who should boast of pearls in a camp of armed bandits?’ he replied evasively. ‘A word spoken in a locked closet becomes a beacon on the hill-top for men to see. Yet have no fear; harm cannot come to you, for your hand is free from complicity.’

“I hadn’t wanted the thing before, but that settled me. I very much doubted how the conjurer had got possession of it and I had no wish to be mixed up in an affair of any sort. I told him definitely that while I appreciated his motives I shouldn’t deprive him of so great a treasure. He seemed really concerned, and Fraser told me afterwards that for one of that tribe to be under what he regarded as an unrequited obligation was a dishonour. I should probably have had some trouble to get him off, only just then we heard Valasquez returning. Calico hastily wrapped up the relic, stowed it away among his wardrobe and, with his most ceremonious salaam, disappeared.

“‘Do you know anything about the tooth of the ape-god Hanuman, Valasquez?’ I asked him some time later. The ‘Portugoose’ seemed to know a little about everything and in consequence of my dependence on him he strayed into a rather

more free and easy manner than might have passed under other conditions. But I'm not ceremonious, you know, Wynn."

And Carrados laughed and agreed.

"'The sacred tooth of Sira Hanuman, sir?' said Valasquez. 'Oh, that's all great tom dam foolery. There are a hundred million of them. The most notable one was worshipped at the Mountain of Adam in Ceylon until it was captured by my ancestor, the illustrious Admiral d'Almeydo, who sent it with much pomp and circumstance to Goa. Then the Princes of Malabar offered a ransom of rupees, forty lakhs, for it, which the Bishop of Goa refused, like a dam great fool!'

"'What became of it?' I asked, but Valasquez didn't know. He was somewhat of a liar, in fact, and I dare say that he'd made it all up to show off his knowledge."

"No," objected Carrados; "I think that Baldæus, the Dutch historian, has a similar tale. What happened to Calico?"

"That was the worst of it. Some of our men found his body lying among the tamarisk scrub two days later. There was no doubt that he'd been murdered, and not content with that, the ghouls had mutilated him shamefully afterwards. Even his cheeks were slashed open. So, you see, the tooth of Hanuman had not protected him."

"No," assented Carrados, "it had certainly not protected him. Was anything done—anyone arrested?"

"I don't think so. You know what the natives are in a case like that: no one knows anything, even if they have been looking on at the time. I suppose a report would be sent up, but I never heard anything more. I always had a suspicion that Calico, with his blend of simple faith and gipsy blood, had violated a temple, or looted a shrine, to save his son's life, and that the guardians of the relic tracked him and revenged the outrage. Anyway, I was glad that I hadn't accepted it after that, for I had enough excitement without."

"What was that, Jim?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I always seemed to be running up against something about that time. Twice my tent was turned inside out in my absence, once my clothes were spirited away while I was

bathing, and the night before we broke up the camp I was within an ace of being murdered."

"You bear a charmed life," said Carrados suggestively, but Tulloch did not rise to the suggestion.

"It was a bit of luck. Those dacoits are as quiet as death, but for some reason I woke suddenly with the idea that devilment was brewing. I slipped on the first few things that came to hand and went to reconnoitre. As I passed through the canvas I came face to face with a native, and two others were only a few yards behind. Without any ceremony the near man let drive at my throat with one of those beastly wavy daggers they go in for. I suppose I managed to dodge in the fraction of a second, for he missed me. I gave a yell for assistance, landed the leader one in the eye and backed into my tent for a weapon. By the time I was out again our fellows were running up, but the precious trio had disappeared."

"That was the last you saw of them?" asked Carrados tentatively.

"No, queerly enough. The day I sailed I encountered the one whose eye I had touched up. It was down by the water—the Apollo Bander—at Bombay, and I was so taken aback, never thinking but that the fellow was hundreds of miles away that I did nothing but stare. But I promised myself that in the unlikely event of ever seeing him again I would follow him up pretty sharply."

"Not under the wheels of a London General again, I hope!"

Tulloch's brown fist came down upon the table with a crash.

"The devil, Carrados!" he exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"Parkinson was just describing to me a rather exotic figure. Then the rest followed."

"Well you were right. There was the man in Holborn, and of all the fantastic things in the world for a bloodthirsty thug from the back wilds of Hindustan, I believe that he was selling picture post cards!"

"Possibly a very natural thing to be doing in the circumstances."

"What circumstances, Wynn?"

"Those you are telling me of. Go on."

"That's about all there is. When I saw the man I was so excited, I suppose, that I started to dash across without another thought. You know the result. Of course he had vanished by the time I could look round."

"You are quite sure he is the same?"

"There's always the possibility of a mistake, I admit," considered Tulloch, "but, speaking in ordinary terms, I should say that it's a moral certainty. On the first occasion it was bright moonlight and the sensational attack left a very vivid photograph on my mind. In Bombay I had no suspicion of doubt about the man, and he was still carrying traces of my fist. Here, it is true, I had less chance of observing him, but recognition was equally instantaneous and complete. Then consider that each time he has slipped away at once. No, I am not mistaken. What is he after, Carrados?"

"I am very much afraid that he is after you, my friend," replied Carrados, with some concern lurking behind the half-amused level of his voice.

"After me!" exclaimed Tulloch with righteous indignation. "Why, confound his nerve, Wynn, it ought to be the other way about. What's he after me for?"

"India is a conservative land. The gods do not change. A relic that was apprised at seven hundred thousand ducats in the days of Queen Elizabeth is worth following up to-day—apart, of course, from the merit thereby acquired by a devotee."

"You mean that Calico's charm was the real original thing that Valasquez spoke of?"

"It is quite possible; or it may be claimed for it even if it is not. Goa has passed through many vicissitudes; its churches and palaces are now in ruins. What is more credible——"

"But in any case I haven't got the thing. Surely the old ass needn't murder me to find out that."

The face he appealed to betrayed nothing of the thoughts behind it. But Carrados's mind was busy with every detail of the story he had heard, and the more he looked into it the less he felt at ease for his impetuous friend's safety.

"On the contrary," he replied, "from the pious believer's point of view, the simplest and most effective way of ascertaining it was to try to murder you, and your providential escape has only convinced them that you are now the holder of the charm."

"The deuce!" said Tulloch ruefully. "Then I have dropped into an imbroglio after all. What's to be done?"

"I wonder," mused the blind man speculatively, "I wonder what really became of the thing."

"You mean after Calico's death?"

"No, before that. I don't imagine that your entertaining friend had it at the end. He had nothing to look forward to, you remember; he did not wish to live. His assassins were those who were concerned in the recovery of the relic, for why else was he mutilated but in order to discover whether he had concealed it with more than superficial craft—perhaps even swallowed it? They found nothing or you would not have engaged their attention. As it was, they were baffled and had to investigate further. Then they doubtless learned that you had put this man under an undying obligation, possibly they even knew that he had visited you the last thing before he left the camp. The rest has been the natural sequence."

"It seems likely enough in an incredible sort of way," admitted the doctor. "But I don't see why this old sport should be occupying himself as he is in the streets of London."

"That remains to be looked into. It may be some propitiatory form of self-abasement that is so potent in the Oriental system. But it may equally well be something quite different. If this man is of high priestly authority there are hundreds of his co-religionists here at hand whose lives he could command in such a service. He may be in communication with some, or be contriving to make himself readily accessible. Are there any Indians at your boarding-house?"

"I have certainly seen a couple recently."

"Recently! Then they came after you did?"

"I don't know about that. I haven't had much to do with the place."

“I don’t like it, Jim,” said Carrados, with more gravity than he was accustomed to put into the consideration of his own risks. “I don’t like the hang of it at all.”

“Well, for that matter, I’m not exactly pining for trouble,” replied his friend. “But I can take care of myself anyway.”

“But you can’t,” retorted Carrados. “That’s just the danger. If you were blind it would be all right, but your credulous, self-opinionated eyes will land you in some mess.... To-morrow, at all events, Carlyle shall put a watch on this enterprising Hindu and we shall at least find out what his movements are.”

Tulloch would have declined the attention, but Carrados was insistent.

“You must let me have my way in such an emergency, Tulloch,” he declared. “Of course you would say that it’s out of your power to prevent me, but among friends like you and I one acquiesces to a certain code. I say this because I may even find it necessary to put a man on you as well. This business attracts me resistlessly. There’s something more in it than we have got at yet, something that lies beyond the senses and strives to communicate itself through the unknown dimension that we have all stood just upon the threshold of, only to find that we have lost the key. It’s more elusive than Macbeth’s dagger: ‘I have thee not and yet I see thee still’—always just out of reach. What is it, Jim; can’t you help us? Don’t you feel something portentous in the air, or is it only my blind eyes that can see beyond?”

“Not a bit of it,” laughed Tulloch cheerfully. “I only feel that a blighted old heathen is leading himself a rotten dance through his pig-headed obstinacy. Well, Wynn, why can’t he be rounded up and have it explained that he’s on the wrong tack? I don’t mind crying quits. I did get in a sweet one on the eye, and he’s had a long journey for nothing. Eh, what?”

“He would not believe.” Carrados was pacing the room in one of his rare periods of mental tension. Instinct, judgment, experience and a subtler prescience that enveloped reason seemed at variance in his mind. Then he swung round and faced his visitor.

"Look here, Tulloch, stay with me for the present," he urged. "You can go there for your things to-morrow and I can fix you up in the meantime. It's safer; I feel it will be safer."

"Safer! Good lord! what could you have safer than a stodgy second-rate boarding-house in Hapsburg Square? The place drones respectability. Miss Vole, the landlady, is related to an archdeacon and nearly all the people there are on half-pay. The two Indians are tame baboos. Besides, if I get this thing I told you of, I shall be off to South America in a few days, and that ought to shake off this old man of the tooth."

"Of course it won't; nothing will shake him off if he's made the vow. Well, have your own way. One can't expect a doctor of robust habit to take any reasonable precautions, I know. How is your room situated?"

"Pretty high up. Next to the attics, I imagine. It must be, because there is a little trap-door in the ceiling leading there."

"A trap-door leading to the attics! Well, at all events there can't be an oubliette, I suppose? Nor a four-post bed with a canopy that slides up and down, Jim; nor a revolving wardrobe before a secret passage in the oak panels?"

"Get on with you," retorted Tulloch. "It's just the ordinary contrivance that you find somewhere in every roof when the attics aren't made into rooms. There's nothing in it."

"Possibly; but there may be some time. Anyway, drive a tack in and hang up a tin can or something that must clatter down if the door is raised an inch. You have a weapon, I suppose?"

"Now you're talking, Wynn. I do put some faith in that. I have a grand little revolver in my bag and I can sleep like a feather when I want."

"Little? What size does it take?"

"Oh, well, it's a .320, if it comes to that. I prefer a moderate bore myself."

Carrados opened a drawer of his desk and picked up half-a-dozen brass cartridges.

"When you get back, throw out the old ones and reload with these to oblige me," he said. "Don't forget."

"Right," assented Tulloch, examining them with interest; "but they look just like mine. What are they?—something new?"

"Not at all; but we know that they are charged and you can rely on them going off if they are fired."

"What a chap you are," declared Tulloch with something of the admiring pity that summed up the general attitude towards Max Carrados. "Well, for that matter, I must be going off myself, old man. I'm hoping for a letter about that little job and if it comes I want to answer it to-night. You've given me a fine time and we've had a great talk."

"I'm glad we met. And if you go away suddenly don't leave it to chance the next time you are back." He did not seek to detain his guest, for he knew that Tulloch was building somewhat on the South American appointment. "Shall Harris run you home?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll enjoy a walk to the station, and these Tubes of yours'll land me within me loose-box by eleven. It's a fine place, this London, after all."

They had reached the front door, opened it and were standing for a moment looking towards the yellow cloud that arched the west end of the city like the mirage of a dawn.

"Well, good-bye, old man," said Tulloch heartily, and they shook hands. At the touch an extraordinary impulse swept over Carrados to drag his friend back into the house, to implore him to remain the night at all events, or to do something to upset the arranged order of things for the next few hours. With the cessation of physical contact the vehemence of the possession dwindled away, but the experience, short as it was, left him white and shaken. He could not trust himself to speak; he waved his hand and, turning quickly, went back to the room where they had sat together to analyse the situation and to determine how to act. Presently he rang for his man.

"Some notes were taken after that little touch in Holborn this afternoon, Parkinson," he said. "Have you the address of the leading motor-bus driver among them?"

"The London General, sir?"

"Yes; the man who was the first to stop."

Parkinson produced his memorandum book and referred to the latest of its entries.

"He gave his private residence as 14 Cogg's Lane, Brentford, sir."

"Brentford! That is fortunate. I am going to see him to-night if possible. You will come with me, Parkinson. Tell Harris to get out the car that is the most convenient. What is the time?"

"Ten-seventeen, sir."

"We will start in fifteen minutes. In the meanwhile just reach me down that large book labelled 'Xavier' from the top shelf there."

"Yes, sir. Very well, sir. I will convey your instructions to Harris, sir."

It was perhaps rather late for a casual evening call, but not, apparently, too late for Cogg's Lane, Brentford. Mr Fitzwilliam—Parkinson had infused a faint note of protest into his voice when he mentioned the bus-driver's name—Mr Fitzwilliam was out, but Mrs Fitzwilliam received the visitor with conspicuous felicity and explained the circumstances. Fitzwilliam was of a genial, even playful, disposition, but he had come home brooding and depressed. Mrs Fitzwilliam had not taken any notice of it—she put it down to his feet—but by cajolery and innuendo she had persuaded him to go to the picture palace to be cheered up, and as it was now on the turn of eleven he might be expected back at any moment. In the meantime the lady had a favourite niece who was suffering—as the doctor himself confessed—from a very severe and unusual form of adenoids. Carrados disclosed the fact that the subject of adenoids was one that interested him deeply. He knew, indeed, of a case that was thought by the patient's parents to be something out of the way, but even it, he admitted, was commonplace by the side of the favourite niece. The minutes winged.

"That's Fred," said Mrs Fitzwilliam as the iron gate beyond the little plot of beaten earth that had once been a garden gave its individual note. "Seems strange that they should be so ignorant at a hospital, doesn't it?"

"Hallo, what now?" demanded Mr Fitzwilliam, entering.

Mrs Fitzwilliam made a sufficient introduction and waited for the interest to develop. So far the point of Carrados's visit had not appeared.

"I believe that you know something about motors?" inquired the blind man.

"Well, what if I do?" retorted the bus-driver. His attitude was protective rather than intentionally offensive.

"If you do, I should be glad if you would look at the engine of my car. It got shaken, I fancy, in a slight accident that we had in Holborn this afternoon."

"Oh!" The driver looked hard at Mr Carrados, but failed to get behind an expression of mild urbanity. "Why didn't you say so at first?" he grumbled. "All right; I'll trot round with you. Shan't be long, missis."

He led the way out and closed the door behind them, not ceasing to regard his visitor with a distrustful curiosity. At the gate he stopped, having by that time brought his mind round to the requirements of the situation, and faced Carrados.

"Look here," he said, "what's up? You don't want me to look at no bloomin' engine, you know. I don't half like the whole bally business, let me tell you. What's the gaime?"

"It's a very simple game for you if you play it straightforwardly," answered Carrados. "I want to know just how much you had to do with saving that man's life in Holborn to-day."

Fitzwilliam instinctively fell back a step and his gaze on Carrados quickened in its tensity.

"What d'yer mean?" he demanded with a quality of apprehension in his voice.

"That is complicating the game," replied Carrados mildly. "You know exactly what I mean."

"And what if I do?" demanded the driver. "What have you got to do with it, may I ask?"

"That is very reasonable. I happened to be in the car following you. We were scraped, but I am not making any claim for paint

whatever happened. I am satisfied that you did very well indeed in the circumstances, and if a letter to your people—I know one of the directors—saying as much would be of any use to you——"

"Now we're getting on, sir," was the mollified admission. "You mustn't mind a bit of freshness, so to speak. You took me by surprise, that's what it was, and I've been wound up ever since that happened." He hesitated, and then flung out the question almost with a passionate directness: "What was it, sir; in God's name, what was it?"

"What was it?" repeated the blind man's level voice persuasively.

"It wasn't me. I couldn't have done nothing. I didn't see the man, not in time to have an earthly. Then we stopped. Good Gawd, I've never felt a stop like that before. It was as though a rubber band had tightened and pulled us up against ten yards squoze into one, so that you didn't hardly know it. I hadn't nothing to do with it. Not a brake was on, and the throttle open and the engine running. There we were. And me half silly."

"You did very well," said Carrados soothingly.

"I did nothing. If it had been left to me there'd have been a inquest. You seem to have noticed something, sir. How do you work it out?"

Carrados parried the question with a disingenuous allusion to the laws of chance. He had not yet worked it out, but he was not disposed to lay his astonishing conclusions, so far as they went, before the bus-driver's crude discrimination. He had learned what he wanted. With a liberal acknowledgment of the service and a reiteration of his promise to write, he bade Mr Fitzwilliam good-night and returned to his waiting car.

"Back home, Harris," he directed. He had gone out with some intention of including Hapsburg Square in his peregrination. He was now assured that his anxiety was groundless.

But the next morning all his confidence was shattered in a moment. It was his custom before and during breakfast to read by touch the headings of the various items in the newspapers and to mark for Greatorex's later reading such paragraphs as claimed his interest. Generally he could, with some inconvenience, distinguish

even the ordinary type by the same faculty, but sometimes the inequality of pressure made this a laborious process. There was no difficulty about the larger types, however, and with a terrible misgiving finger-tip and brain had at once grasped the significance of a prominent heading:

FATAL GAS EXPLOSION

Hapsburg Square Boarding-House in Flames

"Are you there, Parkinson?" he asked.

Parkinson could scarcely believe his well-ordered ears. Not since the early days of his affliction had Carrados found it necessary to ask such a question.

"Yes, sir, I'm here," he almost stammered in reply. "I hope you are not unwell, sir?"

"I'm all right, thanks," responded his master dryly—unable even then not to discover some amusement in having for once scared Parkinson out of his irreproachable decorum. "I was mentally elsewhere. I want you to read me this paragraph."

"The one about Dr Tulloch, sir?" The name had caught the man's eye at once. "Dear, dear me, sir."

"Yes; go on," said Carrados, with his nearest approach to impatience.

"'During the early hours of this morning,'" read Parkinson, "'52 Hapsburg Square was the scene of a gas explosion which was unhappily attended by loss of life. Shortly after midnight the neighbourhood was alarmed by the noise of a considerable explosion which appeared to blow out the window and front wall of one of the upper bedrooms, but as the part in question was almost immediately involved in flames it is uncertain what really happened. The residents of the house, which is a boarding establishment carried on by Miss Vole (a relative, we are informed, of Archdeacon Vole of Worpsley), were quickly made aware of their danger and escaped. The engines arrived within a few minutes of the alarm and soon averted any danger of the fire spreading. When it was possible to penetrate into the upper part of the house it was discovered that the occupant of the bedroom where the explosion took place, a Dr Tulloch who had only recently

returned to this country from India, had perished. Owing to the charred state of the body it is impossible to judge how he died, but in all probability he was mercifully killed or at least rendered unconscious by the force of the explosion.' That is all, sir."

"I ought to have kept him," muttered Carrados reproachfully. "I ought to have insisted. The thing has been full of mistakes." He could discover very little further interest in his breakfast and turned to the other papers for possible enlargement of the details. "We shall have to go down," he remarked casually. "Say in half-an-hour. Tell Harris."

"Very well, sir."

Greatorex, just arrived for the day, and diffusing an atmosphere of easy competence and inoffensively general familiarity, put his head in at the door.

"Morning, sir," he nodded. "Tulloch's here and wants to see you. Came in with me. Hullo, Parkinson, seen a ghost?"

"He hasn't yet," volunteered his master. "But we both expect to. Yes, send him in here. Only one mistake the more, you see," he added to his servant. "And one the less," he added to himself.

"I might just as well have stayed, you know," was Tulloch's greeting. He included the still qualmish Parkinson in his genial domination of the room, and going across to his friend he dropped a weighty hand upon his shoulder.

"'There are more things in heaven and earth than in your philosophy, Horatio,'" he barbarously misquoted with significance. "There, you see, Wynn, I can apply Shakespeare to the situation as well as you."

"Quite so," assented Carrados. "In the meanwhile will you have some breakfast?"

"It's what I came in the hopes of," admitted the doctor. "That and being burned out of hearth and home. I thought that I might as well quarter myself on you for a couple of days. You've seen the papers?"

His friend indicated the still open sheet.

"Ah, that one. The Morning Reporter gave me a better obituary. I often had a sort of morbid fancy to know what they'd say about me afterwards. It seemed unattainable, but, like most things, it's a sad disappointment when it comes. Six lines is the longest, Wynn, and they've got me degree wrong."

"Whose was the body?" asked Carrados.

Gravity descended upon Tulloch at the question. He looked round to make sure that Parkinson had left the room.

"No one will ever know, I'm hoping," he replied. "He was charred beyond recognition. But you know, Wynn, and I know and we can hold our tongues."

"The Indian avenger, of course?"

"Yes. I went round there early this morning expecting nothing and found the place a wreck. One can only guess now what happened, but the gas-bracket is just beneath that trap-door I told you of and there's a light kept burning in the passage outside. One of the half-pay men brought me a nasty wavy dagger that had been picked up in the road. 'One of your Indian curiosities, I suppose, Dr Tulloch?' he remarked. I let it pass at that, for I was becoming cautious among so much devilment. 'I'm afraid that there's nothing else of yours left,' he went on, 'and there wouldn't have been this if it hadn't been blown through the window.' He was quite right. I haven't a thing left in the world but this now celebrated Norfolk suit that I stand up in, and, as matters are, I'm jolly well glad you didn't give me time to change yesterday."

"Ah," assented Carrados thoughtfully. "Still the Norfolk suit, of course. Tell me, Jim—you had it in India?"

"To be sure I had. It was new then. You know, one doesn't always go about there in white drill and a cork helmet, as your artists here seem to imagine. It's cold sometimes, I can tell you. This coat is warm; I got very fond of it. You can't understand one getting fond of a mere suit, you with your fifty changes of fine raiment."

"Of course I can. I have a favourite jacket that I would not part from for rubies, and it's considerably more of an antique than

yours. That's still a serviceable suit, Jim. Come and let me have a look at it."

"What d'ye mean?" said Tulloch, complying half reluctantly. "You're making fun of me little suit and it's the only thing in the world that stands between me and the entire."

"Come here," repeated Carrados. "I am not in the least guying. I'm far too serious. I am more serious, I think, than I have ever been in my life before." He placed the wondering doctor before him and proceeded to run a light hand about the details of his garments, turning him round until the process was complete. "You wore these clothes when the native you call Calico came to you that night?"

"It's more than likely. The nights were cold."

Carrados seemed strangely moved. He got up, walked to the window, as his custom was, for enlightenment, and then, after wandering about the room, touching here and there an object indecisively, he unlocked a cabinet and slid out a tray of silver coins.

"You've never seen these, have you?" he asked with scanty interest.

"No, what are they?" responded Tulloch, looking on.

"Pagan art at its highest. The worship of the strong and beautiful."

"Worth a bit?" suggested Tulloch knowingly.

"Not what they cost." Carrados shot back the tray and paced the room again. "You haven't told me yet how you were preserved."

"How——?"

"Last night. You know that you escaped death again."

"I suppose I did. Yes.... And do you know why I have been hesitating to tell you?"

"Why?"

"Because you won't believe me."

Carrados permitted himself to smile a shade.

"Try," he said laconically.

"Well, of course, I quite intended to.... The sober truth is, Wynn, that I forgot the address and could not get there. It was the silliest and the simplest thing in the world. I walked to the station here, booked for Russell Square and took a train. When I got out there I started off and then suddenly pulled up. Where was I going? My mind, I found, on that one point had developed a perfect blank. All the facts had vanished. Drum my encephalon how I might, I could not recall Miss Vole, 52, or Hapsburg Square. Mark you, it wasn't loss of memory in the ordinary sense. I remembered everything else; I knew who I was and what I wanted well enough. Of course the first thing I did was to turn out my pockets. I had letters, certainly, but none to that address and nothing else to help me. 'Very well,' I said, 'it's a silly game, but I'll walk round till I find it.' Had again! I walked for half-an-hour, but I saw nothing the faintest degree familiar. Then I saw 'London Directory Taken Here' in a pub. window. 'Good,' I thought. 'When I see the name it will all come back again.' I went in, had something and looked through the 'Streets' section from beginning to end." He shook his head shrewdly. "It didn't work."

"Did it occur to you to ring me up? You'd given me the address."

"It did; and then I thought, 'No, it's midnight now'—it was by then—'and he may have turned in early and be asleep.' Well, things had got to such a pass that it seemed the simplest move to walk into the first moderate hotel I came to, pay for my bed and tell them to wake me at six, and that's what I did. Now what do you make of that?"

"That depends," replied Carrados slowly. "The scientist would perhaps hint at a telepathic premonition operating subconsciously through receptive nerve centres. The sceptic would call it a lucky coincidence. The Catholic—the devout Catholic—would claim another miracle."

"Oh, come now!" protested Tulloch.

"Yes, come now," struck in Carrados, rising with decision and moving towards the door. "Come to my room and then you shall judge for yourself. It's too much for any one man to contemplate alone. Come on." He walked quickly across the hall to his study,

dismissing Greatorex elsewhere with a word, and motioned the mystified doctor to a chair. Then he locked the door and sat down himself.

"I want you to carry your mind back to that night in your tent when the native Khaligar, towards whom you had done an imperishable service, presented himself before you. By the inexorable ruling of his class he was your bondsman in service until he had repaid you in kind. This, Jim, you failed to understand as it stood vitally to him, for the whole world, two pantheons and perhaps ten thousand years formed a great gulf between your mind and his. You would not be repaid, and yet he wished to die."

The doctor nodded. "I dare say it comes to that," he said.

"He could not die with this debt undischarged. And so, in the obscurity of your tent, beneath your unsuspecting eyes, this conjurer did, as he was satisfied, requite you. You thought you saw him wrap the relic in its covering. You did not. You thought he put it back among his dress. He did not. Instead, he slipped it dexterously between the lining and the cloth of your own coat at the thick part of a band. You had seen him do much cleverer things even in the open sunlight."

"You don't say," exclaimed Tulloch, springing to his feet, "that even now—"

"Wait!" cried the blind man warningly. "Don't seek it yet. You have to face a more stupendous problem first."

"What is that?"

"Three times at least your life has been—as we may say—miraculously preserved. It was not your doing, your expertness, my friend.... What is this sacred relic that once was in its jewelled shrine on the high altar of the great cathedral at Goa, that opulent archbishopric of the East to which Catholic Portugal in the sixteenth century sent all that was most effective of treasure, brain and muscle to conquer the body and soul of India?"

"You suggested that it might be the original relic to which Valasquez had referred."

"Not now; only that the natives may have thought so. What would be more natural than that an ignorant despoiler should

assume the thing which he found the most closely guarded and the most richly casketed to be the object for which he himself would have the deepest veneration?"

"Then I don't follow you," said Tulloch.

"Because I have the advantage of having turned to the local and historical records bearing on the circumstances since you first started me," Carrados replied. "For instance, in the year 1582 Akbar, who was a philosopher and a humorist as well as a model ruler, sent an invitation to the 'wise men among the Franks' at Goa to journey to Agra, there to meet in public controversy before him a picked band of Mohammedan mullas and prove the superiority of their faith. The challenge was accepted. Abu-l-Fazl records the curious business and adds a very significant detail. These Catholic priests, to cut the matter short in the spirit of the age, offered to walk through a fiery furnace in the defence of their belief. It came to nothing, because the other side backed out, but the challenge is suggestive because, however fond the priesthood of those times was of putting other people to the ordeal of fire and water, its members were singularly modest about submitting to such tests themselves. What mystery was there here, Tulloch? What had those priests of Goa that made them so self-confident?"

"This relic, you suggest?"

"Yes, I do. But, now, what is that relic? A monkey's or an ape-god's tooth, an iron-stained belemnite, the fragment of a pagan idol—you and I can smile at that. We are Christians. No matter how unorthodox, no matter how non-committal our attitude may have grown, there is upon us the unconscious and hereditary influence of century after century of blind and implicit faith. To you and to me, no less than to every member of the more credent Church of Rome, to everyone who has listened to the story as a little child, it is only conceivable that if miraculous virtues reside in anything inanimate it must pre-eminently be in the close accessories of that great world's tragedy, when, as even secular and unfriendly historians have been driven to admit, something out of the order of nature did shake the heavens."

“But this,” articulated Tulloch with dry throat, leaning instinctively forward from the pressure of his coat, “this—what is it, then?”

“You described it as looking like a nail,” responded Carrados. “It is a nail. Rusty, you said, and it could not well be otherwise than red with rust. And old. Nearly nineteen hundred years old; quite, perhaps.”

Tulloch came unsteadily to his feet and slowly slipping off his coat he put it gently away on a table apart from where they sat.

“Is it possible?” he asked in an awestruck whisper. “Wynn, is it—is it really possible?”

“It is not only possible,” he heard the blind man’s more composed voice replying, “but in one aspect it is even very natural. Physically, we are dealing with an historical fact. Somewhere on the face of the earth these things must be enduring; scattered, buried, lost perhaps, but still existent. And among the thousands of relics that the different churches have made claim to it would be remarkable indeed if some at least were not authentic. That is the material aspect.”

“Yes,” assented Tulloch anxiously, “yes; that is simple, natural. But the other side, Carrados—the things that we know have happened—what of that?”

“That,” replied Carrados, “is for each man to judge according to his light.”

“But you?” persisted Tulloch. “Are you convinced?”

“I am offered a solution that explains everything when no other theory will,” replied the blind man evasively. Then on the top of Tulloch’s unsatisfied “Ah!” he added: “But there is something else that confronts you. What are you going to do?” and his face was towards the table across the room.

“Have you thought of that?”

“It has occurred to me. I wondered how you would act.”

It was some time before either spoke again. Then Tulloch broke the silence.

“You can lend me some things?” he asked.

"Of course."

"Then I will decide," he announced with resolution. "Whatever we may think, whatever might be urged, I cannot touch this thing; I dare not even look on it. It has become too solemn, too awful, in my mind, to be seen by any man again. To display it, to submit it to the test of what would be called 'scientific proof,' to have it photographed and 'written up'—impossible, incredible! On the other hand, to keep it safely to myself—no, I cannot do that either. You feel that with me?"

The blind man nodded.

"There is another seemly, reverent way. The opportunity offers. I found a letter at the house this morning. I meant to tell you of it. I have got the appointment that I told you of and in three days I start for South America. I will take the coat just as it is, weight it beyond the possibility of recovery and sink it out of the world in the deepest part of the Atlantic; beyond controversy, and safe from falling to any ignoble use. You can supply me with a box and lead. You approve of that?"

"I will help you," said Carrados, rising.

THE END

The eyes of Max Carrados

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