Samuel Boyd Of Catchpole Square Vol.II

By

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Freeditorial

CHAPTER XXI

THE CHAMBER OF DEATH

He reeled back in horror, but even in that one moment of discovery the necessity of preserving self-control forced itself upon him, and he became calm. The first real step in the mystery was taken, and all his powers of sober reason were needed to consider what would follow, and in what way the dread discovery would affect the beings he held most dear. Fortifying himself with a sip of brandy, and putting into a candlestick the candle he had held in his hand, he turned down the sheets to ascertain how the hard master he had served--the man in whose breast had dwelt no spark of compassion for any living creature--had met his death. There was no blood on the bedclothes, no stab or bullet in the dead man's body. On his face was an expression of suffering, as of one who had died in pain, and his neck was discoloured, as though a hand had tightly pressed it. But this might have been his own act in the agony of the death struggle, and his presence in his bed went far to prove that his end had been a natural one. A closer examination, however, dispelled this theory. The marks on his throat could scarcely have been made by himself, for his arms lay by his side in a natural position. Undoubtedly there had been violence done. By whom?

The first person whose image came to Dick's mind was Abel Death. The image immediately suggested a train of circumstance which, in the heat of the moment, proclaimed the absent man guilty. Abel Death had made his appeal to Samuel Boyd, and had made it in vain. In a paroxysm of fury he had fallen upon his master, and had strangled him. Then, searching for money and finding it, he had fled from the house and taken passage in some outgoing vessel for a foreign land. Presuming that the murder had been committed on the night of the 1st of March there had been ample time to make his escape, but not sufficient time to communicate with his wife. Or, perhaps the man, overwhelmed by terror, was afraid to write.

But upon further reflection this train of circumstance fell apart, and Dick perceived how false it was. It was hardly probable that Samuel Boyd had received Abel Death while he was abed, and still less probable that in his sleeping attire he would open his street door to such a visitor. By no other means than through the door could Abel Death have obtained access to the house. No, it was not he who had committed the crime. But the man was gone, and the mystery of his disappearance was still unexplained.

But if Abel Death could have obtained access to the house only by permission of Samuel Boyd, there was another man who had no need to ask for it. That man was Mr. Reginald Boyd. He possessed a key to the street door, and could obtain admittance at any hour. At any hour? No. Not after Samuel Boyd had chained and bolted the door from within before he went to bed. What was the presumption? That Reginald had quietly entered before the door was fastened, and had secreted himself until his father had retired to rest. Easy to imagine what followed: his appearance in the bedroom when his father was half asleep, his demands for money, the stern refusal and the taunting exchange of angry words, the hot blood roused, the clutching his father by the throat, the murder committed, the disposal of the limbs to make it appear that he had died a natural death, the unbolting and unchaining of the street door, and, finally, the frantic flight. But how to account for the key being upon the mat? As Dick mentally asked this question his eyes fell upon a key hanging by a cord at the head of the bed. Was it Samuel Boyd's own private key to the street door? So much depended upon this that Dick hastened downstairs to settle the point. Yes, it was Samuel Boyd's key. And the second key which Dick had picked up? Dropped by Reginald in his frenzy as he flew out of the house.

Dick's heart sank within him. This plausible chain of circumstance fitted the theory that Reginald was the murderer. Horrible! Most horrible! And Florence loved this guilty man. He it was who was responsible for her flight from her peaceful, happy home; he it was who, for some sinister reason, had imposed secrecy upon her! It seemed to Dick as if he held the fate of Florence's lover in his hands. He returned the second key to its place at the head of the bed, and mechanically--but yet in pursuance of some immature thought--put the key he had found on the mat into his pocket. Then he quitted the room of death, and closing the door, sank into a chair, and rested his head on his hand.

How should he act? What clear line of action did his duty point out to him? His duty! What if in pursuance of this moral obligation he wrecked Florence's life, and brought upon her despair so poignant as to drive her to her grave? No, a thousand times, no! Anything but that.

Why should it be incumbent upon him to proclaim the murder? Let others do it. But even then, would that save Reginald? The finger of suspicion would be pointed at him, and a clever lawyer would wind around him a chain of circumstantial evidence so firm and strong that it would be impossible for him to break through it. What were the links in this chain?

The quarrel between father and son some time since, which ended in Reginald being turned out of the house, with the stern injunction never to enter it again. Proof would surely be discovered to establish this, and it would be vain for Reginald to deny it.

Reginald's first visit to the house in Catchpole Square on the evening of the 1st of March. Abel Death had disappeared, but Mrs. Death was alive to testify to the fact. In this connection the pitiful image of little Gracie presented itself to Dick's mind, and he heard her plaintive appeal, "You will find father, won't you?" He had been anxious to do this, but he recognised now that Abel Death's appearance in court might be fatal to Reginald.

The next link was Reginald's second visit to Catchpole Square an hour or so before midnight, admitting himself to the house on that occasion, as on the first, with his own private latchkey. Who was to prove this? Remote as the Square was from public observation there was little doubt that Reginald had entered unseen. No witness existed, except Reginald himself, who could state what took place on this second visit, but it was a strong link in the chain that he had "come down in the world," and was in need for money.

The murder being made public, Constables Pond and Applebee would be questioned as to whether they had observed any suspicious circumstance in the neighbourhood on the night of the 1st. Applebee would recall the visit to Samuel Boyd of a lady in her carriage. Who was the lady, and what was her business with him? This would be traced. Doubtless the lady herself would come forward. The constables would further recall the appearance of a woman lurking in Catchpole Square on the night of the 5th, her evident alarm on being challenged, and her escape from the clutches of Constable Applebee.

Then came the question of the identity of the woman, in the answering of which Florence's handkerchief would furnish a clue. But if Constable Pond confessed how he had found and concealed the handkerchief it would, in all probability, lead to his dismissal from the force. It was therefore to his interest to say nothing about it. Dick had imposed silence upon him and his wife, and the chances were that secrecy would be preserved.

He carried this point farther. It appeared certain that the murder was committed on the night of the 1st of March. Now, Florence's visit to Catchpole Square--assuming that it was she--was paid on the night of the 5th, five days after. What connection, then, could there be between this visit and the murder? He argued it out. She was in communication with Reginald; since his last visit to Aunt Rob's house, nearly a fortnight ago, letters had passed between them, and there was little doubt that, without the knowledge of her parents, she had seen and conversed with him. Fearful of venturing himself into the Square, had he sent her to ascertain whether there was any appearance of the house having been entered? That would imply her knowledge of the crime. Every pulse and nerve in Dick's body throbbed in revolt against the cruel suggestion.

"No!" he cried aloud, starting to his feet. "No--no--no!"

But earnest as he might be on behalf of Florence he could not deny that the evidence, circumstantial as it was, formed a serious indictment against Reginald. In the midst of his agitation he noticed that in his starting from his chair he had swept off the table the Japanese paperweight and the documents which had lain beneath it. Stooping to pick them up and put them in their original order he saw the name of Reginald on one of the sheets, in Samuel Boyd's writing, with which he was familiar. Re-seating himself he immediately proceeded to read what was written thereon:

"Memoranda for my guidance. March 1st, 9.30 p.m."

"I jot down certain memoranda respecting my unworthy son, Reginald Boyd, to assist my memory in my application to the police to-morrow morning. Things slip my mind sometimes. This shall not. To the police I go early in the morning. I do not consider myself safe. My son and my clerk, Abel Death, whom I discharged from my service this evening, are in a conspiracy to rob me, and I must take measures against them.

"It is two years since I turned my son out of my house in consequence of his misconduct and disobedience. I forbade him ever to darken my door again, or ever to address me.

"In defiance of this command he stole into the house this afternoon during my absence, and though Abel Death endeavoured to keep it from me, I forced the information from him that this scamp of a son of mine intends to come again late to-night.

"Impress strongly upon the police that these men are conspiring to rob me. Reginald has in his possession a key to the street door. It is my property. He stole it from me. If he does not get in through the front door he will find some other way. He is better acquainted with the ins and outs of this house than I am myself. He is an ungrateful, worthless scoundrel. They are a pair of scoundrels.

"To-morrow I will draw out my will. Reginald knows that it is not made yet. If I were to die to-night all that I possess would fall to him as heir at law, and I am determined he shall have not have a shilling of my money. Not a shilling. He is reckoning, I dare say, upon coming into a fortune. He will find out his mistake.

"Shall I see him? I should like to tell him to his face that he will be a beggar all his life, and to tell him, too, that I intend to put the police upon him.

"Notation, 2647. S.B."

The reading of this document filled Dick with consternation. It supplied, not one, but several new links in the chain of circumstantial evidence. Were it to fall into the hands of the police Reginald's doom would be sealed. There would be only one chance for him--his being able to prove that he had not visited his father's house on the night of March 1st. His bare word would not be sufficient; he must produce witnesses, to show how and where he passed his time on that night. Failing this, the evidence, in the murdered man's own handwriting, would be fatal.

It could not be that the murder would remain much longer undiscovered. Mrs. Death's application to the magistrate and the publicity given to the disappearance of her husband, clerk to Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square, in conjunction with the silence and non-appearance of Samuel Boyd himself, would be sure to direct attention to the house, not only on the part of the mystery-mongers who have a passion for such matters, but on the part of the general public. The probability was that in a very short time, perhaps in a few hours, all London would be ringing with this new mystery. He saw, in fancy, the show-bills of the newspapers, and heard the cries of the newsboys as they ran through the streets with successive editions.

Again he had to consider his course of action, and he was not long undecided. He would be silent. It was not Reginald he was championing, it was Florence. Until he saw and spoke with her he would do all that lay in his power to divert suspicion from the man she loved. Animated by this resolve, and with a dogged disregard of consequences, he folded the incriminating document and put it in his pocket. He made no attempt to justify himself; at all hazards he was determined to protect Florence, and, right or wrong, he would do what he had determined to do. The knowledge he had gained he would keep locked in his breast. Let others make the discovery of the murder. He would not move a step towards it.

All this time he had not given a thought to his own safety, to the peril in which he would be placed if his presence in the house of death became known. It was easy enough to devise a train of argument which would cast such suspicion upon himself as to cause most people to believe that he was the guilty man. Having no wish to court this danger he determined to leave the house as quickly as possible, and to postpone further reflection till the morning.

A last look into the death-chamber, a swift glance at the awful form lying there, a hurried examination of the papers to see if there were any other incriminating documents among them--which to his relief there were not--a pause before the wax

figure of the Chinaman and a weird fancy that it also had met its death at the hand of a murderer, the careful gathering together of all the articles he had brought with him into the house, and he was ready to go.

He had a thought of leaving the house by the front door, but there was greater risk in that than in going back the way he had come; so he scrambled out of the window at the back, finding it much more difficult to scramble out than to scramble in, and was once more in the yard. He listened for sounds of voices or footsteps in the thoroughfare on the other side of the dead wall, and, hearing none, flung his grapnel up. It caught at the first throw, and climbing the rope he cautiously peeped over the wall to see if any wayfarers were about. No person was in sight. Detaching the grapnel he hung by his hands and dropped to the ground, thinking how foolish he had been in the first instance not to have adopted this means of reaching the inner ground. Tying the rope round his waist, and buttoning his coat over that and the large bottle, half the water in which he had drank during his investigations, he proceeded in the direction of his lodgings, nibbling a biscuit as he walked along.

The faint light of early morn was in the sky. A new day was dawning, to bring joy to some, despair to some, to raise this toiler up, to dash this toiler down. No warning of these issues in the peaceful grey light of morn. Majestic nature rolls its allotted course heedless of the fret of life. The yellow gas in the street lamps had a ghastly glare; at the end of a street a cat with green eyes gleaming like evil jewels stood in the middle of the road, and scampered off at his approach. A wretched man who seemed to start out of the ground cried, "Hi!" and flung a stone after it, and then, with folded arms and head sunk low on his breast, slinked off with a scowl, as though he had struck at the world for its treatment of him; two or three blear-eyed human night-birds, shivering in the grey light which, in its promise of a fair day, brought no solace to them, slouched close to the walls and houses, and cast lowering glances upon Dick as he passed; a forlorn woman, who had better have been in her grave, said, "Good morning, my dear," in a voice so false and hollow in its horrible gaiety that he shuddered as he heard it, and hurried on. But he turned and threw the degraded creature a sixpence. In his state of mind all forms of misery appealed strongly to him.

He reached Paradise Row in safety, and got into the house without disturbing his landlady. Locking the door of his room, he threw off his clothes and went to bed, deeming it wiser to seek three or four hours' rest in a natural way than to sleep with his clothes on. He was wearied and exhausted, but so excited that sleep did not come readily to him. Drowsily courting it he found himself dwelling upon the last words in the document he had stolen--there was no mincing the matter; he had stolen it: "Notation 2647." What could be the meaning of those words? Notation 2647--notation 2647. He repeated it dozens of times, and dreamt that the wax figure of the Chinaman was

pursuing him over mountain and field, through fire and water, shouting after him, "Notation 2647!" Youth and a healthy physique, however, triumphed over these disordered fancies, and after awhile he sank into a dreamless sleep, and arose, refreshed and full of vigour, at half past eight. He heard the snoring of Constable Pond, and the soft footsteps of Mrs. Pond outside his door. He stepped into the passage, and it was like the breath of spring to his senses to meet her smiling face.

"Good morning, sir," she said. "I hope you slept well."

"Capitally," he replied. "The bed is very comfortable. Did I disturb you at all last night?" He waited in anxiety for her answer.

"Oh, no, sir. I'm asleep the minute I put my head on the pillow. Pond says I should be a blessing to burglars. Can I get you anything for breakfast?"

"Nothing, thank you," he said. "I take my meals out."

The next moment he was on his way to Aunt Rob. She was expecting his arrival, and ran to open the door for him.

"I've been waiting for you, Dick. Have you had breakfast?"

"Wouldn't stop for it, Aunt Rob," he answered, "I thought you would give me a bite."

"It's ready laid for you, my dear. I had a letter from Florence this morning, and one has come for you."

"From Florence?" he cried.

"No, it's not her writing." She gave him both letters, and said that Uncle Rob had gone out early in the morning to seek for her. "We haven't had a wink of sleep all night," she said.

He read Florence's letter first. It was to the same effect as her letters of yesterday. She was quite well and safe, and begged them not to be anxious about her. Her dear love to darling mother and father, and to Dick. She would write twice every day, and hoped with all her heart that everything would soon be all right.

"It is a happiness to know that she is safe and well," said Dick. "We must have patience, Aunt Rob."

"But what does she mean by her 'duty,' Dick?"

"We shall hear that from her own lips by-and-by," he replied.

"And isn't it strange," said the anxious mother, "that she doesn't say a word of Mr. Reginald?"

"Yes, it is strange." But in his heart he did not think so. He believed he knew why the name was not mentioned.

"What is your letter about, Dick?"

He opened it, read it hurriedly, and did not betray the agitation it caused him. "A private letter, aunt, from an old friend. Has Uncle Bob got another day's leave of absence from the office?"

"No; he must go back to his duty to-night. He wanted to see you badly, but he couldn't stop at home, he's that restless. I wish you'd have a talk with him."

"I'll manage it. If I don't catch him here, I'll drop in at the station."

He was itching to read his letter more carefully, but he would not arouse her suspicions by running away too suddenly, so he remained with her a few minutes longer, and then, saying he would see her again in the course of the day, took his leave.

"Are you going anywhere particular, Dick?" she asked, accompanying him to the door.

"I am going to look for Florence," he replied, kissing her. "It will be hard if we don't soon get some good news. Keep up your heart, dear aunt."

He did not take the letter from his pocket till he was in a quiet street.

"My Dear Dick" (it ran), "The reason that I have had the address on the envelope written in a strange hand is that I do not want mother to know I am writing to you. You must not tell her. I feel sure you will get my letter this morning, because you will have heard of my going away, and will go to mother's to get some news of me. I need your help, dear Dick. I am at 16, Park Street, Islington, first floor. Come at 2 o'clock; I shall be looking out for you; and let it be a secret between us. I know how true and faithful you are, and I have no fear that you will betray me. With constant love, my dear Dick,

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"Florence."

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK RELIEVES GRACIE'S FEELING BY ONE EXPRESSIVE WORD.

"At last!" said Dick. "At last a ray of light! What's the time?" He looked at a clock in a baker's shop. "Five minutes past ten. Ought I to go to her at once? No, I think not. Had she wanted me earlier she would have said, 'Come to me the moment you get this letter.' Four long hours to wait. What am I to do with myself till two o'clock?"

With the idea of making time fly faster he began to count his steps-- ten, twenty, thirty, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred. He made a calculation. A step a second, three hundred steps three hundred seconds, five minutes, and five minutes more employed in thought and calculation. Ten minutes gone, ten minutes nearer to Florence. He came to another shop with a clock in it; it marked eight minutes past ten. He had done all this in three minutes. He had walked too quickly, and was fast working himself up to fever heat. "Keep cool, my lad," he muttered; "you'll mar instead of mend if you don't keep cool."

But the events of the last few hours, with their tragic issues, pressed so heavily upon him that he found it no easy matter to keep cool. Much easier was it to conjure up the feelings of a murderer, who, oppressed with the weight of his undiscovered crime, fancies he discerns in every face the knowledge of his guilt--turning his head over his shoulder every minute to see if he was being dogged--starting at familiar sounds, especially at the sound of bells and clocks striking the hour, every peal proclaiming to all the world that a Murderer was passing that way--tortured by the devilish temptation to leap into the middle of the road, and flinging up his arms to scream aloud, "Stop, you grinning fools! I did it!" Then running to a bridge, with a mob at his heels, and flinging himself into the river.

For some minutes Dick was under a spell of this nature. He looked nervously at the head-lines on the newspaper bills, and listened for the shouting of the newsboys, "Murder! Murder! Frightful Murder in Catchpole Square!" But no such words reached his ears. Passing the shop in which he had purchased the rope and grapnel, he was almost prepared to see the dirty-faced old man, in his list slippers and greasy skull cap, run out and cry, "Stop that man! Ask him what he did with the rope he bought of me last night. Stop him--stop him!"

"I am losing my senses," said Dick, "indulging in these fancies. I shall be deluding myself presently into the belief that it was I who murdered Samuel Boyd. I'll go and see little Gracie. I may get some news of Abel Death."

Gracie was in bed, and Mrs. Death was in the adjoining room, preparing a linseed poultice for her. She looked into Dick's face, and dropped her eyes.

"You've heard nothing, sir?"

"Nothing," he replied. "I have come to see Gracie. Is she any better?"

"She's no worse, sir," said Mrs. Death, with a sigh, "but I can hardly keep her in bed, and the trouble I have to put a poultice on her is beyond description; I have almost to go on my bended knees. She's the dearest child, sir; she never thinks of herself."

Upon Dick's entrance Gracie sat up in bed and put out her hand; it was hot and clammy, and Dick patted it kindly, and held it in his. The faces of the other children, who were all sitting on the floor, playing shop with stones and broken pieces of crockery, became illumined at sight of Dick.

"It's good of you to come," said Gracie. "I thought you would. You mustn't mind my coughing a bit. I'm ever so much better, but mother will worry about me. I want to whisper to you. Do you think father's dead?"

"No, Gracie," he said, to comfort her. "I don't think that."

"Then what's keeping him away? Is he afraid of somebody? Father never did anything wrong. We'll look for him together when I'm well. Shall we?"

"Yes, Gracie; and so that you may get well soon and find him, you mustn't sit up in bed." He put her head gently on the hard pillow, and arranged the scanty coverings over her. She made no resistance, but kept her eyes upon him, gravely and steadily.

"I've been dreaming of you all night long," she said.

"Now, what do you want?" said Dick to Connie, who was standing at his knee.

"Here's two ounces of tea," said Connie, giving him a stone, "and some scrag of mutton" (giving him another), "and a silk dress" (giving him another), "and a pound of sugar, and a penn'orth of brandy balls, and a pair of boots, and four pounds of potatoes, and a pint of beer"--all represented by stones, which Dick accepted with an air of great enjoyment. "If you haven't got any money we'll trust you." Having effected which sale upon these unbusinesslike conditions, the child trotted back to her brothers and sisters, who put their heads together and whispered.

Mrs. Death entered with the poultice, and was about to put it on, when a soft tapping was heard on the passage door. Before any one could answer it the handle was turned and Dr. Vinsen presented himself.

Gracie lay back in bed, and clutched Dick's hand tight.

As Dr. Vinsen glanced around the room, Dick thought his eyes were smaller and sleepier than on the first occasion they had met; his heavy white lids hung low, and partially veiled them; but this aspect of languor was more than counterbalanced by the fringe of yellow hair round his bald head, which gave him a luminous, not to say a saint-like appearance.

"Ah, Mr. Dick Remington," he said, in the pleasantest of voices, "good morning, good morning. Are you also here on a mission of kindness to our little patient--our lit-tle pa-tient? Permit me." He disengaged the clammy hand which clasped Dick's, and timed Gracie's pulse by his large gold watch, at which the children stared in awe. "Rather feverish, but an improvement. What do you say? It's nothing to worry about? Then we'll not worry about it. Why should we? Life brings a peck of worries in its train--why should we make the peck overflow--o-ver-flow?" With his head on one side, like a large yellow-fringed bird, he smilingly invited an opinion from Dick.

"Why, indeed?" said Dick.

"True--true. Why?" As though not he, but Dick, had made the inquiry. "We are getting along nicely, Mrs. Death, I am happy to say. In a short time we shall have our little patient running about again, playing with her companions, as well as ever. The troubles of children, eh, Mr. Remington?"

"Yes," said Dick, vaguely.

"A private word in your ear. Have we heard from our missing friend?"

"I believe not," replied Dick.

"Sad--sad--sad! But there is time--there is always time; and hope--there is always hope. She bears up."

"What else can she do? Knocking your head against a stone wall is not an agreeable diversion."

"Your head, my young friend, your head," said Dr. Vinsen, jocosely. Then turning to Mrs. Death, "What is this? A linseed poultice? Very proper. Let it be very hot. Our little patient makes a face. If she never has a worse trouble than a linseed poultice she is to be envied. Here is a bottle of medicine--a tablespoonful every four hours. I will call again to-morrow. You will not shut your door against me, eh?"

"No, indeed, sir. We don't shut the door against our best friends."

"So kind of you to say so." He paused to contemplate the group of children on the floor. "This"--with a comprehensive wave of his hand, so as to take in the whole of the room--"is a scene for an artist, and on the walls of the Academy would attract attention, even from the aristocracy."

"That wouldn't help them much," observed Dick.

"I don't know--I really don't know. It enlarges the scope, widens the sympathies--widens the sym-pa-thies. Be happy, children, be happy." He went through the ceremony of shaking hands with Dick and Mrs. Death, and with an amiable smile, in which his halo seemed to take part, left the room.

"Dick," whispered Gracie. He bent towards her. "May I call you Dick?"

"Yes, Gracie."

"Wait a bit till my cough's over." She almost choked herself in her effort to finish the sentence before the cough commenced. It lasted a long time, but Dick, supporting her in his arms, was glad to hear that it was looser. Then she whispered to him again, "Don't let 'em hear us, Dick. Say Damn!

"Damn!" said Dick, without the least hesitation.

She sank back and smiled. It was the first time Dick had seen her smile, and it brought a wonderful light into her sallow face. Whatever may have been the reason for the singular request, she was evidently much relieved.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLORENCE AND REGINALD.

The hands of all the clocks in Islington that kept correct time marked the hour of two as Dick stood before the door of 16, Park Street. His hand was on the knocker, when the door was opened, and Florence drew him into the house.

"Come upstairs, Dick," she said, panting as if she had been running. "I saw you from the window, and ran down. Oh, Dick, I am so glad to see you--so glad, so glad!"

On the landing of the first floor she stopped and kissed him. "Come in, Dick, come in."

They entered a comfortably furnished room, and by the aid of the better light he saw that she was struggling to keep back her tears.

"Are you well, Florence?" he asked anxiously.

"In health? Oh, yes," she answered. "But I am in trouble. That is why I sent for you."

"You did right. I am here to help you. You may rely upon me, Florence."

"I do, dear. Tell me first. How is my dear mother--and my dear father--how are they, Dick?"

"You know how they must be, Florence, loving you as they do. They are in the most terrible trouble about you. Uncle Rob has been hunting all over London for you. I don't wish to distress you, but they have not had a moment's rest. It is right that I should tell you this."

"You are quite right, dear. Poor mother and father! It cuts me to the heart, but I could not act in any other way. You shall judge, Dick--you shall judge--and if you condemn me----"

"Don't give way, Florence."

"I won't. I will be brave. I have been brave to do what I have done. Such a cruel thing, such a cruel, cruel thing!--but it was my duty--my duty! Oh, Dick, if you knew what love was, you would know of what it was capable. I may speak to you, dear, as a sister to a brother, may I not?"

"Yes, Florence, as a sister to a brother," he said, quietly.

"I can understand now so many things to which I was blind a year ago--what love will lead a woman to do, how it can harden the heart----"

"Harden the heart!" he cried.

"Was my heart not hardened," she said, piteously, "when I stole away like a thief from the parents who loved and cherished me, knowing, as I knew, that I was bringing misery upon them? Was my heart not hardened when, at the call of love, I trod love under my feet? My prayer was that my separation would not be long, and that, when I was free to speak, they would forgive me and take me to their hearts again. But what can repay them for the suffering I have inflicted upon them--how shall I atone for the wound my own hand has dealt?"

"They will not think of it, Florence, if all is well with you, if, when you are free to speak, they approve of what you have done."

"Do you doubt it, Dick?" she asked, her hand at her heart.

"No--on my soul, no!" he cried. "I could never doubt it--I----" He came to a sudden stop as his eyes fell upon the hand that lay at her breast. She saw the earnest gaze, but did not remove her hand. "That ring, Florence!"

"My wedding ring, Dick," she said, and pressed her lips upon it.

"You are married!"

"I am married, dear."

"To Mr. Reginald?"

"Yes; but that is not the name I bear."

He covered his face with his hands. He had long known that she was lost to him, but only at this moment did he fully realise it. And not alone that. He was overwhelmed by the thought of the damning evidence in his pocket, a virtual accusation of murder made by the murdered man himself against his son, against Florence's husband! An ashen face confronted her as he took his hands from his eyes.

"Dick!" she cried.

"It is nothing, dear, nothing." His eyes wandered around the room. "You are not living here alone?"

"No, Dick. My husband is in that room. Come and see him. Tread softly, softly!"

She opened the door, and he followed her into the room, and there, in bed, lay the son of Samuel Boyd, the man lying dead in his house in Catchpole Square.

"The doctor has given him a sleeping draught," said Florence, in a low tone. "He has been very ill, and no one to nurse him but I." With tender care she smoothed the pillow, and drew the counterpane over his shoulders, then stooped and kissed him. When she raised her face it was illumined. Love shone there, and a divine pity. There are memories which dwell in the mind till the hour of death, and this revelation of devoted love would dwell in Dick's mind till his life was ended.

"Is he changed much?" she asked.

"He is worn and thin," Dick replied. "Has he been ill long?"

"A good many days, but thank God! the doctor says he will get well. If he sleeps till eight or nine o'clock it will help his recovery greatly."

They re-entered the sitting room. Dick took a chair with its back to the light, and each looked at the other in silence awhile. Florence was the first to speak.

"Where shall I commence, Dick?"

"At the beginning," he replied. "Hide nothing from me if you are sure you can trust me."

"I am sure. There is no shame in an honest love, dear."

"None, Florence.

"It is eighteen months ago that Reginald and I first met. Mother and I were spending an evening with a friend when he came in and was introduced to us as Mr. Reginald, A few days afterwards we met him in the street, and he walked a little way with us, and asked if he might call and see us; and soon he became a regular visitor. How does love come, Dick? It is a mystery, but I know I used to think a great deal of him when he was away, and once or twice when we expected him and he did not come I felt unhappy. When I

heard his voice I was happy again, and then I knew I loved him. One day he spoke to me, and my heart was filled with happiness when he told me he loved me. He said he feared he was wrong in speaking to me of love, for there was a secret in his life which he did not wish to disclose for a time; and he asked, if we entered into an engagement, that I should say nothing of it to my parents without his consent. I loved him, Dick, and trusted him, and I consented to everything he proposed. So I had a lover, and no one at home knew anything of it. Do not misjudge Reginald; he is the soul of honour, and I would as soon doubt the goodness of God as I would doubt the good faith and honour of the man I love. Do I hear him moving?"

She rose, and stepped softly to the bedroom. Returning, she said,

"No, he is sleeping peacefully. Oh, Dick, dear, you would pity him if you knew how he has suffered, and how little he deserves it. It is two months to-day that he spoke very seriously to me, in consequence of something you said. You will remember it, Dick. You were in a situation as clerk, and one night you told us that you were acting as clerk to Mr. Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square, and that you intended to give up your situation because of the bad character he bore. He was a money-lender, you said, and had brought ruin on a number of poor people. Mother didn't like the idea of your throwing up your situation, but when you asked her if she would advise you to stop with such a man she said, no, she wouldn't, and that Mr. Samuel Boyd was a rascal. I didn't think anything of it at the time except that I was sorry for you. Reginald recalled that conversation, and warned me to prepare for a disclosure that might cause me to shrink from him. He had kept his name concealed, he said, because he was ashamed of his father, who was no other than the Mr. Samuel Boyd of whom such hard words were spoken at home. He told me of his life; how during his boyhood he was kept at school, and then sent abroad to learn languages; how he knew nothing of his father's doings, who described himself as a financier; how, his education being completed, his father summoned him home, and how, while he lived in Catchpole Square, he was shocked at the discovery of the kind of business his father was engaged in. It was so revolting to Reginald that he spoke his mind freely; they had quarrels, and the end of it was that he left his father's house, determined to get his own living in a more honest way. Wasn't it noble of him, Dick?"

"It was what an honourable man would do."

"When Reginald had told me all this, he said he was sure that if it came to the knowledge of mother and father that he was Mr. Samuel Boyd's son they would forbid him the house; and he begged me to give him a proof of my love by consenting to a marriage at a registrar's office, and to keep it a secret till he was in a position to furnish a home for me. I loved him so that I consented, and I promised, too, to keep it secret till he gave me permission to speak to mother and father. So we went one morning to a registrar's

office, and were married. I wasn't absent from home more than two hours, and no one suspected the step we had taken. I can't say I was happy; keeping a secret of that kind from parents so kind and dear made me appear in my own eyes very ungrateful, but Reginald was so hopeful that I bore up, and prayed for the day to arrive when we could ask forgiveness. Do you condemn me, Dick? Do you condemn Reginald? Put yourself in his place, and say whether, if you loved a girl as he loves me, you could bear the idea of losing her?"

"I would lose my heart's blood first," said Dick. "But it was hard for Uncle and Aunt Rob."

"Yes, it was hard, and it often made me very wretched, but I couldn't break my promise to Reginald; that would have been a bad commencement for a young wife. The worst of it was that he wasn't getting along very well. 'I shall be getting desperate presently,' he said, 'unless things take a turn for the better. Our little home seems farther off than ever.' I cheered him up, and said there was plenty of time before us, and that I was sure there was some good luck in store for him. So things went on till a fortnight ago, when he said he was afraid he had done wrong in persuading me to a secret marriage. 'But I've an idea,' he said, 'and whatever comes of it I'll carry it out. Don't ask me what it is; it's something I must keep to myself.' Dick," said Florence, breaking off, "that night at home when you and mother were speaking against Mr. Samuel Boyd, did you do so purposely because Reginald was with us?"

"Yes, I spoke purposely," he answered.

"Reginald said you did, and that you looked as if you had a suspicion of him. But you didn't know he was Mr. Boyd's son?"

"I did know it," said Dick.

"Why did you keep it to yourself?" she asked, with a troubled look.

"It was for your sake, Florence," he answered quietly. "It wasn't for me to pry into your secrets."

"Thank you, dear," said Florence, putting her hand into his with a tender smile, "it was like you."

"Did Reginald carry out his idea, Florence?"

"I can't tell you; he said nothing more about it to me. Last Saturday I received a letter from him saying he wasn't very well, and couldn't come to mother's on Sunday, and asking me not to call and see him till I heard from him again. What day of the month is this, Dick?"

"The 7th. Last Saturday was the 2nd," said Dick, and thought, "The day after he went to his father's house late at night, the day after Abel Death went there in the night in the hope that Samuel Boyd would take him back again, the day after the murder!"

"Yes, Dick, the 7th. I didn't go to Reginald either on that day or on Sunday. You can imagine how miserable I was. On Monday morning I received another short letter, in which he asked me again not to come and see him. The next letter came on Tuesday night when mother and I were sitting together."

"That was the night of the great fog. Aunt Rob told me you went out in the afternoon in the thick of it. What did you go out for?"

"I came here to inquire after Reginald. The landlady said he wasn't well, and that she had just posted a letter to me from him. 'May I go up and see him?' I asked, and she answered, calling me 'miss,' that he had given orders that no one was to be allowed up, and that when I had read the letter I might know what to do. I was far from happy, Dick, as I walked home through the fog, and a great deal unhappier when the night postman brought the letter, for there was something in it--I hardly know what--that made me feel I ought to go to him. I couldn't ask advice of mother because of my promise to Reginald, which I wouldn't break; and even if anyone had advised me against what I believed was right I shouldn't have listened to it. I went to my bedroom early, and so did mother, and I got out of the house at ten o'clock and came straight here. In the streets I put on my wedding ring, which I had not worn at home, of course, only putting it on and looking at it when I was alone in my room, and I took care that the landlady should see it when I told her I was a relation of Reginald's and had come to nurse him. It was time I did, for he was wandering in his mind, and hadn't called in a doctor because he couldn't afford to pay for one. Thank God I had a little money in my purse, and I've got thirty pounds in the Post Office Savings Bank which I've given notice to take out. Reginald didn't know me, and I was in the most dreadful trouble about him. All his wandering thoughts were about me and his father, and I thought what a shocking thing it would be if he were to die without seeing him. Oh, Dick, my heart was breaking, but I wanted to do what was right, and I thought it likely, if Mr. Boyd saw Reginald in the state he was, that his heart would soften towards the poor boy. I tried to get at his wishes. Bending over him I said, 'Do you want to see your father?' I said it three or four times, and then he said, 'Yes, yes, my father, Catchpole Square. The end house in Catchpole Square. My father--my father!' I called the landlady in, and asked her if she would stop up with Reginald while I went to

fetch some one he wanted to see. She consented, and I went out. It was very late when I got to the house in Catchpole Square, and I knocked and knocked without anyone answering me. 'He can't be there,' I thought, and I was creeping out of the Square when two men came into it. One of them had a bull's eye lamp in his hand, and I saw they were policemen. My anxiety then was to get away from them, but they saw me and called out to me to stop, and laid hands on me. How I escaped I don't know, but I tore myself away and ran for my life, and in a minute or two I was alone and free. Then I managed to find my way back here, and sent the good landlady to bed, telling her that the person I had gone to fetch was out of town. Yesterday morning early I sent for a doctor, and he said that Reginald would have died if he hadn't been called in, but that there were hopes for him. Oh, how I thanked God for the good news! and how grateful I was when Reginald last night opened his eyes and recognised me! He didn't blame me, poor boy, but spoke so sweetly of everybody! I told him how I had run away from home, and I begged him to allow me to end this mystery and to make things right with father and mother. He thought a little, and said, 'Send for your cousin Dick, and do what he advises.' I cried for joy, and I sat down at once and wrote to you. Now you know all, dear. Will you go and tell them everything, and ask them to forgive poor Reginald and me?"

"I will, Florence," said Dick, "the moment I go from here. It will be a happiness to me to relieve their suspense. But I want to ask you a question or two first."

"Yes, Dick."

"How long has Reginald been ill?"

"Since Saturday."

"Has he been in bed all the time?"

"Yes."

"May I go into his room?"

"What for? If he's asleep"--she opened the door and peeped in--"yes, he's asleep. You won't disturb him, Dick?"

"No, I will not speak to him. I've got my reasons, Florence."

"Very well, dear," she said, her eyes following him as he stepped softly to the bedroom, and closed the door behind him.

His purpose was to examine Reginald's boots, and he saw them the moment he entered the room. Reginald having been in bed since Saturday they could not have been worn since his visit to Catchpole Square on Friday night. Dick took them up, and discerned on the soles traces of the waxed paper which Samuel Boyd had set as a trap. With his penknife he carefully scraped off these tell-tale evidences of the visit, and returned to Florence.

"Do you know," he asked, "when Reginald saw his father last?"

"No," she answered, "it must have been a long time ago."

He did not disabuse her. "He is sleeping quite calmly," he said. "Did the doctor say when he would be able to get up?"

"In two or three days, he told me, if the opiate he gave him had the desired effect. It is having it, Dick."

"No doubt of that. By the way, Florence, in your haste to escape from the policemen in Catchpole Square did you lose or drop anything?"

"How clever you are to think of it, Dick! I lost a handkerchief."

"With your name on it?"

"Yes. All my handkerchiefs are marked. I think I had it in my hand when I was in the Square, but I can't be sure. It is of no consequence. There are plenty of girls named Florence. How did you cut your hand?"

"With some broken glass. That's of no consequence. It is only a scratch." The exertion and haste he had made in scraping the wax off Reginald's boots had started the blood.

"Let me bind it up. Oh, Dick, you are our good angel! Dear Dick! Reginald likes you so much! But he had an idea that you didn't care for him."

"I care for him very much, Florence."

"And do you know," she said, almost gaily, so happy was she in the prospect of Reginald's speedy recovery, and of removing the cloud of misery she had brought upon her parents, "he had another idea--but I won't mention that."

"Yes, do, dear. Remember, you are to hide nothing from me."

"Well, he had an idea that you were fond of me."

"He is right. I am very fond of you, Florence."

"I know that, dear. But in another way, he meant. You understand."

"Yes, dear cousin, I understand."

"I told him that we had been brought up together, and that he wasn't to be jealous of my dear cousin Dick. Foolish of him, wasn't it?"

"Very foolish. How could such an idea have got into his head?"

"Well--perhaps--it--was--natural," she said, with an arch pause between each word. Ah, if she could have read his heart at that moment! But he did not betray himself. "There! I am sure your hand must feel more comfortable. I hope your feelings won't change towards me now that I'm a married woman."

"My feelings will never change, Florence, dear."

"A married woman! How strange and beautiful it sounds! To think of the time when we were playing together as little children! Such changes, Dick, such changes! It is almost as if we were not ourselves. My dear cousin! Do you think dear mother and father will come to me?"

"I will answer for them. Now, I must go. Every moment saved is a moment of happiness gained to them."

"Go, Dick, go quickly."

They kissed, and he was gone. When he was in the street he looked up at the window, and saw her standing there, looking out after him. She threw the window open, and kissed her hand to him. He returned the fond sign and hurried on.

"Steady, Dick, steady," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DR. VINSEN TAKES AN INTEREST IN DICK.

The admonition was needed, for his brain was in a whirl. The disclosure of Reginald's movements made by Florence, his statement to her that he had an idea for improving his circumstances which he intended to carry out "whatever came of it," his silence regarding his visits to the house in Catchpole Square, his fevered ravings about his father--were, as Dick said with a groan, "so many nails in his coffin."

"No doubt can exist," he argued, "that Samuel Boyd was murdered either by his son Reginald or by Abel Death. If what I know were made public Reginald would be immediately arrested and charged. Poor Florence! She little knows what is in store for her, and what can't be hidden much longer. But where, where is Abel Death? Is it possible that he also has been murdered? That would make things worse for Reginald. I'll search the house from top to bottom to-night in the hope of not finding his body, for then the chance of his being the murderer would still be open. If Florence's husband is put in the dock we'll make a fight for his life."

Having thus relieved his mind he struck a bee-line for Aunt Rob's house, and his knock at the door was instantly answered by her and Inspector Robson.

"I bring good news," said Dick, in a cheery tone.

"You have found her!" cried Aunt Rob, quivering with excitement.

"Yes, I have found her."

"Thank God--oh, thank God!"

Inspector Robson, pale as death, grasped Dick's hand, and in a husky voice asked, "Is she well?"

"Quite well--and waiting to see you."

Aunt Rob threw on her bonnet and mantle. "Here's your hat, father," she said, almost breathless, "we must go to her at once. Come, Dick, come."

"Stop a minute," he said, laying his hand on her arm, "I have something to tell you first."

"I don't want to hear anything," she cried, sternly. "I want my child!"

"Let Dick speak," said Inspector Robson.

Then Dick related all that Florence had told him, and their joy at recovering their daughter was so great that they had no word of reproach for her. The dear child was found, and they would be once more re-united. What more could they desire?

"They must come here this very day, father," said Aunt Rob. "This is their home till they get one of their own."

He nodded, and the fond parents, accompanied by Dick, hastened to the dear one, with love and forgiveness in their hearts. When they were all together in Florence's room he stood apart, a silent witness of the joyful meeting. How the parents embraced and wept over their child, how she clung to them and kissed them, and entreated them to believe that her love for them was stronger than it had ever been! Aunt Rob's tearful eyes shone with gladness; her one ewe lamb was restored to her; a sacred joy stirred their hearts at this re-union.

Then, when their agitation had somewhat subsided, and they had stepped in softly to see Reginald, who was still asleep, came the question of his removal.

"It must be left to the doctor," said Uncle Rob. "When do you expect him, Florence?"

"He is coming to-night, between eight and nine o'clock," she answered, and added, with a wistful look, "we are very poor, father."

"You share with us, my dear," was his ready response. "All we have is yours. Mother, it is hardly likely he can be removed for a day or two. You will stay with Florence to-night."

"And every night," said Aunt Rob, "till we get her home. I don't let her out of my sight. Dick, what are you looking so glum for?"

"Am I looking glum?" he said, striving to speak cheerfully. "I was not aware of it."

"Dear Dick!" said Florence, stepping to his side. "How can we thank you?"

"That will do, that will do," he said. "As if anybody in my place wouldn't have done the same! I must be off now--a thousand things to attend to."

"Pop into the office between eight and nine for a chat," said Uncle Rob.

"All right, uncle, I'll be there," answered Dick, waving goodbye to the happy group.

He was glad to get away, to think of the work before him. The search in Samuel Boyd's house for the body of Abel Death must be made to-night; it might be the last opportunity he would have to do so secretly.

"I must dodge the police, and I must get in early," he thought. "At nine I will have a chat with Uncle Rob, at ten I'll be in Catchpole Square. My mind is in a state of muddle. Let me see how the case stands in respect of dates and the consecutive order of events. To save confusion I will jot them down."

Taking a small memorandum book from his pocket he halted at a street corner, and made the following entries:

"Friday, 1st March.--Abel Death discharged by Samuel Boyd. He pays a visit to Catchpole Square at about ten o'clock to beg Boyd to take him back into his service. Reginald's two visits to the house, the first in the afternoon, the second late at night, hour unknown. In his haste to get away on the second occasion he drops in the passage the key of the street door. Samuel Boyd murdered. Query--Did Abel Death and Reginald meet? Would it be advisable, when Reginald is in his right senses, to ask him about this?

"Saturday, 2nd March.--Mrs. Death goes to Catchpole Square to obtain news of her husband. Unsuccessful. Good reason for it. Dead men tell no tales. Reginald back in his lodgings, in bed, delirious. The events of the previous night being fresh in his mind, it is likely he raved about them. Query--Who attended to him? His landlady. Did she hear anything that would furnish a clue, and will this occur to her when the murder is discovered?

"Sunday, 3d March.--Mrs. Death repeats her visits to Catchpole Square. Same result. Same reason for it.

"Monday, 4th March.--Mrs. Death continues her visits to Catchpole Square.

"Tuesday, 5th March.--The day of the great fog. My conversation with Uncle Rob in the police station. Mrs. Death and Gracie are brought in. Her story. Florence leaves home secretly to nurse Reginald. Fearing that he is dying, and gathering from his ravings that he wishes to see his father, she goes to Catchpole Square after midnight. She is seen by the police and drops her handkerchief, which Constable Pond picks up. My conversation with Applebee. He tells me that Pond has a room to let. I reconnoitre Samuel Boyd's

house, and determine to force an entrance next night. Only one way of getting in, by means of rope and grapnel.

"Wednesday, 6th March.--At the police court with Mrs. Death and Gracie. I write par. for 'L. B. B.' I take lodgings in Pond's house, and obtain possession of Florence's handkerchief. Visit Aunt Rob, and learn particulars of Florence's flight. I purchase rope and grapnel. I visit Mrs. Death. No news of her husband. Make the acquaintance of Dr. Vinsen. He gives Mrs. Death two pounds. Why should he be so generous? At one in the morning I get over dead wall, and into Samuel Boyd's house. Discovery of the murder. Find Samuel Boyd's written accusation of his son. Pocket it. Find Reginald's key to street door. Pocket it. Things look black.

"Thursday, 7th March--Visit Aunt Rob. Receive letter from Florence. Go to her. Fetch Aunt and Uncle Rob. Leave them together. Things look blacker."

Replacing the memorandum book in his pocket he became conscious that he was being observed. Looking up he saw the sleepy eyes of Dr. Vinsen fixed upon him.

"My dear young friend," said the doctor, with an amused smile, "I have been observing you for quite three minutes, and wondering what engrossing task you were engaged upon to make you oblivious of passers-by. An effort of literature--a poem--an inspiration? I envy the literary character. So free, so untrammelled by the ordinary circumstances of our prosaic existence! It soars on the wings of imagination into fairy realms--in-to fai-ry realms. Who knows that you have not in your pocket"--he tapped Dick's breast with a light finger--"something that will open our minds to noble truths? Who knows--who knows?"

"I know," said Dick. "If an account of how many socks, and collars, and handkerchiefs I have sent to the wash will elevate mankind I am sure I have no objection."

"A washing account," said Dr. Vinsen, with a gentle laugh. "Dear, dear, dear! But romance and mystery may be found even in commonplace matters. Look around. Observe the men and women who are passing us. What secrets are hidden in their breasts? In yours? In mine? It occurs to me at this moment to inquire whether mystery is the offspring of romance, or romance the offspring of mystery?"

"You can take your choice," said Dick, attempting to shake Dr. Vinsen off.

"Can one take one's choice?" said Dr. Vinsen, walking by Dick's side, and ignoring his companion's distaste for his society. "Is it open to us to do so? Are we free agents? Are we not rather like boats on a strange sea, with hidden currents that whirl us on, and

occasionally bring destruction upon us--des-truc-tion up-on us? Do you happen to be aware if the missing man has returned to the bosom of his family?"

"I am not aware of it. I should consider it very unlikely."

"Then you have a theory concerning his mysterious disappearance." Dick shook his head sullenly. "No? Perhaps you are right not to trouble yourself. I perceive that you are not in the mood for conversation. My dear young friend, I take my leave. If I can be of any service, pray command me."

So saying, Dr. Vinsen raised his hat, affording the world a view of his bald head and his halo, and slowly ambled away.

"Confound you!" said Dick, looking after him. "Why did you raise your hat to me? I am not that kind of man, you know."

His mind was in a state to magnify and distort the simplest matters. To such an extent that the voice of a newsboy shouting in an adjoining street caused him to hurry in that direction to buy a paper. There was nothing in it touching the murder, and he crumpled it up and threw it into the road So he idled away the time until a few minutes before nine, when he entered the Bishop Street Police Station, where his uncle expected him.

"Well, Dick, my lad," said Inspector Robson, "things have taken a turn since our talk the night before last."

"They have, indeed," returned Dick, and thought, "If you knew all!"

"It has been a terrible time," said the inspector, "and we owe you what we can never repay."

"You make too much of it, uncle. What did I do but go to Florence when she asked me? Did you stop long with her?"

"Till the last minute. Had tea there. It's a blessing the mystery's over; it almost drove me mad. It isn't a pleasant reflection that Reginald is the son of such a man as Samuel Boyd, but it would be hard lines to blame children for the faults of their parents. Have you seen Mrs. Death and her little girl?"

"Yes," replied Dick, "I have been twice to their lodgings, and they have heard nothing of the missing man. They are in great poverty--there are seven little children----"

"Poor creature! How's the little girl?"

"There's a chance of her getting well. A friend has unexpectedly turned up, and a doctor is attending her."

Then he related all that he knew of Dr. Vinsen.

"Have you ever heard of him, uncle?"

"Never; he must be a kind gentleman, and I'm glad such a piece of good fortune has fallen to Mrs. Death's share. I wish we could find her husband for her. Dick, now that Reginald is connected with us, a watch ought to be kept on the house in Catchpole Square. Constable Applebee says it looks as if it was quite deserted. If it remains so a day or two longer I shall consider what is best to be done. Abel Death and Mr. Boyd are mixed up together in my mind, and some steps should be taken to clear the mystery. You remember what you said about murder--do you still hold to it?"

It was an awkward question, and Dick gave an evasive reply.

"You might have a look round Catchpole Square yourself, Dick."

"I will do so," said Dick, and soon afterwards took his departure.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY WHARTON AT THE FOUNTAIN.

A fine starlight night, and the weather fair all over England, especially in Bournemouth where, in their beautiful estate, The Gables, Lord and Lady Wharton are giving their yearly ball. The air is soft and balmy in this favoured southern retreat, and though it is too early yet for the rhododendrons, the gardens are bright with flowers. Guests are riding to The Gables from all parts of the county, for this annual function is eagerly looked forward to by the belles and beaus of Hampshire. At eleven o'clock they begin to arrive, and by midnight the nineteenth century revelry is at its full height; at which hour my Lady Wharton, deeming that she has done her society duty, ceases to receive at the top of the grand staircase, and strolls into the grounds to welcome her tardy friends. Lord Wharton, happily convalescent, but still weak, and, as some whisper, not so strong in his intellect as he might be, is in the card room, where, propped up by cushions, he is entertaining a few choice guests by dropping his guineas to them. My lady's brother, Lord Fairfax, has also contributed to their entertainment, and, feeling that he has done his duty, he also strolls into the grounds, and flirts. He is in his fourth decade, a handsome gentleman with a blonde moustache, and has not yet made his choice in the matrimonial market; therefore he is gladly welcomed by all the spring beauties here assembled. But he is not an assiduous cavalier, and being weary of most things, is soon weary of languishing glances. Standing by a tiny fountain my lady watches him until he joins her there.

"They do these things better on the Continent," he says languidly.

Some hostesses would have misunderstood him, but she knows he refers to the fountain, and she nods assent. His conversational powers are not remarkable, so he allows her to rattle on for his amusement, putting in an occasional monosyllable as his contribution.

"Did you leave Wharton in the card room?" she asks.

"Yes," he drawls, and hazards three consecutive words. "Your friend arrived?" It is not a question in which he seems to take more than a momentary interest. He does everything languidly; even when he raises his white fingers to caress his moustache, which has been the business of his life, it is done as though the effort were a tax upon his physical powers. This, to many of the opposite sex, is one of his charms.

"Not yet," my lady answers.

"By the way," he says, and either forgets what he was going to say, or finds the effort of a long sentence too great.

"You were going to speak about the old bills?" she asks.

"Yes."

"I wrote to him to bring them to-night. I can't imagine how I forgot to ask him for them when I gave him the new acceptances you and Wharton signed."

"Not--business--woman," he observed, with a pause between each word.

"Don't be ridiculous, Fairfax," she protested, with a merry laugh. "Not a business woman? I should like to know what would become of Wharton if I were not."

"Floored," said Lord Fairfax.

"Indeed he would be. And don't I manage you?"

"Difficult?" he asked.

"Not at all. You are the dearest fellow! I shall be almost ashamed to ask you for another cheque to-morrow."

"Don't. Stumped"

"Next week, then?" He nods. She casts a critical look around. "Our most brilliant gathering, I think."

"Jolly," he says, and, being by this time exhausted, he leaves her at the fountain, where, presently, she is joined by other guests, with whom she carries on an animated conversation.

The grounds, with their thousands of coloured lights, are dotted with the attractive dresses of the ladies and the soberer costume of the gentlemen. Pleasure shows its smiling face, and doors are shut upon black care. No face brighter than that of Lady Wharton, none more free from the least suspicion of anxiety. Her hearty voice rings out, an invitation to mirth and gaiety. And yet as time wears on there is an anxious thought in her mind. "Why does the man not come?" she thinks. "He promised to be here faithfully, and it must be now nearly one o'clock." She consults a jewelled watch. "Yes, it is--one o'clock." The fact is, my lady is pressed for money, and she is expecting to receive

a thousand pounds to-night in ready cash, half of which must go to her dressmaker in the morning. For, come what may, my lady must be dressed. So she stands at the fountain, and taps her foot impatiently. Soft gleaming lights, fair sky with its panoply of stars and bright moon shining, sounds of rippling laughter, gay forms gliding and flitting through the lacework of the trees: a fairy scene, made not less beautiful by the dark spaces wherein the pines, their topmost branches silvered by the moon, stand apart, picturesque sentinels of the night.

To my lady a liveried footman, who presents a card. She moves into the light to read it.

"At last!" she says. "Where is the man?"

"He is waiting to see you, my lady."

She follows the servant, and steps into the shadow of a cluster of trees.

* * * * *

What connection is there between that gay scene in Bournemouth and this more sombre scene in Samuel Boyd's house in Catchpole Square, where, an hour after midnight, Dick moves in search of the body of Abel Death? The invisible links are in the air. Will they ever be brought to light and united to form another chain in the mystery?

Dick's search has lasted two hours, and has been conducted with care and patience. It is not alone traces of Abel Death he seeks for; he searches for anything in the shape of incriminating evidence against Reginald, his intention being to take possession of it, and by-and-by, perhaps, destroy it. That by so doing he will be committing a felonious act and frustrating the course of justice does not trouble him. He is working for Florence.

The first room he lingers in is that in which Samuel Boyd lies. No change there. The bed is still occupied by that silent, awful figure, cold and dead. Incapable of aught for good or evil as it is, it exercises a powerful influence over him. He dreads to approach it, and it draws him to its side. He steals from the room, shuddering, and, closing the door, breathes more freely at the barrier between them; but ever and anon, for some time afterwards, he casts a startled look over his shoulder, as though expecting to see a phantom standing there.

The ghostly moon shines through the windows which are unshuttered, and knowing now, from what Inspector Robson said, that an intermittent watch is being kept upon

the house, he dare not in those rooms carry a light. In the rooms with shuttered windows he risks a lighted candle, but holds it close to the floor and moves it warily from spot to spot, and shades it with his hand, in order to lessen the chance of its glimmer being seen from without. This makes his task more difficult, and there are moments when he almost regrets having undertaken it.

The wax figure of the Chinaman is still in its chair, holding in its hand the stick of the reign of Charles the Second. The chair is old-fashioned, too, having a grandmother's hood to it, so that the Chinaman sits, as it were, in a cosy alcove, only those standing in front of the figure being able to obtain a full view of its face.

Dick finds no further incriminating evidence against Reginald than that which he appropriated on his last visit. He makes, however, a curious discovery. He has examined every room with the exception of a small room on the same floor as the office, against the outer wall of which is placed the grand piano. The door of this room opens into the passage, and it is locked. His diligent search is rewarded by finding the key of the door, which he opens. The room is simply furnished, a table and two wooden chairs being all that it contains. A large cupboard with folding doors is fixed to the wall, and by pressing a spring he loosens one of these doors. The cupboard is bare of shelves, and affords ample space for a man to stand upright in. There is a sliding panel at the back, about three feet from the floor, and just wide enough for a man to squeeze through. He is surprised to see that the sliding panel leads to the interior of the grand piano, which is quite hollow and contains no wire or wood-work of any kind. The open space is large enough for a man to lie down in, though not without discomfort. The key of the piano is in the inner part of the lock, and by removing this any person concealed there could see into the office, and could certainly hear any sounds of voices or movements made therein, the watcher being so shrouded in darkness as to be quite safe from observation. "Another of Samuel Boyd's tricks," thinks Dick, "for spying upon his clerks." To verify this he returns to the office, and satisfies himself that he has arrived at the correct explanation.

As he stands pondering over this curious discovery, which in the end he dismisses from his mind as of no importance, he finds himself mechanically counting the bottles of wine stacked against another part of the wall. It is done idly, and without meaning, but he does not forget that there are seventy-six bottles, with the crusted dust of years upon them. "Port wine, I should say," he thinks. "I should like half a pint." But he does not yield to the temptation.

At three in the morning his search is at an end. He can do nothing more. He has met with no traces of Abel Death, and he has not found an additional clue.

"I must keep my own counsel," he mutters. "If Abel Death turns up will it be for good or ill? His absence lays him open to suspicion, but it is altogether a case of circumstantial evidence. Supposing him to be caught, tried, and convicted, and he an innocent man----!"

He cannot pursue this supposition to its just conclusion. The image of Florence presents itself, her hands stretched out, appealing to him to save Reginald.

With a sinking heart, and using every precaution to escape observation, he succeeds in getting out of the office by the front entrance. Oppressed by the conviction that he must now wait for the course of events, and that he is powerless to direct them, he is walking out of Deadman's Court when the voice of Constable Applebee falls upon his ears.

"I thought it was you, sir," said the constable. "Have you been looking at the house?"

"Yes," replies Dick, pulling himself together, "from the outside."

"Of course from the outside, sir," says Constable Applebee. "I should like to have a look at it from the inside. People are beginning to talk about it. It's seven days now since anybody's set eyes on Mr. Boyd, and seven days since Mr. Abel Death disappeared. That's what I call a coincidence. I hope it's nothing more than that. Hope you're comfortable in your new lodgings, sir."

"Quite comfortable, thank you. I must be off to them now. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Dick is by this time thoroughly tired out, and when he reaches his room is glad to tumble into bed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE LITTLE BUSY BEE" GETS AHEAD OF ITS RIVALS.

Two days afterwards, that is, on the 9th of March, some hours after the morning papers were in circulation, all London was ringing with the news of the mysterious murder in Catchpole Square. The name of Samuel Boyd was on every tongue; the newsboys shouted it out raucously and jubilantly, with the full force of their lungs, and the wind carried it into all the highways and byeways of the vast metropolis; it was printed on the variously coloured waybills of the newspapers in scarlet letters, green letters, yellow letters, as large as the width of the sheets permitted; it was read aloud and discussed in omnibuses, in public-house bars, in the workshops and places of business; it was bandied about, tossed in the air, caught up and passed on, embellished, illustrated and exaggerated, and rolled over the tongue as the most tempting of tempting morsels. Editorial offices were alive with it, their swing doors had not a moment's rest, the whole of the staff were on the qui vive, reporters hurried this way and that in their hunt for facts, fanciful or otherwise, that had the remotest connection, or no connection at all, with the name of the murdered man and the circumstances of the murder, as far as they were known. Now was the chance for the descriptive writer, for the youthful aspirants for journalistic fame, for the enterprising interviewer. Things had been rather dull lately. There had been no stirring crime, no bloodthirsty deed, no sensational trial, no tremendous conflagration, no awful shipwreck, no colliery explosion, no terrible railway collision, for quite a week, and circulation was languishing. But here at last was a dish of hot spice to stir the blood, to set tongues wagging, to fire the imagination, to make the pulses glow. A murder! And such a murder! Dark, thrilling, impenetrable, inscrutable, enveloped in delicious mystery. What is one man's meat is another man's poison, and Samuel Boyd, who had never in life given a beggar a penny or the price of a meal to a starving man, was the means, in death, of filling many a platter and frothing up many a pewter pot. Trade revived. People spent more, drank more, smoked more, went to the music-halls and theatres more, for it was impossible to keep still with such an excitement in the air. See the radiant faces of the ragged street urchins as they shout it out and dispose of their sheets, and are not asked for change of a penny--see the journalistic scouts as they follow the trail, true trail, false trail, any trail--see the crowds in Fleet Street and the Strand and all the narrow thoroughfares leading riverwards--see the smart newspaper carts, with their dapper ponies flying north, south, east, and west with their latest editions--see the travellers on the tops of omnibuses throwing down their coppers and bending over to seize the papers--see the railway bookstalls besieged by eager buyers, who, rushing to catch a train, pick up half a dozen different journals, in the hope of finding in one of them two or three lines of different import from those contained in all the others--see the men standing at street corners, running their eyes

down the columns, animated by a similar hope--see the telegraph wires, blind and deaf to human passion, carrying the message of murder, murder, murder, on their hundreds of miles of silent tongues--see the envy of the hawkers of wax matches, penny toys, and bone shirt studs, as they watch the roaring trade that is being done by the busy armies of tag, rag, and bobtail, who form the distributing street agency of journalistic literature, and wish that heaven had sent them such a bit of luck. Sold out again, Jack! Hurrah! Fly off for another quire. As good as a Derby Day, Bill! As good? Ten times better! Where are "all the winners" now? Shorn of their glory they sink into the background, and no small punter so poor to do them reverence? What are "all the winners" to a rattling spicy murder?

Never had "The Little Busy Bee" more fully justified its title than on the present occasion. A daring scheme had suggested itself to one of the members of the staff, which had been crowned with success. Ahead of all its rivals it was the first to publish the exciting news, and needless to say it made the most of its golden opportunity. The office was besieged; it was like a Jubilee Day. Men and boys fought and scrambled for the copies as the steam presses belched them forth, and selling them out before they reached the wider thoroughfares, rushed back for more. The day was Saturday, and the whirling tumult lasted till midnight.

The manner of "The Little Busy Bee's" buzzing in its preliminary editions was as follows: First, a quotation in large type from "Macbeth." "And one cried, Murder!" Then half a column of the usual sensational headings. Then the account of the daring scheme and the discovery in the following fashion:

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE LITTLE BUSY BEE" ENLIGHTENS THE PUBLIC.

"Special and exclusive information has just reached us of

A Remarkable and Ghastly Murder

in the North of London, and we hasten to lay the particulars before the public. It will be fresh in the recollection of our readers that in our Tuesday's editions we drew attention to a blind thoroughfare in that neighbourhood, known as Catchpole Square, to which the only access is through a hooded passage, bearing the ominous and significant designation of Deadman's Court. On that morning a poor woman, accompanied by her little daughter, whose pallid face and emaciated appearance evoked general sympathy, made an application to the magistrate at the Bishop Street Police Court respecting the mysterious disappearance of her husband, Mr. Abel Death. It appears that this man was a clerk in the employ of Mr. Samuel Boyd, of Catchpole Square, and that on Friday evening last he was summarily discharged by his employer. He was in needy circumstances and he came home to his lodgings in a very desponding frame of mind, for the loss of his situation spelt ruin to his family. In this desperate strait he left his wife at between nine and ten o'clock on the same night, with the intention, as she stated, of making an appeal to Mr. Boyd to take him back into his service. From that hour to this nothing has been heard of him. Neither has anything been heard of Mr. Samuel Boyd, who, it may be premised, is supposed to be a man of great wealth, and is described by some of his neighbours as a money-lender, by others as a miser. Credence is given to the latter description by the fact that he lived quite alone, and kept no servants in his house, such domestic services as he required being performed by a charwoman who attended only when she was sent for.

"Mrs. Death's application at the police court having been made public through the medium of our columns it was a reasonable presumption that it would have come to the notice of Mr. Samuel Boyd, and that he would have sent a communication either to the distracted wife or to the newspapers, stating if Abel Death visited him on Friday night, and if so, at what hour he left. But Mr. Boyd made no sign. The woman said that she had been several times to the house in Catchpole Square, and had received no response to her knocking at the street door. Nothing was seen of either of the men, and it is probable that nothing would have been known for a considerable time had it not been for the bold

action taken by a valued member of our staff, to whose love of adventure we have been frequently indebted.

"We may state at once that this gentleman acted entirely upon his own initiative, and that we accept the full responsibility of his proceedings, and are prepared to defend them. It may be objected in some quarters that he took upon himself duties which did not fall within his province. We will not at present argue the point. There was a dark mystery; there were rumours of foul play; hidden from public gaze stood a house which contained the evidence of

A Terrible Tragedy;

futile endeavours had been made to obtain entrance into this house; the police did not act, probably because they had no authority to act. What followed? That the press stepped in, and by a bold stroke

Laid a Foul Crime Bare.

"History records how officers high in command on land and sea, but not invested with complete authority, have disobeyed orders and won great victories. Success justified them. Success justifies us.

"We come now to details.

"In his endeavour to ascertain whether a search of Mr. Samuel Boyd's house would afford a clue to the silence of its proprietor and to the disappearance of Abel Death, our reporter ran the risk of being arrested for burglary. Except that he did not get in by the front door we do not propose just now to disclose how he obtained an entrance into the open space at the back; sufficient that he did obtain it, and that at ten o'clock this morning he found himself in an enclosed yard at the rear of the house. The merest examination of this part of the premises satisfied him that some person, probably a more experienced burglar, had been before him. The back door was locked and bolted, but a window sill and the panes of glass above had been smashed in, and there were signs that the person who had done this had entered the house through the window. To reach the sill the first burglar had stood upon a rickety bench which had apparently given way beneath him. Our reporter managed to put this together in a sufficiently firm manner to afford him a temporary foothold. Then, with an upward spring, he got his

hands upon the sill, and scrambled through the window into a small unfurnished room. He did not effect this violent entrance without noise, but there were no indications that his movements had disturbed any person in the house, which was silent as the grave. His next task was to examine the rooms, all the doors of which were unlocked. He proceeded with great caution, and at length reached an apartment which, from the fact of its containing a writing table, desk, and safe, he concluded was the office in which Mr. Boyd conducted his business affairs, although, from the singular collection of articles scattered about, it might have been the shop of a dealer in miscellaneous goods, comprising as they did several dozens of wine, old tapestry and armour, pictures, valuable china, a grand piano, and, strangest of all, the wax figure of a Chinaman which might have come straight from Madame Tussaud's exhibition. Our reporter confesses to a feeling of alarm when he first saw this figure, the back of which was towards him, and, while it did not lessen his surprise, it was with relief he ascertained its real nature. Up to this point, however, strange as were the objects which met his eyes, he had seen nothing to warrant his breaking into the house. The safe was locked, and there was no appearance of its having been tampered with; with the exception of the broken window at the back of the house, there were no signs of disorder in any part of it, and he began to doubt the wisdom of his proceedings. He was not to remain long in doubt; he was on the threshold of

An Appalling Discovery.

"There are three doors in the apartment in which he stood. One leading to the passage, one on the left, and one on the right. This last door opened into a bedroom, which he entered. Seeing the form of a human being in the bed he retreated, uncertain how to act. Then he called softly, and receiving no answer spoke in a louder tone, and still received no answer. Mustering up courage he approached the bed, stepping very gently, and laid his hand on the man's shoulder. The silence continuing he turned down the bedclothes. The man was dead!

"In view of the proceedings he had determined to take our reporter last night obtained from a policeman a personal description of Mr. Samuel Boyd, and he had no difficulty in identifying the features of the dead man. They were those of Abel Death's employer, and from certain marks on his throat he came to the conclusion that Mr. Boyd had been murdered by strangulation. The position of the furniture did not denote that a struggle had taken place on the floor of the bedroom, and the reasonable conclusion is that Mr. Boyd had been strangled in his sleep. After the deed was done the murderer must have composed the limbs of his victim, and arranged the bedclothes over the body, in order, probably, to make it appear that Mr. Boyd had died a natural death. The

shortsightedness of this proceeding is a singular feature in this ruthless crime, for it is scarcely possible that the marks on his throat could escape detection, or that the strangulation could have been effected without some violent efforts on the part of the victim to save himself, whereby the bedclothes must have been tossed about.

"The silence of Mr. Samuel Boyd on the subject of the disappearance of Abel Death is now accounted for; the disappearance of Abel Death has yet to be explained. We make no comment. From this hour the matter is in the hands of the police, who will doubtless set all the machinery of Scotland Yard in motion to discover the murderer and bring him to justice.

"A circumstance remains to be mentioned which may furnish a clue. Before he left the house to give information to the police our reporter's attention was attracted by certain dark stains on the floor of the bedroom and the office. They bear the appearance of having been made by a man's feet. Our reporter traced these dark stains from the office into the passage, and from the passage down a staircase leading to the small room which our reporter first entered through the broken window. There they end. The mystery is deepened by the fact that there are no marks of blood on the clothes of the bed in which the murdered man lies. Our reporter scraped off a portion of the stains, which we have placed in the hands of an experienced analyst, in order to ascertain whether they are stains of human blood.

"An important question, yet to be decided, is, when the murder was committed. Our reporter is of the opinion that it was perpetrated several days ago. The evidence of doctors will be of value here. We understand that no person in the neighbourhood of Catchpole Square has seen Mr. Boyd since last Friday evening. From Mrs. Death's evidence at the Bishop Street Police Court we gather that her husband has not been seen since that day. The presumption is that the murder was committed on Friday night. Much depends upon the discovery of Abel Death and upon the explanation he will be able to give of his movements. It is understood that Mr. Boyd leaves one son, his only child, who is now in London.

"We shall continue to issue editions of 'The Little Busy Bee' until midnight, in which further particulars will be given of this strange and most mysterious murder."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BURSTING OF THE CLOUD.

Inspector Robson, being on night duty, was not present at the Bishop Street Police Station when the reporter of "The Little Busy Bee" gave information of the murder. Aunt Rob had had a busy day; while admitting that her son-in-law was very weak, she insisted that he would have a greater chance of getting well in a short time if he were removed from his lodgings to their home. "It's his proper place," she said, "and I won't rest till I get him there." She argued with the doctor, one of the old school, who shook his head; she continued to argue with him, and he continued to shake his head. This exasperated her.

"I suppose, doctor," she said, with freezing politeness, "you won't allow that women ought to have opinions."

"Not medical opinions," he replied.

"He may shake his head till he shakes it off," she said privately to Uncle Rob, "but he won't convince me." He smiled an admission of this declaration. "And look at Florence," she continued; "the poor girl is being worn to skin and bone. We shall have her down presently."

"But is it safe to move him, mother?" asked Florence, who, next to Reginald's recovery to health, desired nothing so much as a return to the dear old home.

"My darling child," said Aunt Rob, "when did you know me to be wrong? Ask father how much I've cost him for doctors since we've been married. I nursed you through the whooping cough and scarlatina without a doctor, and are you any the worse for it? I know as much as a good many of them by this time. There are some doctors who won't allow you to suggest a single thing. The moment you do they're up in arms. 'What business have you to know?' they think. This is one of that kind. Reginald is my son now, and I'm doing by him as I'd do by you."

The upshot was, all preparations being made, that Reginald was moved on Saturday morning, and bore the removal well. When Florence saw him sleeping calmly in her own room she cried for joy.

"It's like old times, mother," she said, tenderly.

Aunt Rob smiled a little sadly; when a daughter is married it can never be again quite like old times in the home in which she was born and reared. Something is missing, something gone. It is not that the old love is dead, but that a new love is by its side, with new hopes, and mayhap new fears, to make up the fulness of life. The mother looks back upon her own young days, and realises now what she did not think of then, that the child she nestled at her bosom is going through the changes she has experienced; and so, if her daughter is happily mated, she thanks God--but now and then a wistful sigh escapes her.

In the afternoon Dick came to see them, and they chatted in the sitting room in which they had passed so many happy hours. He was not in a bright mood; dreading every minute that the murder would be discovered and made public, he felt that it would be almost a relief when the cloud burst, as burst it must before long. Knowing what he knew, the suspense was maddening.

"Now, Dick," said Aunt Rob, "I've got something to say to you. Reginald and Florence are here, as you know, but that doesn't make any difference in your room. There it is, ready for you, as it has been all through, and I shall begin to think there's some secret reason for your keeping away from us if you don't occupy it at once. I'll take no denial, Dick."

"Let us wait a bit, aunt," said Dick. "I'll sleep here now and then, and take my meals here, but it wouldn't be fair to Mrs. Pond for me to run away after having been in her house only a few days. So, like the kind dear soul that you are, let it remain as it is for a little while. What's that?"

It was a newsboy shouting at the top of his voice, and selling copies of "The Little Busy Bee" as fast as he could hand them out.

"It's a murder!" cried Aunt Rob. "And do you hear that? Hark! 'Horrible discovery!' Merciful heavens! 'Catchpole Square!' Where Reginald's father lives!"

The two men ran out of the house like mad, and were just in time to tear the last copy from the boy's hands. A glance at the headlines was sufficient.

"You were right, Dick, you were right," said Uncle Rob. "Samuel Boyd's murdered!"

They looked at each other with white faces.

"Found dead in his bed! Strangled! We must keep it from them at home, Dick."

"Impossible, uncle. Listen--there's another boy shouting it out. Let's get back to the house."

They read as they walked, Uncle Rob holding the paper, and Dick looking over his shoulder.

"What is it--what is it?" cried Aunt Rob, meeting them in the passage.

"If it's true, it's murder," said Uncle Rob. "Come into the room, and shut the door. Speak low. Is Florence upstairs?"

"Yes. Wait a minute." She stepped softly to the room above, and quickly returned. "Reginald is dozing, and Florence has fallen asleep in her chair. The poor child is tired out. Murder! Where? In Catchpole Square?"

"Yes."

"Reginald's father?"

"Yes." She uttered a cry of horror. "I must go to the office at once."

"Dick! You're not going, too?"

"I can't stop, aunt. I must go with uncle."

He was in a fever of impatience to get out of the house.

"Do what you can, mother, to keep it from Florence," said Uncle Rob, hurriedly. "If it comes to her ears tell her we've gone to see about it. Now, then, Dick."

"Leave me the paper, father. How horrible! How horrible!"

"Here it is; don't let Florence see it. We'll get another as we go along." As they hastened to Bishop Street Station he said, "This is a bad business, Dick."

"A frightful business."

"I wonder if Mr. Boyd made a will."

"Ah, I wonder."

"If he hasn't his money falls to Reginald. The chances are, though, that there's a will, disinheriting him."

"Do you think so?" asked Dick.

"Don't you?" his uncle asked, in return.

"I don't know what to think. Time will show."

"It will show a good many things. It's got to show what has become of Abel Death. I'm sorry for his wife and that poor little girl."

"I'm sorry for a good many people," said Dick. His uncle cast a hurried look at him. "I don't mean anything. My head's in a whirl."

"No wonder. There's another boy shouting the news. Run after him and get a paper."

They both raced, and bought two copies. The boy's face was beaming.

"He's happy enough," said Inspector Robson.

At the police station they learned that two constables had been sent to Catchpole Square to ascertain whether the news was true.

"I've given them instructions," said the day inspector, "if they can't get into the house by the front door, to scale the wall at the back. I can't say I like the way this case has been got up. Those newspaper men are getting too meddlesome altogether."

"But if it's true," suggested Inspector Robson.

"That will make it all the worse for us," grumbled the day inspector. "The next thing the papers will do will be to start a Scotland Yard of their own. The fact is, the police haven't got power enough; we daren't move without proof positive. It's all very well to talk of the liberty of the subject, but it's my opinion the subject's got more liberty than it has a right to have. I'll give you an instance. I know a man who is as mad as mad can be--a dangerous chap, with a bloodthirsty eye, carries knives, and looks at you as if he'd like to murder you. But we daren't touch him. Why? Because nobody charges him. When he sticks a knife into somebody we can lay our hands on him, but not till then; so we've got to wait till mischiefs done. Then they'll prove him mad, and he'll be made comfortable for life. There's this affair; the public will be down on us for not being the first to make

the discovery. We can't move, but a newspaper man can. It's like taking the bread out of our mouths."

Inspector Robson made no comment, but offered advice.

"If I were in your place I should send three or four more constables to Catchpole Square. Deadman's Court is a narrow thoroughfare, and there'll be a rush of people to stare at the house. There should be a guard back and front. I'm going there now to have a look round."

"I'll send the men after you," said the day inspector, "instanter."

Off they hurried to Catchpole Square, where they found that a great many sight-seers had already gathered, of whom only a few at a time were allowed to enter to stare up at the windows of Samuel Boyd's house, a constable being stationed at the entrance of Deadman's Court to guard the passage. Inspector Robson asked this officer where the other constable was.

"Gone to the station, sir, for further instructions," replied the constable, whose name was Filey.

"Who is it?"

"Simmons, sir. We was detailed together."

"Have you been in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get in?"

"Over the wall, at the back. We borrowed a ladder, and Simmons mounted and got over, while I kept watch outside."

"What did he find?"

"The body, sir, just as the paper describes."

"Did you get into the house the same way as Simmons?"

"No, sir. He found the key of the street door hanging on a cord in Mr. Boyd's bedroom, and he came out that way and let me in."

At this point four constables from the station appeared on the scene, Applebee among them.

"Who has the key of the street door?"

"I have, sir."

"Give it to me. I knew Mr. Boyd by sight, and so did you, Applebee."

"Could pick him out of a thousand, sir."

"And you, Dick, were intimately acquainted with him. We'll go in and see the body. By the way, Filey, was the street door chained and bolted when Simmons unlocked it?"

"I never asked him. Here he is, sir; he can answer for himself."

Constable Simmons joined the group, and Inspector Robson repeated the question.

"Neither locked nor bolted, sir," he replied.

Inspector Robson drew Dick aside, and said, "That's a suspicious circumstance, Dick. The murderer got in by the back entrance, and got out by the front. I argue it this way. He gets in, he kills the man, he finds the key of the street door in the bedroom, he goes down, unchains, unbolts, and unlocks the door. He then returns to the bedroom and fastens the key on the cord, goes down again and lets himself out. It seems to prove that the murder was committed by a novice."

Dick made no remark. He recollected that Mrs. Death had not said anything in the police station of Reginald's visit to his father in the afternoon, and of his having a second key to the street door. That information had been given exclusively to Dick by Mrs. Death in Draper's Mews; it would come out presently, of course, but he would not utter a word to throw the shadow of a suspicion on Reginald. "A nice treacherous part I'm playing," he thought, "but I must go on with it. God knows how things will turn out."

There were some twenty or thirty persons in the Square; a few were airing theories concerning the murder, and recalling other crimes as mysterious and thrilling; one man was boasting that he had seen every house in London in which a murder had been committed during the last forty years; the majority were silent, and appeared to derive a

creepy enjoyment by simply staring at the walls and windows. A journalist was jotting down everything he heard that could be incorporated into an article. Two newspaper artists were sketching, and one of these came forward and asked Inspector Robson if he would kindly point out the window of the room in which the body was lying. He replied that he did not know. The other artist, observing that the Inspector had a key in his hand, inquired if it belonged to the house.

"Key of the street door," said the inspector, whereupon the artist immediately took a sketch of it, and wrote beneath, "Key of the Street Door by which the Murderer Made his Escape."

"We go in for realism," he said, as with a few skilful touches he limned the faces of Inspector Robson, Constable Applebee, and Dick on his sketching pad. "Nothing tickles the public so much as sketches from real life in pen and pencil. We live in a melodramatic age, and must go with the times. I belong to 'The Illustrated Afternoon.' Now I call these speaking likenesses. I take it you belong to the force, and are here upon official business. May I inquire your name, or shall I call it the Portrait of a Gentleman who Carried the Street Door Key?"

With no good grace Inspector Robson gave his name, which was placed beneath his portrait. Then Applebee was asked for his name, and it was given more willingly. The worthy constable had no objection to his features appearing in "The Illustrated Afternoon"; the picture would be preserved in the family as an heirloom.

"And yours?" inquired the artist, of Dick.

"Private person," said Dick.

"Thank you," said the artist, and wrote beneath the portrait, "Private Person who, for Unexplained Reasons, Declined to Give his Name."

The insertion of the key in the lock caused much excitement, and all the artillery of the press was brought to bear upon the inspector. The industrious journalists advanced cogent reasons why they should be let into the house; they begged, they clamoured, but they could not convince the obdurate inspector.

"Very sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but it can't be allowed."

He could not, however, prevent them from obtaining a glimpse of the dark passage, and this glimpse was quite sufficient to enable them to give a vivid description of the walls, the staircase, and the umbrella stand with one umbrella in it, which the eagle eye of the

smarter of the artists transferred like lightning to his pad. It was an interesting feature in his article, "The Murdered Man's Umbrella." There was great disappointment among the group outside when the door was closed upon them.

"You've been up these stairs often enough, Dick," said Inspector Robson. "Take us to the room."

His eyes opened wide when they reached the office, and both he and Constable Applebee stared around in amazement.

"Did you ever see anything like this, Applebee?"

"Never, sir, out of a play."

They spoke in hushed voices.

Dick could not have explained why he counted the bottles of wine. It was done mechanically, and without motive, but it gave him a surprise. "Seventy-five bottles," he thought. "I'll take my oath that when I counted them the night before last, there were seventy-six."

"Where's the bedroom, Dick?" whispered the inspector.

Dick opened the door, and creeping in, they stood looking down upon the dead face. In this awful presence they were dumb. Stepping very softly they returned to the office. Then Inspector Robson spoke.

"It's Samuel Boyd. What do you say, Applebee--do you recognise the features?"

"I'll swear to the man, sir."

"And you, Dick?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"The coroner must be informed. Go and see who's knocking at the street door, Applebee. Don't let any one in." The constable departed on his errand. "It's a clear case, Dick. I wouldn't say so to any one but you, and we must keep our own counsel. The name of the murderer of Samuel Boyd is Abel Death. Now we know why he's keeping out of the way. He's got a long start of us. Here's Applebee coming back. Not a word. Who is it, Applebee?"

"Mrs. Death and her little girl, sir. She's half distracted, and tried to force her way in."

"We've seen what we came to see," said Inspector Robson, "and no person must be admitted into the house. You will keep in the Square to-night, Applebee. I'll put another man on your beat."

"Very good, sir."

The moment they emerged into the Square Gracie ran to Dick and took his hand. An infinite pity filled his heart as he looked down at her pallid, mournful face.

"It's all right now, mother," she said, hoarsely. "Dick'll stand up for us."

"Is it true, sir, is it true?" cried Mrs. Death, a wild terror in her eyes. "We've run here as fast as we could."

"It is unhappily true," he answered.

"Then where's my husband? Do you know what they're saying? That he murdered Mr. Boyd! They lie--they lie! Oh, my God! Is there any justice in the world?"

"Don't make a disturbance, Mrs. Death," said Inspector Robson, very kindly. "I am truly sorry for you, but you can do no good by coming here."

"Where else should I come, sir?" she asked, her tears falling fast. "Mr. Boyd is the only man who can tell me what has become of my husband, and he's dead, you say. Who killed him? What a wicked world--oh what a wicked, wicked world! Haven't I enough to bear without this being thrown in my teeth?"

"Don't take on so, mother," said Gracie, in a dull, apathetic voice, but Dick understood how great her inward suffering was by the convulsive twining of her little fingers round his. "It's all right now we've got Dick. You're our friend, ain't you, Dick?"

"May they be struck down dead for their lies!" sobbed Mrs. Death. "How dare they, how dare they accuse my poor husband, who never raised his hand against a living creature!"

"Do these people live in your neighbourhood?" asked Inspector Robson.

"Yes, sir; they do."

"They should be warned not to be so free with their tongues, or they may get themselves in trouble. Can you point them out?"

"I can show them you," said Gracie, answering for her mother.

"Go with her," said Inspector Robson to Dick, in a low tone, "and give her neighbours a caution. The poor woman has something yet worse in store for her. Then go home to Aunt Rob and Florence, and remain there to-night. They need a man's support and sympathy, and my duties will chain me to the office."

"Thank you, sir," said Gracie, whose sharp ears caught every word, "you're ever so good to us." A sudden tightening of her hand on Dick's caused him to look up, and he saw Dr. Vinsen.

"I have heard what has passed," said the doctor, addressing himself to Inspector Robson, "and shall be glad to offer my services in the interests of humanity--the in-te-rests of hu-ma-ni-ty."

"Who may you be, sir?" inquired Inspector Robson.

"I am Dr. Vinsen. Our friends here have some knowledge of me, I believe." He shed a benevolent smile around. "This is a most shocking murder. It would be worth your while, Mr. Remington, if you could discover the perpetrator of the frightful crime, and so relieve this unfortunate woman's distress. It shall be done, madam, it shall be done. Rely upon me. Let not the criminal hope that his guilt can be for ever hidden. There is an All-seeing Eye--Divine justice will overtake him--will o-ver-take him. Is that the house in which the victim lies?"

"Yes," said Dick.

"A singular place for a man to live in--and die in. Now, my dear madam, if you wish me to admonish these slanderers I am ready to accompany you."

"Dick's going to speak to 'em," said Gracie.

"Oh, Dick's going to speak to them. And you would rather Dick did it?"

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"Well, then, Dick it shall be. I have no doubt he will do it as well as myself--better, perhaps, he being a literary character." There was a faint twinkle in his sleepy eyes. "But you have no objection to my walking a little way with your mother, I hope? Mr. Inspector, have you any opinion----"

"Don't ask me for opinions," interrupted Inspector Robson.

"Pardon my indiscretion, but one's natural curiosity, you know. There will be an inquest?"

"Of course there will be an inquest."

"Of course--of course. Good day, Mr. Inspector, I am greatly obliged to you. Now, my dear madam."

They walked out of Deadman's Court, Mrs. Death and Dr. Vinsen in front, Dick and Gracie in the rear, at whom now and then the doctor, his head over his shoulder, cast an encouraging smile.

"Do you like him, Dick?" asked Gracie.

"No, I don't," he replied, "and I don't know why."

"I do," said Gracie. "He's so slimy."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MODERN KNIGHT OF CHIVALRY.

Draper's Mews and its purlieus were on fire with excitement, raised by a spark dropped by a vicious beetle-browed coster, whose chronic state for years past had been too much beer, and liquor of a worse kind. Mrs. Death's neighbours were by no means unfavourably disposed towards her and her family. The kindness of the poor to the poor is proverbial, and there is much less friction in the way of social scandal among the lower classes than among those of higher rank. This was exemplified in Draper's Mews, where the Death family had long resided, and had fought life's bitter battle in amity with all around them. Now and then, of course, small differences had cropped up, but they were soon got over, and there was no serious disturbance of friendly relations. To this happy state of things there was, however, an exception. It happened in this way.

Two or three years ago, on a bright summer day, the beetle-browed coster wheeled his barrow through the poor neighbourhood, disposing of his stock of early cherries at fourpence the standard pound. Children who had a halfpenny or a penny to spare, beggared themselves incontinently, and walked about with cherry ear-rings dangling in their ears, while some made teapots with fruit and stalks, and refreshed themselves with imaginary cups of the finest leaf of China. Abel Death stood by, and looking at the children thought of his own, and fingered the few loose coppers in his pocket. Strange that fruit so tempting and young--the cherries were whitehearts, with the daintiest blush on their innocent cheeks--should have been destined to bring sorrow to the hearts of those who were dear to the poor clerk! But in this reflection we must not forget the apple in the Garden of Eden.

Unable to resist the temptation Abel Death bought half a pound of the pretty things, and had received and paid for them, when he noticed an ugly piece of lead at the bottom of the scale in which the fruit was weighed. What made the matter worse was that on the coster's barrow was displayed an announcement in blazing letters of vermilion, "Come to the Honest Shop for Full Weight." Which teaches a lesson as to the faith we should place in boisterous professions. Abel Death remonstrated, the coster slanged and bullied, there was a row and a growling crowd, some of whom had been defrauded in like manner, and among the crowd an inspector of weights and measures, who, backed by a constable, forthwith brought before the magistrate the cheat, the barrow (the coster wheeling it), the innocent cherries, and the scales with the piece of lead attached to the wrong balance. The moving scene, with its animated audience laughing, babbling, explaining at the heels of the principal actors in the drama, was almost as good a show as a Punch and Judy. With tears in his eyes, which he wiped away with his cuff, the

coster declared that he'd take his oath he didn't know how the piece of lead could have got on the bottom of the scale, all he could say was that some one who had a down on him must have put it there to get him in trouble, he'd like to find out the bloke, that he would, he'd make it hot for him; and, despite this whining defence, was fined, would not pay the fine, and went to prison for seven days, whimpering as he was led from the court, "Wot's the use of a cove tryin' to git a honest livin'?"

The result of this swift stroke of justice was a mortal enmity against Abel Death. He proclaimed a vendetta, and waited for his chance, meanwhile avenging himself by kicking and cuffing the younger members of the Death family when he met them, and encouraging his children to do the same. The chance came with the disappearance of Abel Death and the discovery of the murder of Samuel Boyd. Forthwith he set light to a fire which spread with startling rapidity, and he went about instilling his poison into the ears of Mrs. Death's neighbours. Hence her agony of mind.

Dick traced the rumours to their fountain head, found the man, talked to him, argued with him--in vain. It was a public matter, and the usual crowd collected.

"Look 'ere," cried the coster, to Dick, "we don't want none o' your
cheek, we don't. Who are you, I'd like to know, puttin' your spoke in? A innercent man, is 'e? Looks like it, don't it? Wot's the innercent man a-keepin' out of the way for? Why don't 'e come 'ome? Tell me that? 'Ere, I'll wait till you've made up somethink, somethink tasty, yer know. Take yer time. Wot! Ain't got a bloomin' word to say for yerself? Wot do you think?" Appealing to the people surrounding them. "'E's a nice sort o' chap to come palaverin' to me, ain't 'e?"

The listeners were not all of one mind, many of them, indeed, being mindless. Some took one side, some took another, while Mrs. Death and Gracie stood by, pitiful, white-faced spectators of the scene.

"Why, it's as clear as mud," continued the coster. "The sneakin' thief killed 'is master, and then laid 'ands on everythink 'e could collar, and cut away. Put them things together, and there you are, yer know."

"I know where you'll be," said Dick, speaking in his best judicial manner, "if you're not careful. It won't be the first time you've got yourself in trouble." The shot told, and the listeners wavered. "We're Englishmen, I believe," said Dick, following up his advantage. "We don't carry knives like the Italians, or fight with our legs like the French, and we're not made in Germany." This cosmopolitan reference was an immense hit, and two or three politicians said "Hear, hear!" Dick went on. "We fight with our fists, and we don't hit a man when he's down. What we insist upon is fair play; that's what we wave our flag

for--fair play. Look at Mrs. Death, a hard-working, respectable woman, that's lived among you all these years, and never done one of you an ill turn. Look at her innocent children that this great hulking brute is flinging stones at. It's cowardly, sneaking work. Oh, I'm not afraid of you, my man; if you lift your hand against me I'll give you something to remember me by. You haven't the pluck to hit one of your own size; you only hit women and children. I don't believe you've got a drop of English blood in your cowardly carcase." With sparkling eyes and glowing face he turned to the crowd. "I appeal to a jury of English men and women. Is what this brute is doing manly, is it fair, is it English--that's the point, is it English?"

There was no doubt now as to the sympathy. It went out full and free to Mrs. Death and Gracie, who stood, as it were, in the dock, with the beetle-browed, sodden-faced coster accusing them, and this generous, bright-eyed, open-faced young fellow defending them. A woman who had a good recollection of the cherry incident, called out, "Cherries!" and they all began to laugh. This laughter completely settled the matter; the victory was won. The coster slunk off.

Dick was overwhelmed with congratulations, and Mrs. Death cast grateful glances at him, and wistful glances at her old friends and neighbours. They answered the mute appeal by thronging about her. To her they said, "Never you mind, my dear, we'll see you righted." And to Dick, "You spoke up like a man, sir, and we're proud of you." Which he capped, rather vaguely, by retorting, "I'm proud of you. You're the sort of women that have made England what it is. Wives and mothers, that's what you are." A shrill voice called out, "Not all of us, sir," amid shouts of laughter, which caused Dick to add, "Then I hope you soon will be." This happy rejoinder won him the admiring glances of all the single women, many of whom (as yet unattached) breathed silent aspirations that heaven would send them such a man. At the worst of times Dick was a good-looking young fellow; seen now at his best, glowing with fervour, and espousing the cause of the weak, he was positively handsome. What wonder that maiden hearts were fluttering! He could have picked and chosen.

Dr. Vinsen had been an amused witness of the encounter.

"My young friend," he said, "my dear young friend, victorious again, always victorious; and in eloquence a Demosthenes. Accept my congratulations. Mrs. Death, take your little girl home and put her to bed, then apply a hot linseed poultice. I will call upon you to-morrow morning. Mr. Dick Remington--pardon the familiarity, but Dick is so appropriate--I salute you--sal-ute you."

Dick nodded good-day, and turned off with Gracie.

"Oh, Dick," she said, fondling his hand, "you're splendid, splendid!" No knight of chivalry in "the good old times" (which were much worse than the present) ever inspired deeper admiration in the breast of lady fair than Dick did in the breast of this poor little waif. "I told you, mother, it would be all right if we had Dick with us."

"Yes, you did, dear."

"Don't I wish I was old enough to walk out with you!" said Gracie.

"How do you know I'm not a married man, Gracie?" he asked.

"Go along!" she replied, with a touch of scorn. "As if I don't know the married ones by only looking at 'em!"

"You mustn't mind her foolishness, sir," said Mrs. Death. "She says the silliest things! We're very grateful to you, sir."

"Oh, nonsense," he said, "anyone else would have done the same."

"They wouldn't," said Gracie. "They couldn't."

With a kind pressure of their hands he turned in the direction of Aunt Rob's house, where a very different task awaited him.

CHAPTER XXX.

REGINALD'S MAN OF BUSINESS.

As it was in Draper's Mews so was it in other parts of the metropolis. The murder was talked of everywhere, and in some mysterious way the disappearance of Abel Death was associated with it. The wildest speculations were indulged in. He had gone to Australia, he had gone to America, he had never left England at all, he had taken with him an enormous sum of money which he had found in the house in Catchpole Square, he had so disguised himself that his own wife and children would not have known him, he had been seen in various parts of London. He was generally condemned, and had no defenders. Had his fate, if caught and in the clutches of the law, depended upon the public vote, his doom would have been sealed.

So was it with Mrs. Pond and Mrs. Applebee, who could talk upon no other subject.

"Applebee says that when Inspector Robson saw the body he turned as white as a ghost."

"Why should he?" asked Mrs. Pond. "It's not the first body he's seen by many."

"Why, don't you know, my dear," said Mrs. Applebee, "that his daughter's married to Mr. Boyd's son?"

"No, I never heard of it."

Mrs. Applebee bristled with importance. "They were married only a few weeks ago, and they do say it was a runaway match. Off they went one morning, arm in arm, to the registrar's office, and she comes home half an hour afterwards, and says, 'Mother, I'm married to Mr. Reginald Boyd.' 'Married, Florence!' cries Mrs. Robson, and bursts into tears.

"Florence!" said Mrs. Pond, in dismay, thinking of the handkerchief.

"That's her name, my dear, and a pretty girl I'm told. She's a lucky one. Applebee says if Mr. Boyd hasn't made a will her husband'll come in for everything. Mr. Boyd must have been worth piles of money. Let's hope it'll do somebody good; it never did while he was alive. It's curious that your lodger, Mr. Remington, is mixed up in it, too. He's Inspector Robson's nephew, you know; him and Miss Florence was brought up together. He's been hanging about Catchpole Square a good deal the last week or two; in the dead of night, too. Applebee says he'd like to get hold of that woman that slipped through his hands on

the night of the fog. He's got an idea that she must have something to do with the murder."

"But doesn't he think Abel Death did it?" asked Mrs. Pond, faintly.

"Oh, yes, he thinks that, as everybody does, but the woman might be mixed up with it somehow. Just listen to those boys shouting out another edition. What are they calling out? Fresh discoveries! I must get a paper; that'll be the third I've bought to-day. Perhaps they've caught Abel Death. The man on 'The Illustrated Afternoon' took Applebee's portrait, and I'm dying to see it. I wouldn't miss it for anything."

There was, of course, but one subject in Aunt Rob's mind when Dick presented himself. She told him that Reginald was in a terrible state.

"I couldn't stop the boys coming into the street," she said, "and Reginald heard them. Florence ran down to me all in a flutter, and asked if I didn't hear them calling out something about a murder in Catchpole Square, and what was it? Then she caught sight of the paper that I was trying to hide, and when she looked at it she was frightened out of her life. We did all we could to keep it from Reginald, but he couldn't help seeing from our faces that there was something serious the matter. At last there was nothing for it but to tell him, and we did it as gently as we could. But the shock was dreadful; he sobbed like a little child. Then he cried that he must go to the house, and we had almost to use force to prevent him leaving his bed. Florence threw her arms round him, and begged and implored so that he had to give in. We tried to comfort him by saying that it mightn't be true, that it might be another man who was murdered, and that you and Uncle Rob had gone to see about it. I'm afraid to ask you if it's true, Dick."

"It is too true," he replied, and rapidly related all that had passed since he and Uncle Rob had left her. She listened horror-struck, and when he finished could hardly find voice to ask who he thought was the murderer.

"I don't know what to think," he said.

"There can be only one man," she said, but he stopped her from proceeding.

"Don't let's talk about it just now, aunt. There are a dozen men who would rather see Samuel Boyd dead than alive. He had plenty of enemies, and he deserved to have. If Reginald knew I was here he would want to see me."

"He made me promise the moment either of you came back to bring you up to him."

"We'll go at once. There must be no further concealment."

Reginald was sitting up in bed, very white and haggard.

"I thought I heard voices," he said when they entered the room. "Have you been there?"

"Yes, I have been there," said Dick.

"Did you see him? Speak--speak!"

"I saw him."

"You saw him! Well--well?"

"He is dead."

"My God! My God! My father!--Dead! And he died at enmity with me!" groaned Reginald, sinking down in bed, and turning his face to the wall. They did not disturb him--did not dare to speak. "Is it certain that he was murdered," he said presently in a broken voice, "that he did not die a natural death?"

"I fear there is no doubt."

"Strangled, the paper says--strangled!" Dick was silent. "Strangled in his sleep! Without having time to think, to pray! Oh, Florence, what shame, what misery I have brought upon you!"

"It is an awful misfortune, Reginald, dear," said Florence, her arms round his neck, her face nestled close to his, "and it makes us all very unhappy. But there is no shame in it, dearest."

"There is, there is," he moaned. "Shame, shame--misery and disgrace!"

Dick, observing him closely, strove to arrive at some conclusion, apart from the evidence in his possession, with respect to his complicity in the terrible deed. Innocent or guilty, the shock of the news could have produced no other effect than was shown in the white face, the shaking body, the sobbing voice. There was another interval of silence, which, again, Reginald was the first to break. "Tell me everything."

"You know the worst," said Dick, "let us wait till you are stronger."

"No," cried Reginald, "I cannot wait. You must tell me everything--now, here! Wait? With those cries ringing in my ears? Don't you hear them? Hark!" They listened, and heard nothing. It was the spiritual echo of the ominous sounds that was in Reginald's ears. "Is anyone suspected? Is there any clue? Are not the people speaking about it in the streets?"

"There are all sorts of rumours," said Dick, reluctantly. "When Uncle Rob and I went into the house we found everything as the papers describe. Nothing seems to have been taken away, but of course we can't be positive on that point yet. There were no signs of a struggle."

"The paper speaks of bloody footprints," said Reginald, a white fear in his eyes.

"There are signs of them," said Dick, with a guilty tremor.

"And no blood on my--my father's body, nor in the bed?"

"None."

"The house has been broken into?"

"Yes."

"The man who broke into it did the deed," said Reginald, in a low, musing tone; then, after a pause, "But the blood--the blood! How to account for that? How did you get into the house?"

"Through the front door."

"But--the key!" exclaimed Reginald, and Dick fancied he detected signs of confusion. "Where did you get the key from?"

"A policeman scaled the wall at the back of the house, and entered through the broken window. He found the key in your father's room, and he came down and let us in."

"He had to draw the bolts?"

"The door was not bolted, and the chain was not up."

"Then my father couldn't----," said Reginald, and suddenly checked himself. "Go on."

"When Uncle Rob and I left the house Mrs. Death and her little girl were in the square; she had tried to force herself into the house, but the policeman kept her back. You know from the papers that her husband has not been seen since Friday week."

"Until I read it in this paper an hour ago," said Reginald, pointing to the copy of "The Little Busy Bee" that lay on the bed, "I was in ignorance of it. I cannot understand his disappearance; it is a mystery. The last I saw of him was on the afternoon of that very Friday, when I went to see my father in Catchpole Square."

"Yes?" said Dick, eagerly, greatly relieved at this candid confession. It was a gleam of comfort.

"My father was not at home, and I came away." He pressed his hand upon his eyes, and a long silence ensued. They looked at him anxiously, and Florence, her finger at her lips, warned them not to speak. Removing his hand, he proceeded: "I ought to tell you now why I went to see my father. Had I been well I should have spoken of it before. Even you, Florence, have not heard what I am about to say. Dick, I can trust you not to speak of this to any one."

"You may trust me thoroughly, Reginald."

"I know, I know. In my dear wife's eyes you are the soul of honour and faithfulness, and in my eyes, also, Dick. It is my hope that we shall always be firm friends."

With but one thought in his mind, the peace and happiness of the woman he loved, Dick answered, "And mine."

"Thank you," said Reginald, gravely. "What I wish to tell you commences with my child-life. My mother, when she married my father, brought him a small fortune, and she had money, also, in her own right. Young as I was, I knew that she was not happy, and that there were differences between her and my father, arising partly from his endeavours to obtain the sole control of every shilling she possessed. There were probably other causes, but they did not come to my knowledge. My mother's refusal to comply with his demands was prompted by her solicitude for my future. She was the best of women, and never uttered one word of reproach against my father; she suffered in silence, as only women can, and she found some solace in the love she bore for me and in the love I bore for her. We were inseparable, and, occupying the home with my father, we lived a life apart from him. He had but one aim, the amassing of money, and there was no sympathy between us. I hope there are not many homes in which such estrangement exists. She died when I was ten, and I lost the one dear friend I had in the world. In our last embrace on her deathbed she said to me, in a whisper, 'Promise me that when you

are a man--a happy man, I fervently pray--you will not become a money-lender.' I gave her the promise, and an abhorrence of the trade my father practised took deep root in me, and has grown stronger every year of my life. Over an open grave there should be no bitterness, and though my heart is sore I will strive to avoid it. My mother left me her little fortune, and appointed a trustee over whom, by ill chance, my father subsequently obtained great influence, and in the end had him completely in his power. This trustee died when I was twenty-two, and before then my inheritance was in my father's hands to deal with as he pleased. My mother's will was very precise. A certain sum every year was to be expended upon my education until I came of age, when the residue was to be handed to me to make a practical start in life. She named the schools and colleges in which I was to be educated, and when I was nineteen I was to spend the next two years in France and Germany and Italy, to perfect myself in the languages of those countries. It was at my option whether I remained abroad after I came of age, and, in point of fact, I did, returning home a year after the death of my trustee. You will see by these provisions that I was cut off entirely from the domestic and business life of my father, and I understood and appreciated her reasons when I became intimately acquainted with it--as I did when, my education completed, I returned to his home in Catchpole Square. I lived with him between two and three years, and during that time his one endeavour was to induce me to share the business with him, to obey his orders, to carry out his directions, to initiate myself into a system which I detested, into practices which I abhorred. We had numberless discussions and quarrels; he argued, he stormed, he threatened, and I steadily resisted him. At length matters came to a head, and I finally convinced him that I would not go his way, but would carve out a path for myself. 'Upon what kind of foundation will you carve out this path?' he asked. 'You will want money to keep yourself in idleness till you establish a position, and are able to pay for your livelihood.' 'I have it,' I replied. 'Indeed,' he said, 'I was not aware of it. Have you some secret hoard of wealth which you have hidden from me?' 'I have my inheritance,' I said. He laughed in my face. 'Your inheritance!' he exclaimed. 'You haven't a shilling. Every penny of it, and more, has been spent upon your education and riotous living since your beautiful lady mother died.' The sneering reference to my dear mother angered me more than his statement that I was a beggar, and hot words passed between us, in the midst of which I left the room. The next day I returned to the subject, and said I had understood from my trustee that when I was twenty-one years of age I should come into a fortune of eight thousand pounds. 'He lied,' my father said. 'I have the papers and the calculations here in my safe. You can look them over if you like. I deal fair by every man, and I will deal fair by you, ungrateful as you have proved yourself to be. I could refuse to produce the papers for your private inspection, but I am honest and generous, and though all is at an end between us unless you consent to assist me in my business, I will satisfy you that your father is not a rogue. You are indebted to me a large sum of money, and I shall be happy to hear how soon you intend to pay it.' I replied that I would choose the humblest occupation rather than remain with him, and he took from his safe a mass of

documents and said I must examine them in his presence. I did examine them, but could make nothing of them, the figures were so confusing. There were records of transactions into which my trustee had entered on my behalf, losses upon speculations, of charges for my education, of sums of money which had been sent to me from time to time for my personal expenses, of interest upon those advances, of interest upon other sums, of the cost of my board and lodging during the time I had lived at home with my father, of the small sums he had given me during the last two or three years, and of interest upon those sums. At the end of these documents there was a debit upon the total amount of twelve hundred pounds, which my father said I owed him. All this I saw as in a mist, but cunning as the figures were, there was no doubt in my mind that I had been defrauded, and by the last man in the world who should have inflicted this wrong upon me. What could I do but protest? I did protest. My father, putting the papers back in his safe, retorted that I was reflecting upon his honesty, that I was his enemy and had better go to law, and that he renounced me as his son. We had a bitter quarrel, which ended in my leaving his house, a beggar, to begin the world; and so strong were the feelings I entertained towards him, and so sensitive was I to the opprobrium which, in the minds of many people, was attached to the name of Boyd, that I determined to renounce it, as he had renounced me. Thus it was that you knew me only as Mr. Reginald; it caused me many a bitter pang to deceive you, and I was oppressed with doubts as to the wisdom of my resolve. All that is now at an end, however, and I ask your pardon for the deceit. Perhaps you have heard from Florence of the struggle I made to provide a home for her, and of my disappointment and despair at not seeing the way to its accomplishment. I thought much of the fraud of which I had been the victim, and the more I thought the more was I convinced that my father was retaining money which rightly belonged to me. At length it seemed to me that it was my duty to see him again upon the subject, and to make an earnest endeavour to obtain restitution. For my own sake, no. Had I not my dear Florence I think I should have left England, and have striven in another country to carve my way; but having seen her I could not, could not leave her. It was in pursuance of this resolution that I went to Catchpole Square last Friday week, and saw Abel Death, who informed me that my father was not at home. Now you know all."

It was with almost breathless interest that Dick listened to this confession, and it was with a feeling of dismay that he heard the last words, "Now you know all." Did they know all? Not a word about the key, not a word about the second visit to his father late on that fatal Friday night!

"Are people speaking about Abel Death?" asked Reginald, turning to Dick.

"Yes. They are coupling his disappearance with the murder. A strong suspicion is entertained. His poor wife is nearly mad with grief."

"Do you tell me he is suspected of the crime?" cried Reginald, in an excited tone.

"Many suspect him."

"What cruelty to defame an innocent man--what cruelty, what cruelty!"

"Do you know for a certainty that he is innocent?" asked Dick.

"That is a strange question, Dick. How can I be certain? Until the truth is known, how can any man be certain? I speak from my knowledge of his character. A drudge, working from hand to mouth. Alas! what misery and injustice this dreadful deed brings in its train!"

"Reginald, dear," said Florence, gently, "you are exhausted. Do not talk any more. Rest a little. Dick will remain here, and will come up when you want him."

"Yes, I am tired. You are a true friend, Dick. You will assist us, I know. Do all you can to avert suspicion from Abel Death. I must rest and think. There are so many things to think of--so many things!"

He held out his hand to Dick, and then sank back in his bed and closed his eyes. There was nothing more to be said at present, and Dick and Aunt Rob stole softly to the room below.

"Now, Dick," she said, "I am going to open my mind to you."

"Do, aunt."

"Has it occurred to you that in this trouble that has fallen upon Reginald he needs a man of business to act for him." Dick looked at her for an explanation. "A man of business," she repeated, "and a devoted friend, rolled into one. I am a practical woman as you know, Dick, and we mustn't lose sight of Reginald's interests--because his interests are Florence's now, and ours. He stands to-day in a very different position from what he did when he married Florence without our knowledge. Mr. Boyd's death is very shocking, and it will be a long time before we get over it; but after all it's not like losing one we loved. He's dead and gone, and the Lord have mercy upon him. The longer he lived the more mischief he'd have done, and the more poor people he'd have made miserable. It sounds hard, but it's the honest truth. I'm looking the thing straight in the face, and I feel that something ought to be done without delay."

"What ought to be done, aunt?"

"Well, Reginald is Mr. Boyd's only child, and there's that house in Catchpole Square, with any amount of valuable property in it, and no one to look after it. It mustn't be left to the mercy of strangers."

"It ought not to be."

"Reginald won't be able to stir out of the house for at least three or four days. Now, who's to attend to his interests? You. Who's to search for the will, supposing one was made--which with all my heart and soul I hope wasn't? You. Even if there is a will, leaving the money away from him, he can lay claim to the fortune his mother left him, for there isn't a shadow of doubt that he has been robbed of it. There's no one else with time on their hands that will act fair by him. You must be Reginald's man of business, Dick."

"Some person certainly should represent him," said Dick, thoughtfully, "and I shall have no objection if he wishes it. But it must be done legally."

"Of course it must. Do you know a solicitor?"

"Not one."

"And I don't, but I think I can put you on the scent of a gentleman that will do for us. In High Street, about a dozen doors down on the left hand side from here, there's a brass plate with 'Mr. Lamb, Solicitor,' on it. Just step round, and ask Mr. Lamb if he'll be kind enough to come and see me on very particular business. While you're gone I'll say just three words to Reginald; I'll answer for it he'll not object."

"You are a practical woman, aunt," said Dick, putting on his hat.

"Have you lived with us all these years without finding it out? Cut away, Dick."

Away he went, and soon returned with Mr. Lamb, a very large gentleman with a very small practice; and being a gentleman with a very small practice he brought with him a capacious blue bag.

"This is professional, Mr. Lamb," said Aunt Rob.

"So I judge, madam, from your message," he answered, taking a seat, and pulling the strings of his blue bag with the air of a gentleman who could instantly produce any legal document she required.

Aunt Rob then explained matters, and asked what Reginald's position was.

"If there is no will, madam, he is heir at law," said Mr. Lamb.

"Until a will is found can he enter into possession of the house?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And being too ill to leave his bed, can he appoint some one to act for him?"

"He has an indisputable right to appoint any person he pleases."

"Then please draw up at once a paper to that effect, in as few words as possible."

"At once, madam!" exclaimed Mr. Lamb, with a professional objection to a course so prompt and straightforward.

"At once," said Aunt Rob, with decision. "This is an unusual case. There is the house with no one to take care of it, and here is my son-in-law upstairs, unable to leave his bed. If you cannot do what you want I must consult----"

"Madam," said Mr. Lamb, hastily, "there is no occasion for you to consult another solicitor. I will draw out such an authority as you require, and it can be stamped on Monday. Favour me with the name of the attorney."

"The attorney?" she said, in a tone of inquiry.

"The gentleman whom Mr. Reginald Boyd appoints to act for him?"

"Oh, Mr. Dick Remington. My nephew."

The solicitor, recognising that Aunt Rob was not a woman to be trifled with, even by a solicitor, accepted the situation with a good grace, and set to work.

"I have spoken to Reginald, Dick," said Aunt Rob, "and he consented gladly. It is to be a matter of business, mind that. We can't have you wasting your time for nothing."

In due time the solicitor announced that the document was ready, and read it out to them, not quite to Aunt Rob's satisfaction, who shook her head at the number of words, and was only reconciled when Dick said it was all right.

"It is in proper form and order," said Mr. Lamb, "though shorter than it should be."

"The shorter the better," said Aunt Rob.

He smiled sadly. "There is another thing Mr. Reginald Boyd should do, madam. He should take out letters of administration."

"Is that a long job?" she asked.

"No, madam, it is very simple, very simple."

"Then let it be done immediately."

"There are certain formalities, madam. With Mr. Reginald Boyd's permission we will attend to it on Monday. To this present power of attorney the signatures of two witnesses are necessary."

"I'm one, and my nephew's another."

"Your nephew, madam, being an interested party, is not available. Your signature will be valid, and there is probably a servant in the house."

"Of course there is," said Aunt Rob, resentfully. "The law seems to me to be nothing but going round corners and taking wrong turnings purposely. Such a fuss and to-do about a signature I never heard."

Mr. Lamb gave her a reproachful look. "It is for the protection of the individual, madam. The law is a thing to be thankful for."

"Is it?" she snapped.

"Without law, madam," he said, in feeble protest, "society could not exist. We should be in a state of chaos."

The formalities were soon concluded. Reginald signed, Aunt Rob signed, and the servant signed, though at the words, "This is your hand and seal," she trembled visibly. Then

instructions were given for the taking out of letters of administration, and Mr. Lamb took his departure.

"Your worthy aunt," he said, as Dick opened the street door for him, "is a very extraordinary woman. The manner in which she has rushed this business through is quite unique, and I am not sure, in the strict sense of the term, that it is exactly professional. I can only trust it will not be accepted as a precedent."

CHAPTER XXXI.

SCENES IN CATCHPOLE SQUARE.

From time to time there had been murders committed in London with details dismal and sordid enough to satisfy the most rabid appetites, but it was generally admitted that the great Catchpole Square Mystery outvied them all in just those elements of attraction which render crime so weirdly fascinating to the British public. Men and women in North Islington experienced a feeling akin to that which the bestowal of an unexpected dignity confers, and when they retired to bed were more than ordinarily careful about the fastening of locks and bolts. Timid wives woke in the middle of the night, and tremblingly asked their husbands whether they did not hear somebody creeping in the passages, and many a single woman shivered in her bed. Shopkeepers standing behind their counters bristled with it; blue-aproned butchers, knife in hand, called out their "Buy, buy, buy!" with a brisk and cheery ring; crossing sweepers touched their hats smartly to their patrons, and preceding them with the unnecessary broom as they swept nothing away, murmured the latest rumour; the lamplighters, usually a sad race, lighted the street lamps with unwonted alacrity; and the Saturday night beggars took their stands below the kerb in hopeful anticipation of a spurt in benevolence. Naturally it formed the staple news in the newspapers on Sunday and Monday, and all agreed that the excitement it had created was unparallelled in the records of the criminal calendar.

"On Saturday evening," said "The Little Busy Bee" in its Monday's editions, "numbers of people wended their way to Catchpole Square from every part of the metropolis. Up till late the usually quiet streets resembled a Saturday night market, and there was an extraordinary demand for the literature of crime, with which the vendors of second-hand books had provided themselves. Towards midnight the human tide slackened, but even during the early hours of the morning there were many fresh arrivals. On Sunday the excitement was renewed, and it is calculated that seven or eight thousand persons must have visited the Square in the course of the day, many of whom seemed to regard the occasion as a picnic.

"In our columns will be found picturesque accounts of incidents that came under the notice of our reporters, not the least amusing of which is that of the mother and father who brought with them a large family of children, and had come provided with food for a day's outing. They arrived at eleven in the morning, and at eleven at night were still there. They had been informed that when a murdered man was lying in his own bed unburied on the Day of Rest he was ordered to get up and dress himself when the church bells rang, and go to church to pray for his sins. If he disobeyed his soul was lost, and his ghost would appear on the roof at midnight, surrounded by flames and accompanied by

the Evil One. 'Did he go to church?' asked our reporter, who, in a conversation with the woman late on Sunday night, elicited this curious piece of information. 'No,' replied the woman, 'and it's a bad day's work for him. I shouldn't like to be in his shoes.' The woman furthermore said that she would give anything to see the ghost at midnight on the roof, thus evincing small regard for Samuel Boyd's salvation. 'It would be a better show, wouldn't it?' she observed, with an eye to theatrical effect. 'I've never seen the Devil.' It is deplorable that in this age such silly superstitions should obtain credence, and that with numbers of people in different parts of the country the belief in witchcraft and in demoniacal demonstrations should still exist.

"Secondary only in importance to the murder is the disappearance of Samuel Boyd's clerk, Abel Death. To suggest anything in the shape of complicity would be prejudging the case, but whatever may be the fate of Abel Death his poor family are to be commiserated. The theories and conjectures respecting the disappearance of this man are perfectly bewildering, and many are the excited discussions concerning it. Such licence of speech cannot be commended, and we suggest to those persons indulging in it the advisability of suspending their judgment.

"A full report of the inquest held this morning appears in our columns. In view of the burial of the body of the murdered man, which will take place to-morrow, it was deemed necessary to open the inquiry to-day, although it was anticipated that little progress would be made; but although the Coroner stated that the proceedings would be of a formal character, it will be seen that matters were introduced the development of which will be followed with the keenest interest. The appearance of an eminent barrister for Lord and Lady Wharton, whose names have not hitherto been associated with the mystery, aroused general curiosity, which was intensified by the conduct of Lady Wharton herself. The Court was crowded, and numbers of persons could not obtain admittance. Among the audience we noticed several famous actors and actresses."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THE LITTLE BUSY BEE'S" REPORT OF THE INQUEST.

This morning, at the Coroner's Court, Bishop Street, Mr. John Kent, the Coroner for the district, opened an inquiry into the death of Mr. Samuel Boyd, of Catchpole Square, who was found dead in his house on Saturday, the 9th inst., under circumstances which have already been reported in the newspapers.

The coroner, addressing the jury, said the initial proceedings would be chiefly formal. Their first duty would be to view the body of the deceased; after that certain witnesses would be examined who would testify to the finding of the body, and others who would give evidence of identification. The inquiry would then be adjourned till Wednesday, on which day medical and other evidence would be forthcoming. He refrained from any comment on the case, and he advised the jury to turn a deaf ear to the strange rumours and reports which were in circulation; it was of the utmost importance that they should keep an open mind, and be guided only by the evidence which would be presented to them. Much mischief was frequently done by the prejudice aroused by injudicious public comment on a case presenting such singular features as the present. Comments of this nature were greatly to be deplored; they hampered, instead of assisting, the cause of justice.

The jury then proceeded to Catchpole Square to view the body, and upon their return to court Mr. Finnis, Q.C., rose and stated that he appeared for Lord and Lady Wharton, who had a close and peculiar interest in the inquiry.

The Coroner said the inquiry would be conducted in the usual manner, without the aid of counsel, whose assistance would be available in another court, but not in this, where no accusation was brought against any person, and where no person was on his trial.

Mr. Finnis: "Our desire is to render material assistance to you and the jury. Lady Wharton----"

The Coroner: "I cannot listen to you, Mr. Finnis."

Mr. Finnis: "Lady Wharton has most important, I may say most extraordinary evidence to give----"

The Coroner: "Her evidence will be received, but not to-day. Pray be seated."

Mr. Finnis: "Her ladyship is in attendance."

The Coroner: "She is at liberty to remain; but I repeat, her evidence cannot be received to-day. Only formal evidence will be taken to enable the body to be buried."

Mr. Finnis: "Evidence of identification, I understand?"

The Coroner: "Yes."

Mr. Finnis: "Lady Wharton's evidence bears expressly upon this point."

The Coroner: "It must be tendered at the proper time."

Mr. Finnis: "With all respect, Mr. Coroner, I submit that this is the proper time."

The Coroner: "I am the judge of that. I ask you not to persist. I shall conduct this inquiry in accordance with my duties as Coroner."

The first witness called was Mr. Robert Starr.

"You are a reporter?"

"A special reporter and descriptive writer for 'The Little Busy Bee.'"

"Were you the first person to enter the house in Catchpole Square after the death of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"I cannot say. Some person or persons had been there before me, as is proved by a broken window at the back of the house through which I obtained entrance, but whether after or before the death of Mr. Boyd is unknown to me."

"It appears, however, to have been a recent entrance?"

"It appears so."

"You have no knowledge of these persons?"

"None whatever."

"Having obtained entrance into the house, what next did you do?"

"I went through a passage, and up a staircase to another passage which leads to the street door. In this passage are doors opening into various rooms. I looked into these rooms without making any discovery, until I came to one which seems to have been used as an office. There are two doors in this office, one opening into a small room in which I saw nothing to arouse my suspicions, the other opening into a larger room which I found was a sleeping apartment."

"Examine this plan of the rooms, and tell us whether it is accurate?"

"Quite accurate, so far as my memory serves."

"The room on the right is the sleeping apartment?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Samuel Boyd's bedroom?"

"I do not know. There was a bed in it, and the usual appointments of a bedroom. I stepped up to the bed, and saw it was occupied. Examining closer, I discovered that the person in it was dead."

"By the person you mean Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"I do not. I have never seen Mr. Boyd in his lifetime, and I could not therefore identify the body. But from the fact of the house being his, and from certain rumours of foul play which had reached me, I assumed that it was he."

"You examined the body?"

"Yes, and I observed marks on the throat which favoured the presumption that the man had been murdered."

"In his sleep?"

"I cannot vouch for that."

"Were there any signs of a struggle?"

"None. The limbs were composed, and what greatly surprised me was the orderly condition of the bedclothes."

"How long did you remain in the house?"

"About two hours."

"During that time were you quite alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Were there any indications of a robbery having been committed?"

"I observed none. The clothes of the deceased were on a chair, and there was no appearance of their having been rifled. There is a safe fixed to the wall; it did not seem to have been tampered with."

"Having completed your examination, what next did you do?"

"I left the house, and proceeded to the Bishop Street Police Station to give information of my discovery."

"And after that?"

"I went to the office of 'The Little Busy Bee,' and wrote an account of what I had seen and done, which, being published, was the first information the public received of the murder--if murder it was."

"Had any orders been given to you to take action in this matter?"

"None. I acted entirely on my own initiative."

"What impelled you?"

"Well, there seemed to me to be a mystery which should be unravelled in the public interests. I pieced three things together. The disappearance of Mr. Boyd's clerk, as reported in our paper, the silence of Mr. Boyd respecting that disappearance, upon which, had he written or spoken, he could probably have thrown some light, and the house in Catchpole Square sealed up, so to speak. These things required to be explained, and I set about it."

Mr. Finnis, Q.C.: "Now, Mr. Starr, at what time in the morning----"

The Coroner: "No, no, Mr. Finnis. I instruct the witness not to answer any questions you put to him."

Mr. Finnis: "Will you, then Mr. Coroner, ask him at what hour in the morning he made the discovery? I assure you it is a most important point."

The Coroner: "At what hour in the morning did you enter the house?"

"At a little after ten."

"And you left it?"

"At a few minutes before twelve. I went straight to the police station, where, no doubt, the time can be verified."

"Have you any other information to give bearing on this inquiry?"

"One thing should be mentioned. In my printed narrative I state that I noticed dark stains upon the floor of the office and the bedroom, and that I traced these stains to the window at the back. I scraped off a portion of the stains, which I gave to my chief, who handed it to an analyst. His report is that they are the stains of human blood."

"Were they stains of old standing?"

"No. I scraped them off quite easily."

"Did you observe any blood on the bedclothes?"

"None whatever."

The next witness was Constable Simmons, who stated that he and Constable Filey were instructed by the day inspector at the Bishop Street Police Station to enter the house for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was any truth in the information given by Mr. Starr.

"At what time were those instructions issued?"

"Somewhere about three o'clock."

"So that three hours elapsed before any action was taken?

"I am under orders, sir."

The witness then gave an account of how he got into the house by means of a ladder over the wall at the back, and through the window. Corroborating in every particular the evidence of the reporter, he went a step farther. In the bedroom of the deceased he found the key of the street door, which he opened to admit Constable Filey, who was keeping watch in the Square outside. The street door was neither chained nor bolted. He did not see any stains of blood on the floor; he did not look for them.

Constable Filey, who was next examined, gave evidence to the same effect. Neither of these officers was acquainted with Mr. Samuel Boyd, and could not therefore speak as to the identification of the body.

Inspector Robson was then called. His appearance caused some excitement, it being understood that his daughter was married to the son of the deceased.

"You are an inspector of police?"

"Yes. At present on night duty at the Bishop Street Station."

"You were acquainted with Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"Not personally. I have seen him several times, but have never spoken to him."

"You are sufficiently familiar with his features to identify him?"

"I am."

"When did you first hear of his death?"

"On Saturday afternoon, when I was sitting at home with my wife and my nephew, Mr. Richard Remington. The boys were calling out news of a murder in Catchpole Square, and we went out and bought a paper."

"Before Saturday afternoon had your attention been directed in any way to the house in which the deceased resided?"

"Yes. Last Tuesday night a woman was brought into the office who made a statement respecting the disappearance of her husband, who had been in the service of the deceased."

"What is the name of the woman?"

"Mrs. Abel Death. I advised her to apply to the magistrate on the following morning, in order that it might be made public."

"After reading the news in the paper on Saturday afternoon what did you do?"

"I went to the Bishop Street Station, and learned that constables had been sent to enter the house, for the purpose of ascertaining if the statement made by the reporter was correct."

"And then?"

"I went to Catchpole Square, accompanied by Constable Applebee and my nephew, Mr. Richard Remington--both of whom were acquainted with the deceased--I entered the house and saw the body. I identified it as the body of Mr. Samuel Boyd."

"Is there any doubt in your mind on the point?"

"Not the slightest. I have seen him scores of times, and his features were quite familiar to me."

"You saw the marks on his throat?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea as to the cause of his death?"

"It appeared to me to have been caused by strangulation."

"Now, Inspector Robson, I wish to ask you if you formed any idea as to how long he had been dead. You cannot, of course, speak with the authority of an expert, but we should like to hear what your impression was?"

"My impression was that he had been dead several days."

At this answer considerable commotion was caused by a lady exclaiming "Impossible! Impossible!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SCENES IN COURT.

The Coroner: "I cannot allow the proceedings to be interrupted by any of the spectators, and I must request the person who spoke to preserve silence."

The Lady (rising): "My name is Lady Wharton, and I know what I am saying. It is not in the nature of things to be silent when so monstrous a statement as that is made. I say again, it is impossible."

The Coroner: "The witness has given his impression----"

Lady Wharton: "He cannot be in his right senses, or he must have some motive----"

The Coroner: "You are impeaching the witness and delaying the proceedings. Unless you resume your seat it will be my duty to have you removed----"

Lady Wharton (indignantly): "Have me removed! Is this a court of justice?"

The Corner: "I hope so. Kindly resume your seat."

Lady Wharton: "I insist upon being heard."

The Coroner: "You compel me to do what will be disagreeable to you." (To a Constable.) "Officer----"

Mr. Finnis, Q.C.: "One moment, I beg." (To Lady Wharton.) "Please observe the Coroner's directions. At present you can be heard only through me." (Lady Wharton, who was accompanied by her brother, Lord Fairfax, resumed her seat in great agitation.)

Mr. Finnis: "It is a point of vital importance, and I ask the witness--upon whom neither Lady Wharton nor I cast any imputation--whether he positively swears that the body is that of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

The Coroner (to the witness): "Do not reply to any question except those put to you by me or the jury."

Mr. Finnis: "You will understand, Mr. Coroner, when Lady Wharton is examined, why the statement of the witness appears to her incredible. Our desire is to prevent a miscarriage of justice."

The Coroner: "It is the desire of all of us."

A Juror: "There can be no harm in asking the question again. With your permission, Mr. Coroner, I will put it. Inspector Robson, do you positively swear that the body you saw is that of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

Inspector Robson: "So far as a human being can be positive, I swear it."

"And that you formed the idea that he had been dead several days?"

"That is certainly my impression."

The Coroner (after listening to a whispered communication from the juror): "It has been suggested to me to ask whether you have any personal interest in the death of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

Inspector Robson (with warmth): "I do not understand you."

The Coroner: "We are aware, Inspector Robson, of the high character you bear, and of the deserved estimation in which you are held. It is probable that in the course of this inquiry questions may be asked which may not seem to have any direct bearing upon the investigation, but which may eventually lead to issues of more or less importance."

Inspector Robson: "I am giving my evidence as inspector of police."

The Coroner: "Not entirely. You are a witness in this case, and are here both as an official and a private citizen. If you have an objection to answer the question I will not press it; but I would point out to you that your refusal may leave an unfavourable impression on the minds of the jury."

Inspector Robson (after a pause): "Will you put the question in more direct terms, Mr. Coroner? I would prefer my private affairs not being imported into this case, but I should be sorry to lay myself open to misconstruction."

The Coroner: "In plainer terms, then, is there any relationship between you and the deceased?"

Inspector Robson: "He is my son-in-law's father."

The Coroner: "You were, of course, aware of this when Mrs. Abel Death reported the disappearance of her husband?"

Inspector Robson: "No, Mr. Coroner, I was not aware of it."

The Coroner: "Was the marriage between your daughter and Mr. Reginald Boyd quite recent?"

Inspector Robson (with evident reluctance): "No, they have been married two months."

The Coroner: "There is a strange discrepancy here. How could you have been ignorant of the relationship when Mrs. Death came to the Bishop Street Police Station?"

Inspector Robson: "At that time I did not know that my daughter was married. As what passes in this court will be reported in the newspapers, I wish to add that no blame attaches either to her or her husband, for whom my wife and myself have the highest regard."

The Juror: "He is the only son of the deceased?"

Inspector Robson: "Yes."

The Juror: "In point of fact the heir-at-law, unless he is dispossessed by will?"

Inspector Robson: "Yes."

The Juror: "Has any will been found?"

Inspector Robson: "Not to my knowledge."

The Juror: "Has search been made for it?"

Inspector Robson: "It is now being made."

The Juror: "By whom?"

Inspector Robson: "By my son-in-law's attorney, Mr. Richard Remington."

The Juror: "Your nephew?"

"Yes."

The Juror (to the Coroner): "Will Mr. Reginald Boyd be called?"

The Coroner: "Not to-day. It appears, from a letter I have here, which is accompanied by a doctor's certificate, that he went yesterday to his father's house in Catchpole Square to identify the body, that he has been very ill, and that the exertion was too much for him. It is hoped that on Wednesday, to which day the inquiry will be adjourned, he will be well enough to give his evidence."

The Juror: "How long has he been ill?"

Inspector Robson: "Since last Saturday week."

The Juror: "The day following that on which Mr. Abel Death disappeared?"

Inspector Robson: "Yes."

The Juror: "Can you inform us whether Mr. Reginald Boyd was on good terms with his father?"

Inspector Robson: "I do not think it is a question I should be called upon to answer."

The Juror: "Very well, Inspector Robson."

The next witness was Mr. Richard Remington, who gave his answers generally with rapidity; but occasionally there was a slight hesitancy before he replied, as though he were considering the form of words in which he should reply. Asked if Inspector Robson was his uncle, he answered that he was proud to own it. Asked if he followed any occupation, he described himself as a Jack of all trades. "And master of none?" queried a juror jocosely. "I won't say that," replied the witness, quickly. "There are some things I can do thoroughly."

"You accompanied Inspector Robson when he entered the house of the deceased on Saturday?"

"I did."

"You saw the body?"

"Yes. It is the body of Mr. Samuel Boyd."

"You were acquainted with him?"

"Intimately. I was in his service nearly three months, and saw him daily."

"So that you can speak with confidence on the point?"

"With perfect confidence."

"Can you inform us whether the room in which the body was found was Mr. Boyd's regular bedroom?"

"It was. He always slept there."

The Juror: "Is it the only bedroom in the house?"

"No; there is another bedroom on the second floor."

The Juror: "Occupied by any person?"

"By no person during my service with the deceased."

The Juror: "But at some time or other occupied by another person?"

"I believe by Mr. Reginald Boyd when he lived in the house."

The Juror: "Under what circumstances did he leave his father's house?"

"It is hardly a question that should be put to me."

The Juror: "You think it would be better to ask Mr. Reginald Boyd?"

"That is for you to decide."

The Coroner: "You were in the house yesterday?"

"Yes."

"We understand you are searching for a will?"

"Yes."

"And have found none?"

"None."

The Coroner: "I am now going to put a question to you which I put to Inspector Robson. When you saw the body did you receive any impression as to the length of time Mr. Boyd had been dead?"

"Yes. He must have been dead four or five days at least."

Lady Wharton: "They are stark staring mad!"

The Coroner: "I assure Lady Wharton that if she persists in these interruptions she cannot be allowed to remain in Court."

The evidence of Constable Applebee, who was the next witness, was then taken. Catchpole Square is within the radius of his beat, and not a week passed without his seeing Mr. Samuel Boyd two or three times. He was positive that the body was that of Samuel Boyd, and he would not admit the possibility of his being mistaken.

"Did you see any suspicious persons about on the night of the 1st?"

The witness answered "No," and happened to glance in the direction of Lady Wharton, upon which another scene occurred. Her ladyship exclaimed, "Gracious Powers! I am in a hornet's nest! Does the man suspect me?" It was with difficulty that she was calmed, and it was only upon her giving her promise that she would not speak again that an order for her removal was not carried out.

Mr. Finnis: "Her ladyship visited Mr. Samuel Boyd on the night of the 1st upon a matter of business, and the witness probably saw her."

The Coroner: "That is no excuse for these interruptions, Mr. Finnis." (To the witness.) "On any subsequent occasion did you see any suspicious persons about?"

"Yes, on the night of the great fog something occurred. The fog was so thick that I missed my way, and by accident I stumbled upon Constable Pond, whose beat joins mine. We were close by Catchpole Square, and we went into it. As we were moving away I saw a woman trying to steal from the Square into Deadman's Court. I ran and caught

the person by the arm, but somehow or other she slipped through my hands and escaped."

"Did you see her face?"

"No, she was too quick for me."

"At what time did this take place?"

"I can't say exactly, but it was past midnight."

"Is it usual for people to be in the Square so late?"

"Quite unusual."

"That is all you can tell us?"

"That's all, except----" Here the witness hesitated.

"Except what?"

"Well, it has nothing to do with the case, but it come into my mind that two nights last week I met Mr. Richard Remington near the Square."

"You must have met many persons. What is there special in your meeting Mr. Remington?"

"Only that both times it was two or three o'clock in the morning. It isn't worth mentioning."

"The smallest incident in connection with a case of this description is worth mentioning. Did you have any conversation with him?"

"Oh, yes. The first time we had a long talk together."

"Did he say what brought him out so late!"

"Well, he said he was looking for a lodging."

"What! At two or three in the morning?"

"Yes, that is what he said."

"It sounds like a joke; he can hardly have been serious."

A Juror: "Perhaps Mr. Remington would like to explain."

Mr. Richard Remington (from the body of the Court): "I am quite ready to explain."

The Coroner (to Constable Applebee): "We have nothing further to ask you."

Mr. Richard Remington was recalled.

"You have heard what the last witness said in reference to yourself?"

"Yes; he spoke the truth. I met him on two occasions last week, in the middle of the night, and we had a chat. Of course it is absurd to suppose I was looking for lodgings at that time, but I intended to do so next morning, and I mentioned it to Constable Applebee, thinking it likely he might know of a place to suit me. In point of fact he did know, and it was upon his introduction that I took a room next day in the house of Constable Pond in Paradise Row. You might like to hear why I went in the direction of Catchpole Square on the night of the fog. Well, I was in the Bishop Street Station at about midnight when Mrs. Abel Death reported the disappearance of her husband and asked the assistance of the police. As I had been in the employ of Mr. Samuel Boyd I took an interest in her story, and, my time being my own, I thought I would have a look at the old house."

The Coroner: "Thank you, Mr. Remington."

The last witness called was Mrs. Jewel, a charwoman, whose evidence was mainly interesting from the insight it afforded of the singular domestic habits of the deceased. She was the only female servant employed by Mr. Boyd, and her services were not requisitioned for more than two half-days every week. The witness described the deceased as the hardest master she ever had. When she swept out a room or made a bed he grumbled at the way it was done, and made it an excuse for beating her down to the last farthing. She did no cooking for him; he took his dinner at some cheap eating house, and prepared his own breakfast and tea. "He'd skin a flint," the witness remarked. The value of Mrs. Jewel's evidence lay in her intimate familiarity with the personal appearance of the deceased. She swore positively to the body, and laughed at the idea of her being mistaken. Some amusement was caused by her being hard of hearing, and she resented this by giving short snappy replies to the questions put to her, and declining to be moved by so much as a hair's breadth from any statement she made. The last of these

questions were put by the juror who had taken so prominent a part in the proceedings, and who resisted every effort made by the Coroner to abbreviate his inquiries.

The Juror: "You worked for the deceased during the time his son, Mr. Reginald Boyd, lived in the house?"

Mrs. Jewel: "Of course I did, and Mr. Reginald's a gentleman."

"Were they on good terms with each other?"

"No," she answered, "old Mr. Boyd was always quarrelling with Mr. Reginald. He stormed a lot, but Mr. Reginald was very quiet, and hardly answered his father. At last he went away, and I don't blame him."

Nothing further was elicited from the witness, and the inquiry was adjourned till Wednesday, when, the Coroner said, important evidence would be laid before the jury.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

"There's trouble coming, there's trouble coming." This was the dominant thought in Dick's mind as he emerged from the court. Reporters, hurriedly gathering their sheets of notes and sketches, were hastening to their respective offices, and persons who had been unable to obtain admission were eagerly asking for news of what had taken place. The jurymen filed out, with a judicial weight on their brows, and the man who had put and prompted so many questions gave Dick a searching look as he passed. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Remington," said a cheery interviewer, "I belong to 'The Hourly Inquirer,' and if you would give me a few minutes----" "No time for interviewing--nothing to say," interrupted Dick, and hurried on. Of which the interviewer made a quarter of a column. Dick was not in the mood to impart information or impressions; he had more serious matters to think of. It seemed to him as though sinister forces were at work inimical to Florence and Reginald. "I wonder," he thought, "what kind of evidence Lady Wharton has to give--she seems terribly in earnest."

Clear of the crowd he felt a light touch upon his arm; looking down he saw it was Florence.

"Reginald sent me," she said; "he is very anxious. Is it over?"

"Not by a long way," he replied. "People are staring at us. Let us walk on."

"What has been done, Dick?"

"Evidence of identification has been taken, and a lot of stupid and unnecessary questions asked. You will read all about it in the papers, one part true, and three parts fiction." He spoke with a light air to relieve her mind. "Reporters make the most of everything; it is their business to lay on colour pretty thickly. There is one rather vexatious thing--your visit to Catchpole Square on the night of the fog."

"Has my name been mentioned?" asked Florence, in alarm.

"No, but it may be, and we must consider what we ought to do. Don't look distressed; a straightforward explanation will set it right. Docs Uncle Rob know you went there?"

"No."

"Aunt Rob?"

"No. There was no harm in my going----"

"None whatever, dear."

"And none in my not speaking of it. There has been so much else to think of."

"Indeed there has, and you have done everything for the best; but in this unfortunate matter Uncle Rob is very delicately and peculiarly placed; he is not only privately but officially connected with it. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, Dick."

"People are so uncharitable that a false step, though taken quite innocently, may lead to trouble. I am afraid you will read many unpleasant thing in the papers, and I want you to be prepared for them." She gave him a startled look. "You must have courage, Florence."

"I will."

"That's right. Now go home and tell them about your visit to Catchpole Square, and why you went. I will be there in an hour or so. And don't for one moment lose heart. There are some unhappy days before us, but before long the clouds will clear, and all will be well."

She left him at the entrance to Deadman's Court, and he gave her a bright smile to cheer her; but when she was out of sight he murmured again, "There's trouble coming, there's trouble coming." He feared he knew not what; every hidden danger seemed to grow, and the dark clouds to deepen. How to ward this danger from Florence? This was his aim and hope, and to this end he was continually nerving himself.

Up to the present nothing but perplexity and mystery had attended his search in the house of the murdered man. There were the bottles of wine. On the first occasion he had mechanically counted seventy-six bottles, on the second occasion seventy-five, and now there were but seventy-four. "Either I am out of my senses," he thought, "or some person has been twice in the house since I forced an entrance into it." Wildly improbable as was the suggestion he found it impossible to reject it. True, he was not the only person who had been there these last two days. Scotland Yard was astir, and had sent detectives and policemen, to whom free access was granted by Dick. These officials made themselves very busy, but for the most part kept a still tongue. Plans of the room

were drawn, and every inch of the walls and floors and staircases was examined. When it was proposed to photograph the blood-stained footprints made by Dick, he looked on calmly, and assisted in the preparations.

On this Monday afternoon the undertaker's men were waiting for Dick in the Square, and they followed him upstairs with the coffin. It had been a gruesome task, and he felt as if he could not breathe freely till the body was taken to its last resting place.

Then there was the safe, of which he had found the key. During his service with Samuel Boyd this safe had been the receptacle of all the documents of value and of all the record books belonging to the dead man--bank book, bill book, ledger, mortgage deeds, undue bills, etc.; he expected to see these articles in the safe, but to his astonishment it contained only a few unimportant papers.

At five o'clock the undertaker's men had departed, and Dick with a last look around also took his departure. As he pulled the street door behind him he heard a familiar cough, and a little hand was slid into his. Gracie's hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Dick," she said, clinging to him. "I've been everywhere to find you."

"Has your father come back?" he asked, in sudden expectation that she brought him news of the missing man.

"No such luck. You didn't come to see us yesterday."

"I was too busy, Gracie. Are you any better?"

"Ever so much." Her pallid face and the sunken rims round her large black eyes did not confirm the statement. "I can't rest, Dick, I can't rest. Is he caught?"

"Who, Gracie?"

"The man that murdered Mr. Boyd?"

"No; and God knows when he will be."

"If God don't catch him," said Gracie, slowly, "and you don't, I
will. You just see if I don't. I've got to, because of what they're saying of father. Dick, if I was a man I'd tear 'em to pieces. Poor father! It's too bad, ain't it?"

"Altogether too bad."

"There's mother fretting herself to skin and bone. She gets up in the night, and goes down to the Mews, and when she thinks nobody sees her she cries and cries fit to break her heart; but I see her, and I feel like killing somebody!"

Not a trace of emotion in her dark little face; no kindling light in her eyes; no tremor in her voice. The passion which agitated her was expressed only in the clinging of her fingers to the hand of the friend in whom she trusted and believed.

"I dreamt of father last night, Dick," she continued. "He was running as hard as he could, and there was a mob of people after him. I kept 'em back. 'If you dare,' I cried, 'if you dare!' So we got away together, and where do you think we got to?"

"Couldn't say for my life, Gracie, dreams are such funny things."

"Yes, they are, ain't they? We got into Mr. Boyd's house in Catchpole Square, and we went all over it, into every room, creeping up and down the stairs, looking for the murderer. 'You didn't do it, father?' I said. He swore a big oath that he was innocent, and he cried to me to save him and catch the murderer. I'm going to. I promised I would, and I'm going to."

"It was only a dream, Gracie."

"It was real. I can hear him now, I can see him now. I've promised to catch the murderer, and I'm going to."

They had reached Aunt Rob's house, and Dick stopped.

"I must leave you now, Gracie. My friends live here."

"You won't throw us over, will you? You'll come and see us?"

"Yes, I will come."

She raised her face; he stooped and kissed her and she went away with a lighter heart.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY WHARTON STARTLES THE COURT.

When the jury re-assembled on Wednesday the excitement created by the mystery had reached fever heat, and long before the Court was opened a crowd of people had gathered round the doors. Numbers of influential persons had applied for admission, and as many of these were accommodated as the limited space at the disposal of the Coroner would permit. The first day's proceedings had whetted curiosity, and many members of the aristocracy were present to hear the evidence which Lady Wharton was to give, the nature of which had been kept a profound secret. The learned professions were adequately represented; the stage sent some of its best actors and actresses, and literature some of its most famous authors. Never in the history of crime had a gathering so notable assembled at the initial inquiry into the circumstances of a mystery murder.

The murdered man had been buried the previous day, and a vast concourse of people had attended the funeral. Reginald--still very weak--and Florence were the chief mourners, and in their carriage were Inspector Robson and his wife. There was but one other mourning carriage, and this was occupied by Dick and the poor charwoman who had been fitfully employed domestically by the deceased. The newspapers devoted columns to descriptions of the funeral and to those pictorial sketches of personages and incidents which have become almost a craze in up-to-date journalism. Standing by the grave, Dick, looking over the heads of the people, saw Gracie and her mother and Dr. Vinsen, side by side. Mrs. Death was in tears, Gracie wore her accustomed impassive expression, and Dr. Vinsen bared his halo to the skies.

"My young friend, my dear young friend," he said, sidling up to Dick, "this is the end of a crafty life, but let us extend our pity--ex-tend our pi-ty. The grave, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins. We will be clement; we will soften our judgment; it is the least we can do in the presence of death, in the solemn presence of death. If it teaches us a lesson, Mr. Samuel Boyd will not have lived in vain."

"What lesson?" asked Dick, half angrily; the voice, the manner, jarred upon him.

"The lesson of humility, of charity--sweet charity--of justice."

"You call the life that ends here," said Dick, pointing to the grave, "a crafty life. Where does justice come in?"

"Ah, my young friend," responded Dr. Vinsen, shaking his head remonstrantly, "ah, my dear young friend!"

"Meaning--what?" demanded Dick.

"Meaning that you are young, that you have much to learn, much to unlearn."

"You speak in enigmas," said Dick. "Good day."

"Not in anger," said Dr. Vinsen, gently, "not in anger, my dear young friend, lest the dead rise to reproach you."

"He is better where he is," said Dick, cynically. "I knew him--did you?"

"I had not the privilege. In life we never met."

"But you take it very much to heart. Why?"

"My heart is large; it bleeds for all." He laid his hand upon the shoulder of Mrs. Death, and repeated, "It bleeds for all."

"More enigmas--more platitudes," said Dick, scornfully.

Dr. Vinsen looked at him with a pitying smile. "I fear I do not find favour in your eyes."

"To speak plainly, you do not."

"To speak plainly is commendable. But give a reason for it."

"I cannot. You have a scientist for a friend."

"Dr. Pye? Yes."

"He will tell you that there are certain chemicals that will not mix."

"I do not need to be told. I know it."

"Well, then, Dr. Vinsen, we don't mix; and there's an end of it."

"No, my young friend, not an end of it. The end is there, for him, for you, for all. Better for some of us if we were in our graves." There was no change in his voice; it was mild,

benignant, reproachful. "Better, far better, for some of us if we were in our graves. Come, Mrs. Death; come, Gracie, my child."

They turned away, but not before Gracie had taken Dick's hand and kissed it.

And now, on Wednesday morning, the Coroner took his place, and addressed the jury in the following terms:

"Upon the opening of this inquiry I advised you to keep an open mind respecting it, and to turn a deaf ear to the strange rumours and reports which were in circulation. I feel it necessary to repeat this caution. The extraordinary statements which have appeared in the public press may or may not have a foundation of fact, but with these statements we have nothing to do, and I beg you to dismiss them. You are here to give your verdict in accordance with the evidence which will be presented to you, and not in accordance with unauthorised and unverified rumour. If you do this without fear or favour you will have performed your duty. Before medical evidence is taken Inspector Robson has requested permission to make a statement, to which, as he is an important witness in the case, I see no objection."

Inspector Robson was then called.

The Coroner: "Does the statement you wish to make, Inspector Robson, relate to the present inquiry?"

Inspector Robson: "It does, Mr. Coroner, though it has no direct bearing upon it. A matter has come to my knowledge since Monday which, although it is purely of a private nature, I consider it my duty to make public. Constable Applebee, in his evidence on that day, mentioned that on the night of the 5th, when he was in Catchpole Square, he saw a woman there whom he challenged, and who escaped from him. The incident was reported at the Bishop Street Station, and note was taken of it. I wish to state that the lady he challenged is my daughter."

"You were not aware of the fact when Constable Applebee was under examination?"

"I was not. My daughter, hearing on Monday that the incident had been mentioned in court, informed me that it was she who had visited Catchpole Square on the night in question."

"Is there any special reason why she did not inform you of it before?"

"None. Had the matter been of importance she would have spoken of it earlier."

"Perhaps we had better hear from her own lips the reason of her visit. Is she in court?"

"She is."

"Let her be called."

Florence came forward. She was sitting between Reginald and her mother, who gave her an encouraging smile as she left them.

The Coroner: "You have heard what your father has said. There is no obligation upon you to state why you went to Catchpole Square at such an hour on such a night; but we are ready to listen to any explanation you may desire to make."

Florence: "I will answer any questions you ask."

"Previous to your visit where were you on that night?"

"At my husband's lodgings in Park Street, Islington. He was very ill, and I was nursing him."

"Did he send you for his father?"

"No, he was delirious. He spoke of his father several times, and it appeared to me to be my duty to make him acquainted with his son's dangerous condition. There was no one else to go but myself, and I went to Catchpole Square because I considered it right to do so."

The Juror (who had taken so conspicuous a part in Monday's proceedings): "When he spoke of his father, what were his precise words?"

The Coroner: "I do not think the witness should be asked that question."

Florence: "Oh, yes, there is nothing to conceal. He simply said, 'My father, my father!' and I gathered from that that he wished to see him. It was natural that I should think so."

The Coroner: "Quite natural. You arrived at Catchpole Square, and knocked at the door of the deceased?"

"Yes, I knocked a good many times, but no one answered me. As I was about to leave the square I heard voices, and saw, very dimly, two men very close to me. I did not know they were policemen, and one of them called out to me to stop, and caught hold of me. I was so frightened that I tore myself away, and ran out of the Square as quickly as I could."

The Juror: "Did you know at that time that your husband was not on good terms with his father?"

The Coroner: "You need not answer that question."

"I wish to answer every question. I did know it, and I knew that there was no fault on my husband's part. It was my hope that his illness would lead to a reconciliation between them. I thank God that my husband is spared to me, but if he had died I should never have forgiven myself if I had not made the attempt to bring his father to him."

"Thank you, Mrs. Boyd; that is all we have to ask."

A buzz of admiration ran through the court as Florence returned to her seat by Reginald's side.

Dr. Talbot Rowbottom, of Harley Street, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a doctor of medicine, was then called.

"You examined the body of the deceased?"

"Yes, on Sunday, at the request of Mr. Reginald Boyd, who wrote me a note to that effect. I had read of the discovery of the body in the newspapers, and, anticipating an inquest, I called first upon you, as coroner of the district, and received your permission to make the examination."

"Did the deceased die a natural death?"

"No. He met his death by strangulation."

"You have no doubt upon the subject?"

"Not the slightest."

"He could not have strangled himself?"

"From the condition of the body that is impossible."

"Does your examination of the body warrant you in saying that there was resistance on the part of the deceased?"

"Great resistance. There is every indication of a violent struggle having taken place."

"So that the orderly state of the bed and bedclothes was unnatural?"

"Most unnatural. After the deed was done singular care must have been taken to compose the limbs and arrange the bedclothes."

"Do you consider it likely that, during the struggle, the deceased succeeded in getting out of bed?"

"More than likely. I observed upon the body traces of bruises which could not have been produced had the deceased remained in bed. There was a bruise upon the shin of the right leg, another on the head, and another on the right shoulder. These must have been caused by the deceased coming into violent contact with heavy pieces of furniture. Above the left eye there was an abrasion from a similar cause."

"Was there any wound on the body such as might have been caused by a knife or a pistol?"

"No."

"Is the furniture in the bedroom of a sufficiently heavy character to cause the wounds and abrasions you spoke of?"

"There is no heavy furniture in the bedroom. My impression is that the deceased was first attacked in his sleep, that he awoke, that in the course of the struggle he succeeded in getting out of bed, and dragged, or was dragged by his assailant or assailants, into the adjoining apartment, where the furniture is of a much more substantial description."

"Do you consider it likely that the deceased could have called for help during the struggle?"

"Not to any appreciable extent. The compression of the windpipe was remarkable, and under such compression the capacity of the vocal chords must have been considerably weakened. Even had he succeeded in releasing himself for a few moments he could not

in that brief time have regained control of his voice. The exhaustion would have been too great."

"Now, Dr. Rowbottom, you examined the body on Sunday, the l0th. Can you state with some degree of precision on what approximate date the deceased met his death?"

"He must have been dead at least eight days."

"That takes us back to Sunday, the 3rd?"

"Yes. And it is probable that he died the day before, on the Saturday."

At these words, which were uttered with decision, there was a commotion in the part of the court in which Lady Wharton was sitting, but the Coroner looking with some severity in that direction, her ladyship, who had risen to her feet, obeyed the injunction of her counsel not to speak. She sank back in her seat, and evinced her agitation by a vigorous fluttering of her fan. When the excitement caused by this interruption had subsided, the Coroner continued.

"The deceased being in his night attire, we may take it that he died either on the night of Friday, the 1st of March, or on the night of Saturday, the 2nd?"

"Certainly on one of those nights."

"Absolutely certain?"

"Absolutely certain."

Dr. John Webster, of Canonbury Square, and Dr. Lipman, of Wimpole Street, who were next examined, corroborated in every respect the evidence of Dr. Rowbottom, and agreed with the conclusions at which he had arrived. They spoke positively to the fact that the deceased had been brutally murdered, and to the presumption that the murder had taken place either on the Friday or the Saturday night.

At this stage of the inquiry Mr. Finnis, Q.C., requested the Coroner to take Lady Wharton as the next witness. Her ladyship, he said, had evidence of an extraordinary nature to give which would throw an entirely new light upon the inquiry, and it was most important that there should be as little delay as possible in hearing what she had to say.

The Coroner: "Before Lady Wharton is examined there is official information to lay before the jury. An officer from the detective department in Scotland Yard is present, and we will hear him first. He has duties elsewhere, and is anxious to be relieved from a longer attendance in this court than is absolutely necessary. His evidence will open up matter which may have a bearing on the verdict. Call Mr. Lambert."

This gentleman, whose name is well known in association with many celebrated criminal cases, stepped forward and was sworn.

"You are a detective in official service?"

"I am."

"You have visited the house of the deceased in Catchpole Square?"

"On three occasions. The first on Sunday, the second on Monday, the third yesterday."

"Whom did you find in charge there?"

"Mr. Richard Remington, who gave me every facility for a thorough examination of the premises."

"Describe what steps you took, and their result."

"I first examined the bedroom and the adjoining office. On the floor of both rooms I observed the marks of a man's footsteps, with stains of blood which had been trodden upon. In three places the footmarks were partially outlined in these stains, and I took photographs of them."

"Are these the photographs?"

"Yes."

The Coroner passed the photographs to the jury.

"How do you form the conclusion that they are the footsteps of a man?"

"The boots are those of a man, and the size, No. 8, is an unusual size for a woman."

"Were there marks of other footsteps?"

"None."

"Could these footsteps have been made by the deceased?"

"No. The deceased was flat-footed; the man who wore the boots had a defined arch in his soles. Here are photographs of the soles of deceased's boots; you will see a marked difference in the size and shape."

The photographs were produced, and examined by the Coroner and the jury.

"After searching the bedroom and the adjoining office you proceeded to another part of the premises."

"With your permission I will first finish with these two rooms."

"Very well. Proceed."

"The walls of the office are partially hung with old tapestry, and I observed in one place that a hand had clutched it. The finger marks are still discernible, and the tapestry has not returned to its original folds. This indicates that, during a struggle, one of the men had caught hold of it. Upon parts of the wall not covered with tapestry are scratches which seem to have been made by finger nails."

"Recent scratches?"

"Made within the last two or three weeks."

"Do you consider it certain that there was a struggle between the deceased and his assailant?"

"I am positive there was."

"In that case would there not have been, in addition to the defined blood stains of footmarks, smears of blood upon the floor?"

"I was coming to that. There is no doubt that a prolonged struggle took place, but the absence of blood-smears, such as would have been caused by the naked feet of the deceased, proves that the wound from which the blood proceeded could not have been inflicted during the struggle."

"Before or after?"

"After. If blood had dropped upon the floor before the struggle it would have taken some time to dry, and signs of dragging feet would have been observable. Besides, there would have been blood-stains on the naked feet of the deceased. There were none. Examining farther I discovered a bullet in the wall, which I extracted, and which must have been fired within the last two or three weeks. The bore is .320, the barrel of the pistol, four inch. The weapon used was probably a Colt's ejector revolver."

"Probably, you say. Did you not find the pistol?"

"No. I inquired of Mr. Remington whether he had found one. He had not."

"So that you cannot say whether the shot was fired by the deceased or his assailant?"

"I cannot say."

"Was that the only bullet you found?"

"The only one. My examination of these two rooms concluded, I turned my attention to other parts of the house. On the stairs leading from the street door to the bedroom I picked up two pieces of brown paper, with small pieces of wax adhering to them."

"Did you examine the back of the premises?"

"Yes. Over the basement rooms, which had not been used for a considerable time, was a window which had been broken from without, and broken by an unskilled hand."

"How do you arrive at the conclusion that the window was broken from without?"

"By the splinters of glass on the floor of the room, and by the broken pieces remaining in the panes, the jagged edges of which are a verification of my statement."

"We should like to hear your reason for saying that the hand that broke the window was unskilled?"

"A regular burglar would have been provided with tools which would have enabled him to cut the glass without running the risk of personal injury."

"But might not such a man have adopted these rougher means for the purpose of averting suspicion?"

"I have never known it done by a skilled burglar. It was through this window that the man effected an entrance. Continuing my investigation I came to the wall which surrounds the back of the house, and there I received confirmation of the theory I had formed. The man had brought with him a rope to which a grapnel was attached. This rope he had thrown up from the outside until the grapnel caught in the mortar at the top of the wall. Then he climbed up; the rest was easy. The marks of the grapnel are plainly discernible, and the freshness of the loosened mortar proves that but a short time has elapsed since he paid his last visit."

"Is it your opinion that there was more than one visit?"

"As to that I have formed no opinion."

"All this must have taken some time?"

"Yes, and was done at night when there were few people about. The street on which the dead wall abuts is but little frequented. The movements of the policeman on the beat were doubtless carefully noted."

"Should you say that robbery was the object of this burglarious entrance?"

"It is a fair presumption."

"Did you search the clothes of the deceased?"

"Yes. Mr. Remington had gone through the pockets before I came, and had replaced what he found in them."

The Juror who had asked previous questions: "How do you know that?"

"He told me so. The watch and chain had not been taken, and there was money in his purse, a £5 note and some gold and silver, £9 18s. in all. I opened the safe; there were no articles of value in it. If there had been any before the death of the deceased they had been removed, and the key put back in its original place."

"You found no burglars' tools about?"

"None."

"Nor tools of any kind?"

"No."

"There were desks and drawers in the room adjoining the bedroom. Did any of the locks appear to have been forced?"

"No."

"I have no further questions to ask you, Mr. Lambert. Call Lady Wharton."

Expectation ran high at this summons. The scenes in Court in which her ladyship had played a principal part, and her excited comments upon a vital point in the inquiry, had caused her evidence to be looked forward to with intense interest.

The Coroner: "We understand that you have a communication of importance to make to the jury, and we are now prepared to hear what you have to say. You were acquainted with the deceased?"

Lady Wharton: "Whom do you mean by the deceased?"

The Coroner: "You are here to answer questions, Lady Wharton, not to ask them."

Lady Wharton: "But I do ask them. I want to know whom you mean by the deceased."

The Coroner: "Mr. Samuel Boyd, of course. You were acquainted with him?"

"I was very slightly acquainted with him. As a matter of fact I saw him only twice in my life. The first time was on the evening of Friday, the 1st of March. Lord Wharton had entered into certain financial transactions with Mr. Boyd, which did not come to my knowledge till a week or two before that date. Some settlement had to be made respecting these transactions, and Lord Wharton being ill, I undertook the business, having also a little business of my own to do with him. So far as I am aware there was no person in the house except Mr. Boyd when I called upon him in Catchpole Square. The business being of a private nature I entered alone, and ordered my servant to wait outside for me in the Square."

"At what hour was this visit paid?"

"At eight o'clock, and I remained with him thirty or forty minutes. I had brought with me some bills signed by Lord Wharton and endorsed by my brother, Lord Fairfax. In return for these bills I should have received bills not then due. It slipped my mind at the

time, and I wrote to him about them, and about another matter as well. In his reply he promised to bring the old bills to our place in Bournemouth on Thursday night, the 7th."

"A moment if you please. Do you say that you received a letter from the deceased on a date subsequent to Friday, the 1st of March?"

"I say that I received a letter from Mr. Samuel Boyd on the 6th of March, and that I saw him on the night of the 7th."

So great was the commotion in the Court at this statement that it was two or three minutes before order was restored.

The Coroner: "Do you seriously assert this, Lady Wharton, in the teeth of the medical evidence that Mr. Samuel Boyd met his death on the night of the 1st or the 2nd of March?"

Lady Wharton: "A fig for the medical evidence! Mr. Samuel Boyd was alive last Thursday night, and it is my belief that he is alive at this moment!"

The Coroner: "Surely, surely, Lady Wharton----"

Lady Wharton (interrupting excitedly): "And surely, surely, Mr. Coroner! Am I to believe the evidence of my senses? I tell you I saw the man last Thursday night, and had a conversation with him; and as his body has not been found, Mr. Samuel Boyd is alive now, and is keeping out of the way, like the thief and scoundrel he is, for the purpose of robbing me!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE INQUEST.

These words, spoken loudly and emphatically, acted like a spark upon gunpowder, and it was not until the Coroner threatened several times to clear the Court that order was again restored. From Lady Wharton the attention of the audience was turned to Reginald, whose head was bowed in shame. Some pitied him, some condemned him, and all were feverishly curious to hear the outcome of Lady Wharton's disclosures. The only crumb of comfort Reginald received was expressed in the close clasp of Florence's hand. Fearlessly and indignantly the young girl faced the eyes that were directed towards her and her husband; her cheeks were flushed, her lips parted, as though crying shame upon those who seemed to be mutely accusing the man she loved. Dick looked contemptuously upon these silent accusers, and Aunt Rob glared at them; it was with some difficulty that Uncle Rob prevented her from addressing Lady Wharton in terms of indignant reproach. "Keep still, mother, keep still," he whispered, "you will only make matters worse." So she held her tongue, and nursed her wrath in bitterness of spirit. During the course of this drama of human passion and emotion Mr. Finnis, Q.C., rose and addressed the Court.

"Lady Wharton," he said, "has suffered a grievous wrong, and however strongly she may express herself, it cannot for one moment be doubted that she is speaking what she believes to be the truth. An endeavour has been made to prove that Mr. Samuel Boyd was murdered on the Friday or Saturday night of the week before last. We do not impeach the witnesses, we do not say that they have spoken from interested motives. What we do say is that they are in error. That Mr. Samuel Boyd did not meet his death at the time mentioned is proved by the fact that Lady Wharton saw and conversed with him five or six days afterwards. Her testimony is supported by that of her brother, Lord Fairfax, who is now in Court, and who also saw and conversed with him. As you may gather from her evidence we go farther than that; we say that Mr. Samuel Boyd has not been murdered. Her ladyship, as you will presently learn, has had, unfortunately for herself, some business transactions with Mr. Samuel Boyd, and in view of the strange mystery which surrounds the case, I have advised her to make these transactions public. I ask you now, Mr. Coroner, to permit her to relate her story with as little interruption from yourself as possible; and I would also ask Lady Wharton to control her feelings, and to refrain from strong language. There are persons in Court related to Mr. Samuel Boyd, to whom such epithets as she has applied to him must be extremely painful."

The Coroner: "The extraordinary turn this inquiry has taken renders it imperatively necessary that a full disclosure be made of all that has passed between Lady Wharton and Mr. Samuel Boyd. Now, if your ladyship pleases."

Lady Wharton: "And kindly do not interrupt me. I have mentioned that I paid Mr. Samuel Boyd a visit on the evening of Friday, the 1st of March. On that occasion I gave him bills for a considerable amount in renewal of bills shortly to fall due, and I foolishly forgot to ask him for the return of the old bills. In the course of the interview I requested him--(it is perfectly abominable that I should be compelled to speak of it, but I suppose it cannot be prevented)--I requested him to advance me a thousand pounds for my personal use, quite apart from the business between him and Lord Wharton. With some idea of the character of the man I was dealing with, I had brought with me as security for the loan certain articles of jewellery of great value, for which I had no immediate use, and which I handed over to him. After inspecting them he consented to advance the money, but said he could not let me have it immediately--which, of course, was a trick and subterfuge. I told him that I was going out of town, to our place in Bournemouth, and he said he would bring the sum to me there on Thursday night--last Thursday, you know--in bank notes. With that understanding I left him. Two days afterwards it was brought to my recollection that Mr. Boyd had not returned the old bills, and I wrote to him about them. At the same time I mentioned that I needed a much larger sum for my private personal use than we had arranged for, and I requested him to bring £1,500, promising to give him further security in the shape of additional jewels, for there is only one way of dealing with these Shylocks: they must have their pound of flesh. He replied that he would bring the money and the old bills on Thursday night. We were giving a ball on that night, and as I did not wish such a person to mix with our guests I decided to finish the business with him in a retired part of the grounds, and I instructed my servants to that effect. He had the assurance not to present himself till one in the morning, when a servant brought me his card. I went to the spot I had appointed, and there I saw Mr. Samuel Boyd. I asked him if he had brought the money; he answered that he had, and he produced a small packet, which he declined to part with till I gave him the additional jewels I had promised as security. The scoundrel assumed an air of saucy independence which completely deceived me The jewels were in the house, and Lord Fairfax happening to be passing at that moment I called to him and requested him to remain with Mr. Boyd while I went to fetch them. When I returned I gave them to Mr. Boyd, who then handed me the packet, saying that it contained the £1,500 in bank notes and the old bills. As I could not count the money in the grounds I went to the house again, accompanied by Lord Fairfax, and opening the packet, discovered that I had been robbed. There were no bills inside, and no money, nothing but blank paper cunningly folded to make it feel like bank notes. I hurried back, with the intention of giving the thief into custody, but though search was made for him in every direction he was not to be found. I want to know what has become of him and of my property."

The Coroner: "This is a strange story, Lady Wharton, and is in direct conflict with the evidence that has been tendered."

Lady Wharton: "The evidence that has been tendered is in direct conflict with the facts of the case. In all my life I have never heard such a tissue of misrepresentations and delusions."

"May you not yourself be labouring under a delusion?"

"You had better say at once that I am not in my right senses."

"Pray do not speak so excitedly. May you not have been deceived by an accidental likeness to Mr. Samuel Boyd in the person who presented himself?"

"It is an absurd suggestion. There is no possibility of my having been mistaken. I tell you it was the man himself."

The Coroner: "Did you keep a copy of the letter you wrote to Mr. Boyd?"

Lady Wharton: "I am not in the habit of keeping copies of my letters. I leave that to tradesmen."

"Have you the letter you received from him?"

"I have brought it with me."

Lady Wharton handed the letter to the Coroner, who read it aloud:

"Mr. Samuel Boyd presents his compliments to Lady Wharton, and will have the pleasure of waiting upon her ladyship on Thursday night with the bills which he forgot to return last Friday evening, and with the additional advance her ladyship requires. Mr. Boyd hopes that her ladyship will be prepared with the jewels she speaks of, and that they will be adequate security for the increase in the loan.

"Catchpole Square, N., 5th March, 1896."

Lady Wharton: "And people come here and swear that at the time the man wrote that letter he had been dead five days! Can anything be more preposterous?"

The Coroner: "We shall have witnesses before us who are familiar with Mr. Boyd's handwriting, and this letter will be submitted to them. Have you the visiting card Mr. Boyd gave your servant in Bournemouth?"

"Here it is."

"Could you identify the jewels?"

"I can swear to them, if they are fortunately recovered."

"That is all I have to ask you at present, Lady Wharton. If Lord Fairfax is present perhaps he will come forward."

Lord Fairfax (advancing from the body of the Court): "No objection."

"You have heard the account given by Lady Wharton of the visit of a person last Thursday night who announced himself as Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"Quite true."

"You saw that person?"

"Yes."

"Have you had any dealings with Mr. Boyd?"

"Happy to say, no."

"Then you are not acquainted with him?"

"Not the pleasure."

"Then you cannot say it was Mr. Boyd."

"Take Lady Wharton's word for it. Her ladyship presented him. She said, 'Mr. Samuel Boyd, Catchpole Square.' I said, 'Ah.'"

"You conversed with him?"

"He conversed with me. Fifty words to my one."

"What was the subject of the conversation?"

"Money. Asked if I wanted it. I said every fellow wanted it. Said he would be happy to oblige. I said, 'Ah.'"

"When Lady Wharton returned did you remain with them?"

"At her request. Saw her give him jewels. Saw him give her packet. Saw her dismiss him. Glad to be rid of fellow."

"You went back to the house, and was present when she opened the packet?"

"Yes. Blank paper. Infernal scoundrel."

"Was information given to the police?"

"Wanted to. Lady Wharton said no, go to lawyer. Went to Mr. Finnis Saturday. Then, surprising report in papers. Man murdered, or supposed to be."

"That is all you know, Lord Fairfax?"

"All I know."

The Coroner (to the jury): "Before we call Mr. Reginald Boyd I wish to ask Mr. Richard Remington a question or two, arising out of Lady Wharton's evidence."

The profound amazement with which Dick had listened to this evidence was not reflected in his countenance as he stepped airily forward. Never in his life had he so strongly felt the need for dissimulation as at the present time. It was forced upon him--by the discoveries he had himself made and by the testimony of the witnesses who had been examined--that in this mystery another agency was at work the existence of which he had hitherto only dimly suspected. The person who had presented himself to Lady Wharton as Samuel Boyd and had committed the fraud upon her must have been intimately familiar with the business operations of the murdered man, and must have had free access to the house in Catchpole Square. He must also have a talent for disguise to have so imposed upon Lady Wharton. He could think of but one person who had the knowledge requisite to carry out the deception--Abel Death. But to do what Lady Wharton had described needed courage, coolness, skill, and an evenly balanced brain; none but a master of resource, and one who had perfect command over himself, could have brought to a successful issue a task so difficult. Dick could hardly believe that Abel

Death was equal to a man[oe]uvre so daring, a scheme so full of peril, in which a single false step would bring destruction upon him. Dick felt as if every hour added a new mystery to those that lay unsolved. He had one cause for deep gratitude, and he gladly welcomed it. These disclosures helped to dispel the cloud of suspicion that hung over Reginald. Whatever else he might have done, he could have had no personal part in the duplicity and in the robbery of the jewels. How far this would help to clear him in the minds of others who might suspect him had yet to be seen. They might argue that he was in league with another man, and that the imposition practised upon Lady Wharton was part of a cunningly laid scheme, all the details of which had been carefully considered and mapped out beforehand. There was, indeed, but little light in the cloud that hung over Florence's husband.

This was the state of Dick's mind when he submitted himself for the third time to the Coroner.

The Coroner: "Since you were examined on Monday, have you continued your search in Mr. Samuel Boyd's house?"

Dick: "Yes, I have carefully searched every room, every cupboard, every drawer."

"Have you found any jewels?"

"None."

"Any bills of acceptance?"

"None."

"Nothing of any value?"

"Nothing."

"Look at this visiting card which was presented to Lady Wharton on Thursday night in Bournemouth. Do you recognise it as one of Mr. Samuel Boyd's regular visiting cards?"

"It is exactly like. There are thirty or forty similar cards in a drawer in the writing table."

"You are doubtless familiar with Mr. Boyd's handwriting?"

"I was very familiar with it, but that is some time ago. I may err in my recollection of it."

"So far as your recollection serves is this letter received by Lady Wharton on the 6th of March, and dated the 5th, in his writing?"

"It cannot be his writing because on the 5th of March he was dead."

"Confine yourself strictly to answering the questions put to you. Should you say it was in Mr. Samuel Boyd's handwriting?"

Dick examined the letter with great care. He had in his pocket at that very moment proof positive in the shape of the incriminating document written by Samuel Boyd only a few hours before he was murdered, the production of which would have caused Reginald's instant arrest. The writing on the letter was like it, and he would have given much to be able to compare them. After a long pause he said, "It looks like his writing, but I am not an expert in caligraphy."

The Coroner made a gesture as if he had exhausted his questions, and Dick was about to step back, when the Juror interposed.

The Juror: "Have you found a pistol of any kind in the house?"

"Now, who is prompting you?" thought Dick, as he confronted the Juror, a sallow-faced, pock-marked man, with an aggressive voice. "No," he answered aloud, "I found no pistol."

The Juror: "The detective officer who has been examined spoke of a recently fired bullet which he extracted from the wall of the office. How is it that in your evidence on Monday you said nothing of this bullet?"

Dick: "In the first place, because I was not asked. In the second place, because on Monday nothing was known about it."

There was a titter in Court at this, and the juror flushed up and was silent.

The Coroner: "When was the bullet found?"

Dick: "Yesterday."

"It had escaped your notice before the detective officer pointed it out?"

"It was I who first pointed it out. We were examining the wall together when I said, 'What is this?' My question led to the discovery of the bullet."

The Coroner: "Call Mr. Reginald Boyd."

A firm pressure of Florence's hand, and Reginald faced the jury. Dick moved a little nearer to the young wife, whose heart was throbbing violently. Reginald was very pale, and traces of the sickness he had passed through were visible in his face, though he bore himself with composure.

The Coroner: "You have been ill, and probably would like to be seated."

Reginald: "Thank you, Mr. Coroner, I prefer to stand."

"As you please. We understand that you went to your father's house in Catchpole Square to see the body of the deceased?"

"Yes, I went there on Sunday.'

"You saw the body?"

"Yes."

"And identified it?"

"Yes. It was my father's body."

"In the teeth of the conflicting evidence that has been given, you are positive?"

"I am positive. I wish with all my heart and soul that there was room for doubt."

"We recognise that your position is a painful one, and we should, of course, wish to hear all the evidence it is in your power to give, but I consider it right to say that you are not compelled to answer every question put to you."

"There is no question that I shall decline to answer. I am a willing witness in a most unhappy tragedy."

"When did you last see your father alive?"

"On Friday the 1st of March."

"Before that day were you in the habit of visiting him regularly?"

"Before that day I had not seen him for two years. I regret to say we were not on friendly terms."

The Juror: "What was the cause of the disagreement between you?"

The Coroner: "We cannot have that at this point of the inquiry."

The Juror: "The witness states that there is no question that he will decline to answer, and the inquiry will be incomplete unless we arrive at all the facts of the case."

Reginald: "I am willing to answer everything."

The Coroner: "We will proceed in something like order. The last time you saw your father alive was on Friday the 1st of March. Did the interview take place in his house in Catchpole Square?"

"Yes, on that day I paid two visits to the house, the first in the afternoon, the second at night."

The Juror: "How did you obtain admittance in the afternoon?"

The Coroner (to the Juror): "I must request you not to make these frequent interruptions; they tend to confuse the issue."

The Juror: "With all due respect, sir, it is the jury who have to return the verdict"----

The Coroner: "Under my guidance and direction."

The Juror: "Not entirely. We are not simply machines. You can advise us, and clear up knotty points, but you cannot dictate to us. Otherwise you might as well hold this inquiry without our aid. The question I put to the witness is a very simple one."

The Coroner: "Very well." (To Reginald.) "Did you obtain admission into your father's house on Friday afternoon in the usual way?"

Reginald: "No. I knocked at the door two or three times, and receiving no answer, admitted myself with a private latchkey I had in my pocket."

The Juror: "You see, Mr. Coroner, I had an object in asking the question."

The Coroner: "How did you become possessed of the latchkey?"

Reginald: "It was one I used when I lived in Catchpole Square with my father. When I left the home I took it with me."

"Having let yourself in, what then did you do?"

"I went upstairs to the office in the expectation of seeing my father. He was not at home. The only person in the house was his clerk, Abel Death."

"You were personally acquainted with Abel Death?"

"Yes."

"And on friendly terms with him?"

"Yes."

"Why did he not open the street door for you?"

"He had been instructed not to admit anyone during my father's absence."

"Not even to go down to the door to see who it was who sought entrance?"

"Not even that. He was ordered not to stir out of the office."

"Was your father a very strict man?"

"Very strict."

"Had you a definite object in view when you paid the visit, apart from the natural desire to see him?"

"I had. My circumstances were not good, and I went to see if I could not improve them. My mother had left me a small fortune, and had appointed a trustee to administer it. This trustee had given me to understand that when I was of age I should come into possession of £8,000. I spent my youth and early manhood abroad, and when I returned home my trustee was dead, and my father had the disposition of my inheritance. He wished me to join him in his business, but I had a distaste for it, and we had many arguments and discussions on the subject."

The Juror: "Quarrels?"

"I suppose they would be considered so. We were equally firm, and the consequence of our disagreement was that there was a breach between us, which ended in my leaving his house."

"Voluntarily?"

"He sent me away. Before I left he asked me what I intended to live upon, and I answered that I had my inheritance. Greatly to my surprise he informed me that all the money had been spent upon me during and three or four years after my minority. He showed me a statement of accounts which I did not understand."

"Interrupting you here, has that statement of accounts been found among your father's papers?"

"No statement of accounts has been found. Shall I proceed?"

"If you wish."

"It is hardly my wish, but I certainly desire to anticipate questions which might be put to me by the jury."

The Juror: "Quite right. It will save trouble."

Reginald: "I questioned the correctness of these accounts, and my father said he was ready to prove their correctness in a court of law. Such a course was repugnant to my feelings, and we parted, my resolve being to carve out a path for myself. I was not fortunate, and on the day I visited my father I was practically penniless. I was then married, and I desired to make a home for my wife, which in my then circumstances was not possible. It was this which drove me to making another appeal to my father to restore money which I believed was rightfully mine. On the occasion of my afternoon visit I remained only a short time with Mr. Abel Death, and before I left I informed him of my intention to come again at night. I paid my second visit at about ten o'clock, which I thought was the best time to find my father alone. I knocked at the door, and he came down and asked who was there. He recognised my voice when I answered him, and he refused to admit me. I told him from without that I was determined to see him, if not that night, the next day or night, and if not then, that I would continue my efforts until I succeeded. Upon that he unlocked and unbolted the door, and I entered and followed him upstairs into the office, where I explained the motive for my visit. I informed him that I was married, and that it was necessary I should provide for my wife. We were

together half an hour or so, and he refused to assist me, and denied that any money was due to me. I offered to accept a small sum, and to sign a full quittance, but he turned a deaf ear to all my appeals, and at length I left him. Mr. Coroner, I am aware that in this disclosure I have touched upon matters which do not come strictly within the scope of your inquiry. I have done so because I wish to avoid the suspicion of any reluctance on my part to make known to you and the jury all my proceedings with respect to my father. Private matters have already been introduced which affect me closely, and while I dispute the justice of the direction which this inquiry has taken I recognise that more mischief may be done by silence than by a frank and open confession."

The Coroner: "Your statement is a voluntary one, and much of it is not pertinent to the inquiry. You say that you visited your father at about ten o'clock?"

"At about that hour."

"You left the house before eleven o'clock?"

"Certainly before that hour."

"Were you and your father quite alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Did any one apply for admission while you were with him?"

"No one."

"There was no other person except yourselves in the house?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did your father accompany you to the street door?"

"I do not think he did."

"Cannot you say with certainty?"

"No. I regret that, as regards the last few minutes of the interview, I cannot entirely depend upon my memory. I was deeply agitated, and my mind was in confusion. I have endeavoured in vain to recall every incident and word, and it has occurred to me that the fever from which I immediately afterwards suffered, and which kept me to my bed for

several days, may have been upon me then. I have a recollection--not very clear--that as I went downstairs I felt in my pocket for the latchkey."

"For what reason? You did not need the key to open the door from within?"

"I cannot say why I did it. I can only tell you what is in my mind."

"Have you the latchkey now?"

"No, I have lost it."

"Where?"

"I do not know where."

"Have you searched for it?"

"Yes, without success."

"Between your two visits to your father on that Friday did you come into communication with Mr. Abel Death?"

"No."

"Did you not see him in Catchpole Square, or in its vicinity?"

"I repeat that I did not see him, and had no communication with him."

The Juror: "Angry words passed between you and your father?"

"I am afraid so."

"Threatening words?"

"Not on my part."

"On his?" (A momentary pause.) "I do not insist upon a reply."

"Oh, I will reply. My father threatened to bring an action against me for a balance of £1,200, which he said was due to him on the account."

"You disputed the correctness of the account?"

"Certainly I disputed it."

"Did you accuse your father of fraud?"

The Coroner: "Order, order!"

The question was not answered.

The Juror: "Is it true that during these last two years you have been living under an assumed name?"

"I have been passing as Mr. Reginald. Reginald is my Christian name."

"Was it as Mr. Reginald you introduced yourself to the family of Inspector Robson?"

"I was introduced to them by that name."

"They did not know you were the son of Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"They did not."

"And you did not inform them?"

"Not for some time--not, indeed, till I was married."

"That is quite lately?"

"Yes."

"Have you any objection to inform us why you suppressed the name of Boyd? Were you ashamed of it?"

"You are pressing me rather hardly."

The Coroner: "I quite agree. Many of these questions are totally irrelevant."

The Juror: "Surely, Mr. Coroner, it is of importance that we should be made acquainted with the true state of the relations existing between Mr. Samuel Boyd and his only child.

Putting aside Lady Wharton's statements and impressions, and assuming that the medical evidence is correct, the witness is the last person who saw the deceased alive."

Reginald: "That is not so. Some person or persons must have seen him after I left him on Friday night."

The Juror: "Well, the last person who has given evidence in this Court?"

Reginald: "Yes."

"Have you taken out letters of administration?"

"Yes."

"As matters stand at present you are the only person who has benefited by the death of your father?"

The Coroner: "I will not allow questions of this nature to be put to the witness, who has given his evidence very fairly, and has shown every disposition to assist the Court."

Reginald: "I should like to explain that I did not know my father had not made a will. My impression was that he had made one, disinheriting me. Even now, although no will has yet been found, one may be forthcoming."

The Juror: "Extremely unlikely. There has been plenty of time for its production."

The Coroner: "You have heard the evidence respecting the bullet in the wall. Is it within your knowledge that your father kept a pistol by him?"

Reginald: "During the time I lived with him he always had a loaded pistol. It was a Colt's revolver. I do not know whether, during the last two years, he continued to keep it."

"Did your father ever fire the pistol?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"On what day were you taken ill?"

"On the day following my visit to my father. I recollect feeling giddy and light-headed when I returned home that night. I went to bed about midnight, and the next morning I was too ill to rise. The circumstances of my marriage have been made public in the

course of this inquiry. I was living alone in Park Street, Islington, and I had intervals of consciousness during which I wrote from time to time to my wife, who was living with her parents. Eventually she came to nurse me, and then the secret of our marriage was at an end. She has related how, being alarmed at my condition, she went to Catchpole Square last Tuesday night to inform my father, and, if possible, to bring him to me. I am deeply, deeply grateful to her for the love and devotion she has shown towards me, and to her parents for their kindness and consideration."

"Where were you on Thursday night?"

"Ill in bed. For a week, from Saturday to Saturday, I did not leave my room."

Reginald's loving look towards Florence, and his tender accents in speaking of her, made a strong impression upon the spectators as, his examination concluded, he retired to his seat by her side.

The Coroner (to the jury): "An hour ago I received a communication from a gentleman who stated that he had evidence of importance to tender which he thinks we ought to hear with as little delay as possible. This gentleman, I understand, is in waiting outside. It may be a convenient time to examine him. Call Dr. Pye."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DR. PYE MAKES A STATEMENT.

There was an interval of almost breathless suspense as, upon the Coroner's instructions, an officer left the Court. Dick looked forward to the entrance of Dr. Pye with no less curiosity than the other spectators, but mingled with this curiosity was an element of alarm. Dark forebodings crossed his mind; he feared he knew not what, but still he smiled confidently at Florence when she turned imploringly to him, for she also was in that state of tension which made every fresh feature of the inquiry a terrifying presage. Presently the officer returned, followed by Dr. Pye.

The new witness was tall, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, his face was ashen gray, his brows knit and concentrated, his eyes habitually downcast, but, when raised, irradiated with a keen steady light, giving one the impression that the pupils might be of steel, which was indeed their colour, his mouth with its thin long lips compressed, his hands long and nervous, his voice calm, clear, and deliberate, his manner altogether that of a man of supreme moral strength and self-possession, who could hold his passions in control, and make them subservient to his will.

"In volunteering a communication which may have some relation to your inquiry," he said, addressing the Coroner, without bestowing a glance upon the spectators, "I am impelled simply by a sense of public duty. As to its value you will be the best judge. What I have to offer to the Court is merely the narration of an occurrence which came under my observation on the night of Friday, the 1st of March, when I was making some experiments in chemistry in a room at the back of my house in Shore Street, the window in which looks out upon Catchpole Square, and commands a front view of the house in which Mr. Samuel Boyd resided. It is my habit to work late, and it was not till three in the morning that my labours were at an end. At that hour I was standing at the window, gazing aimlessly into the solitude of Catchpole Square, when my attention was arrested by movements at Mr. Boyd's street door. It was gradually opened, and the form of a man emerged from the house. The night was dark, and what I saw was necessarily dim and uncertain in my sight, but it appeared to me that the man, halting on the threshold, lingered in the attitude of a person who wished to escape observation. This impression impelled me to a closer scrutiny of the man's movements. I have in my room a device of my own construction in the shape of a small box containing a coil of magnesium wire. By withdrawing the curtain from a glass globe set in this box, and by pressing a spring, I can, upon lighting the wire, throw a powerful light upon objects at a great distance, remaining myself in darkness. There appeared to me to be something so suspicious in the shadowy movements of the person at Mr. Boyd's door at such an hour that I brought

my box to the window, and threw the light upon the Square. It was the work of a moment, but in that moment I had a clear view of the man's features. They were of deathlike paleness, and seemed to be convulsed by fear, but, I argued inly, this might have been caused by the fright occasioned by the sudden glare of light falling upon him--resembling in some respects a flash of lightning, and calculated to startle the strongest man. In his attitude of watchfulness--which I may call the first stage of my observation of him--he stood holding the street door partially open, thus providing for himself a swift retreat into the house in the event of a policeman entering the Square. The second stage was his fear-struck appearance, from whatever cause it proceeded. The third stage--occurring when the light was extinguished--was the shadowy movement of a man gliding out of the Square. Then his final disappearance."

The Coroner: "You say, Dr. Pye, that you had a clear view of the man's features. Did you recognise them?"

Dr. Pye: "No, sir, the man was a stranger to me."

"There appears to be some kind of connection between the death of Mr. Samuel Boyd and the disappearance of a clerk in his employ, Mr. Abel Death? Have you any knowledge of this clerk?"

"No, I never saw the man."

"Were you acquainted with Mr. Samuel Boyd?"

"Very slightly."

"If you saw the man again, could you identify him?"

"I think so."

"Have you ever seen any other man in Catchpole Square leaving Mr. Boyd's house in the middle of the night?"

"Never. It was the unusualness of the incident that attracted my attention."

As he uttered these words he raised his eyes and slowly looked around. When they reached the spot where Inspector Robson and his family were seated his gaze was arrested. The eyes of all the spectators, following his, were now fixed upon the group. A wave of magnetism passed through the Court, and, to a more or less degree, affected the nerves of every one present. Aunt Rob clutched her husband's sleeve, and Florence's

eyes dilated with a nameless fear. The long pause was broken by Dr. Pye, who murmured, but in a voice loud enough to be heard by all,--

"It is a very strange likeness."

"To whom do you refer?" asked the Coroner.

"To that gentleman," replied Dr. Pye, pointing to Reginald. "He bears a singular resemblance to the man I saw leaving Mr. Samuel Boyd's house in Catchpole Square in the middle of the night."

Reginald started to his feet with an indignant protest on his lips, and there was great confusion in Court, in the midst of which Dick gently pulled Reginald down to his seat. "It is easily disproved," he said, in a low tone. "You were home and in bed before midnight. Be calm, Florence, there is nothing to fear, nothing to fear." But his heart fell; he saw the net closing round those he loved.

The Coroner (to Dr. Pye): "The gentleman you are pointing to is Mr. Samuel Boyd's son."

Dr. Pye: "I did not know. I say he resembles the man."

"Are you sure?"

"Who can be sure of anything? In hundreds of my experiments all my calculations have been overturned at the last moment. I have been sure of success, and the crucial test has given me the lie. It is the same in human affairs, and in this case I can do no more than record my impressions. In spite of the conditions under which I saw the man his likeness to this gentleman is very striking; but I would impress upon you that great wrongs have been committed by accidental likenesses, and there are cases on record in which men have been condemned to death, the proof of their innocence coming too late to save them." Florence shuddered and closed her eyes. To her fevered mind her beloved husband was on his trial, surrounded by pitiless judges. Dr. Pye continued: "There is a notable instance of this in Charles Dickens's story, 'A Tale of Two Cities,' where, happily, a life is saved instead of being sacrificed. The incident, strangely enough, occurs also in a court of justice."

The Coroner: "That is fiction. This is fact."

Dr. Pye: "True. If you have nothing more to ask I shall be glad to retire. The atmosphere of this Court is unpleasant to me."

The Coroner intimating that he had no further questions to put, Dr. Pye retired, and the inquiry was adjourned till the following day.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DICK IS OF THE OPINION THAT THE MYSTERY SEEMS IMPENETRABLE, BUT IS STILL DETERMINED TO PIERCE IT.

In great agitation Reginald and his party left the Court and turned in the direction of home, followed at a short distance by a few persons, whose appetite, whetted by what had transpired, thirsted for more. Those whose fate seemed to hang upon the result of the inquiry exchanged but few words on the way. Dick was plunged in thought, and Florence clung more closely to Reginald. Inspector Robson and Aunt Rob exchanged disturbed glances; she was wildly indignant, but his official experience warned him that Reginald was in peril.

With respect to the evidence given by Dr. Pye the one chance for the young man lay in his being able to prove that he had returned to his lodgings before twelve o'clock on that fatal Friday night, and did not leave them again. This proof would not only clear him of the suspicion which naturally attached to him through Dr. Pye's evidence, but would clear him in other respects. But was the proof obtainable? Reginald's silence on the point rendered it doubtful. Could he have brought it forward he would have been eager to speak of it.

When the little party reached the street in which Aunt Rob's house was situated Inspector Robson, turning, saw Mr. Lambert, the detective who had given evidence about the finding of the bullet. Telling his people to go into the house, and saying he would join them presently, he crossed over to the detective, and gave him good day, to which the inspector responded. Then they stood a moment or two without saying anything further.

"On duty?" asked Inspector Robson.

"Partly."

"Anything new stirring?"

"Nothing new."

"I won't beat about the bush," said Inspector Robson, "you have been following us."

The detective rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Come, come, Lambert," continued Inspector Robson, "you and I have been friends this many a year, and friends I hope we'll remain. Be frank with me."

"Is it fair to put it that way, Robson?" said the detective. "When duty calls does friendship count?"

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," replied Inspector Robson, hurriedly, "but you see the close personal interest I have in this unfortunate affair. Are you shadowing my son-in-law?"

The detective rubbed his chin again. It was a habit with him when there was anything unusually grave in his mind, and Inspector Robson understood the meaning it conveyed.

"Now, I ask you, Lambert," he said, "could any man in the world have given his evidence more fairly?"

"No man," answered the detective; "but there's the outside of a man, and the inside of a man. We've had some experience of that, I think. If it's intimated to me to take up a case, I take it up. I won't go farther than that, so don't press me. It isn't often that a case so full of mystery crops up, and there'll be a lot of credit for the man who manages to get to the heart of it. It's something more than bread and butter: it's cake, and I don't want another man to get that cake. Now, mind you, I don't offer an opinion, but so far as this case has gone there are two or three parties to it."

"My son-in-law for one?" asked Inspector Robson, anxiously.

"Yes, your son-in-law for one. I don't say that he's not as innocent as the babe unborn, but you've got to convince people. Just you ask a hundred men and women, and half of 'em 'll wag their heads at mention of Mr. Reginald Boyd's name. The other half 'll wag their heads at mention of Mr. Abel Death's name. I'd give a lot to lay hands on that chap. He's the second party in the case. That's a queer story Lady Wharton told, and of course a true story, only it wasn't the real Samuel Boyd she saw. Somebody made up for him. If it wasn't Abel Death, it was the third party in the case. What a nerve!" said the detective, admiringly. "I couldn't have done it better myself."

"That ought to remove the suspicions against my son-in-law," said Inspector Robson. "There are three or four witnesses who can prove he never left his bed for a week."

"That's all right, but lawyers will say collusion, conspiracy. We're speaking confidentially, you know."

"Yes, and I'm obliged to you, Lambert."

"No need to be. We've been long in the service, you and me--boys together, weren't we?--and we can take credit for keeping one thing steady before us. Duty. The case, you see, doesn't hang only on what took place in Bournemouth last Thursday night; it hangs quite as much upon what took place in Catchpole Square the Friday before. A man is accountable for his actions, and if there's a mystery that's got to be cleared up, as this has got to be, and Mr. Reginald Boyd is concerned in it--which there's no denying--the law calls upon him to explain his actions."

"There's many a man held responsible and accountable for what, in the absence of witnesses, he finds it out of his power to explain, and which, in the nature of the circumstances, he couldn't reasonably be expected to explain. But that doesn't prove him guilty."

"I don't say it does. The hardship to that man is that the law is the law, and, in the absence of an explanation that can be proved to be true, refuses to be satisfied. 'Guilty or not guilty?' says the law. 'Not guilty,' says the man. Does the law accept it? No. It proceeds to open the case. Robson, you've my best wishes, and I hope you and yours will come well through it. Let us leave it there. We've had a comfortable chat; let us leave it there."

"Very well," said Inspector Robson, rather stiffly, "we'll leave it there. If any charge is brought against my son-in-law he will be ready to meet it. I pledge you my word that he'll not run away. Perhaps, if any decided step is resolved upon you will give me timely notice, for old friendship's sake, in return for my promise that you will meet with no obstruction in the performance of your duty. It will help me to soften the shock to my dear daughter--our only child, Lambert, the sweetest girl!"----

He turned his head, to hide his emotion. Lambert pressed his hand, and said,

"You shall be the first to hear of it, Robson. Cheer up. Things mayn't be so bad as some people suspect."

Inspector Robson nodded and left him, and rejoined his family in the house. Aunt Rob had seen him talking to the detective from the window, and had been so successful in instilling courage into Florence and Reginald that cheerful faces greeted his entrance; the cloud left his own at this unexpectedly bright reception.

"We've been talking about things, father," said Aunt Rob in a brisk voice, "and have made up our minds not to mope and mourn because a bit of trouble seems to be coming on us. If it passes all the better, but if we've got to fight it we'll fight it bravely."

"Bravo, mother," said Uncle Rob, "that's the right spirit to show. Here's my hand, Reginald."

"And here's mine," said Aunt Rob, "with my heart in it."

"Thank you both," said Reginald. "I can bear anything rather than that you should doubt me."

"No fear of that, my dear. You've behaved like a man, from first to last. Never speak ill of the dead, they say, and I'm not going to. He was your father, and if his ways were not our ways, we're the better for it, and while he lived he was the worse for it. You were right in refusing to take up his business, right in trying to carve out an honourable career for yourself, right in going to see him that Friday, and trying to get the money you were entitled to. Not that you would
have got it--but, there, I won't say anything against one that's gone to where I hope he'll be forgiven. You were right in everything, Reginald."

"God bless you, mother," said Florence.

"Right even in falling in love with our dear Florence?" said Reginald, tenderly.

"Who could help it, bless her sweet face! Give me a kiss, my son, and you, too, Florence, and you, too, Dick, and you, too, father. And mind you, lad, I'm as glad as glad can be that you gave your evidence as you did to-day, and made a clean breast of it. You spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, with love and innocence in your heart. Now, father, what did the detective have to say to you? Don't be afraid to tell us. Is he keeping an eye upon Reginald?"

"He is, mother; and I said if any charge is brought against him he'll be ready to meet it."

"Of course he will, and we'll stand by him, shoulder to shoulder. Father, you've been thirty years in the service, and you ought by this time to be pretty well used to the ways of witnesses. What is your opinion of Dr. Pye as a witness?"

"He gave his evidence in a straightforward manner," replied Uncle Rob, guardedly. "What one has to consider in reckoning up a witness is the effect he produces upon judge and jury, whether they put faith in what he says, or throw doubt upon it."

"Which way would it be with Dr. Pye?"

"They'd believe every word he spoke."

"What do you think, Dick?" asked Aunt Rob.

"I don't trust him," Dick replied.

"Give your reason."

"Can't. Haven't any?"

"Prejudice, then, Dick," said Uncle Rob.

"Perhaps. Call it that. Aunt, have you never seen a man you disliked, without being able to account for it?"

"It's happened more than once."

"And you've found him out afterwards to be a bad lot?"

"That has happened, too."

"A kind of instinct, you see," said Dick.

"What gets over me," said Aunt Rob, shaking her head, as though she had not made up her mind, "is the way he stood up for Reginald. All he seemed to want was fair play."

"Yes, seemed to want," said Dick, doggedly.

"At all events it was honest in him not to be too positive about the resemblance to the man he saw. Do you know anyone, Dick, that answers to the description and that might be mistaken for Reginald?"

"No one, aunt."

"Not Abel Death?"

"Not a bit like Reginald."

"In the name of all that's mysterious, what is he keeping out of the way for? Did you ever know a case in such a tangle?"

"Never. I don't wonder that Lambert is keen upon it. It would make his fortune to unravel the tangle."

"I mean to unravel it," said Dick. "Oh, you may shake your head, aunt. I've certain ideas I'm not going to speak of just now; you would think me mad if I were to tell you what they were. If you keep your mind upon a thing it's wonderful how ideas crowd upon you."

"Leading too often to confusion," observed Uncle Rob. "The main thing is a starting point."

"I've a dozen," said Dick.

"That's the mischief of it. You put a bloodhound on the track. What's the consequence unless he gets a scent? He flounders; he might as well be a mongrel for all the use he is. Coming back to the evidence that was given in Court to-day, might not the man who presented himself to Lady Wharton as your father, Reginald, be the same man Dr. Pye saw, who made himself up to resemble you in case any one caught sight of him. Such things have been done, you know."

"Look out!" cried Dick, starting forward, and catching Reginald, who was swaying forward.

"We'll talk no more of this miserable business to-day," said Aunt Rob, in a tone of stern decision. "Take him up to bed, Florence, and keep him quiet. If we're not careful he'll be having a relapse."

Reginald, indeed, had overtaxed his strength, and the caution did not come too soon.

"I must be off," said Dick, when Florence and Reginald were gone. "If I'm not back before nine o'clock you need not expect to see me again to-night."

In point of fact he had made up his mind to sleep in Catchpole Square, and to keep secret vigil there. But first he must go to Reginald's old lodgings in Park Street to speak to the landlady. So much depended upon proof being forthcoming that Reginald's account of his movements after leaving his father's house was true that Dick could not rest until he had questioned her.

When Dick said to his uncle that he had ideas which would be considered mad if he revealed them, it was no mere figure of speech. So weird and grotesque was one of these ideas that, even in the midst of his gloomy forebodings, he could not resist a smile as he pondered upon it. "It's a game that two can play at," he muttered, "and my short experience on the stage ought to carry me successfully through. It may be time wasted, but it's worth the trying. We'll see whether that flashlight invention of Dr. Pye will come upon the scene again. If it does he'll see something that will astonish his weak nerves."

He brightened up when he presented himself to the landlady, who not only welcomed him because he was a favourite with every one, but because he might be able to impart something new relating to a mystery with which, through the fact of the son of Samuel Boyd being her lodger, she was indirectly connected. Mrs. Weevil was one of those women to whom a gossip is one of the most enjoyable things in life, and she gave Dick good day with glad anticipation in her voice.

"And 'ow's the poor young gentleman, sir," she said, "after 'is day at the inkwich? I've been readin' about it in the papers, but wot I say is, if it wos the last word I spoke, it ain't no more like 'im than chalk is to cheese."

"What is not like him?" inquired Dick.

"'Is pictcher, sir, and yours, too, sir,' I ses to Mrs. Porter, the 'am and beef shop across the road, 'It's a shame,' I ses, 'that sech things is allowed. If a portrait it is, a portrait it ought to be. Actions 'ave been brought for less.' 'Wot you say, Mrs. Weevil, I say,' ses Mrs. Porter, 'but we're obliged to put up with it. Them newspaper men don't mind wot liberties they take.'"

Dick listened with patience to this and to much more to the same effect, and then approached the object of his visit.

"I've come to ask you," he said, "whether you recollect what occurred last Friday night week."

"Ah," she said, abstractedly, running her eye along the hem of her apron, "there's them as 'as cause to remember; there's them as won't forget to their last hour."

"Meaning?" he asked.

"Mr. Abel Death, sir, and Mr. Samuel Boyd."

"His last hour has gone by; he's past remembering."

"A truer word you never spoke, sir, and it's wot we must all come to. But Mr. Abel Death ain't past remembering, and wot 'e's got on 'is conscience I shouldn't like to 'ave on mine."

"That is one of the things that has yet to be settled," said Dick, ambiguously.

"And settled I 'ope it will be, sir, and better sooner than later, for Mr. Reginald's sake. You see, sir, I speak of 'im as Mr. Reginald because that's the name he went by when he first come to me. 'A reference, is usual, sir,' I ses to 'im, 'if so be as you'll egscuse me for mentionin' of it.' 'Mrs. Weevil,' he ses, 'I can't give you a reference, but I can give you a month in advance.' Wot gentleman could say more? A month in advance 'e paid, from first to last, and never a word between us when I give 'im the book on Monday mornin'--puncchual, because 'e said 'e liked to be. When I 'eard 'e wos Mr. Samuel Boyd's son you might 'ave knocked me down with a feather. I ses to Mrs. Porter, while she wos spreadin' mustard on a sangwitch for a gent as eats six every afternoon of 'is life as the clock strikes three, 'Well,' I ses to 'er, 'of all the strange things!' 'That's my opinion, Mrs. Weevil,' she ses."

"Last Friday week," said Dick, taking up the threads of the subject. "I wish you to tell me at what hour of the night Mr. Reginald came home."

"And you ain't the first as wishes me to tell you. There's been two detectives 'ere, and three newspaper men. 'Do you recollec',' they ses, 'wot time Friday night young Mr. Boyd come 'ome?' Your own words, sir, as if they wos turned out of a mould. 'No, I don't,' I ses to them. 'I went to bed at ten, when Mr. Reginald was out. I knocked at his door,' I ses, 'to see if 'e wanted anythink, but he didn't answer, and I jest peeped in to make sure 'e was out. Which he wos.' 'Oh,' ses they, 'did 'e keep 'is door unlocked?' 'Yes, 'e did,' I ses, 'and everything else as well. 'E wos always as open as open can be. I wish all wos like 'im, but that can't be egspected, because it takes all sorts to make a world.' They wanted to go up to 'is rooms, but I ses, 'No, you don't. I know my duties as a landlady,' I ses, 'and I won't 'ave no pokin' and pryin' in a gentleman's private apartments.' Would you believe it, sir, they orfered me money to let 'em go in, but they couldn't wheedle me. I ain't one of that sort."

"Try and remember," urged Dick, earnestly, "whether, after you were in bed you didn't hear him come in on Friday night."

"If I tried ever so 'ard, sir, I couldn't recollec' wot I don't remember. Why should a gentleman be spied upon when 'e pays 'is rent reg'lar? Mr. Reginald 'ad 'is own street

door key, and wos free to come and go. 'E might 'ave come 'ome any time in the night without me knowin' it.

"It is a very important matter," said Dick, greatly disheartened. "Perhaps your servant may recollect something."

"I'll ring for 'er, sir, and you can arsk 'er yourself."

In answer to the bell the servant came up, a heavy lumbering girl of twenty, in a chronic state of sulks, with whom Dick fared no better than he had with her mistress. She did not know what time she went to bed, nor what time she got up. Sometimes she awoke in the middle of the night, and sometimes she didn't; she generally didn't, and if she did she did not know what time it was. She did not recollect when Friday night was, she could not think so far back as the week before last. All she knew was that it wasn't her night out, and if the gentleman kept talking to her all day long how could she get her work done? So Dick reluctantly let her go, and took his departure himself, no wiser than when he came. 'Reginald's statement that he had returned to his lodgings before midnight was of no value in the absence of corroborative evidence. Thicker and blacker grew the clouds around him.

From Park Street he proceeded to Draper's Mews, and there he met with another disappointment. Mrs. Death opened the door for him, and he saw a change in her. She was embarrassed, suspicious, sorrowful, angry. The old cordiality was gone.

"Is Gracie at home?" he asked, looking around without seeing the sallow, wistful face.

"No, she isn't," answered Mrs. Death, in a constrained voice, "and I don't know where she is. I haven't had misfortune enough, I suppose, that my own child should go against me."

She dashed away the tears that were gathering in her eyes, and Dick gazed at her in pity and surprise.

"Go against you, Mrs. Death!" he exclaimed. "No, no. It isn't in Gracie's nature."

"It wasn't," she retorted, "till you stepped between us."

"You are labouring under some grievous error," he said, sadly. "I have not seen Gracie. I came to ask how she was--as a friend, Mrs. Death, as a true friend."

"Oh, yes," she cried, bitterly, "as a true friend! I'm learning the meaning of that word. It's time, it's time. Hush children!" For one or two, alarmed at their mother's loud voice, began to cry. They were all huddled together on the floor, and had looked up eagerly when Dick entered. "If you're not quiet I'll give you a beating all round." She turned to Dick. "Come into the next room; it isn't right that they should hear us. There, children, there, be good."

With compressed lips, and eyes that seemed to be inwardly searching for an explanation, Dick accompanied her to the adjoining room. Night was coming on, but there was still light enough for them to see each other's face.

"Be fair to me, Mrs. Death," he said, in a gentle tone. "Whatever you may think of me now, think of me for a moment as I was, and tell me first about Gracie."

"There isn't much to tell," she returned; and she, also, seemed to be searching inwardly for something she could not understand. "She does nothing but talk of you. Dr. Vinsen walked home with us from the funeral yesterday, and Gracie wouldn't keep by our side; she walked behind. Two or three times he beckoned to her, but she was rebellious. 'What have you been thinking of, child?' he asked when we got home. 'I've been thinking of Dick,' she answered. 'Always of Dick, Gracie?' he said. 'Yes,' she answered, 'always of Dick.' 'Never of me?' he asked, and no one in the world could have spoken more kindly. 'Oh, yes,' she said, 'I think of you a lot, but in another way.' 'Now, tell me, child,' he said, 'what you think of me?' 'You'd best not ask,' she answered, and ran away. When we were alone I asked her what she meant by behaving so to our best friend. I will not tell you what her reply was; I was shocked and grieved that a child of mine could be so ungrateful. She looked out for you yesterday afternoon and evening, and this afternoon, too. 'Why doesn't Dick come?' she kept on saying. 'Where's Dick?' It's three hours now that she went away, and I don't know what's become of her. That's all I've got to tell you about Gracie, if you didn't know it before. I want my child, I want my child! Do you hear, Mr. Remington. I want my child! I have lost my husband--am I to lose my Gracie, too?"

"I sincerely hope not," said Dick; "I honestly believe not. She will come back presently. But there is something else in your mind against me, Mrs. Death."

She stepped close to him, and looked fiercely into his eyes.

"Who killed Mr. Samuel Boyd?" she said, in a hissing whisper. "Tell me that."

"I wish to God I could!" he replied.

"I wish to God I could!" she retorted, still speaking in a low, fierce whisper, so that the children in the next room should not hear. "But though we don't know, we have our suspicions. I know what mine are. What are yours? Tell me, if you dare!"

He did not answer her. In the presence of misfortune so undeserved, of suffering so keen, how could he breathe a word against her husband?

"No, you do not dare," she continued. "You haven't the courage to say to my face that you believe my poor husband to be guilty of the crime; but you can say so behind my back, you can go about poisoning people's minds against him, and then come to me smiling in pretended friendship. Oh, Mr. Remington," she said, with a remorseful sob, and her changeful moods showed how her heart was torn, "I would not have believed it of you. You make us trust you, you make us love you, and then you turn against us. See here!" She pulled up the sleeve of her gown, and bared her emaciated arm to his pitying gaze. "As this is, so my whole body is, and my soul is on the rack. You have seen us in our poverty, you know the state to which we have been driven, you have witnessed how we live. Is it the work of an honest man to oppress and malign us?"

"It would be the work of a coward," he answered, "if I had done a hundredth part of what you bring against me. I have done you no wrong, no injustice. I think I know who has instilled these thoughts into your mind, but I will not ask you for his name. Doubtless he has laid the seal of silence on your lips----"

"He has not," she interrupted. "What he has said to me he would say to you if you stood before him."

"I think not," said Dick.

"He would. He has been kind and generous to us; if it had not been for him my children would have starved."

"I would have done as much if I could have afforded it," said Dick, with set teeth. "Has it not crossed your mind, Mrs. Death, that you are being deceived?"

"How, deceived?" she asked, and despite the warmth of her championship there was doubt in her face.

"In being led to believe that those who are your friends are your enemies?"

"I speak as I find."

"No," said Dick, firmly, "you speak from ideas which have been put into your head, heaven knows for what purpose. What that man's motive may be----"

"Yes, yes, yes," she interrupted again. "Motive, motive, motive. I've heard enough of motive. What is yours, Mr. Remington? Who is more deeply interested in the death of Mr. Samuel Boyd, who is more directly connected with it, who has more to gain from it, than you and your friend. You speak of motive. What motive brings you here?"

"I have told you."

"You have not told me," she said, violently. "You come to seek information about my poor husband."

"Yes," he admitted, "partly."

"And," she said, very slowly, "to cast suspicion upon him, if the poor dear is alive, and so avert it from yourself and Mr. Reginald Boyd."

Dick was too startled to reply. No need to ask the source of this insidious suggestion.

"If it happened that you found him here," she continued, "would you give information to the police? Would you say, 'Go into that house and arrest the murderer of Mr. Samuel Boyd?' Oh, I know, I know! But we do not fear the truth, and we have a friend who will see that justice is done. That is all we want, and I pray that I may live to see the day."

She had worked herself into a white heat of passion, and Dick saw that no good would result from prolonging his visit. "May there come a happier day for all of us," he said, and passed from her presence.

Night was coming on as he took his way to Catchpole Square, but he did not heed the falling shadows nor the soft drizzling rain that now began to fall. "This is Dr. Vinsen's work," he thought, "and he does not work without a purpose. What motive can he have in fixing suspicion upon me and Reginald, what motive in taking so deep an interest in Mrs. Death? The mystery seems impenetrable, but I will pierce it till light comes. I will, I will, I will!" He did not hear pattering feet behind him, and was not conscious that anyone was by his side till his hand was clutched.

"Dick!"

"Gracie!" he cried. "I am glad you are here. Your mother is terribly anxious about you. Let me take you to her."

"No," she said, panting, "not yet, Dick. I've been looking for you everywhere. I've got something to tell you first. Come, come, come!"

She dragged him in the direction he had been taking, towards Catchpole Square.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GRACIE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

He did not resist. The enterprise to which he was pledged had so fastened itself upon his imagination that the least thing appertaining to it claimed first place. Except that her breath was short there were no symptoms of excitement in Gracie, but Dick was sufficiently conversant with her peculiar manner to know that she had something of importance to communicate.

"Tell me as we go along," he said.

"No," she answered, "you must see for yourself."

"Don't walk so fast, then. We must not attract attention."

There were only two or three loungers in Catchpole Square. Now that Samuel Boyd was buried the general interest in the house had waned, and public attention was chiefly devoted to the proceedings in the Coroner's Court, in consequence of which there had been intervals during this day when the Square was bare of sight-seers. The two or three idle persons who were staring aimlessly at the walls as Dick and Gracie came near regarded the appearance of the new-comers as an agreeable diversion, and gazed at them instead.

"Now, Gracie, what is it?" asked Dick.

She cast a sharp glance at a little iron gate at the side of the next house to Samuel Boyd's, and replied, "Not while they're here, Dick. Stare them out."

Nothing loth, Dick stared so sternly at the idlers that they became nervous, shifted their gaze, to see him still staring at them when they looked at him again, made awkward movements, and finally strolled away, and left the Square to him and Gracie.

"Let's talk inside the house," she said, with a nod of approval.

"No, Gracie, here. I don't care about taking you in."

"I've been in," she said calmly.

"You've been in!" he exclaimed, hastening to the door. "Is anybody inside now? Ah!" with a sudden thought. "Your father!"

"I didn't see a living soul when I was in the place," she said, mournfully.

"Who opened the door for you?"

"Nobody. I won't talk in the Square, Dick; people'll be coming and interrupting us. I'll show you all about it when we're inside. You'll be glad to know."

Recognising the imprudence of running the chance of being overheard, he unlocked the door, and they stood in the dark passage.

"Don't be frightened, Gracie. What has happened within these walls is eerie enough to send the shivers through one."

"I ain't frightened a bit, Dick."

"Very well, then. Remain here while I go and get a light. The candles and matches are upstairs."

"I'll come with you. You do like me a little, don't you, Dick?"

"I like you a good deal. You're the queerest and bravest little girl I've ever met."

She nestled close to him. They reached the office, and he fumbled about for the matches.

"Where are we, Dick?"

He hesitated a moment, and answered gently, "In the office where your father used to work."

"Father?" she sighed. "Dick, what do you see when you are in the dark?"

"Darkness."

"I see more than that."

"Do you see anything now?" he asked, still groping for the matches.

"I see father. There he stands. He looks so white and thin, and he's holding out his arms to me to save him."

"From what? Ah, here they are at last." He struck a match, and lighted a candle.

"I don't know from what, but I'm going to. Now he's gone. No, no! He's there, he's there! Father, father!"

She darted forward to the hooded chair in which the wax figure of the Chinaman was seated.

"Hold hard, Gracie," said Dick, catching her by the arm. "That's not a man; it's a wax figure."

"Let me go, let me go!" It was not a scream, but a fierce whisper that issued from her lips. She twisted herself out of Dick's grasp, and ran to the chair. She stood awhile before she spoke again, and Dick watched her curiously. "Is he dead?"

"Wax images generally are," said Dick, endeavouring to speak lightly.

She gazed earnestly at the dead white face.

"Has he been here long?"

"A pretty long time, I should say."

"Was he here when Mr. Boyd was murdered?"

"Yes."

"If he could only speak, Dick!"

"Ah, if he only could!"

She crept to the bedroom door. "Is this the room?"

"Yes. I wouldn't go in, Gracie."

"Why not? He's dead and buried; and if his ghost is there it can't do me any harm."

Her black eyes travelled over the walls and ceiling and floor, as though in search of a clue to her father's fate. She evinced a disposition to linger there, but Dick pulled her back into the office.

"Now, Gracie, how did you get into the house?"

"I'll show you. Come downstairs."

Taking the candle with them they descended to the lower part of the premises. There were three small rooms in the basement, in addition to the kitchen, all in a state of ruin. He was filled with wonder when Gracie informed him that there was a cellar underneath the kitchen, for neither he nor the officials who had searched the place knew anything of it.

"Pull up the trap door, Dick. There it is, under that old chair."

The wonder still upon him he removed the chair, and, kneeling, lifted the trap door, beneath which was a short fixed ladder.

"I'll go first," said Gracie, "then you can give me the candle, and come after me." It was done as she directed, and he found himself in a dungeon-like room, about ten feet square, without window or door in it.

"I got in through that wall, Dick."

It was the wall that divided the two houses. Dick looked and saw no means of entrance.

"Can't you see how, Dick?"

"No. You are a spirit."

"Can a spirit do things that we can't?"

"It is what people believe," replied Dick, doubtfully.

"And see things that we can't?"

"So they say."

"If I was a spirit I'd soon find out where poor father is. I ain't a spirit, Dick. Look here."

Stepping to a part of the wall which bore traces of crumbling away, Gracie pushed a brick into the cellar of the adjoining house; she pushed another, and that fell; another, and that fell. A rat scampered past, and gave Dick a shock. Gracie laughed. Then she wedged her small body through, and stood apart from him, he being in one house, and she in another.

"Wait a bit, Gracie," he cried excitedly. "Hold the candle."

There were other loose bricks which yielded to his pressure, and in a few moments he had made a hole large enough for a man to creep through. Dick and Gracie were now side by side.

"Easy, ain't it, Dick? We'd best put up the bricks, in case of accidents."

"You ought to have been a detective," said Dick.

"I shouldn't have made a bad one, I don't think," she answered, with unemotional complacency, proceeding to replace the bricks, which she did very carefully, even fixing the loose mortar about them. The work was done so neatly that nothing but the closest scrutiny would have led to the discovery of the unlawful communication between the houses.

"Dick," said Gracie, "Mr. Samuel Boyd was as artful as they make 'em. Do you think he went in and out through this hole?"

"He'd have been in a rare mess if he did," replied Dick, brushing the dust from his clothes. "The puzzle is what he wanted in an empty house. Supposing he did not wish to go back, how did he get out of it?"

"This way."

He followed her out of the cellar up a short, narrow flight of rickety stairs. At the end of the passage was a door, the lock of which was broken. This door opened upon half a dozen stone steps, and at one time had probably been used as a kitchen entrance for tradesmen. A little rusty gate at the top opened into the Square. Only two of the houses had an entrance of a similar description, and Dick inwardly railed at his own lack of foresight in overlooking this means of getting into Samuel Boyd's residence. Upon further reflection, however, he thought it hardly likely that he would have succeeded in carrying his investigations to the point which Gracie's shrewdness and pertinacity had enabled her to reach.

"It's a good job for me the place is empty," said Gracie. "I had to get into Mr. Boyd's house somehow, you know, even if I had to climb the wall at the back, the way the murderer and the newspaper man did. As I was looking at the houses I saw these steps, and when nobody was in the Square I crept down. It was all a job to push the door open, but I did, and there I was, without anybody seeing me. Then I tried to get into the backyard, but couldn't. I knew there was only a wall between me and the next house, and I thought of the way prisoners make their escape from prison. They made holes in walls--why couldn't I? I found a bit of old iron in the cellar here, and I poked at the bricks with it till I came across one that was looser than the others. It didn't take me long to push it through, and when I got that out the rest was easy. That's the way of it, Dick."

"You were in the dark all the time."

"That didn't matter. I've got cat's eyes."

"You're a clever girl."

"Thank you, Dick. When you say anything like that to me I feel warm all over."

"What made you so anxious to get into Mr. Boyd's house? Surely you did not expect to find your father there?"

"I don't know what I didn't expect. I thought I might find a bit of paper with his writing on it that'd tell me where to look for him. I told you about my dream the night before last, and how I promised father I'd catch the murderer. I dreamt of him again last night. 'Don't forget your promise,' he said. 'Look for me in Catchpole Square.' 'You ain't dead, are you, father?' I asked. 'No,' he said, 'look for me in Catchpole Square, and catch the murderer.' It's a large order, ain't it, Dick?"

There was nothing humorous in the question; her voice was perfectly passionless, but Dick had a clear sense of the absorbing earnestness and the pitiful pathos which lay beneath, unexpressed though they were in tone or gesture.

"Poor little Gracie!" he said. "The body of a mouse and the heart of a lion."

"I am small, ain't I? But I shall grow. Did I do right, Dick, in coming to tell you about the hole? Don't say you're mad with me."

"I won't. You did quite right, and I only wish you were a man. You and I together would get at the bottom of a mystery that is making many innocent people unhappy."

"We'll do it as it is, Dick. It's made mother unhappy--oh, so unhappy! The worst of it is"--she paused, and with a grave look added, "Dr. Vinsen. What does he mean by speaking against you?"

"Passes my comprehension, Gracie. There's no love lost between us, that's clear. It is a case of mutual antipathy. But I don't want to do him an injustice. He has been very kind to you."

"Yes," she said. "I wonder why."

"Ah, I wonder."

"I tried to get in at the inquest to-day, but couldn't get near the door. Was he there?"

"I did not see him. His friend was."

"His friend?" she queried.

"Dr. Pye, and he made it hot for us."

"What did he say, Dick, what did he say?"

"Too long to tell you now; you'll hear all about it by and by."

"Give me a ha'penny to buy a paper, Dick, will you?"

"Here's a penny. So, Dr. Vinsen speaks against me?"

"Yes, and smiles and pats me when I stick up for you. He ain't angry, you know; he speaks as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. 'You'll know better, my child,' he says, 'before you are much older, and then you'll stick up for me.' He'll have to wait a long time for that. Mother's wild with me because I don't like him, but I can't, I can't! I feel sometimes as if I could stick a knife in him. I'm sure he'd do you a mischief if he could, so just you take care of him, Dick."

"I will; and I dare say I shall be a match for him in the end. We've talked enough about him, Gracie, my girl. Now we'll get back to the house, and I'll take you to your mother, who is fretting her heart out about you."

"I'd sooner go by myself, Dick, and I'll tell her you found me and sent me home."

"That will do as well. I know you will not break a promise you give me."

"Never, Dick, never! I'd die first!"

They returned to the house the way they came, and she lifted her face to his.

"Kiss me, Dick," she said.

He kissed gladness into her, and they parted at Samuel Boyd's street door.